

European Security At All Costs?

How the European Security Crisis Shapes Public Opinion

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Generali Chair at Bocconi University

European Stability Mechanism, 4th of April 2025

Outline

1. **Is Europe forged in crisis?** Crises affect the political room to manoeuvre in Europe
2. **How have recent crises shaped political room to manoeuvre?** Understanding the populist turn
3. **How do security and economic concerns shape public support for European defence cooperation and aid for Ukraine?** In shaping their response, political leaders need to develop a new narrative

**1. To what extent in Europe
forged in crisis?**

Monnet's Mantra: Europe Forged in Crisis

This, because in addition to its benefits – freedom of movement for people, goods, services and capital – the single market also increases the interdependence among national economies and fuels the feeling that we need “to act together.” That is especially important today when, in each of our countries’ grass-roots opinions, **the globalisation process is frightening people and populism is gaining ground, urging countries to turn in on themselves. That is why elected governments have a tendency to assign priority to purely national interests, forgetting the benefits of shared sovereignty.** This interdependence in the market is a kind of plinth, a base which, even if the climate were to deteriorate in the future, would still make it possible to keep the construction of Europe alive.

– Jacques Delors 2012

Countries Turning Inward?

Supply

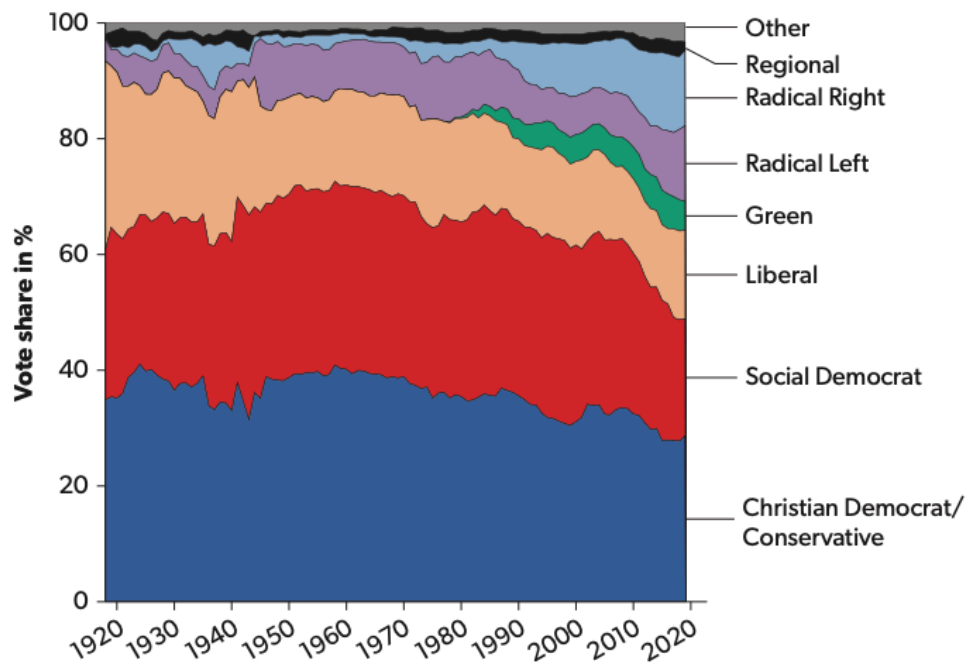
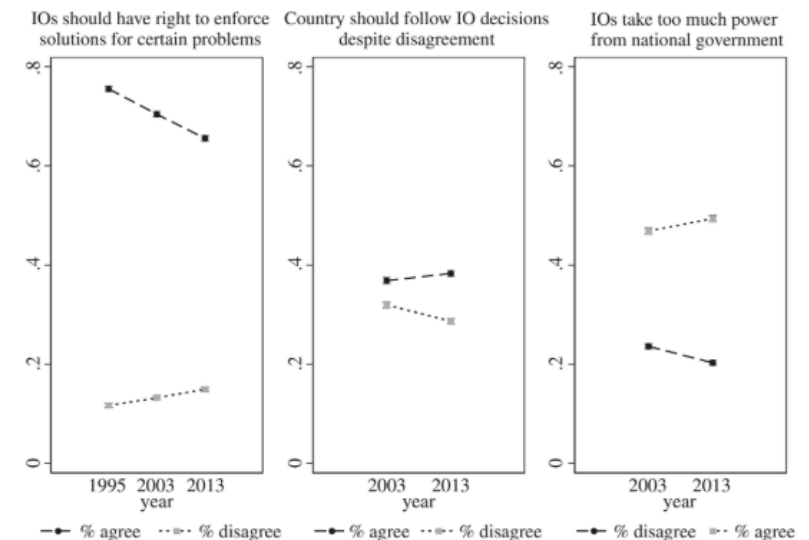


Figure 9.3 Party family vote shares in western Europe, 1919–2019

De Vries and Hobolt 2020

Demand



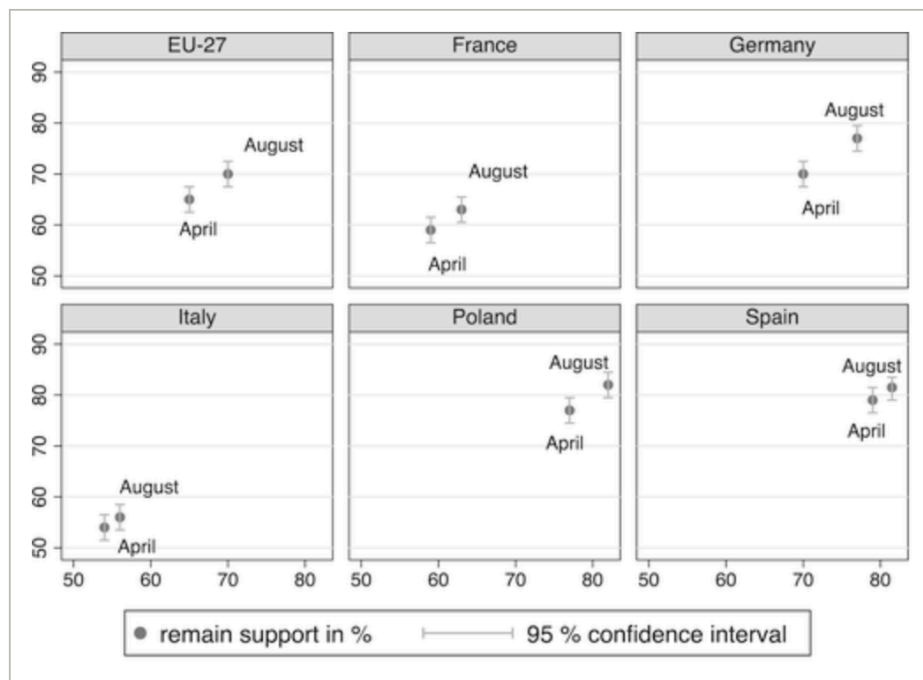
Source: International Social Survey Program, waves 1995, 2003, 2013. Share of respondents (dis)agreeing or strongly (dis)agreeing with each statement.

FIGURE 1. Support for international organizations, 1995–2013

De Vries, et al. 2021

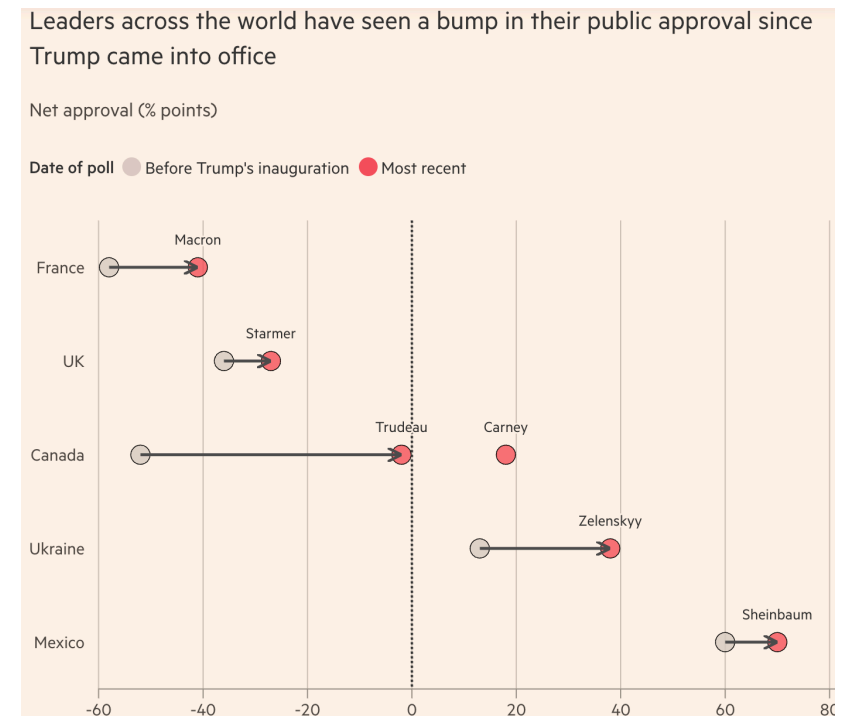
Not A One Way Street

Brexit Effect



De Vries 2017; 2018

Trump Effect



Financial Times 2025

Politicising International Cooperation

Politicizing International Cooperation: The Mass Public, Political Entrepreneurs, and Political Opportunity Structures

Catherine E. De Vries, Sara B. Hobolt, and Stefanie Walter

Abstract International institutions are increasingly being challenged by domestic opposition and nationalist political forces. Yet, levels of politicization differ significantly across countries facing the same international authority as well as within countries over time. This raises the question of when and why the mass public poses a challenge to international cooperation. In this article, we develop a theoretical framework for understanding the nature and implications of politicization of international cooperation, outlining three scope conditions: the nature of public contestation, the activities of political entrepreneurs, and the permissiveness of political opportunity structures. By empirically examining these scope conditions, we demonstrate that politicization can have both stabilizing and destabilizing effects on international cooperation. Highlighting the systemic implications of politicization for international cooperation has important implications for international relations scholarship. Although international organizations may face challenges, they also have ways of being remarkably resilient.

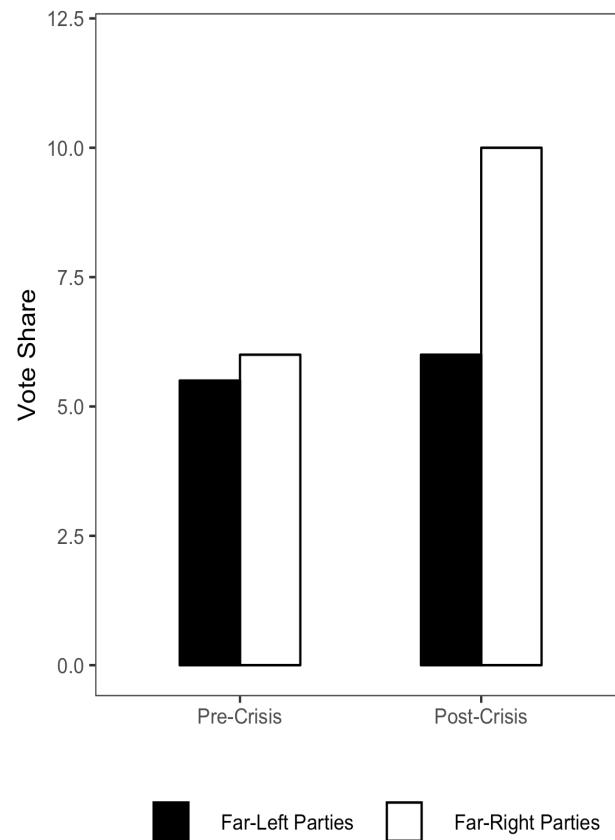
TABLE 1. *Consequences of politicization for countries' ability to engage in international cooperation*

<i>Public Contestation</i>	<i>Political opportunity structures</i>	
	<i>Lack of institutional opportunities to challenge international institutions</i>	<i>Institutional opportunities to challenge international institutions</i>
<i>Low public contestation</i>	(1) Permissive consensus	(2) Democratically legitimized international cooperation
<i>High public contestation</i>	(3) Public discontent	(4) Challenged international cooperation

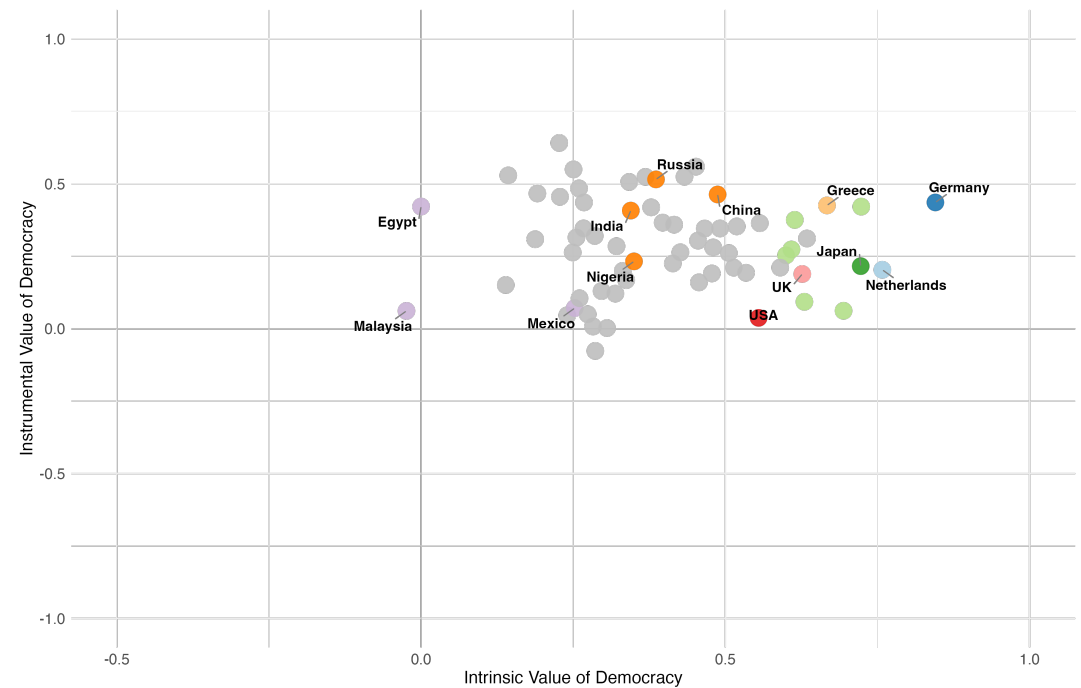
1. Crisis shapes the political room to manoeuvre

2. How have recent crises shaped political room to manoeuvre?

(Financial) Crises Moves Politics to the Extremes

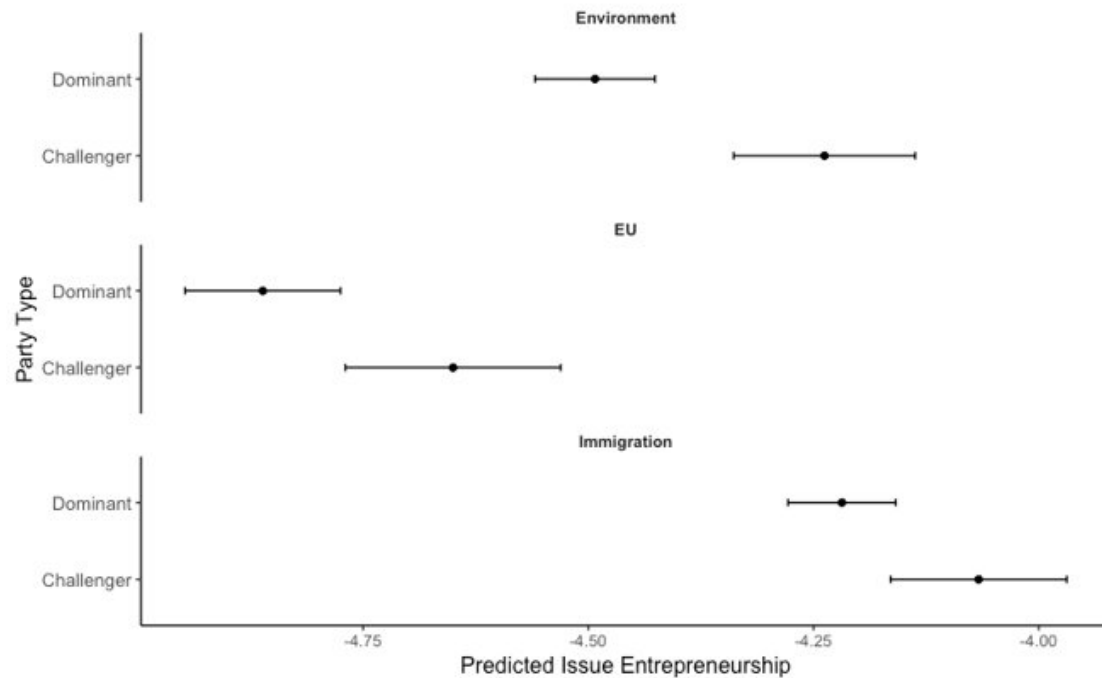


Funke et al. 2016

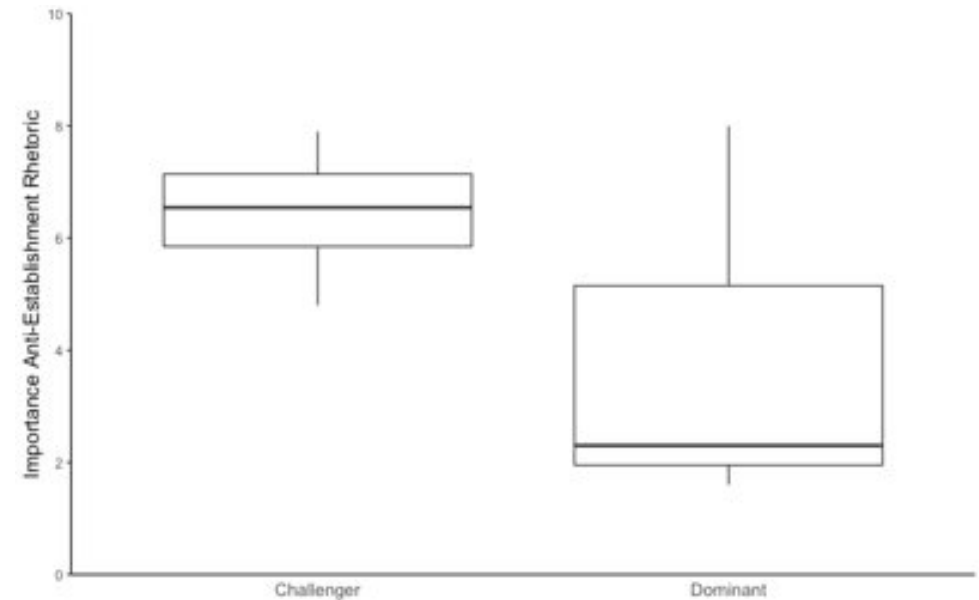


Arceneaux & De Vries 2025

Supply: Populist Political Entrepreneurs



Mobilize Wedge Issues



Mobilize Anti-Elite Sentiment

Demand: Negative Experiences with Government



Without Roots: The Political Consequences of Collective Economic Shocks

Published online by Cambridge University Press: 07 March 2025

SIMONE CREMASCHI , NICOLA BARILETTO and CATHERINE E. DE VRIES

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American Political
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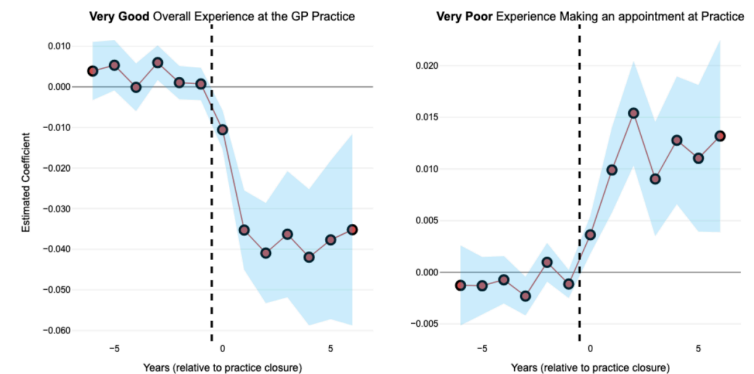
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Geographies of discontent: Public service deprivation and the rise of the far right in Italy

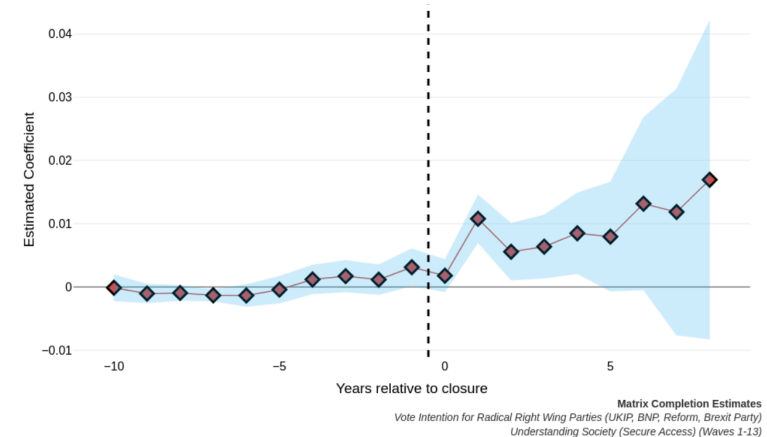
Simone Cremaschi, Paula Rettl, Marco Cappelluti, Catherine E. De Vries

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Verification Materials: The materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures, and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/I3VHZK>



Note: Matrix Completion Estimates and 95% confidence intervals shown.
Data Source: Ipsos MORI GP Patient Survey (2012-2023)



European Research Council Project

Dickson et al. 2025

Populist Turn

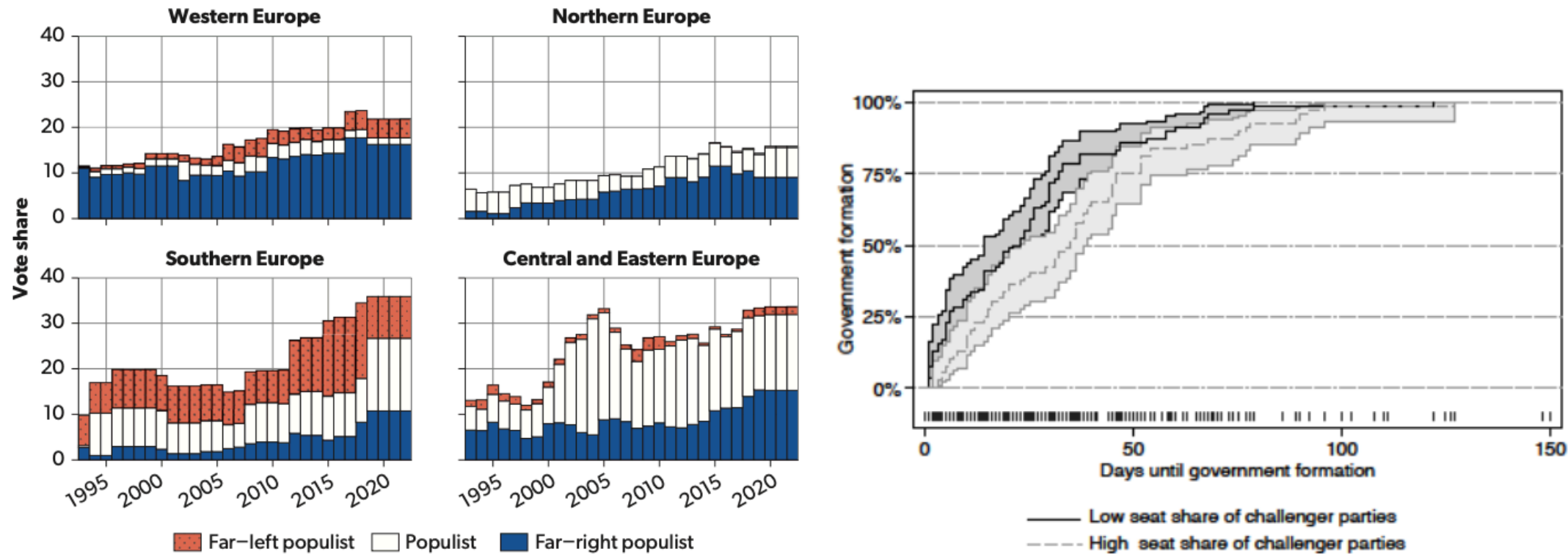


Figure 5.6 Vote shares for populist parties across Europe, 1993–2022

De Vries et al 2025

De Vries & Hobolt 2020

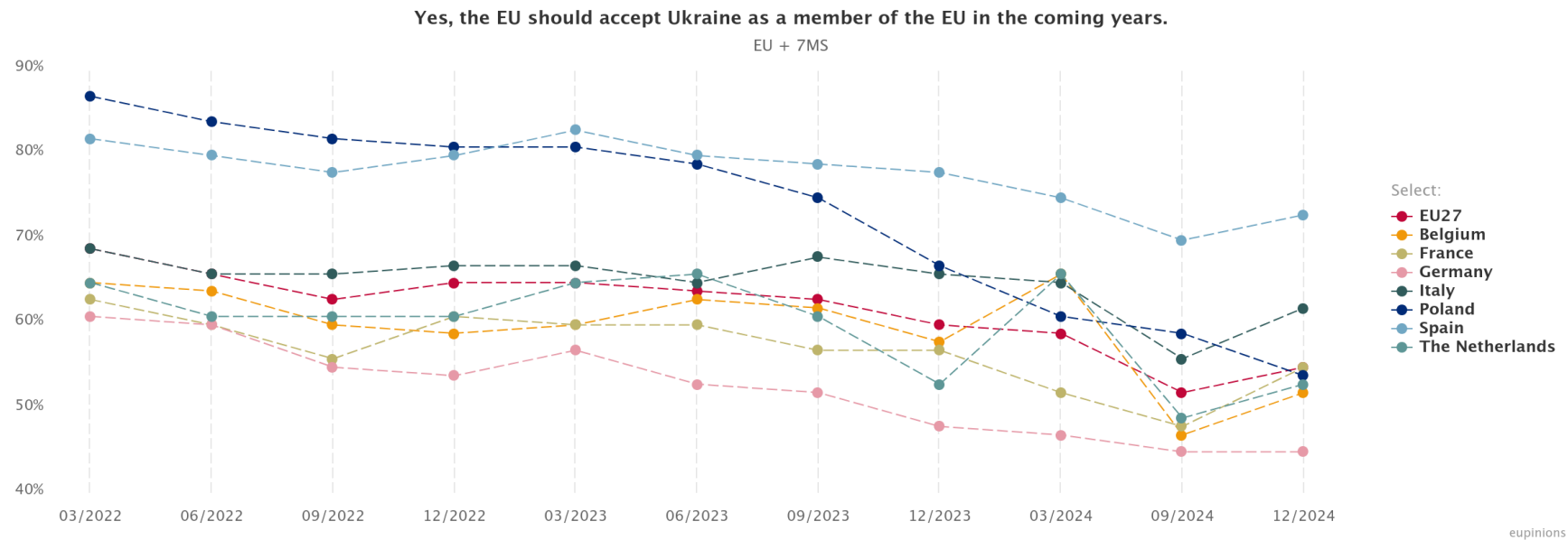
2. Populist turn limits political room to manoeuvre

3. How do security and economic concerns shape public support for European defence cooperation and aid for Ukraine?

Trends Cont'ed

eupinions Ukraine Trends / EU membership Ukraine

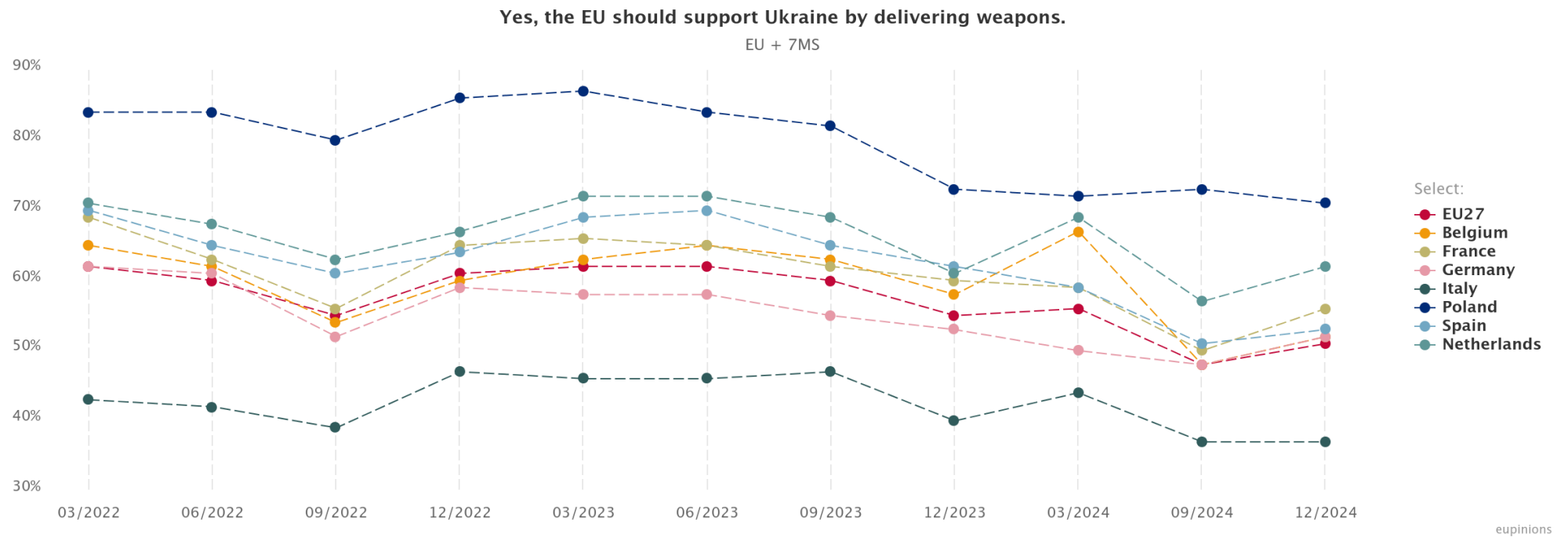
Should the EU accept Ukraine as a member of the EU in the coming years?



Trends

eupinions Ukraine Trends / Weapons delivery – EU

Should the EU support Ukraine by delivering weapons?



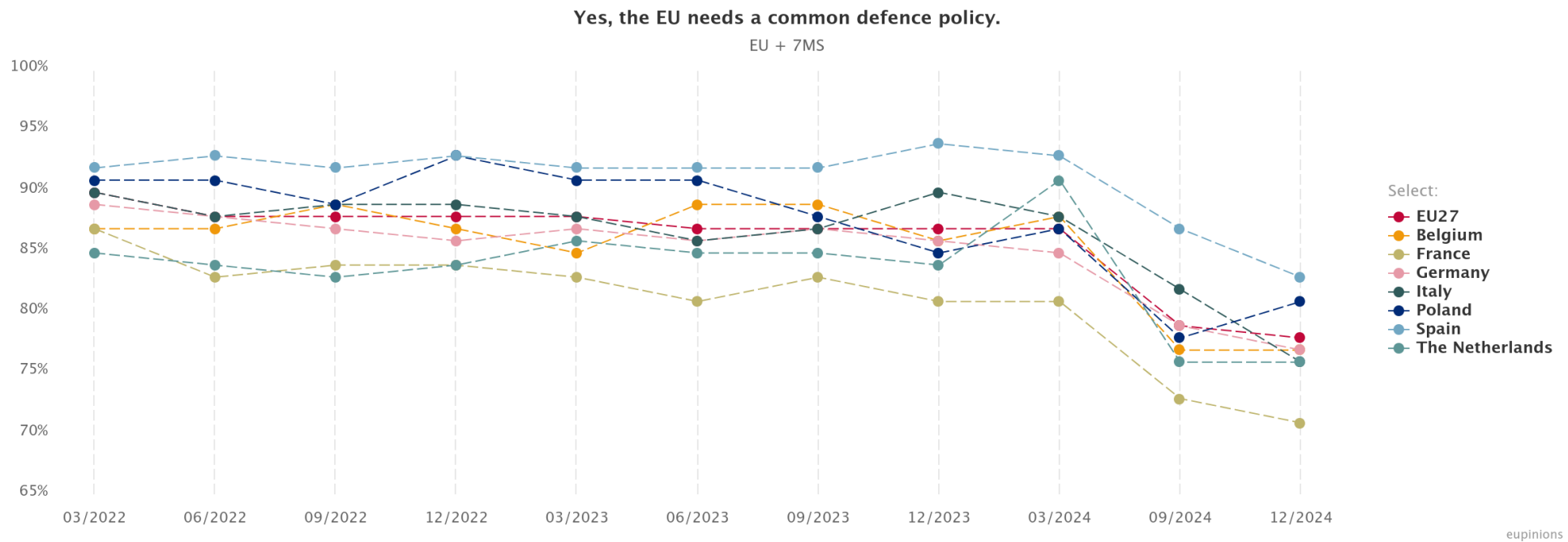
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Trends Cont'ed

eupinions Ukraine Trends / Common defence policy

Does the EU need a common defence policy?



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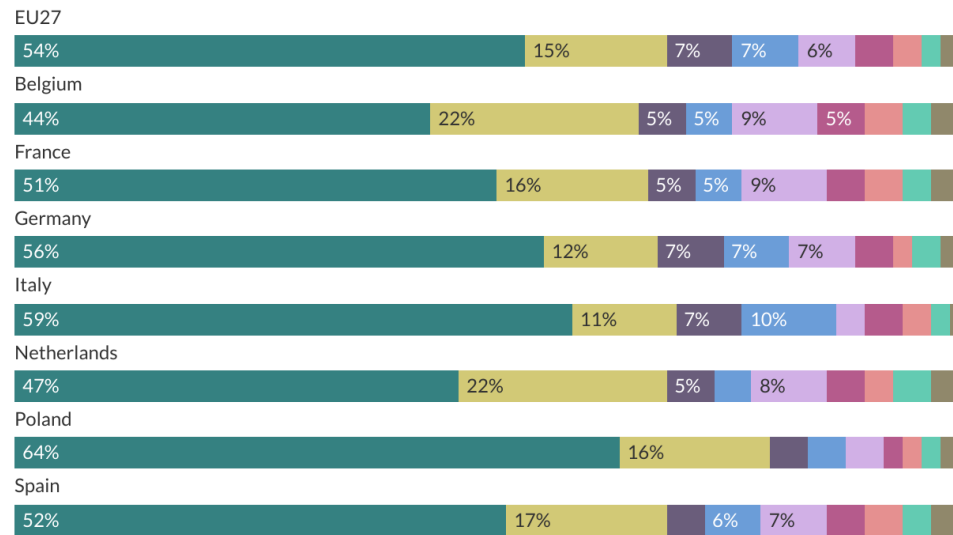
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Transatlantic Relationship

Who's the European Union's most valuable ally?

Only one answer possible

United States United Kingdom Russia China Canada Japan Saudi Arabia Israel India

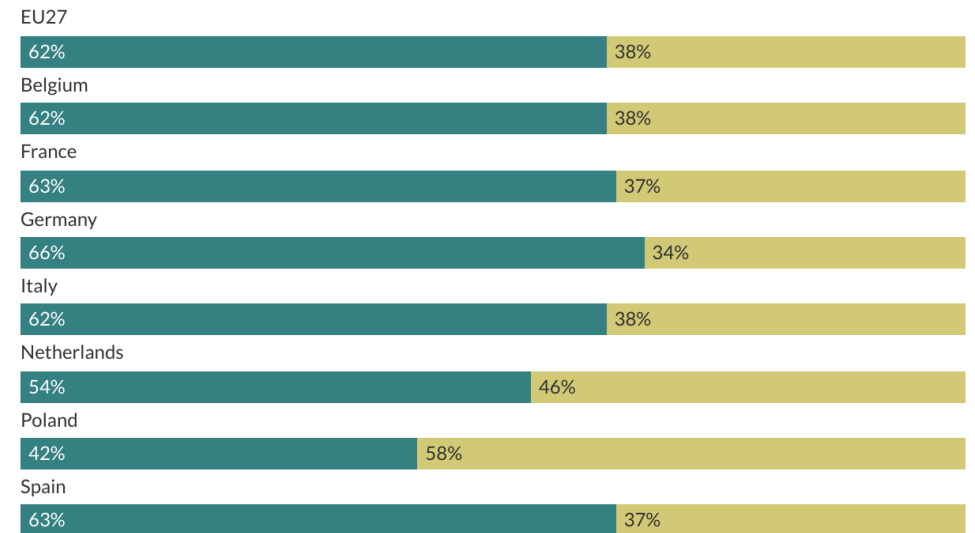


December 2024

eupinions | what do you think?

In the last half century, Europe and the United States have often cooperated closely. Do you think that it is time for Europe to go its own way?

Agree Disagree



December 2024

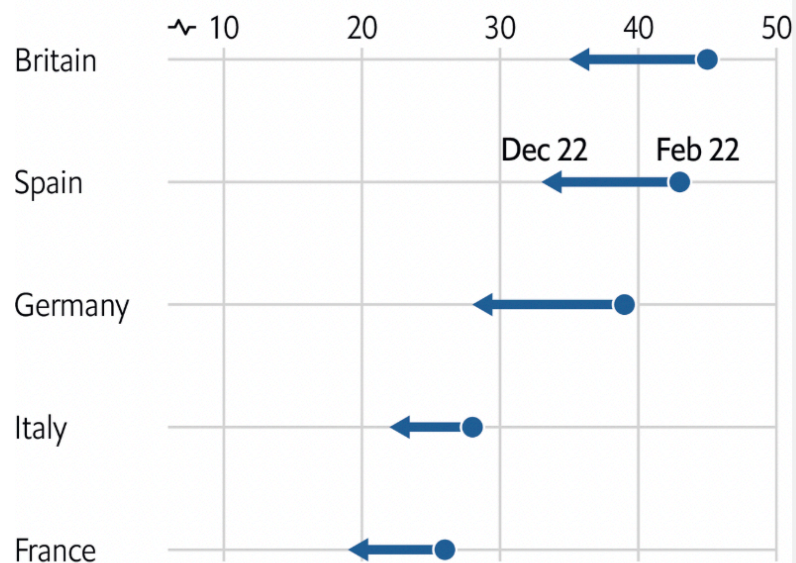
eupinions | what do you think?

eupinions 2024

Trade Offs When It Comes To European Security

Mais non

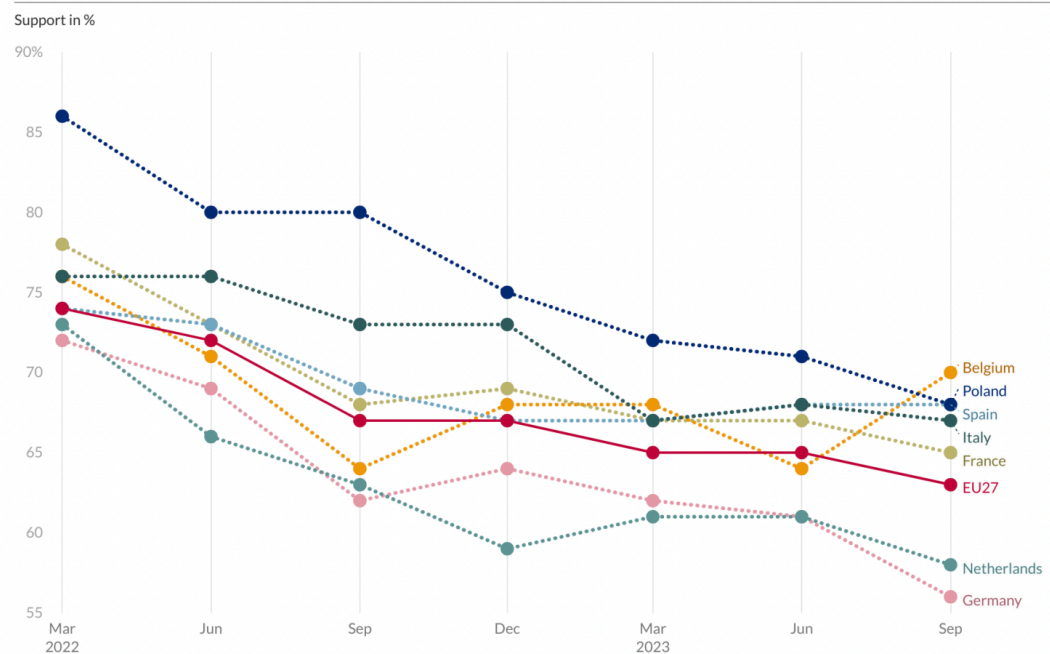
Europe, support for “increased sanctions against Russia if it meant an increase in cost of living?”, %



Source: YouGov/*The Economist*

The Economist

EU27: Should the EU seek to become more energy-independent even if that means costs are rising further?



For single data points, please check the appendix

eupinions | what do you think?

Public Support for European Security

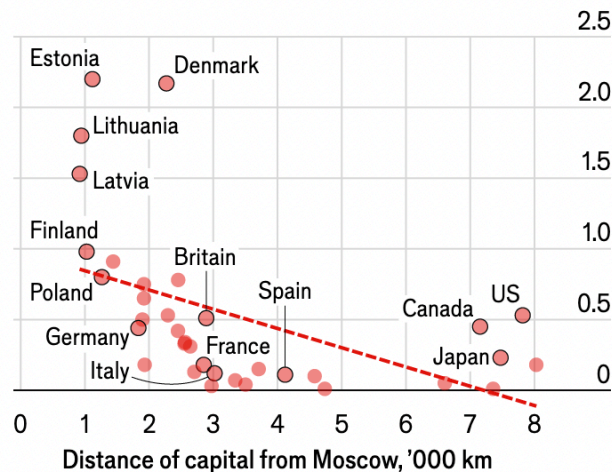
- Despite Europe's resilience, concerns are growing that **economic costs** could weaken public support for Ukraine and **undermine Europe's ability to act in unity**.
- This concern is mounting given the **recent pivot** of the Trump administration.
- As a result, the link between security, economic concerns & European public opinion on foreign policy is now a critical concern for scholars & policymakers.

Security Concerns Shapes Ukraine Support

Russia's draw

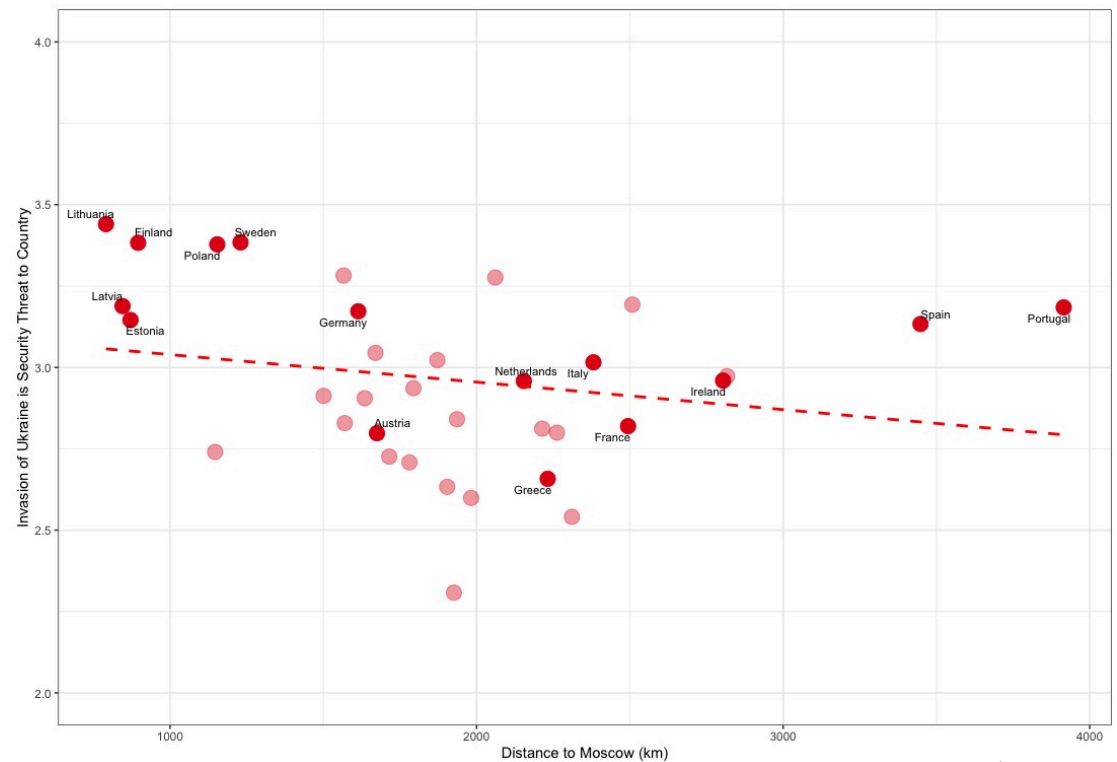
6

Bilateral aid allocated to Ukraine, % of 2021 GDP
Jan 24th 2022-Dec 31st 2024



Sources: "The Ukraine support tracker: which countries help Ukraine and how?", C. Trebesch et al., Kiel Working Paper, 2024; Google Maps

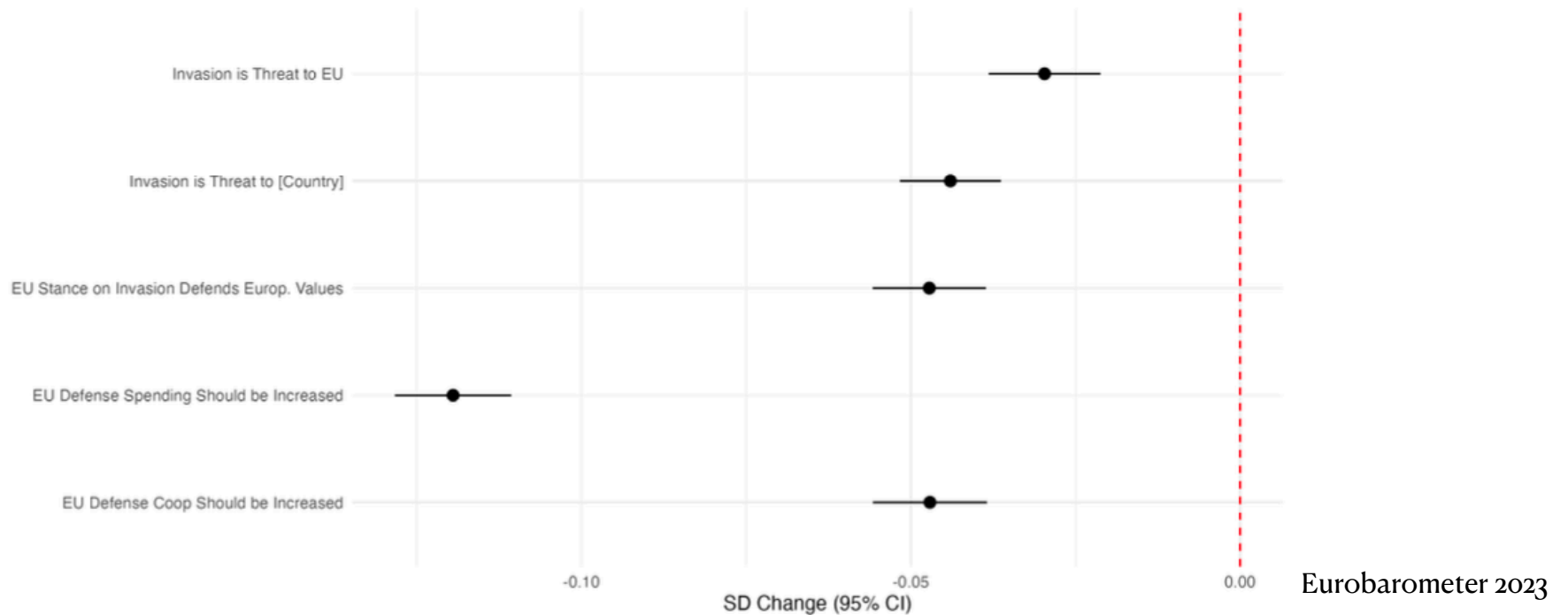
Recall Aid Trends



Eurobarometer 2023

Security Threat Perception Trends

Security Concerns Shapes EU Defence Support



Closeness to Moscow Increases Threat Perception and Support for Defence Cooperation

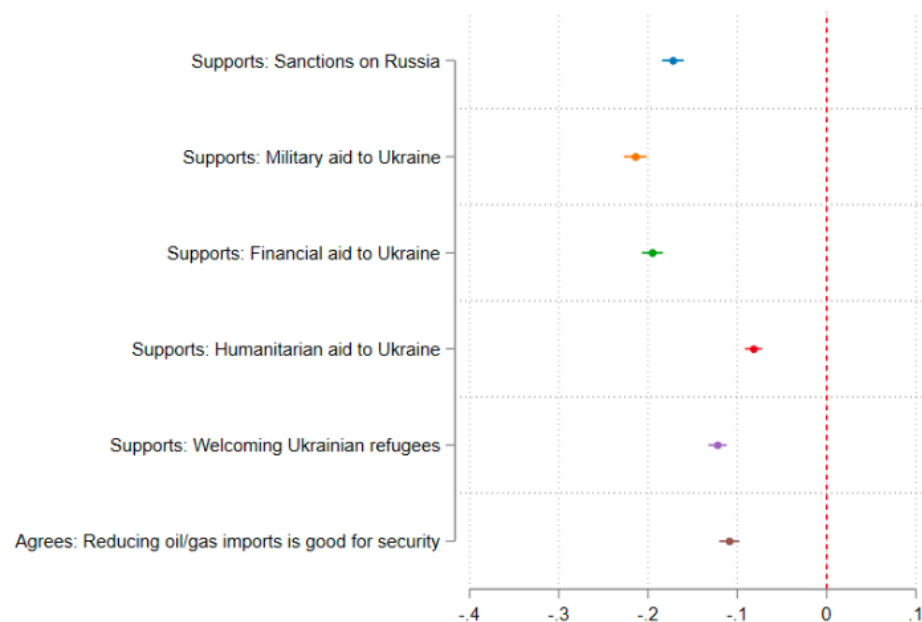
But What About Economic Concerns?

- Public opinion for security and foreign policy involvement is not just a function of concerns about security threat perceptions, but due to possible costs of support. Recall German coalition example: **Ukraine support involves tradeoffs.**
- Studying this at micro level is challenging. While Europeans who worry about their economic situation are less likely to support sending weapons to Ukraine, but this is **correlation.**
- Causality could run in the **opposite direction**, i.e. Europeans who oppose EU involvement in Ukraine may be more likely to emphasize economic problems.

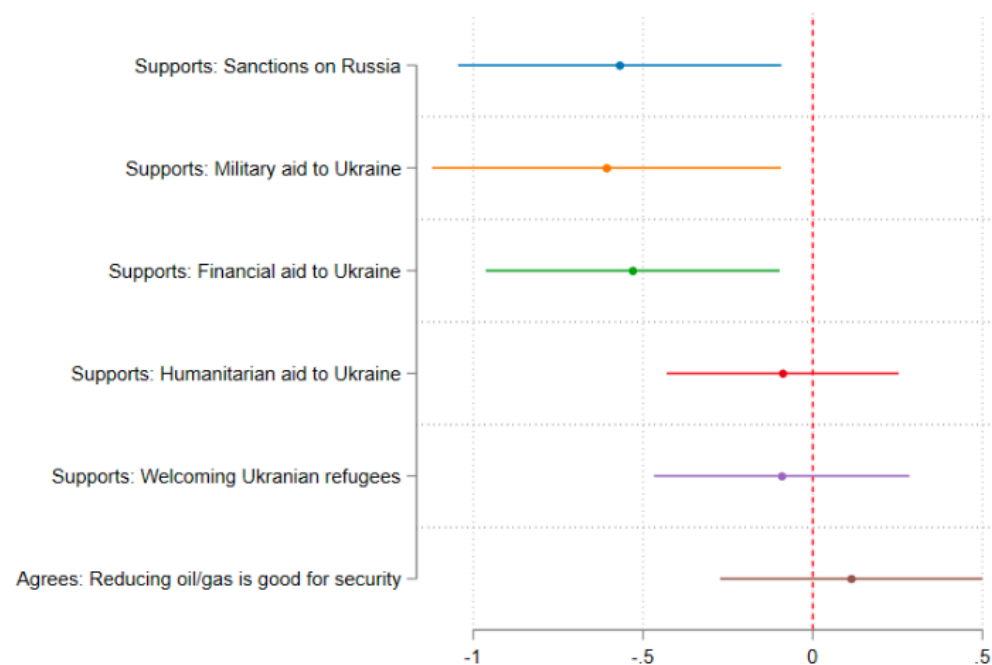
Instrumental Variable Approach

- We study the effect of economic hardship on Europeans' foreign policy attitudes using Eurobarometer (EB) survey data from April 2022 & June 2023.
- We use an **instrumental variable (IV) approach**. Our instrument exploits the interaction between **local temperature fluctuations & national energy price changes**, which affects how salient economic costs are to individuals across different regions & times.
- While rising energy prices generally heighten economic hardship, this effect should be weaker for people experiencing warmer weather, as they consume less energy.
- First stage results show significant effect on respondents' economic concerns.

Economic Concerns Reduce Support for Aid & Sanctions



Correlational Results



IV Results

Eurobarometer 2022-23

Increased Economic Concerns Reduced Support for Russia Sanctions & Ukraine Aid

Security & Economic Concerns

Figure 46: “Invasion of Ukraine is Security Threat to EU” - Situation Household Finances

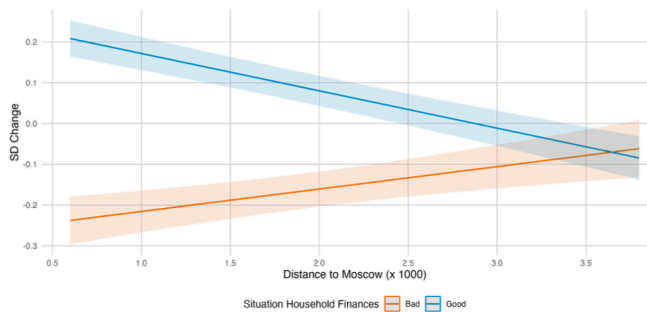


Figure 51: “By standing against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the EU is defending European values” - Situation Household Finances

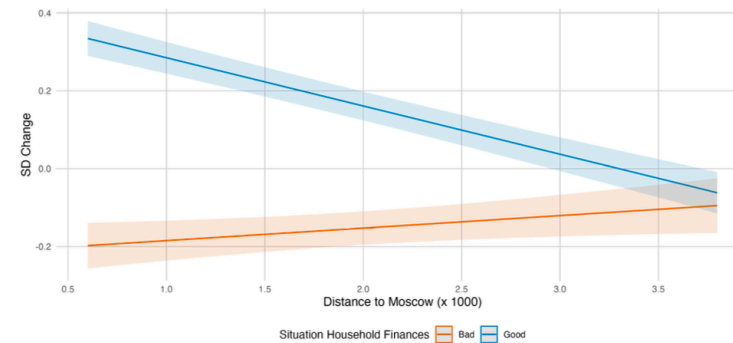
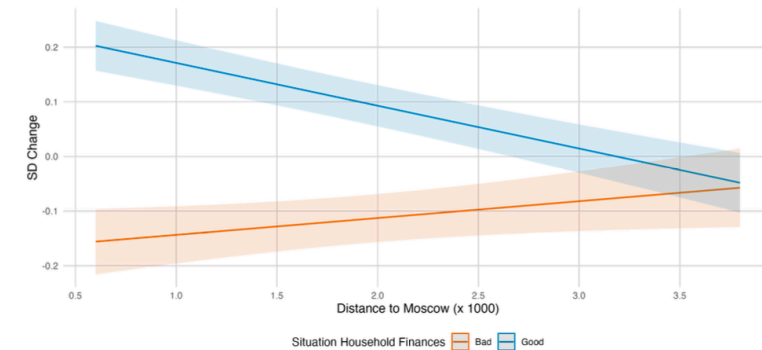


Figure 61: “More money should be spent on defence in the EU - Situation Household Finances



Eurobarometer 2023

The Effect of Security Concerns on Support for Ukraine & European Defence Cooperation Is Driven By Better Off

3. Security & Economic Concerns

Shape Security Support

Concluding Remarks

- Europeans' attitudes on security and foreign policy change over time, display important **differences across member states & individuals.**
- **Security and economic concerns** shape security and foreign policy attitudes in much the same way as we would predict based on existing work.
- If **public support wanes**, this opens up future political contention & may jeopardise effort to maintain the EU's security.
- In the efforts of increasing European security cooperation and Ukraine support, political leaders should **not forget (perceived) costs for the public.**
- Shifting the core of the European project away from soft power to hard power requires trade offs & sacrifices, leaders need to develop a **narrative about why and how.**

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Security in Europe will mean sacrifices for citizens

Europeans must decide whether they're willing to bear the costs of shaping their future, or risk having it shaped for them.