

Perils of Populism: How Populists Warp Global Governance

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The organs of global governance, painstakingly constructed through decades of diplomatic negotiations and multilateral agreements, face unprecedented threats. Chief among them is the rise and spread of anti-globalization sentiment. An array of concurrent challenges has fueled opposition to global governance: rising economic inequality, mass migration, a raging pandemic, the existential threat of climate change, technological disruptions, and the shifting international balance of power amidst China's rise. People around the world feel forgotten, resentful, and disenchanted by the traditional political order — especially in working-class areas of many developed, deindustrializing, and decarbonizing democracies.

Those who are discontented with the globalized world increasingly coalesce around populist political ideologies. Charismatic populist leaders amplify these sentiments, promising a return to a bygone era. They lambast the corrupt elite, blaming incumbent politicians and international actors alike for runaway globalization. Populist candidates argue that their countries should break loose from the shackles of economic interconnectedness and multilateralism that have sapped state sovereignty and diluted democracy. Across continents, populists advancing such messages have gathered political strength with fiery rhetoric that taps into longstanding fears and promises swift solutions to difficult problems.

As such leaders rise to power, their policies and ideas increasingly threaten established global networks and governing bodies. Populists preach nationalism, isolationism, and protectionism to their domestic audiences. In their quest to champion the people, they seek to undermine and diminish the international organizations and treaties that states have gradually forged since the conclusion of the Second World War. Many of the architects of the liberal international order have become its staunchest critics under populist regimes, as Britain exited the European Union and the United States abandoned many of its international commitments.

Perils of Populism cuts to the heart of this global storm, exploring the effects of populists' attacks on the foundations of global governance. The book confronts several pressing questions: Can international cooperation survive despite the perils of populism? If so, what form will it take, and what are the implications for the quality of global governance?

This manuscript puts a spotlight on international organizations' efforts to fight back against hostile actors. We show that such efforts increase IOs' short-term resilience but also generate perverse effects. As international organizations work to counter populist threats, they often erode their own legitimacy and can consequently fuel more populist resistance.

1.1 Populism and Global Governance

Scholars and policymakers often react to the spread of populism with pessimism regarding the future of global governance. They express concern that as populism surges around the globe, globalization will stagnate or reverse, and the international organizations that support it will incur significant damage. For example, Goldstein and Gulotty (2021, 553) observe, "Today, American commitment to the [trade] regime may be at a watershed moment, facing both anti-trade-treaty populism at home and skepticism from its founders abroad." Others suggest that the World Trade Organization (WTO) — the largest and most important multilateral

trade body — has incurred fatal damage: “The WTO was a lovely promise of a more rational, predictable, and fairer global economic order. Its death should be mourned.”¹

Indeed, populists frequently criticize the international elite that dominates bodies like the WTO, reducing their cooperation with such institutions and prioritizing their own countries’ needs (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019). They express concern about relative rather than absolute gains, wishing to increase their share of the pie rather than to expand the size of the pie as a whole; such a preference undercuts international collaboration (Mearsheimer 2001). Campaign statements including “America First”,² “We are for local, against global”,³ and “Brazil Above Everything”⁴ make clear that populists decry international cooperative efforts and prefer to turn inward.

Populists portray the “global elite” as corrupt and out-of-touch and therefore as key members of the opposition. For example, former American President Donald Trump asserted that one of his political opponents was “the candidate of [...] globalists [...] ripping off the United States with bad trade deals and open borders.”⁵ Similarly, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson felt “very, very frustrated by people being told what to do by nanny in Brussels” and wanted to “take back control [...] of our money, our borders, and our laws” from the EU.⁶ Polish President Andrzej Duda and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan have also utilized such language.

Given populists’ repeated calls to tear down the global architecture, it is no wonder that the rise of populism has spread fears of international calamity. At stake are no less than the unprecedented levels of peace and global economic prosperity that have been driven, in part, by globalization and international cooperation (Russett and Oneal 2001; Gartzke

¹CFR, 2018, <https://bit.ly/481coC4>.

²Donald Trump, 2016 campaign slogan.

³Marine Le Pen, 2022 campaign speech.

⁴Jair Bolsonaro, 2022 campaign speech.

⁵Levy, Marc. “Oz’s Ties to Turkey Attacked in Pennsylvania’s Senate Race.” *AP*. May 6, 2022.

⁶Rankin, Jennifer and Jim Waterson. “How Boris Johnson’s Brussels-Bashing Stories Shaped British Politics.” *The Guardian*. July 14, 2019.

2007; Ikenberry 2011). Critics worry that if populists upend the trade regime, for example, the global policies and processes that practitioners have refined over decades to guide global commerce will fall apart, with enormous economic and political ramifications. If populists undercut global development institutions or organizations tasked with maintaining peace between rivals, the move could thrust many individuals into poverty, forced migration, or conflict. If populists block cooperation on environmental degradation and climate change, the planet may become engulfed in irreversible heat and biological devastation (Barnett and Adger 2007; Colgan, Green and Hale 2021).

Despite these immense stakes, populist parties are popular in virtually every corner of the world. Figure 1.1 shows that populists have led a diverse array of countries in recent memory and populism has become increasingly prominent in recent decades. Figure 1.2 displays the countries whose executives were populist in 1990 compared to 2018; the number of populist heads of state has increased from 5 to 22 over that time. More recent examples abound as well, including the 2022 election of far-right populists Giorgia Miloni as Prime Minister of Italy and Javier Milei as president of Argentina.

Due to populist's popularity and anti-IO orientation, many have concluded that the international order is under severe duress (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Voeten 2020; Borzel and Zürn 2021). Yet despite its importance, we know little about the nature of the populist threat to international cooperation, and how global governance is changing as a result. In this project, we take up these essential topics. We observe that the controversy over whether populism is distorting the liberal international order is misguided and often treats the question as a black-and-white debate. Instead, we ask *how* populism is changing the liberal international order.

To do so, we investigate 1) the strategies IOs adopt in response to populist attacks, and 2) how these defensive measures are altering global governance. While we discuss and briefly test how populists undermine IOs, the book focuses primarily on how IOs change as a result.

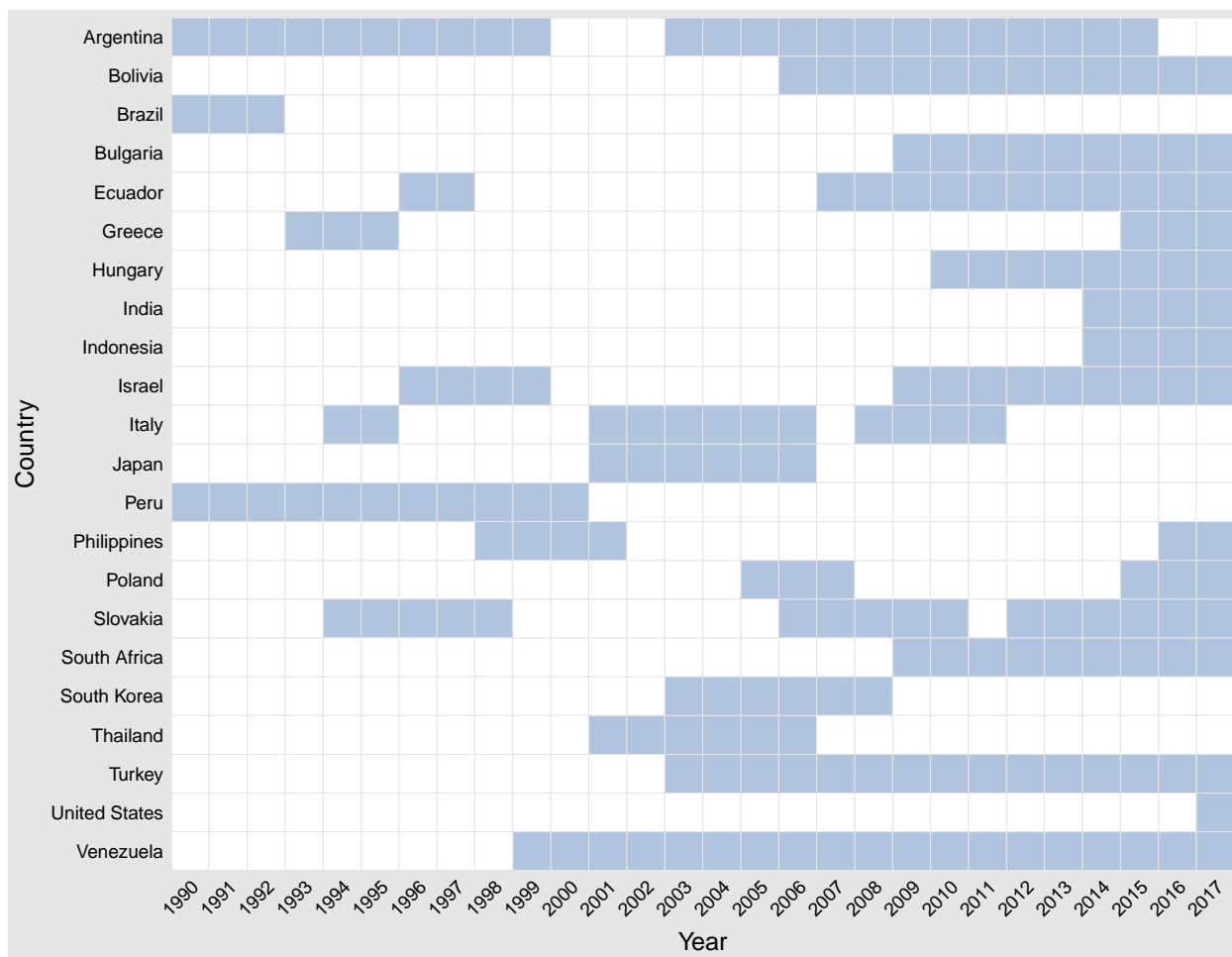


Figure 1.1: **Global Distribution of Populism.** The shaded squares represent cases where countries have a populist leader or government. Data comes from Funke, Schularick and Trebesch (2022).

Our theory is generalizable, though our empirics focus primarily, but not exclusively, on international financial institutions, which enables us to compare findings across empirical analyses and to speak to the large literature analyzing the effects of IOs in this realm (Stone 2011; Schneider and Tobin 2016; Lipsky 2017; Pratt 2021).

In doing so, we address several large debates, including those regarding how IOs can or cannot foster cooperation, the effects of the populist resurgence, and the degree to which states and institutions of global governance possess power in the international system. Further, our study carries lessons for practitioners about how to strengthen multilateral coop-



Figure 1.2: **The Rise of Populism.** These maps show where leaders were populist in 1990 and 2018, highlighting its spread. Data comes from Funke, Schularick and Trebesch (2022).

eration in the face of widespread resistance.

Our primary contentions are that IOs are strategic actors that can — and do — combat attacks by hostile actors, and that their methods of doing so can foster organizational pathologies. We thus push against the majority of scholarship on global governance which overlooks IO agency, and which often argues that IOs “do not take on a life of their own, and thus [...] are simply tools of the great powers” (Mearsheimer 2019). Others contend that IOs only possess authority within narrow bounds, restricted by the limited degree to which member states delegate responsibilities to them (Keohane 1984; Pollack 1997; Abbott and Snidal 1998). Even when IOs’ agency is acknowledged, scholars have difficulty applying these insights to derive specific, testable predictions about IO behavior.⁷

In contrast, we argue that IOs have leveraged and innovated a variety of tools to push back against detractors. We adapt insights from organizational sociology and the study of bureaucracies to the international context to theorize IOs’ responses to populists. We then use this framework to understand how IOs change systematically and the consequences of these changes for global governance writ large.

⁷See e.g., Barnett and Finnemore (1999).

Our theory highlights four main methods that IOs use: sidelining or appeasing unfriendly leaders and sidelining or appeasing their constituents. In other words, IOs work around populist leaders by relying on them less heavily for things they need, like funding and information. Or, IOs hide their interactions from populists' constituents so that populists can avoid domestic penalties associated with cooperation. IOs also appease populists by providing them with greater benefits or mollify their constituents by appealing directly to them. In our empirical chapters, we use new data to test each of these methods systematically, validating our theoretical contentions that IOs respond to populists in these ways.

However, while IOs use these tools to defend themselves and remain viable in the short run, these methods often come with some undesirable long-term consequences. In particular, IO forays into secrecy and bribery can lead them to become less legitimate, less transparent, and over-extended, all of which threaten normative pillars of global governance. We argue that ultimately, IOs' efforts to combat populism often fuel populist resistance to the organizations in the long term. We thus conclude that while IOs are adapting in ways that enhance their short-term resilience, doing so comes with long-term costs to their legitimacy and viability. Rather than destroying international organizations, then, populists are warping them in dangerous ways.

1.2 Why Populism?

Scholars and policymakers frequently bemoan the many barriers confronting international institutions (Gray 2018; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2018; Brutger and Clark 2022) and the liberal international order more broadly (Borzel and Zürn 2021; Farrell and Newman 2021; Weiss and Wallace 2021). Indeed, there is a plethora of hostile actors actively working against international cooperation. A variety of factors cause negative perceptions of IOs including perverse economic experiences (Kiratli 2021), elite cues, political ideology (Brutger

and Clark 2022), core values (Brutger 2021), and low levels of empathy (Casler and Groves 2022). But while many detractors oppose specific things about particular IOs, most do not oppose IOs broadly speaking. They may lament a certain constraint imposed by these bodies without opposing international organizations generally. Populism, however, offers individuals an ideology to explain why IOs should not constrain the state in the first place (Voeten 2021).

Moreover, many political ideologies and core values are compatible with populism, such that it crosses party and ideological lines. This has helped populists' success at the ballot box relative to other detractors. Indeed, populists of all kinds push back against perceived IO overreach — the idea that IOs have expanded too far, too fast. They argue that IOs are unaccountable, out-of-touch, elite organizations that have too much power. IOs are seen as violating an implied bargain of “embedded liberalism,” whereby IOs could operate while preserving states' domestic interests and imperatives (Ruggie 1982).

Thus, while our theory applies to a variety of globalization's detractors, we focus on populists as a particularly salient and widespread set of actors who consistently oppose global governance (Voeten 2020; Broz, Frieden and Weymouth 2021; Ikenberry 2018). While populists differ on many dimensions, they share two defining characteristics: 1) a belief that a country's “true people” are locked into conflict with outsiders and elites, and 2) opposition to constraints on the will of the true people.⁸

Populists maintain that IOs violate both of these key tenets. First, they perceive multilateral bodies to be elite organizations. IOs are typically staffed by unelected, highly educated, lifelong bureaucrats, which epitomize the global elite that populists disparage. Such bureaucrats are rewarded for acquiring elite skills and experience — receiving their education from top Western universities and working for other elite organizations, whether public or private

⁸Our definition draws on a number of recent pieces on populism and its micro-foundations — see Muller (2016); Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017); Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018); Copelovitch and Pevehouse (2019); Broz, Frieden and Weymouth (2021); Funke, Schularick and Trebesch (2022).

(Novosad and Werker 2014; Adler-Nissen 2021). These workers possess specialized knowledge and technical expertise in areas such as economics, law, diplomacy, and development. However, this very expertise also makes them seem out of touch with common people who tend to value lived experience over book smarts. IO staff also hail from foreign countries and thus do not represent “the true people” that populists privilege, i.e., the native, working-class members of their country (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Carnegie, Clark and Zucker 2021).

This perception is reinforced by IOs’ complex decision-making processes that involve negotiations among member states or appointed representatives (cf. Putnam 1988), which appear distant from the general public. IOs have their own rules and norms, with a focus on technical expertise that seems far removed from people’s everyday experiences. The involvement of diplomats, bureaucrats, and other high-ranking officials, who interact with multinational corporations, governments, and influential state actors, contribute to these perceptions of privileged and exclusive groups making decisions that impact – but are not shaped by – ordinary people.

In addition to appearing as elite organizations, IOs threaten populists’ prioritization of state sovereignty because they explicitly seek to constrain and alter state behavior (Keohane 1984; Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019). IOs establish norms, standards, and rules for their members, which encompass a wide range of issues, including human rights, trade, environmental protection, and security. IOs are often tasked with enforcing these regulations, such as through monitoring and reporting activities, along with the application of international pressure (e.g., through naming and shaming, see Hafner-Burton 2008; Tingley and Tomz 2022). They gather data, conduct investigations, and publish reports highlighting violations or areas of concern. Many have formal dispute resolution mechanisms in place to adjudicate potential violations of their rules. IOs also offer economic incentives to influence state behavior, such as financial assistance, trade benefits, or access to markets.

These activities allow IOs to ensure that states adhere to their agreements, yet they also drive populist anger since they constrain states' behavior. Populists often feel that the areas that IOs govern should fall within states' purviews. They see these institutions as lacking compatibility with domestic priorities (Snyder 2019). Unlike pushback from many other types of leaders, populists' resistance is credible because both populists and constituents are ideologically opposed to IOs. If their grievances are not addressed, populists can credibly threaten to undermine or even exit IOs. Populists thus experience fewer costs from resisting IOs than other leaders do.

However, populist leaders vary in terms of how strongly they hold these beliefs. In particular, we conceptualize populists as falling on a continuum between those who genuinely take anti-elite, pro-sovereignty stances, and those who merely "perform" populism. In the latter category, leaders adopt populist positions including opposition to IOs to appeal to domestic audiences. These politicians often use populism as a part of their political strategy to win office, but their anti-IO positions are insincere. For them, the main cost of publicly embracing IOs is backlash from supporters who observe inconsistency between their stated anti-elitism and their cooperation with international bodies (cf. Fearon 1994; Tomz 2007*a*). Bashing IOs is then a way to bolster populists' anti-elite and anti-globalist bona fides. Genuine populists, in contrast, are often political outsiders who sincerely distrust the global elite and thus have both ideological and domestic incentives to oppose IOs. In reality, most populists fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, assuming domestic and ideological costs from engaging with IOs to varying degrees. Regardless of whether they are more genuine or performative, however, the result is that populists across this spectrum tend to take anti-IO stances.

1.3 Populist Tactics to Oppose IOs

Though populists across the board tend to oppose IOs, such opposition manifests in a variety of ways. While the main contribution of this book is to uncover how IOs respond to populist attacks and thus how populist attacks warp global governance, we must first understand the nature of these attacks. We therefore discuss how populists oppose IOs briefly here, providing further explanation in Chapter 2 and empirical testing of these tactics in Chapter 3. We touch on a variety of examples to fix ideas in this chapter, which are fleshed out in the case studies found in Chapter 4.

The populist backlash to IOs ranges from subtle resistance to dramatic actions. Some populists seek to reshape IOs from within, while others endeavor to dismantle them from the outside. Unfortunately for IOs, they often contend with a multitude of these strategies simultaneously; populists tend to employ all feasible strategies at once. Moreover, different leaders adopt diverse approaches, subjecting IOs to a barrage of such measures. The specific strategies chosen by a given populist are contingent upon the populist's objectives and the constraints they encounter.

State power is one important factor that shapes the form of populist resistance. Powerful states have many levers they can use to dismantle IOs, such as cutting off funds or reducing their participation in the organizations. Weaker states, meanwhile, typically impact IOs to a lesser extent. That said, small countries that oppose IOs can band together to damage organizations (Helfer 2004; Pratt 2021). Populist countries in Africa have opposed the International Criminal Court in concert in recent years, limiting its authority (Voeten 2020). Defections by small states can also trigger chain reactions, and small states may have outside power given institutional rules such as unanimous decision-making. As such, both the number of populist member states resisting an IO and the collective power possessed by such states can determine the potential harm inflicted on an organization. We discuss these

considerations further in Chapters 2 and 3.

In categorizing populists' menu of options to resist IOs, we adapt insights from organizational sociology, which considers how hostile actors undermine the organizations in which they participate. They do so primarily by withholding key resources and creating toxic environments, which is often referred to as "organizational deviance" or "workplace aggression" (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Likert 1967). However, IOs introduce complications since both the international and domestic realms are relevant to the analysis. We therefore first discuss how members harm organizations generally and then adapt these insights to consider how they apply to populists and IOs. While this list is not exhaustive, it highlights key strategies these actors use to disrupt their organizations.

As mentioned, organizational sociology shows that withholding resources can dramatically impact organizational vitality. An important resource that all members possess is effort, or engagement with the organization. Withholding effort includes intentionally performing below expectations, declining to provide knowledge or expertise, or refusing to contribute to collective goals (Robinson and Bennett 1995; Lawrence and Robinson 2007). By undermining productivity and efficiency, hostile members erode the organization's effectiveness and reputation (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002; Fombrun and Shanley 1990). Withholding effort also takes the form of noncompliance, including challenging authority, disregarding rules and policies, or obstructing organizational processes (O'Leary 2010).

Accurate information and/or communication is an additional critical resource that oppositional actors manipulate. Damaging behaviors include spreading rumors, issuing misinformation, or selectively communicating information to sow doubt, confusion, or distrust among members (Kramer 1999; Bordia et al. 2006). Information manipulation contributes to more general toxic communication patterns, such as engaging in aggressive or passive-aggressive behavior or issuing personal attacks and persistent criticisms. Hostile actors create or amplify conflicts within the organization, fostering a negative and contentious environment (Tucker

1993; Neuman and Baron 2005; Giacalone and Greenberg 1997). By sowing discord and undermining interpersonal relationships, hostile members weaken organizational cohesion and disrupt collaboration (Pearson, Andersson and Wegner 2001).

Withholding effort and information contributes to an overall strategy of creating toxic environments. Hostile actors build coalitions or alliances with other dissatisfied individuals within the organization, mobilizing support and forming subversive groups (Brown 2003; Mechanic 2003). Doing so challenges existing power structures and influences decision-making processes. These coalitions erode the authority and legitimacy of leaders, disrupt organizational hierarchies, and promote alternative agendas (Fleming and Spicer 2007; Ezzamel, Willmott and Worthington 2001; Clemens and Cook 1999). This also takes the form of exploiting loopholes or weaknesses in organizational structures and processes. Individuals engage in bureaucratic obstruction, procedural gaming, or strategic non-participation to impede decision-making or the implementation of initiatives they disagree with. By capitalizing on organizational vulnerabilities, hostile members create inefficiencies and undermine the organization's functioning (Ackroyd and Thompson 2003).

Analogously in the international sphere, populists withhold effort from IOs by failing to participate or to comply with IO rules, exiting IOs (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2018), declining meetings and activities, blocking agenda items, and creating competitor IOs (Jupille, Mattli and Snidal 2013; Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2015; Pratt 2021), which pulls resources and influence away from existing IOs (Alter and Meunier 2009; Clark 2022). Prominent examples include Britain leaving the EU, and Hungary blocking EU agenda items (Kelemen 2017). Disengagement also takes the form of non-compliance with the IO's rules and regulations, which could have a domino effect as other countries fear being the only compliers (Barrett 2003; Carnegie and Carson 2019). Depending on the IO's decision-making rules, populists also impede IOs' abilities to act in support of their mandates by vetoing agenda items, only supporting those that fall within the scope of their agendas. India's populist

leader Modi, for example, frequently vetoes agenda items at the WTO. Additionally, they seek to block staff appointments and replace the expert bureaucrats engaged with IOs with national loyalists (Eichengreen 2018; Sasso and Morelli 2021; Bellodi, Morelli and Vannoni 2023).

Disengagement is problematic for IOs, as they require state participation to remain vibrant and influential global governance actors. State representatives must participate in their meetings to formulate policy prescriptions and make meaningful progress toward their mandates. When participation in these forums declines, IOs can become “zombies” wherein they exist in name alone (Gray 2018). Broad participation is also essential for IO legitimacy so it is not seen as serving the interests of select states and is required to achieve cooperative outcomes (Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Dellmuth et al. 2022a).

Information, too, is essential for international cooperation (Keohane 1984; Clemens and Kremer 2016; Carnegie and Carson 2020), and is manipulated by populists. IOs must understand member states’ economic and political situations to properly administer policies and determine whether members comply with organizational rules. Since raw information often comes from members, ceasing to supply it prevents IOs from fulfilling their mandates (Giacalone and Knouse 1990; Serenko 2019). Populists often either refuse to provide information or disrupt domestic information collection activities, which spills over into the quality and volume of information supplied to IOs. For example, populists such as Donald Trump and Viktor Orban undermined domestic scientific bureaucracies by firing scientists and hiring loyalists, which negatively impacted IOs’ abilities to collect this information (Carnegie, Clark and Zucker 2021).

Populists also use information and communication tactics to undermine IOs domestically, vilifying IOs to weaken them and generate backlash. Populists explicitly use harsh rhetoric and incorporate anti-IO stances into their domestic platforms (cf. Kaya, Günaydin and Handlin 2023). This is evident from populists’ domestic campaigns against IOs, including

speeches blaming these organizations for a host of domestic ills (Carnegie and Carson 2019). Indeed, populists around the globe bash “globalists” and international elites, positioning themselves against international actors. Cooperation with IOs then generates audience costs since violating campaign promises drives accusations of inconsistency and flip-flopping (Tomz 2007*a*; Casler and Clark 2021). The public and other states often lose faith in the IO’s mission and capabilities (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2022).

An additional resource that members withhold in international settings is funding. IOs typically rely on member states for the funds used to carry out their activities (Ruggie 1985; Daugirdas 2013), whether providing loans, furnishing aid, deploying peacekeepers, or adjudicating inter-state disputes.⁹ If countries turn off the funding spigot, IOs may be left without the resources to function. For instance, the Trump administration’s refusal to fund the World Health Organization (WHO), which crucially relied on U.S. contributions under its voluntary funding model, significantly hampered its pandemic response.

As in domestic contexts, these strategies contribute to toxic environments within IOs and limit their ability to function. In this way, the IO becomes hollowed out or re-purposed toward new ends (Gray 2018; Spandler and Söderbaum 2023). However, IOs also push back against these tactics, as we explore in the following section.

1.4 How IOs Fight Back

The bulk of our theory and empirical tests is dedicated to understanding how IOs respond to populist attacks. We argue that IOs are not powerless entities that passively observe populists’ efforts to tear down the global governance architecture. Instead, IOs are composed of mission-driven bureaucrats and leaders who want their organizations to persist and seek to

⁹Funds can also be mandatory (e.g., quotas at the IMF) or voluntary (e.g., contributions to the WHO and many other UN organs). While many IFIs earn profits on their activities (e.g., interest payments at the IMF and World Bank), they are insufficient to cover such organizations’ operating expenses.

uphold the international order, as well as other member states that are not run by populists and dislike populist interference. This conceptualization follows work in political sociology that acknowledges that the bureaucrats that staff and manage IOs are not simply representatives of their home countries but operate in a distinct field in which they are socialized into a particular IO's culture and practices (Chwieroth 2015; Honig 2018). Moreover, it goes beyond scholarship that recognizes IO agency (Barnett and Finnemore 1999) by theorizing IOs' specific responses and then testing those predictions.

Several groups of actors shape IOs' behavior. For staff and management, career concerns are ubiquitous. When populists retreat from such organizations, IOs face resource shortfalls and are forced to consolidate their activities. In extreme cases, this leads to layoffs or even the death of the organization (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2022). Populist non-cooperation also threatens the performance of staff and management's programs and operations. Many IOs utilize extensive top-down controls to enable management to monitor field agents and prevent them from pursuing their own agendas when deployed to member states (Woods 2008). For instance, the World Bank makes use of quantitative targets to evaluate staff performance (Honig 2018). But when states refuse to share crucial data or documents with field agents or obstruct program implementation, staff fail to meet these targets and can face sanctions from management. As such, IO bureaucrats wish to ensure that populists either participate or that any resource gaps are filled.

For non-populist member states in an IO, and powerful stakeholders in particular, the continuation of the organizations advances their interests. States like the U.S. have leveraged IOs to coerce favorable policy changes, such as economic and political liberalization, in target states (Li, Sy and McMurray 2015; Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King 2016). They do so both by attaching mandatory policy conditions to material assistance and by socializing states to the perspective that such policies ought to be pursued to improve the country's security, economy, and overall stability (Johnston 2008; Ikenberry 2011; Davis and Pratt 2020). These

states often benefit from the existing order and do not wish to see it threatened.

Populists' attempts to dismantle IOs are thus problematic for these organizations' bureaucrats and member states, and we expect them to fight back. We show that IOs have several tools at their disposal that allow them to work to preserve their role and power on the international stage. While the strategies we highlight here are used to fend off attacks by other kinds of actors as well, we show that IOs use these tools together in a concerted way to combat populism and that doing so is fundamentally reshaping global governance. Moreover, populism represents a unique large-scale threat to IOs that comes from within, and these tools are specifically suited to fight back against these internal threats, unlike external threats which require different strategies.

As before, we incorporate insights from organizational sociology and adapt them to the international context, which involves an interplay between domestic and international bodies. Organizational sociology points to two primary methods by which organizations deal with difficult members: administering punishments and offering concessions. Carrots and sticks are well-recognized as the primary tools of coercion in many settings in international relations (Schultz 2010; Ikenberry 2011). However, applied to international organizations, they take distinct forms and can be used at multiple levels of analysis.

Generally speaking, punishments within organizations are meant to sideline difficult actors and/or to bring them back into compliance. Organizations often rely on a shared identity to define and distinguish themselves from external entities and may penalize members who challenge or violate these boundaries. Formal rules are important because they clearly define acceptable behavior and outline consequences for violations (Abbott and Snidal 2000) such as reprimanding, disciplining, withholding organizational benefits, or removing members from the organization (Dzehtsiarou and Coffey 2019). On the other hand, carrots are used to incentivize conformity, socializing hostile actors into the organizations' norms, rules, and culture by offering them desirable items like acceptance into an exclusive club or

material benefits (cf. Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990; Gowa and Kim 2005). Organizations use tools like open communication, mediation, negotiation, formal grievance procedures, and collaboration to foster an inclusive environment and facilitate dialogue and understanding.

In the case of IOs specifically, such carrots and sticks can be applied not only to member states but also to their domestic populations, upon whom their leaders rely for support and power. Indeed, public acquiescence is viewed by many scholars as an essential prerequisite to international cooperation (Bearce and Scott 2018; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Brutger and Clark 2022). Our theory thus conceptualizes IOs' defensive strategies as falling into one of four categories. IOs can: 1) sideline populists 2) appease populists 3) sideline populists' constituents, and 4) appease populists' constituents. We discuss each in turn.

First, IOs sideline populists and proceed with their reduced participation. Sidelining often includes sanctions or suspensions to punish detractors and deter others from similar behavior, or to compel them to modify their actions (Dzehtsiarou and Coffey 2019). This strategy requires IOs to recover lost resources from elsewhere; they may thus rely more heavily on other IOs (Johnson 2014; Abbott et al. 2015), NGOs, or non-populist states for expertise, information, and funding. For example, after the Trump administration withheld energy-related information from the World Bank, the Bank signed information-sharing agreements with the Arab multilateral development banks, in which a key objective was to obtain this kind of information Carnegie and Clark (2020). IOs can also further develop their own capacities, such as independent surveillance or in-house expertise, or focus more heavily on areas in which they are already relatively independent.¹⁰

Second, IOs appease populists by making concessions to them. IOs may convince populists to stop opposing them by providing them with material benefits, giving them more formal or informal control within the IO, or eliminating objectionable policies. For example,

¹⁰See e.g., Henning and Pratt (2020) on differentiation; Green (2020) on hierarchy; Gehring and Faude (2014) on divisions of labor.

we show that IOs that add conditions to their aid and loans provide more favorable terms to populists.¹¹ IOs also undertake reforms to vote shares and procedures to mollify populist leaders (Kaya 2015); for instance, the WTO offered a variety of reform proposals in the wake of Trump’s opposition to the institution, as we discuss in Chapter 4.

The third and fourth avenues through which IOs fight back target populists’ constituents rather than populist leaders. First, IOs sideline populists’ constituents by interacting with populists out of the public eye. Populists may wish to benefit from an IO but worry about the domestic costs of doing so. Cooperation may make populists appear weak or inconsistent, and threaten the populist leader’s reputation with their domestic base (Kertzer 2016; Casler and Clark 2021). However, populists may be willing to engage with IOs covertly to obtain benefits such as technical advice, economic rewards, or security advantages (Keohane 1984; Davis 2004). IOs could therefore develop secret channels of communication to allow populists to participate, or provide services to them behind-the-scenes (Carnegie, Clark and Kaya 2022).¹² As we document, populists such as Silvio Berlusconi and Hugo Chavez continued to engage with the IMF at high levels privately while publicly eschewing the organization.

Lastly, IOs appease populists’ constituents. If IOs convince domestic populations to support them, populists may derive a smaller political benefit from positioning themselves against IOs. Such organizations could provide public goods or spread awareness of the benefits they have already supplied to citizens. Many IOs that give foreign aid brand it with the IO’s name to increase public awareness of the IO’s work. To appeal to populists, IOs may adopt explicitly populist rhetoric on social media and other channels of communication, emphasizing their connections to ordinary people. For instance, international financial institutions often work to eradicate corruption and close tax loopholes that benefit elites over the masses. For example, both the IMF and EU employed these rhetorical strategies in Greece

¹¹International financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF often offer such concessions to allies of leading stakeholders, for example (Stone 2008, 2011; Copelovitch 2010*b*; Clark and Dolan 2021*a*).

¹²Also see McManus and Yarhi-Milo (2017); Carson (2020) on how leaders interact “offstage.”

	Sideline	Appease
Populists	Reduce reliance on populists; improve capacity; cooperate with other IOs, states, NGOs	Make policy concessions; reform to benefit populists (e.g., increase vote share)
Constituents	Engage populists covertly; use behind-the-scenes channels	Cue the public; employ populist language

in an attempt to bolster public support for their operations in the wake of the Eurocrisis. The IOs emphasized how their proposed reforms would reduce corruption and prevent elites from taking advantage of ordinary citizens.¹³

IOs might select a particular method from these four options, but they often pursue all four simultaneously. IOs may not know in advance which methods will work best, so they may try multiple strategies to fend off populist attacks. Indeed, our four methods are typically compatible. For example, appeasement may allow IOs to retain populist participation, but they may simultaneously develop strategies to sideline populists to make up for resource shortfalls. IOs may at the same time appease populists' constituents since doing so can help with efforts to appease populist leaders, as the leaders then face fewer costs from cooperation. IOs may also undertake appeasement of populists in secret, since populists may be more susceptible to appeasement if it occurs out of view of constituents.

Other factors lead IOs to adopt a multifaceted response as well. For instance, they often confront a variety of populists and types of attacks in parallel, and different strategies may be appropriate for each. Furthermore, since distinct groups of actors within IOs – staff, leadership, and non-populist member states – have disparate incentives, each actor may select a different method rather than muster a coordinated response. For example, in the case of the IMF, each tactic is pursued. As we show, the IMF provides populists with special concessions, while also endeavoring to gain more independence from these actors. The IMF further seeks to engage populists secretly, while also appealing directly to the public via social media.

¹³Interview with former senior IMF official involved in the Greek program.

We do not test the variation in IOs' responses to particular states but rather note that in most of our examples, we find evidence of each method being employed to some degree. While we look for general effects, we note that the particular degree to which each strategy is implemented depends on the strategies' efficacy, costs, and availability. For example, if the IO has nothing populists or their constituents want (i.e., no desirable material resources), appeasement strategies may not be available. Or, if populists demand something that relates to a core function of the IO — an extremely costly concession — the IO may decline to appease them in this manner. Generally speaking, larger and more well-resourced IOs have more goods that interest populists than smaller and more poorly-funded ones. Similarly, populists from poorer countries rely more on IOs' offerings to fill funding and expertise gaps and may be easier to appease (Clemens and Kremer 2016). An IO may also have an easier time offering concessions if the secretariat is fairly independent and can therefore push through controversial policy changes. Further, appeasement of domestic populations may be more efficacious for more visible IOs so the IO's communications reach its intended audience.¹⁴ Sidelining strategies face similar considerations; for instance, IOs can more easily rely on other IOs to provide key informational inputs if multiple IOs exist in their policy spaces and if they possess different specialties or glean information from different sources.

In sum, we expect that IOs adopt a combination of these tactics in the wake of populist threats, boosting IO resilience and effectiveness. Since change is not always easy for IOs, we expect them to generally wait until a populist threat emerges rather than proactively adapt. Status quo bias is frequently strong in such institutions, so they often do not implement reforms unless they face a significant impediment to their operations. This kind of stickiness in institutional rules has been theorized extensively (Page 2006; Bennett and Elman

¹⁴This visibility also varies over time since IOs become salient at critical junctures. For example, the WHO became widely known during the coronavirus pandemic due to its outsized role in addressing it, and could therefore better address domestic populations. Domestic recognition also varies by country since some IOs are well-known in regions in which they operate routinely but are less familiar to other populations.

2006; Kaya 2015); so too have the importance of large shocks or punctuated equilibria in driving reform in IOs and global governance more generally (Krasner 1976; Wallander 2000; Schneider 2011). Path dependence leads IOs to forego changes that could make them more resilient until they face a severe threat, such as that posed by populism.

1.5 Downstream Consequences

We show that IOs defend themselves against populist threats to survive and remain relevant in the short term. Indeed, we provide a variety of examples throughout the book in which IOs' tactics allowed them to turn the tide of populist resistance. However, their actions have additional long-term consequences for the power, agency, transparency, and legitimacy of IOs, as well as for populism itself. While we do not test these systematically, we discuss them extensively and provide a variety of examples in later chapters.

We argue that these downstream consequences are particularly important to understand in an era of geopolitical competition, as populism reinforces and exacerbates such competition. Populists' opposition to global governance opens the door for revisionist powers to upset the status quo. Western IOs are often seen as a bulwark against their rivals. When the West becomes more hamstrung internationally, revisionist powers become emboldened. This provides an opening for China in particular, which has expanded its leadership over multilateral forums and launched IOs such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and New Development Bank. While our findings do not apply exclusively to Western-led IOs, they have important implications for their continued exercise of power and leadership.

IOs may be particularly ill-equipped to respond to geopolitical competition in the wake of populism since populism reshapes power within IOs. When IOs reform their policies and institutions to appease populists, awarding them breaks on requirements or additional influence in the institution, populist members become more powerful relative to other states.

In such cases, populists may use their new power to advance non-traditional goals and objectives, such as reducing the IO's ability to hold states accountable or reducing constraints on member states. In this way, populism can reduce the autonomy and power that IOs possess relative to member states.

Further, when a powerful state is led by a populist and is sidelined by an IO, other members may jump at the chance to seize more control within an institution. A recent example occurred during Trump's presidency when Chinese leader Xi Jinping affirmed his commitment to the WTO and sought a larger role in its governance as Trump pulled back from the institution and the WTO struggled to survive.¹⁵ IO responses to populism thus can allow revisionist powers to exert more control from both outside and within the IO.

Ultimately, IOs' reactions to populism can change more than which states hold power in the international system; they can compromise the transparency and legitimacy of the institutions and can even exacerbate populism itself. While populists already view IOs as illegitimate due to IOs' perceived elitism and constraints on national sovereignty, IOs' reactions to populists can exacerbate these issues and alienate non-populist leaders and citizens. For example, if IOs increase covert governance through behind-the-scenes engagement with populist member states, they may appear even more opaque and out-of-touch, increasing resentment (cf. Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Appeasing populists, moreover, can empower populists by giving them public victories and allowing them to coopt the institution. Appeasement may simultaneously fuel discontent among non-populists, as the IO may seem unfair and politically motivated. Conversely, if IOs engage more with populists' constituents in an attempt to increase public awareness and approval of their activities, improved communication may help with transparency concerns, but may also alienate the IO's core constituency, which may be turned off by simplistic, populist-leaning language.

¹⁵"Xi Pledges More Openness as China Fulfills WTO Commitments." *Xinhua Net*. November 5, 2021. <https://bit.ly/3JCQ0re>

Finally, populist appeals are often attractive to individuals who believe IOs have infringed on state sovereignty and benefit elites at their expense. Sidelining populists may exacerbate these feelings, as populists are ignored by design.

1.6 Scope Conditions

We demonstrate throughout the book that populists are typically hostile to IOs, and in response IOs exercise the four strategies we theorize. We argue that these tactics are effective at curbing populists' resistance to IOs in the short term, though they have long-term repercussions. However, our theory does not apply to every IO. We outline several scope conditions here and discuss them more extensively in Chapter 2.

First, IOs are not equally targeted by populists. Since the definition of populism highlights their aversion to elites and constraints on sovereignty, populists have particular antipathy for IOs that (1) employ international, expert bureaucrats, and (2) are perceived as intrusive by domestic officials. We focus our empirical testing primarily on leading international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF, which fit these criteria, though we also consider a broader set of IOs, showing that many employ the strategies that we outline.

While we demonstrate our theories' applicability to major IOs like the EU, the WTO, the UN, NATO, and others, we note that global financial institutions are a particularly good fit for our framework because they explicitly seek to constrain state behavior and employ highly elite individuals. Their staff consists of mostly Western-educated economists and lifelong bureaucrats whose ideal policy preferences are quite distant from those of populist leaders, especially since they lend mostly to developing and transitioning economies with bloated public sectors (Nelson 2017; Clark and Dolan 2021*a*). In contrast, populists perceive smaller regional IOs as less threatening since they are often staffed and governed by a cohort of neighboring states. Such organizations often do not attach stringent conditions to their

material support (Clark 2022), and their staff composition typically includes more local bureaucrats. Moreover, such regional organizations are often driven by political symbolism rather than a desire to impose real constraints on populists. They therefore tend to allow populists to opt out of initiatives they do not care to join (Borzel and Zürn 2021).

Further, not all populist countries pose an equal threat to IOs. Powerful stakeholders like the U.S. and U.K. can severely cripple IOs when they turn populist, while smaller and less wealthy countries typically cannot. In our empirical tests, we account for this distinction by examining just the impact of populist leaders in the most powerful member states, when appropriate. We suggest that IOs are more likely to utilize more costly strategies when larger and more powerful member states are led by a populist since they are the main providers of IOs' funding, information, and other resources. However, we also note that even small populist states have outsized influence when they band together strategically with other populist parties, or when IOs have rules that make them more pivotal, such as in IOs that make decisions based on principles of unanimity. Small states also matter more when their defections can set off a chain reaction, as IOs then worry about cascading noncompliance with their rules. This is especially common in areas where a defection inflicts negative externalities on other states, such as when a country fails to uphold its trade commitments.

In addition, IOs' tactics do not always reduce populist opposition. In particular, IOs experience more success at combatting populism when IOs are better able to implement their strategies. For example, appeasing populists is more effective when IOs have more to offer to populists. If populists can extract more concessions, working with an IO can be more beneficial than opposing it. Similarly, if IOs have more resources at their disposal, they are better able to sideline populists. When IOs have built-in venues for secrecy, they can more easily sideline constituents, and when they have developed a larger social media presence, they can more readily communicate directly with the public. We discuss these conditions further in subsequent chapters, but the bottom line is that efficacy varies both within and

across IOs depending on their resources and capabilities.

1.7 Contributions

Our work provides a multi-method, unified approach to studying populism and global governance. In doing so, it makes a variety of theoretical and empirical contributions. It also carries normative implications and offers lessons for practitioners.

1.7.1 Theoretical

While we focus on the effects of populism specifically, we develop a theory of how IOs deal with rogue actors broadly defined; such subversive actors are largely unanticipated in scholarly accounts of these organizations. Most theories of IOs postulate that IOs serve a particular function for their members such as remedying collective action problems by supplying information, minimizing transaction costs, and lengthening time horizons (Keohane 1984; Abbott and Snidal 1998).¹⁶ If states do not need such services, these theories expect that they will not join the IO, or if they are already members, they will exit. IOs are thus “coalitions of the willing” that are constructed to solve specific international issues. Alternatively, realist accounts do not anticipate such cooperative outcomes in the first place and therefore are unable to explain the variation we identify in attitudes toward IOs (Grieco 1988; Mearsheimer 1995*a*).

Instead, we know from theories of domestic politics that institutions are a messy product of competing interests, some of which seek to undermine these institutions from within (Schickler 2001). Moreover, participants’ preferences, and therefore the costs and benefits they incur from participation in IOs, are dynamic. These factors result in layers of compromise and bargaining that produce imperfectly and inefficiently designed institutions. If such

¹⁶Also see Chayes and Chayes (1993); Downs, Rocke and Barsboom (1996); Fearon (1998).

issues exist at the domestic level, they should be even more pronounced at the international level, where IOs must deal with country representatives along with each of their domestic populaces (Putnam 1988). These actors often have divergent interests, which can lead to hostility developing over time, especially among countries that feel underrepresented by IOs (Pratt 2021).

While existing work notes the possibility of pathologies emerging in international institutions (Barnett and Finnemore 1999), especially among bureaucrats (Autesserre 2014), scholars have not fully grappled with the presence of hostile members that seek to undermine IOs. Instead, accounts of international organizations tend to assume that member states act in good faith once they join these institutions. Poor outcomes are thought to mostly result from agency drift — bureaucrats acting in ways not anticipated by member states — or specific acts of non-compliance. We instead show how detractors with ideological opposition to IOs change IOs in consequential ways.

In doing so, we contribute to long-standing debates about how political contestation shapes and reshapes organizations (Streeck and Thelen 2005). We go beyond work that analyzes how seminal shifts in the political landscape drive multilateral change (Ikenberry 2001) to ask how more subtle, continuous political shifts remake the international environment. We thus contribute to scholarship interested in how political incentives alter multilateral policymaking (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Stone 2011).

Finally, we add to the collective understanding of challenges to the liberal order (Borzel and Zürn 2021; Farrell and Newman 2021; Weiss and Wallace 2021), particularly populism. While a variety of scholars show that the liberal order faces many challenges and that populists are generally hostile to IOs and seek to undermine them (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Voeten 2020, 2021), this work generally assumes that IOs are helpless to respond. We complicate this body of work by positing a role for IOs as agents that defend themselves from the populist onslaught. We revise and extend scholarship that investigates how IOs

pursue their goals even when they conflict with the preferences of member states (Vaubel 1991; Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Johnson 2014; Clark and Zucker 2023a). In short, the book recognizes the practical realities of how IOs operate in the face of existential threats.

1.7.2 Empirical

This project makes many empirical contributions. We show that IOs often adopt the strategies we identify, namely appeasing and sidelining populists and constituents, to deal with populist challenges to their writ, and we show these strategies help IOs to fulfill their mandates in the near term. To accomplish this, we collected a variety of new data, which future scholars can use to address many interesting and related questions.

First, we supply data on covert communication within the IMF using a new source – written submissions by states to the IMF before Board meetings. Empirical tests of secret activities are notoriously difficult to conduct due to the opaque nature of such activities. However, these data allow us to show that populists engage behind the scenes with the IMF at a higher rate than other leaders, despite their harsh outward stances. We anticipate that these data can be used by future scholars of the IMF and of covert interactions with IOs alike.

In addition, we conducted an original survey experiment, obtaining data on public opinion about a hypothetical development IO that seeks to communicate with the public. This experiment yielded new insights on whether and when IO efforts to engage with populists can be effective. We show that IOs can garner support by appealing to populists directly using populist rhetoric. This experiment is paired with new data on IOs’ social media communications with domestic audiences, through which we analyze domestic audiences’ reactions to IO appeals to the public.

Further, we introduce new data on the forging and content of information-sharing agreements across IOs. Using this data, we can show that the rise of populism leads IOs to sideline

populists by forging new ties with IOs. We anticipate that this data can also be used for the exploration of the factors that lead IOs to connect and expand their links with other entities.

We also use new data on the source and quality of information provided to IOs. With this data, we find that populist leaders are significantly less likely to provide information to IOs. This data can be used by future scholars to further explore the political determinants of information sharing with IOs, a critical topic given that information is in some ways the lifeblood of these bodies.

To analyze these data, we use a variety of empirical strategies including descriptive analysis, difference-in-difference designs, text analysis, elite interviews, surveys, and case studies. Our elite interviews come from experts at a variety of international organizations, providing insider perspectives on this topic. Our case studies, too, ground our argument in real-world examples. They also illustrate the diverse array of IOs to which our theory applies, and the many populist leaders who behave in the manner we theorize. This multi-method approach demonstrates the robustness of our findings and shows the applicability of our theory to many different and important contexts. We believe that our data and approach will facilitate future work on this topic. Indeed, in the concluding chapter, we suggest many directions such scholarship.

1.7.3 Practitioners

From a practical standpoint, our theory has several important implications. On the one hand, our argument suggests that IOs need to continue to adopt defensive tactics to preserve the liberal international order in the face of populism and related threats to their operations. For those who seek to uphold this order, the implication that there exist several effective strategies for doing so – at least in the short term – may be welcome news. Indeed, many scholars and policymakers have argued that the liberal international order helped the West

in its struggle against the USSR during the Cold War (Rosato 2011), assisted with the promotion of human rights and democracy (Johnston 2008; Ikenberry 2011), spread free trade and capital mobility (Krasner 1976; Gartzke 2007), and maintained a democratic peace among members (Doyle 1986; Russett and Oneal 2001).¹⁷ While some have been more critical of the order (Colgan and Keohane 2017), it is generally viewed as being helpful for economic growth and security relative to many plausible alternatives.¹⁸

However, IOs' efforts to defend the order raise additional challenges, chief among them the fact that appeasing and sidelining populists and their constituents exacerbates the aspects of global governance that populists object to most. IOs are increasing their ties to other elite organizations and developing additional areas of expertise to sidestep populists, making them appear even more elite and out of touch. They are also increasingly operating out of view of the public, driving opacity and limiting public scrutiny of their activities.

These tactics thus risk fueling populist opposition over the long term. As the populist challenge persists, some defensive tactics may become less effective — for instance, populists may increasingly co-opt IOs and increase their demands. Thus, rather than solely trying to conduct business as usual by working around populists or buying them off, our book suggests that IOs should attempt to address populists' grievances head-on. One implication we discuss in the conclusion is therefore that IOs could communicate their genuine understanding of populist perspectives, and work to ameliorate some of the conditions that give rise to their discontent. This could be done alongside some of the strategies that IOs are already using but in a more concerted, consistent manner.

For instance, economic dislocation and inequality are major drivers of populism. To the extent that IOs can alleviate some of the economic pressure felt by ordinary people and their communities, populist ideologies may not hold as great of an appeal. Further, proactively

¹⁷Also see Lake, Martin and Risse (2021) for an overview.

¹⁸E.g., "Strengthening the Liberal Order." *Brookings Institute*. April 25, 2016.

reining in IOs' activities in certain respects to avoid populist claims of IO overreach may be prudent. More generally, to persist, IOs should take political conditions — such as domestic populist sentiment within member states — into account when devising their programming. Making efforts to explain to ordinary people how IOs can help them to secure benefits and demonstrating an understanding of their concerns can reduce the impression of IOs as run by out-of-touch elites forcing policies on members. We provide ideas and thoughts for how this could be done in the concluding chapter.

1.8 Plan of the Book

Chapter 2 develops our theory in detail, introducing our core concepts and deriving our empirical hypotheses. We begin this chapter with definitions of our main ideas and discuss the conditions under which our theory applies. We explain the main tenets of populism and why populists present a problem for global governance institutions. We then describe the features of IOs that allow them to push back on the populist threat, giving specific examples, and explaining IOs' options. We conclude the chapter by deriving our empirical expectations that guide the following empirical analyses regarding which features IOs adopt to counter populism and which IOs are most resilient as a result.

Chapter 3 explores the tactics populists use to undermine IOs. We explain how populists withhold resources like effort and information or engage in toxic communication. We provide examples of each and demonstrate their prevalence empirically. We show first that populists manipulate information provided to IOs, and that their communication is more hostile than those of non-populists. We then demonstrate that populists engage less with IOs in public fora.

Chapter 4 then provides a series of real-world examples to illustrate how populists undermine IOs in practice, and how IOs respond to these efforts. This chapter also serves to

illuminate the generalizability of our argument, as we offer cases from a range of IOs and populist countries. It shows how populist attacks span the globe and that IOs use remarkably similar strategies to defend themselves with similar results.

The following four chapters test our theory's predictions regarding specific defensive measures that IOs take to shield themselves from populist attacks: sidelining populists, appeasing populists, sidelining populists' constituents, or appeasing populists' constituents. Chapter 5 analyzes how IOs sideline populists, focusing on the case of information sharing in particular. Since populists often seek to undermine IOs by restricting the flow of information, we argue that IOs often broaden their information bases by exchanging more information with each other. We test our argument using an original dataset of information sharing among IOs in the development lending issue space. We show that when IOs face resistance from populist leaders in powerful member states, they sign more and deeper information-sharing agreements with other institutions. To explore the mechanism driving these results, we supplement our main analysis with an illustrative study of U.S. information provision to IOs under the Trump administration. We also provide preliminary evidence that this tactic helps to garner more information for IOs.

Chapter 6 pivots to a different method to combat populist attacks: appeasing populists. In this chapter, we look specifically at how IOs make targeted concessions that benefit populists to mollify them. While a large literature looks at when IOs make concessions to allies and friends of leading stakeholders, we analyze when such breaks are awarded to populists to show that IOs reward members with concessions to prevent them from disengaging and that this keeps more populists in the fold. Pairing statistical analysis using data on the stringency of policy conditionality at the IMF and World Bank between 1978–2014 with qualitative evidence, we find significant support for our hypotheses. Our findings help make sense of otherwise puzzling instances of breaks given to IO member states.

Chapter 7 turns to a third way that IOs protect themselves from populists: sidelining

populists' constituents. We argue that while populists often take highly public anti-IO stances, they still desire the benefits of IO membership. Thus, populists are frequently willing to interact with IOs in a behind-the-scenes manner, which allows them to claim to their constituencies that they are part of the "common people" while also using IOs to advance their economic and foreign policy agendas. To test our hypothesis, we collected new archival data on two forms of private participation at the International Monetary Fund. We find that populists participate more than other types of leaders in these contexts and that their interactions are just as positive. This suggests that IOs can increase populist participation by offering covert venues for them to engage. This finding has important implications for institutional design, building on the literature interested in the politics of secrecy in IOs.

In Chapter 8, we shift to studying the effects of IO efforts to appease populists' constituents. Specifically, we focus on how IOs mirror populists' rhetorical style to convince the public that they are not distant elites and instead have the people's interests in mind. To test whether such rhetorical tactics work, we run a survey experiment in which we manipulate whether a hypothetical development IO uses a populist frame and find that when it does so, people are much more likely to support it. Drawing on elite interviews with IO officials who worked in particularly contentious states, we also examine Twitter data, looking at cases in which IOs used this strategy and showing that it boosted support for the institution.

Chapter 9 concludes with a discussion of implications for scholars and policymakers, as well as normative considerations that the project raises in terms of transparency, legitimacy, democracy, and equity. We explain how IOs' current strategies are inadvertently fueling populism, and suggest approaches that would more squarely address populists' concerns. We also consider the generalizability of our theory, showing how it applies to many IOs in various issue areas. Finally, we discuss the expectations of our framework for the future of global governance, along with new questions that it raises regarding populism and the

international order.

Chapter 6

Sidelining Populists' Constituents

In 2011, amid the Italian economy's biggest downturn in decades, the IMF offered Italy a lifeline that could help to pull it out of its crisis. Yet populist leader Silvio Berlusconi rejected the assistance package, saying that it was "not needed."¹ This was consistent with Berlusconi's overall disdainful public stance toward the IMF, and his frequent disparaging remarks towards it. Indeed, the IMF was deeply unpopular with Berlusconi's coalition, and he was struggling to stay in power, with sliding popularity amidst Italy's economic troubles. Populist-leaning constituents in Italy viewed the institution as intrusive and a severe encroachment on Italy's sovereignty. They also tended to lump it together with the EU, which they held similar animosity toward. Berlusconi feared that taking IMF assistance would make his coalition and economic policies look ill-advised and thus took great pains to distance himself from the institution.

Berlusconi's hesitance to engage was a problem for the IMF, which sought to shore up Italy's economy and keep Italy's economic troubles from spreading further within the eurozone. Many northern European countries, as well as the U.S. and U.K., owned Italian debt, which severely exposed them to the crisis. These states had an interest in securing

¹"Defiant Silvio Berlusconi Refuses IMF Bailout." *The Daily Mail*. November 4, 2011.

a bailout deal for Italy. The Italian government, too, desired a stronger economy, and thus could potentially benefit from engaging with the IMF, apart from the public stigma associated with such engagement.

The IMF thus did not cut ties with Italy despite Berlusconi's reticence to agree to a bailout. Instead, the IO sought to engage Italy less conspicuously, monitoring the government's economic reforms and communicating with Berlusconi behind the scenes. Meetings of the IMF's Executive Board proved especially useful in this regard. Statements made by the Italian Executive Director, and the ensuing discussions among IMF member states and organizational leadership, enabled the Fund to assist Italy without Berlusconi suffering associated domestic political costs.

An examination of these covert communications shows constructive dialogue regarding Italy's economic position. Despite Berlusconi's public stance, in private he was willing to discuss issues including fiscal policy, structural economic reforms, and taxes. Between 2010-2012, Italy's Executive Director to the Fund issued 202 pre-meeting written statements, which was more than any other country during this period. Figure 6.1 contains a word cloud constructed from all of the written statements filed by the Italian Executive Director in these years.

In this chapter, we show that Berlusconi's behavior is representative of a broader set of cases in which populist leaders distance themselves from IOs to escape the public opprobrium that accompanies engagement. Their unwillingness to cooperate publicly threatens IOs because IOs rely on member participation to make and enforce regulations, and to remain active and viable in regulating global economics and security.

However, populists often suffer from their disengagement from such institutions; in pulling back from IOs, they lose the technical and financial benefits these organizations offer them. IOs thus often fight back against a lack of populist participation by offering to sideline their constituents. Populists cut constituents out of the equation by engaging with IOs

hand, secrecy might allow international cooperation to proceed despite public resistance; circumventing public opinion may be necessary for an IO to furnish global public goods, similar to how leaders must sometimes circumvent the public to conduct optimal foreign policy (Morgenthau 1948; Krasner 1978). Indeed, many scholars have shown that secrecy allows leaders to prevent posturing to strike advantageous bargains (Davis 2004; Stasavage 2004; Poast 2012).

However, leaders also abuse secrecy to achieve their own goals, which may not mirror those desired by the public (Downs 1957). Accountability and transparency are often perceived as important to maintain in multilateralism, as they prevent corruption and other forms of misbehavior (Vreeland, Hollyer and Rosendorff 2011; Tallberg et al. 2013). They are often seen as necessary for IOs to maintain legitimacy and help them avert scandals and allegations of misused resources (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Violations of norms and rules may be kept secret in the absence of transparency (Carnegie and Carson 2018) since public criticism cannot keep leaders' behavior in check in such cases.

By adopting secrecy, IOs ultimately do not address populists' grievances, but rather simply hide leaders' participation in the organizations. While leaders receive benefits from engagement, their core issues are not resolved. Moreover, though their participation is not observed by the domestic public, populist citizens' views of IOs as elite and out-of-touch also remain. If anything, these issues are exacerbated by the increased secrecy, as IOs may seem even more removed from citizens' scrutiny and participation. As such, while IOs can retain populist participation via secrecy, it is not a costless solution and can fuel even more populist resistance.

6.1 How IOs Sideline Populists' Constituents

Populist leaders often have incentives to cooperate with IOs despite the apparent political benefits associated with retrenchment. The specific incentives vary depending on how deeply held a leader's populist beliefs are. As described in Chapter 1, we conceptualize populists as falling on a continuum between those who genuinely hold anti-elite stances, and those who merely perform' populism for their domestic audiences. In the latter case, leaders use populist appeals as a part of their electoral strategy, but the anti-IO positions they espouse are not sincere. For such leaders, the main costs of engaging with IOs are associated with public backlash to IO engagement; the public observes inconsistency between these leaders' promises and their actions and punishes them accordingly (Fearon 1994; Tomz 2007*b*). Constituents channel their disapproval through the ballot box, protests, donations, or other means.

But these leaders face countervailing incentives to participate in IOs since these organizations provide many benefits including helping them resolve disputes, secure economic assistance, attain security benefits, and supply crucial information (Keohane 1984; Dai 2002*b*; Vreeland 2003). Pseudo-populists engage with IOs when the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. IOs can lower the costs by limiting the domestic penalties of cooperation such as by obscuring the visibility of their participation.

Populists who are genuinely anti-elite, meanwhile, suffer both ideological and domestic costs from cooperating with IOs. Such leaders are often political outsiders who sincerely distrust international elites and organizations. Still, they may realize benefits from working with IOs as well. While genuine populists face additional, ideological costs of engagement relative to pseudo-populists, the benefits of engaging are still more likely to exceed the costs when engagement is hidden from public scrutiny because domestic costs are eliminated.

Of course, populists worry about the possibility that their cooperation will leak out, leading the domestic public to discover their engagement with IOs (Castle and Pelc 2019).

However, the risk of leaks may be worth the cooperative benefits derived from the IO. This risk is also often quite small; many IOs have provisions that defend against leaks including classification schemes, confidentiality systems, and professional penalties for disclosures (Carnegie, Clark and Zucker 2021). At the IMF, which is the subject of our empirical tests in this chapter, there are robust classification procedures, and the Fund keeps an array of documents in its Archives to shield them from public scrutiny. If the risk of leaks is too high, however, or the cooperative benefits are too low, we do not expect populist leaders to engage with IOs even in secret. Generally, though, covert participation implies a risk of leaks, whereas overt participation guarantees that their engagement will be known. Populists thus are more willing to engage secretly than publicly.

To retain populist participation, then, IOs can leverage or innovate channels through which skeptical leaders cooperate with the organizations out of the public eye. IOs, however, would prefer states to engage with them overtly all else equal. Sidelineing populists' constituents allows populists to continue to scapegoat and bash international organizations publicly while realizing the tangible benefits of international cooperation behind the scenes (Vreeland 2003; Kurizaki 2007). Public criticism reduces confidence in these organizations, particularly since elite cues often shape public opinion of IOs (Brutger and Clark 2022).

Still, member-state participation is the lifeblood of international cooperation. When states participate in constructive ways, it fuels organizational legitimacy and vitality (Gray 2018). Rather than assume uncompromising stances toward populist leaders, IOs thus allow these leaders to engage in private spaces (Stasavage 2004). Both IOs and populist leaders therefore benefit from behind-the-scenes interactions.

These theoretical conjectures fit with a large literature that argues that states often use secrecy to enact policies that domestic audiences do not like. Leaders seek to avoid the backlash that follows from the exposure of controversial stances or policy decisions (Schuessler 2010). IOs help leaders to keep such secrets safe; for example, states funnel foreign aid

(Dreher et al. 2018) or make secret deals through IOs when the public is opposed to avoid public backlash (Dreher and Jensen 2007; Dreher 2009; Vreeland and Dreher 2014).

6.2 Forms of Covert Engagement

To retain populist participation, IOs may develop new channels of secrecy or use existing channels. They can opt for various degrees of secrecy, from partial to full secrecy. There are many examples of partial secrecy. For instance, many IOs redact portions of public-facing documents (Carnegie and Carson 2020) to hide populist participation. IOs can then reveal information without providing which country supplied it. For example, the IAEA produces reports on countries' nuclear developments, but it omits the identities of the countries that offered it.

IOs also use partial secrecy by limiting access to particular proceedings and documents. They use classification systems, encryption, or other methods to accomplish this (Carnegie and Carson 2020). For instance, the WTO uses stand-alone computers that can only be accessed in person to limit the likelihood of data breaches. They also create legal liability for information that is leaked beyond those who are given access. Similarly at the IMF, many documents remain classified in the Fund's archive for many years.

More complete secrecy can involve refusing to produce certain documents at all. Many ICSID cases, for instance, result in total opacity, depending on the level of transparency chosen by the panelists (Hafner-Burton, Steinert-Threlkeld and Victor 2016). This kind of secrecy is also often used in the security realm when information is so sensitive that states will not share it unless total secrecy is guaranteed.

Another option is for portions of IO processes to be kept fully secret, while others are transparent. WTO dispute settlement procedures, for example, incorporate both transparent and more opaque elements. Disputants opt to participate in private bargaining through the

WTO either before or instead of more transparent dispute settlement. Other IOs, make some data publicly available while declining to share sensitive information like the health of a country's central bank.

It might seem difficult or far-fetched for IOs to obscure interactions between themselves and states run by populist leaders from the public and other members. Indeed, some IOs have reputations for leaking confidential information,² and are staffed by citizens of the very member states that are meant to be left in the dark. However, many IOs have a history of successful secret-keeping. For example, the IAEA has long retained nuclear secrets, developing member-state trust over time. IOs have also kept secrets to preserve international norms (Busch and Pelc 2010), maintain state security (Coe and Vaynman 2020; Carnegie and Carson 2020), or protect proprietary information (Hafner-Burton, Steinert-Threlkeld and Victor 2016). As long as the risk for leaks is not overwhelmingly high, we expect private avenues for participation to be attractive for populists, and less so for non-populists since their constituencies do not penalize them for their cooperation with IOs.

Theoretically, covert and overt engagement with IOs could function as complementary methods of participation or substitutes. When they are complements, a member state may engage through any means available. Non-populists, for instance, may pursue cooperation through both types of channels to maximize the material and legitimacy benefits of their membership. For populists, however, we theorize that overt means of communication are more costly. Thus, we expect that populists eschew this kind of engagement and rely more heavily on, or substitute toward, more covert forms of participation. We therefore hypothesize that populist leaders participate in IOs more often privately – and less often publicly – than non-populist leaders.

²Taylor (1991).

6.3 Empirical Analysis

It is difficult to track secrecy in IOs over space and time since secret interactions are hard to observe. However, we make use of new data on covert interactions at the IMF that allow us to observe these behind-the-scenes encounters. Our focus on the IMF not only allows us to study this question systematically but also permits us to learn about a normatively important institution. The IMF represents a highly salient for many voters, populist and non-populist alike, due to its prominent role in states' economic affairs (Kaya, Handlin and Gunaydin 2023). As a large literature recognizes, it is often difficult for leaders to reject interactions with the IMF, even when the Fund imposes stringent reforms on states, because of the variety of economic and technical benefits that the organization provides (Vreeland 2005; Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King 2016). In particular, countries often must rely on the IMF as a lender of last resort when they encounter financial trouble. The IMF also offers expertise to countries through programs, surveillance, and technical assistance missions.

However, engagement with the IMF through conditional loans or stand-by arrangements is necessarily public, as IMF programs are extensively covered in popular media and have noticeable effects on citizens. Many leaders (Dreher and Gassebner 2012), and populists in particular (Kaya, Günaydin and Handlin 2023), thus outwardly reject the institution, making overt engagement politically difficult. In one example, Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister from SYRIZA, described the joint IMF-EU bailout loan to Greece as “nothing short of cruel and unusual punishment” (Varoufakis 2017, 19). Similarly, supporters of populist Donald Trump often opposed U.S. support of the IMF and World Bank (Brutger and Clark 2022), and populists in general are more likely to scapegoat the IMF for economic declines (Kaya, Günaydin and Handlin 2023).

As a result, we expect populist leaders to participate in the IMF in more concealed ways. In particular, states often take part in regular meetings of the IMF Board, where

various economic topics are debated. States benefit from making their voices heard at these meetings since the Board sets the policy agenda at the Fund and is responsible for approving far-reaching legislation including loan agreements and institutional reforms. Therefore, IMF Executive Directors file written statements ahead of Board meetings that are then read and discussed during these meetings. These statements — called “GRAYS” (herein “Grays”) — are also used by staff to understand countries’ opinions on a variety of issues including conditionality, lending, quotas, and other policy questions.³ Because they are housed in the IMF’s archive and only declassified after 3–5 years,⁴ Grays represent a measure of private participation at the Fund.

The issuance of a Gray is also substantively meaningful. Submitting a Gray indicates a careful pre-meeting formulation and exposition of positions on key issues. Moreover, Grays capture member state positions. EDs speak on behalf of and as representatives of country authorities and not in their capacity as IMF bureaucrats or institutional technocrats. Because Grays present official stances on key institutional outcomes, EDs cannot exercise autonomy in a way that contradicts the preferences and policies of their countries. Doing so leads to tensions with their direct political supervisors, and EDs can even be recalled.

For these reasons, the Grays provide a wealth of information about member state perspectives on economic issues. In Table 6.1, we provide examples of these discussions, including for some countries with populist incumbents. As the Table suggests, Grays denote substantive and primarily technical deliberation of the economic issues at hand. Notably, they do not tend to be IMF-bashing exercises,⁵ and thus are not simply another avenue through which populists levy criticisms of the IMF. We corroborate this more systematically using sentiment analysis subsequently.

³IMF Official. Interview by authors. August 24, 2021.

⁴Communication with the IMF Archives revealed that Grays are made public through the Archive after three years unless they discuss the member’s use of Fund resources, the Policy Support Instrument, or the Policy Coordination Instrument. In these cases, Grays are made public after five years.

⁵IMF Official. Interview by authors. August 24, 2021.

Country	Date	Topic	Representative Detail from Gray
Argentina	2/10/10	The Fund's mandate in post-2008 crisis period	"The Fund must therefore play a bolder role in fostering a fundamental change in the form and degree of international cooperation."
China	7/27/95	Exchange rate restrictions	"We do understand that it is necessary to consider an enlargement of the GAB in order for the Fund to play an effective role in assisting its member countries in financial emergencies."
Greece	5/9/17	Fiscal capacity in fragile states	"We commend staff and local stakeholders for the efforts deployed in ensuring continuity in surveillance and assistance often under very challenging circumstances."
India	3/24/98	Fund surveillance post-East Asian crisis	"I agree that there should be a periodic review of the policies of countries which may have a regional impact, particularly when there is a formal grouping of countries such as ASEA, SAARC, etc..."
Turkey	5/29/15	Fiscal policy and long-term growth	"In addition to its analysis on energy subsidies, we wonder whether the Fund plans to revisit its work on other common subsidies with the view of taking stock of recent experience in member countries and providing reform options."

Table 6.1: **Illustrative Grays.**

To construct our measure of private participation, we collected all Grays available through the IMF Archives Online as of January 2021. This exercise yielded around 55,000 documents spanning the IMF's global membership over the period 1987-2017. Our communications with the IMF Archives confirm that all available Grays are posted on the IMF's digital archives website per the IMF Open Archives Policy; thus, our data are complete.

Our primary dependent variable is a count of the number of Grays submitted by a country or constituency leader in a given year. While multiple countries belong to constituencies, we only credit Grays to the country leading a given constituency. We do so because the ED hails from that country, writes Grays in consultation with their home government, and should privilege their country's policy goals and orientations in formulating Grays. Indeed, while constituency leaders are supposed to take other members' preferences into account when issuing Grays, the leader's views should matter most given their formal control over issuance and content. If constituency members disagree with the leading state, the ED, in

conversation with their government, ultimately determines whether a Gray will be issued and the specific position(s) expressed therein.

Because Grays represent a private form of participation, our theory expects populists to file more Grays than non-populists, who face lower costs from overt engagement with IOs. Populists, in contrast, often display outward antagonism toward IOs and should rely more heavily on private communication. Indeed, our interviews with IMF staff emphasized that even when leaders disengage from the IMF publicly, as populists often do, in private settings their EDs attempt to “gloss over differences” and “try not to make enemies with staff or management.”⁶

Anecdotal evidence supports this contention as well. The populist Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez often avoided the IMF publicly, even threatening to exit the institution,⁷ but Venezuela remained an active participant behind the scenes.⁸ For example, many of its Grays highlight that “[t]echnical assistance [...] has been and will continue to be a very significant instrument in the relationship among the Fund and its members.”⁹ Even under populist U.S. President Donald Trump, the U.S. continued to “toe the line” and “avoid making enemies with [IMF] staff” by filing such statements at IMF meetings despite Trump’s publicly dismissive stance toward the international organization.^{10, 11}

To demonstrate the substantive nature of Grays and illuminate their content, we conducted topic modeling through Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA).¹² Figure 6.2 plots the

⁶IMF Official. Interview by authors. August 24, 2021.

⁷*Reuters*, 2007, <https://reut.rs/41Nxo04>.

⁸IMF Official. Interview by authors. August 24, 2021.

⁹Statement by Mr. Padoan and Mr. Bossone. Executive Board Seminar 01/6, July 6, 2011. GRAY/01/763.

¹⁰IMF Official. Interview by authors. August 24, 2021.

¹¹Another interesting example, in which a transition away from a populist government led to fewer Grays filed, is Poland. We observe that under populist rule (2005–2007, 2015–2017), an average of 41.5 Grays were filed annually, while only 16 were filed on average under non-populist governments between 1990–2018.

¹²We pre-processed the documents by removing white space, punctuation, numbers, and common English stop words. We fit the model to ten topics, which yielded the most coherent and exclusive set of topics after experimenting with five and fifteen topics. We dropped one of the ten topics, however, because it did not produce coherent results due to documents with poor OCR quality.

over-time variation in the *gamma* – the probability that a document covers a given topic in a given year on average – for each of the nine topics that we identified in the Grays. The Figure shows that there is substantial temporal variation in which topics receive the most attention from EDs. The topics correspond to both salient global economic issues like global financial markets, exchange rates, and labor and employment issues, as well as more technical and IMF-specific matters such as access to financing, surveillance, and the discussion of IMF reports and staff papers. Moreover, the trends accord with those that we would anticipate based on the timing of global economic shocks, which increases confidence in the validity of our private participation measure.¹³

6.3.1 Statistical Analysis

We use our new measure of private participation to test our expectation that populists rely more heavily on this form of interaction than non-populists. Our dependent variable is the level of private participation undertaken by a state or constituency leader in a given year, as described above. Because it is over-dispersed, we add one to zeros and take its natural logarithm to help normalize its distribution.

Our key independent variable, as in other chapters, is constructed utilizing the binary populism measure from Funke, Schularick and Trebesch (2022), which identifies leaders (executives) who claim to represent “true, common people” against dishonest “elites” in line with our theoretical framework. They classify 1,500 leaders as populist or non-populist between 1900 and 2018 by digitizing 770 books, chapters, and academic articles on populism from the social sciences.

In using this populism measure, we take into account the constituency system at the IMF. At the institution’s Executive Board, seven relatively powerful IMF members have their own

¹³For example, concerns about labor and employment spike following the two most severe economic crises affecting the West in the sample (the early 1990s recession and 2007-2009 Great Recession).

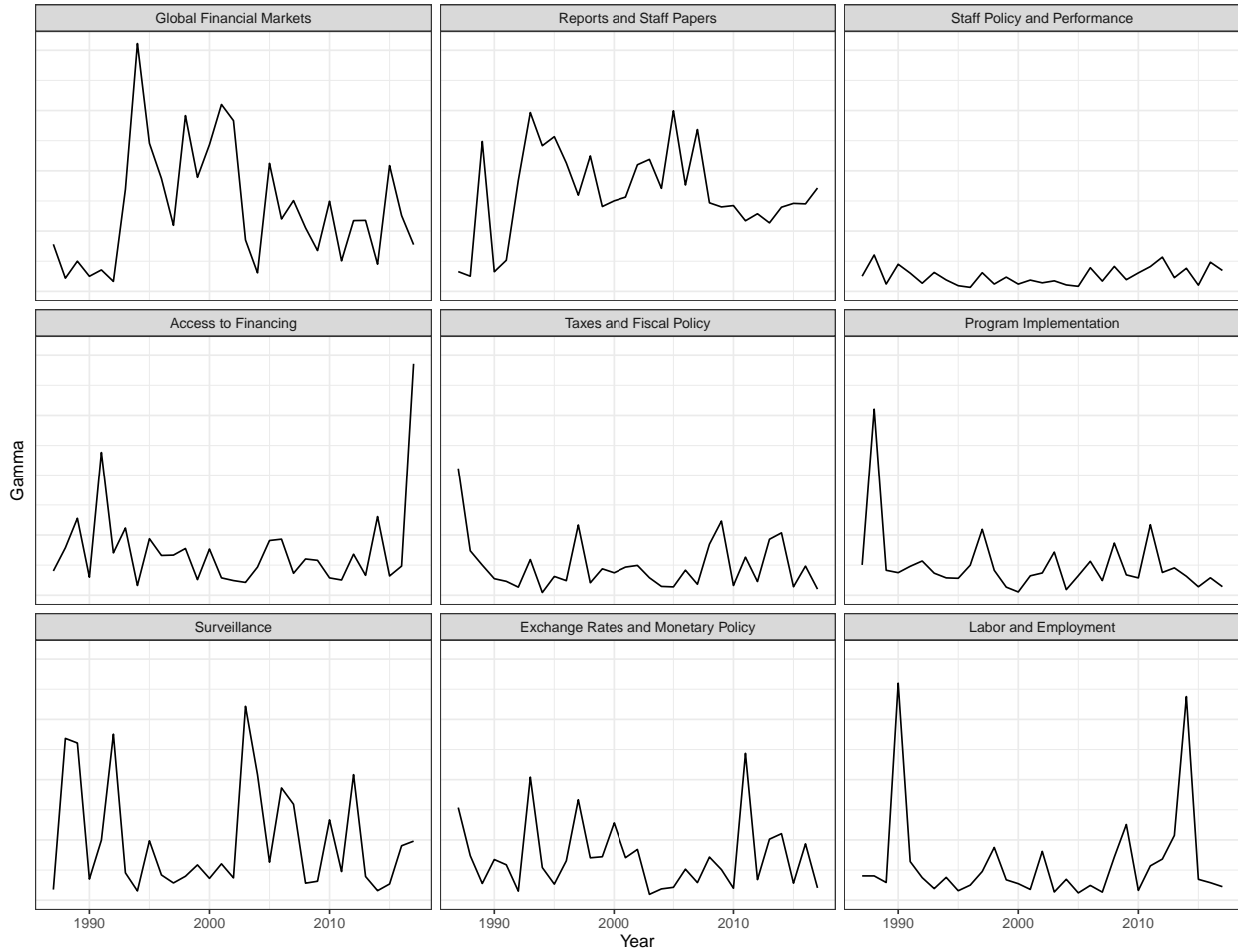


Figure 6.2: **Salience of Topics in Grays Over Time.**

EDs — the U.S., Japan, Germany, China, France, the U.K., and Saudi Arabia. The rest of the membership organizes itself in groupings known as constituencies, which largely but not exclusively follow regional lines. Though EDs representing constituencies often privilege the interests of their own country in IMF deliberations, as outlined above, they are expected to aggregate the preferences of all members of their constituency before expressing a view in a Gray. An ED’s ability to prioritize its country’s interests is therefore likely a function of the relative size and importance of its country compared to the others in the constituency. To account for this, we weight the populism measure described above by a country’s GDP share of its constituency. We do so because we expect EDs from larger and more powerful countries

to more successfully realize their government's preferences when they lead a constituency. In other words, populism in these countries should be particularly impactful.¹⁴

A cursory look at our data provides suggestive evidence in favor of our theoretical prediction. The average number of Grays filed by populist governments' EDs in our data is 24.4, while the average number for non-populists is only 9.9. This difference is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), which suggests that representatives from countries ruled by populist governments tend to participate behind-the-scenes at the IMF to a greater extent than their non-populist counterparts.

We next turn to a more systematic test of the relationship between populism and private IMF participation. We begin our analysis using a parsimonious baseline specification. We then gradually add a range of political and economic variables encompassing factors that the literature identifies as determinants of IMF participation. We first include variables that capture a country's domestic political characteristics that also may affect their inclination to file Grays. We add Polity2 democracy scores because democratic countries might be more eager participants at the Fund since the IMF promotes liberal norms and ideas (Nelson 2017), and democratic countries are more transparent towards international bodies (Vreeland, Hollyer and Rosendorff 2011). Additionally, we include the political orientation of a country's government with an indicator of whether the executive is a right-wing leader.¹⁵ Right-wing governments may participate more readily, as their economic preferences tend to accord with those of the IMF (Caraway, Rickard and Anner 2012).¹⁶

Several other variables capture a country's international political standing, which also impacts a country's engagement with the IMF. We control for UN voting distance from

¹⁴While our dataset covers all IMF member states during the period 1990–2017, we associate EDs either with a single country in the case of the aforementioned seven countries, or with the country leading the constituency. If we do not weight the populism measure, we obtain similar results.

¹⁵Data comes from the Database of Political Institutions.

¹⁶This variable helps us draw conclusions about the orientation of left-wing parties toward the IMF as well since there are very few independents in the sample.

the U.S. in the UNGA¹⁷ since countries that are closer to the U.S. receive better deals on conditionality packages at international financial institutions (Stone 2008; Clark and Dolan 2021*b*) and may thus participate more frequently with the IMF. We also include U.S. aid receipts and membership on the United Nations Security Council since countries that receive more U.S. aid or are temporary UNSC members often possess leverage at the Fund (Stone 2008; Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland 2015).¹⁸

Economic factors also can impact a country's propensity to engage with the IMF. We control for per capita GDP; since Grays often contain technical information and pertain to economic knowledge, countries with greater wealth and state capacity may be able to file more of them. We also control for a country's total debt service to GNI ratio, which serves as a measure of a country's potential need for an IMF program.¹⁹ Additionally, we include GDP growth and unemployment rates, since countries suffering from economic contractions may require Fund support and therefore impact engagement.

Finally, we directly control for IMF program presence and a country's position in the institution. Specifically, we include an indicator measuring whether a country participates in an IMF program in a given year,²⁰ since IMF program participants may need to engage behind the scenes more than other countries. This also helps us to account for possible differences between borrowers and lenders, though we note that we expect our theory to apply to both sets of actors since both receive benefits from the institution.²¹ We also control for vote-power asymmetry, which captures the gap between a country's level of economic power

¹⁷Data comes from Bailey, Strezhnev and Voeten (2017).

¹⁸Data on UNSC membership comes from Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland (2009), but we hand-coded the data to improve temporal coverage. Data on U.S. aid comes from the WDI.

¹⁹Data for per capita GDP and debt service comes from the WDI.

²⁰This measure is constructed using data from Kentikelenis, Stubbs and King (2016). We swap this variable for the debt service one when it appears in the model because they are highly correlated.

²¹Lenders receive surveillance benefits as well as benefits from the IMF's expertise, and appreciate the prevention of spillovers and contagion effects from the IMF's interventions elsewhere. Further, drawing a sharp distinction between these categories is difficult, as all countries are technically lenders since they all pay their quotas, and some countries borrow in some years while others do not, or borrow from elsewhere.

and its formal power at the IMF (Pratt 2021). Countries with more formal power at the Fund may participate more often, while countries with larger gaps between actual and voting power at the Fund might be more dissatisfied with it, which could influence participation (Kaya 2015).²²

Because some of our control variables exhibit missingness, especially for developing and transition countries, we impute covariate data with multiple imputation, as is common in recent work focusing on international financial institutions (Schneider and Tobin 2020; Clark 2022). Doing so allows us to avoid “advanced democracy bias,” which occurs since many countries that do not report data are low-capacity countries with weak political institutions (Lall 2016). While imputation can introduce bias when observations are not missing at random (Pepinsky 2018), it is beneficial when missingness affects auxiliary as opposed to the main independent variables of interest and when missingness is largely a factor of observed characteristics such as development and state capacity (Lall 2016; Arel-Bundock and Pelc 2018). This is the case in our data since there is no missingness on the populism or Grays measures; we perform bivariate tests to ensure our results are not driven by imputation alone.

Private Participation Analysis

We run ordinary least squares for our primary models,²³ using the following baseline specification:

$$DV_{it} = \beta_1 Populism_{it} + \alpha(i) + \delta(t) + u_{it} \quad (6.1)$$

²²We coded data on vote-power asymmetry in line with Pratt (2021) as a country’s share of GDP in the IMF minus their vote share in the institution. GDP data comes from the WDI, and voting power information comes from the IMF. Data on quotas comes from the IMF’s MONA database.

²³We select OLS over zero-inflated models, such as negative binomial, because our dependent variable approximates a continuous variable, and OLS is more reliable and easier to interpret than generalized linear models (Gomila 2021).

where DV_{it} measures the (logged) number of Grays submitted by country i in year t , $Populism_{it}$ is whether a populist is in power in country i and year t and is weighted by a country's GDP share of their constituency as explained above, α and δ represent country and year fixed effects, and u_{it} represents the unobserved error term. We then add theoretically motivated covariates, which vary depending on our specifications as detailed above. We cluster standard errors at the country level.

We begin with the findings from our parsimonious models and then progressively integrate the aforementioned covariates. The results shown in Table 6.2 support our theoretical contentions. Column 1 shows that countries' EDs file significantly more Grays when their country elects or appoints a populist leader. The addition of our baseline covariates does not alter this primary finding (Column 2). Notably, the magnitude of the effect for populism is substantively meaningful – having a populist leader (or moving from no populists in a constituency to populism for all members in that constituency) leads an ED to file around 80 percent more Grays when accounting for baseline covariates. These results are robust to the inclusion of additional covariates (Columns 3–5). Overall, Table 6.2 suggests that populists engage with the IMF behind the scenes much more than non-populist leaders do, in line with our theoretical expectations.²⁴

Alternative Explanation: Private Criticisms

A potential alternative explanation for our core result is that representatives of populist countries simply echo their leaders' public criticisms of IOs in private, using the Grays as an opportunity to air their grievances to other EDs. While our theory does not rest on private participation taking a particular form, it does imply that there are differences between costly public engagement, on the one hand, and less costly private engagement, on the other. While

²⁴We note that many of our control variables are measured “post-treatment.” However, as Column 1 shows, the results obtain without these controls included.

	Covert participation				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Populism	0.811** (0.303)	0.805* (0.334)	0.735* (0.290)	0.776* (0.331)	0.804* (0.333)
GDPPC		0.087*** (0.010)	0.087*** (0.010)	0.088*** (0.010)	0.088*** (0.010)
Polity2		-0.011* (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.010* (0.005)	-0.011* (0.005)
UN voting (ideal pt dist)		-0.006 (0.057)	-0.012 (0.058)	-0.013 (0.057)	-0.005 (0.057)
Right wing government		0.077 (0.053)	0.087 (0.053)	0.081 (0.053)	0.077 (0.053)
Debt service / GNI		0.010*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.003)
IMF program			0.017 (0.047)		
Vote-power asymmetry			-3.240*** (0.749)		
U.S. aid				-0.013 (0.009)	
UNSC member				-0.086 (0.080)	
GDP growth					-0.001 (0.002)
Unemployment					0.0004 (0.003)
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	5122	4190	4190	4190	4190
Adj. R-squared	0.634	0.645	0.647	0.645	0.645

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table 6.2: **Covert Participation in the IMF.** Robust standard errors are clustered at the country-level. Model specification is OLS.

in public populists may incur costs if they interact with IOs in a positive manner, in more concealed venues, they may nonetheless rely on the IO's expertise and engage substantively. If Grays merely represent vessels for more IMF criticism but in a different format, then we would expect the sentiment of populist countries' Grays to be relatively negative. Our own readings of the documents and the aforementioned examples suggest that this is not the case, as Grays written by populists and non-populists alike are highly technical rather than critical.

However, we also verify this using our data to examine differences in the sentiment of the Grays' text between countries led by populists and those led by non-populists. We first assess this descriptively using word clouds and then more systematically. The word clouds, which appear in Figure 6.3, reveal that populists and non-populists discuss an array of economic topics including debt, markets, and financial and fiscal policy matters, as well as those related to IMF staff and the Board.²⁵ However, there is no clear difference in tone or sentiment across the two clouds. This finding suggests that populist and non-populist leaders engage the Fund in similarly positive ways behind-the-scenes.

We further probe these preliminary results on content similarity between populists and non-populists by performing sentiment analysis on the text of the Grays, followed by a regression analysis. To do so, we utilize the Loughran and McDonald dictionary of financial sentiment terms (Loughran and McDonald 2011) which, unlike a generic dictionary, centers around the core issues of interest at the IMF. This makes it particularly suitable for our sentiment analysis since the Grays pertain mostly to economic and financial issues, as our word clouds illustrate.²⁶ Frequently used positive words include strong, progress, and improve; negative words include crisis, challenges, and difficult.

Based on this dictionary, we compute a sentiment variable, which subtracts the number of negative terms from the number of positive terms for each country-year and takes that value as a share of the total number of positive and negative words combined from that country-year. We then compute a simple difference-in-means for sentiment between populists and non-populists, for which the 95 percent confidence interval bounds zero and fails to achieve statistical significance ($p = 0.874$).²⁷ Finally, we perform ordinary least squares using

²⁵The word “authorities” appears prominently, which signifies that EDs are not speaking of their own accord, but rather as representatives of country authorities.

²⁶Where standard consumer-based sentiment dictionaries categorize words like “risk” or “debt” as having negative sentiment and words like “growth” as positive, the Loughran and McDonald dictionary handles them appropriately. We exclude words categorized as litigious, uncertain, constraining, and superfluous from our analysis, focusing only on positive and negative words.

²⁷The 95 percent confidence interval is $[-0.018, 0.021]$.

sentiment as the dependent variable, and otherwise mirroring our previous specifications, as shown in Table 6.3. The results suggest that the sentiment of populists' Grays is similar to that of non-populist leaders.

	Sentiment				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Populism	-0.036 (0.021)	-0.041 (0.026)	-0.039 (0.025)	-0.041 (0.027)	-0.040 (0.027)
GDPPC		0.001 (0.018)	0.005 (0.019)	0.001 (0.019)	0.004 (0.019)
Polity2		0.002 (0.001)	0.003 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
UN voting (ideal pt dist)		0.008 (0.012)	0.013 (0.012)	0.008 (0.012)	0.009 (0.012)
Right wing government		0.013 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)	0.010 (0.008)
Debt service / GNI		-0.00001 (0.0004)	-0.0002 (0.0005)	-0.00001 (0.0004)	-0.0001 (0.0004)
IMF program			0.034** (0.012)		
Vote-power asymmetry			-0.023 (0.061)		
U.S. aid				-0.0001 (0.001)	
UNSC member				0.002 (0.008)	
GDP growth					-0.002* (0.001)
Unemployment					0.002 (0.001)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1158	1004	1004	1004	1004
Adj. R-squared	0.515	0.500	0.506	0.499	0.504

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table 6.3: **Sentiment and Participation at the IMF.** Model type is OLS. Robust standard errors are clustered at the country-level.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we revealed that populists fight back against populist non-participation by engaging with populists through secretive channels. We used new data to demonstrate that populists engage with IOs privately more often than non-populists. While our results remain observational, we are encouraged by their robustness. Further, if it were the case that an omitted variable was driving both participation in Grays and populism, we would not expect to see populists participate fewer in public settings, as we showed in Chapter 3. We also supplemented our statistical analysis with interview evidence as well as additional case study evidence found in Chapter 4.

While we focus on the IMF, our theory is generalizable to many types of IOs. Indeed, many IOs offer leaders the opportunity to participate out of the public eye; for instance, investor-state dispute outcomes are often kept private, and IOs like the WTO and IAEA redact and classify an array of sensitive materials (Pelc 2017; Carnegie and Carson 2020), and most IOs offer avenues for behind the scenes diplomatic engagement. We thus expect that populists engage with these IOs privately at higher rates as well.

However, we expect that populists only disguise their engagement with an IO if it is otherwise visible to their constituents (or selectorate, in the case of non-democratically elected leaders). If not, there are few domestic costs associated with overt engagement, so populists can disparage IOs at home while freely engaging with the organizations in practice. However, we note that overt participation still carries risks, since IOs become salient at critical junctures. For example, the WHO became widely known during the coronavirus pandemic due to its outsized role in addressing it. Visibility also varies by country since some IOs are well-known in regions in which they operate routinely but may be less recognized elsewhere.

An additional scope condition is that, as mentioned in Chapter 1, our theory should apply when IOs have something that populists want. If they do not, populists should not

bother to engage with them, even clandestinely. Generally speaking, larger and more well-resourced IOs may have more to offer populists than smaller and more poorly-funded ones and thus may be most germane. Similarly, populists from poorer countries may rely more on IOs' offerings to fill funding and expertise gaps. That said, even better-resourced populists may not wish to disengage from IOs due to the aforementioned benefits, so the net result of private engagement may still be positive.

This chapter's findings have theoretical and policy-relevant implications. In particular, they suggest that engagement in global governance may be most readily attained by working with populists behind the scenes, at least in the short-term. In line with research arguing that IOs ought to maneuver around domestic political constraints to assist their members (Putnam 1988; Caraway, Rickard and Anner 2012), we suggest a potentially productive way of doing so. Incorporating populists in this way can keep them from leaving or completely shunning IOs (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2018), potentially boosting the survival prospects of the institutions.

However, though we show that populists participate in IOs privately, their public disengagement nonetheless damages these bodies by eroding their legitimacy and authority. A burgeoning literature shows that IOs more easily fulfill their mandates if states and their publics believe that their decisions are valid and ought to be obeyed (Hurd 1999; Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). By eroding public trust in the organizations, populists therefore stymie IOs' efforts despite their continued private participation. Moreover, enhanced secrecy within IOs raises potential concerns about accountability and transparency within the institutions (Dahl 1999; Moravcsik 2004).

In effect, by opening up additional channels for secrecy and engaging more out of the public eye, IOs may fuel populists' grievances in the long term. They may appear distant and unaccountable to ordinary people, as they hide from view from such individuals. This appearance can become a reality- the more IOs limit their engagement to elites that represent

member states and shun public engagement, the more attractive populist disenchantment with IOs becomes.



(a) *Populists*



(b) *Non-populists*

Figure 6.3: Most Common Words Appearing in Grays. Common stop words, punctuation, words systematically used in headers and document naming conventions, and numbers are removed. We construct the clouds using the program Wordle.

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