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1

Introduction

THE ORGANS of global governance, painstakingly constructed through decades of diplomatic negotiation and multilateral agreements, face unprecedented threats. Chief among them is the rise and spread of anti-globalization sentiment. An array of challenges has fueled opposition to global governance: rising economic inequality, mass migration, a global pandemic, the existential threat of climate change, technological disruptions, and the shifting international balance of power. 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 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 lambaste the corrupt elite, blaming incumbent politicians and international actors alike for runaway globalization. These leaders 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 diminish the international organizations (IOs) and treaties that states have gradually forged since the conclusion of World War II. Strikingly, many of the architects of the liberal international order have become its staunchest critics under populist regimes.

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

This book spotlights international organizations' attempts to fight back against detractors. We show that IOs are not helpless but rather have several powerful tools at their disposal that can allow them to persevere and even thrive. Yet their methods can also have unintended consequences, at times eroding their legitimacy and fueling additional populist resistance. We provide recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to make their institutions more "populist-proof" while avoiding these negative side effects.

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. This is because, as we describe subsequently, populists are highly pro-state sovereignty and anti-elite. Because international organizations are staffed by elites and place constraints on their members, populists typically oppose them.

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 elites that dominate bodies like the WTO, refusing to cooperate 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

1. *CFR*, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/trump-china-and-steel-tariffs-day-wto-died>.

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 IOs as infringing on their national sovereignty. For example, US president Donald Trump, in his first term, 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

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 among nonpopulists. 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 2007; Ikenberry 2011a). 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 consequences. If populists undercut global development institutions or organizations tasked with maintaining peace between rivals, they could thrust many individuals into poverty, forced migration, or conflict. Should 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).

Yet others argue that populists offer a necessary corrective for an international order that has expanded too fast and intruded too far into issues that should be under countries’ purviews (Rodrik 2017). Critics point to IOs’ sprawling bureaucracies and large budgets and argue that their waste and inefficiency must be tamed. They charge that IOs have become too powerful and

2. Donald Trump, 2016 campaign slogan.

3. Marine Le Pen, 2022 campaign speech.

4. Jair Bolsonaro, 2022 campaign speech.

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

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

have evolved far past their original mandates. Populism may bring such important issues back into the public sphere for discussion (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Still others, however, argue that even if populists make valid points, the solution is not to undermine or destroy existing systems of global governance but to reform them.

These issues are regularly debated, as populist parties are popular in virtually every region of the world. Figure 1.1 displays all countries with populist executives in 1990 compared with 2018; the number of populist heads of state increased from 5 to 22. More recent examples abound as well, including the 2022 election of far-right populist Giorgia Meloni as prime minister of Italy, the 2023 election of populist anarcho-capitalist Javier Milei as president of Argentina, and the 2024 reelection of Donald Trump as US president.

As a result of populism'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). While some bemoan IOs' perceived downfall and others cheer it on, the idea that global governance faces critical challenges is generally accepted. 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. In short, we conclude that the notion that populism is decimating the liberal international order is misguided; instead, we ask *how* populism is changing the global order.

To do so, we recognize that IOs have agency, and we investigate the specific strategies they adopt in response to populist attacks. We then explore 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 shift their policies as a result. Our theory is generalizable, though our empirics center primarily, but not exclusively, on international financial institutions. This concentration 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).

This book addresses several important scholarly debates, including how IOs can or cannot foster cooperation, the effects of the populist resurgence on such cooperation, and the degree to which states and institutions of global governance possess power in the international system. Further, our study carries lessons for practitioners who seek to strengthen multilateral cooperation in the face of widespread resistance.



FIGURE 1.1. The rise of populism. These maps show countries with populist leaders in 1990 and 2018, highlighting populism’s spread. Data comes from Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch (2023).

Our primary contention is that IOs are strategic actors that can—and do—combat attacks by hostile actors, allowing them to remain much more resilient than they are often given credit for. We thus push against the considerable scholarship on global governance that overlooks IO agency, which argues that IOs “do not take on a life of their own, and thus . . . are simply tools of the great powers” (Mearsheimer 2019). Others argue that IOs possess authority only 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.

In contrast, we show that IOs leverage and innovate tools to push back against detractors. We adapt insights from organizational sociology and the study of bureaucracies to the international context to identify the tools in IOs’ foreign policy toolkits. Unlike countries’ coercive strategies, IOs’ instruments can target two levels of actors: member states and their domestic publics. Our theory highlights four main methods that IOs use to defend themselves, which span both of these levels: sidelining or appeasing unfriendly leaders and sidelining or appeasing their constituents. IOs sideline populist leaders by relying on them less heavily for things they need, like funding and information. Or, IOs marginalize or obscure activities from populists’ constituents so that populists can avoid domestic penalties associated with cooperation. IOs also appease populists by providing them with greater benefits and reduced costs or mollify constituents by appealing directly to them.

This framework enables us to analyze how IOs evolve systematically and to generate testable predictions. In the empirical chapters, we leverage new data to rigorously evaluate each of these mechanisms, providing evidence to support our theoretical claim that IOs can maintain resilience in the face of external threats. Our findings demonstrate that populist challenges compel IOs to confront status quo biases and adopt meaningful reforms.

However, while populist hostility drives IOs to defend themselves in order to remain viable, these methods have unintended consequences. While some tactics can make IOs more responsive to the public and efficacious, others can have pernicious effects. For instance, IOs’ forays into secrecy and bribery can make them less legitimate, less transparent, and overextended, thereby threatening the normative pillars of global governance. Indeed, in their struggle to

combat populism, IOs may inadvertently sow the seeds of further populist backlash, undermining the very legitimacy they seek to protect. Throughout this book, we discuss how IOs can avoid such negative outcomes, remaining vibrant despite ongoing populist resistance.

1.2. Why Populism?

Scholars and policymakers frequently bemoan the many barriers confronting international institutions (Gray 2018; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019b; Lake, Martin, and Risse 2021; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023) and the liberal international order more broadly (Borzel and Zürn 2021; Farrell and Newman 2021; Weiss and Wallace 2021). Indeed, a plethora of hostile actors actively work against international cooperation. A variety of factors cause negative perceptions of IOs, including perverse economic experiences (Kiratli 2021), elite cues (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023), limited knowledge (Rho and Tomz 2017; Dolan and Milner 2023), political ideology (Brutger and Clark 2022; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024a), core values (Brutger 2021), and low levels of empathy (Casler and Groves 2023). Many states, such as those in the former Soviet bloc, Latin America, and others, have long questioned certain IOs' legitimacy and abilities to represent ordinary people. But while many detractors oppose specific facets of IOs (e.g., procedures, authority, or performance), most do not oppose international cooperation altogether. Those that do typically are not large enough in number or power to fundamentally threaten IOs. Populism, however, offers a popular and widespread ideology to explain why IOs should not constrain states, and thus represents a potent challenge (Voeten 2021).

Because many political ideologies and core values are compatible with populism, its appeal crosses party and ideological lines, boosting its popularity. Populism's congruence with other beliefs helps populists attract support at the ballot box relative to other skeptics of international cooperation. Thus, while our theory applies to many of globalization's detractors, we focus on populists as a particularly salient and prevalent set of actors who consistently oppose global governance (Ikenberry 2018; Voeten 2020; Broz, Frieden, and Weymouth 2021).

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.⁷ The meaning of “the true people” can vary based on context, but it generally refers to a perceived authentic, idealized majority that populist leaders claim to represent while excluding those who are seen as outsiders or part of the establishment. These true people are portrayed as good and hardworking, in contrast to corrupt elites. Populists claim they will provide power to these people at the expense of elites.⁸

Populists accuse IOs of standing in the way of this goal because IOs typically comprise elites and constrain national sovereignty. IOs are staffed by unelected, highly educated, lifelong bureaucrats who epitomize the global elites whom populists disparage. Such bureaucrats are rewarded for acquiring elite skills and experience—often receiving their education from top Western universities (Weaver 2008; Chwieroth 2015) and working for other elite organizations, whether public or private (Novosad and Werker 2019; Adler-Nissen 2021). These workers possess specialized knowledge and technical expertise in areas such as economics, law, diplomacy, and development. While they need this training to perform their jobs, it also can make them seem out-of-touch with common people who tend to value lived experience over “book smarts.” IO staff also hail from a diverse mix of foreign countries and thus do not represent the “true people” that populists privilege, that is, the native, working-class members of their country (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Carnegie, Clark, and Zucker 2024).

This perception is reinforced by IOs’ complex decision-making processes that involve negotiations among member states or appointed representatives (cf. Putnam 1988), and that appear far removed from the general public. IOs have their own rules and norms, with a focus on technical knowledge 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, contributes to these perceptions of privileged and exclusive groups making decisions that affect—but are not shaped by—ordinary people.

7. Our definition draws on recent pieces on populism and its microfoundations—see Muller (2016); Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017); Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018); Copelovitch and Pevehouse (2019); Broz, Frieden, and Weymouth (2021); Funke, Schularick, and Trebesch (2023).

8. The framing of the “true people” often has a racial or ethnic element, especially for right-wing populists—see Copelovitch and Pevehouse (2019).

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 that encompass a wide range of issues, including human rights, trade, environmental protection, and security. IOs often enforce these regulations through monitoring, reporting, and applying international pressure.⁹ They gather data, conduct investigations, and publish reports highlighting violations or areas of concern. Many have formal dispute-resolution mechanisms to adjudicate potential violations of their rules. IOs also offer economic incentives to influence state behavior, such as financial assistance, trade benefits, or market access.

These activities help IOs encourage states to adhere to their agreements and facilitate cooperation, yet they also drive populist anger because they constrain states' behavior. Populists often feel that the areas IOs govern should fall within states' purviews. They see these institutions as lacking compatibility with domestic priorities (Snyder 2019). As IOs' remits have grown, populists have pushed back on what they see as IO overreach.

Unlike resistance from other types of leaders, populists' resistance is often credible because populist leaders and their constituents ideologically oppose international cooperation. Moreover, populism is so widespread that IOs cannot afford to ignore it. If populists' grievances are not addressed, populists can credibly threaten to undermine or even exit IOs. Because their constituents are also skeptical of ceding sovereignty to international bureaucrats, they do not penalize leaders who disengage from these bodies and may even reward them.

However, populist leaders vary in the strength of their anti-IO beliefs. 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 solely to appeal to domestic audiences. These politicians often use populism as a part of their political strategy to win and retain office, but their anti-IO positions are insincere (e.g., when politicians scapegoat the International Monetary Fund for needed economic reforms, see Vreeland 1999; Handlin, Kaya, and Günaydin 2023). For them, the main cost of publicly embracing IOs is backlash from supporters who oppose IOs and observe

9. For example, through naming and shaming; see Hafner-Burton 2008; Tingley and Tomz 2022; Casler, Clark, and Zucker 2024.

inconsistency between populists' stated anti-elitism and their cooperation with international bodies (cf. Fearon 1994; Brutger and Kertzer 2018). 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 political incentives to oppose IOs.

In reality, most populists fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum, incurring domestic and ideological costs from engaging with IOs to varying degrees. While the sincerity of their beliefs is unobservable, the point is that populists across this spectrum take anti-IO stances and actively undermine these bodies. Of course, certain types of IOs may activate populists' concerns more than others; we discuss the organizations to which our theory best applies later in this chapter.

1.3. Populist Tactics to Oppose IOs

Populists' opposition to IOs manifests in a variety of ways. Because the main contribution of this book is to uncover how IOs respond to populist attacks, 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 also touch on several key examples to fix ideas in this chapter, which we flesh out in the case studies found in chapter 8.

The populist backlash against 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, populists often implement a multitude of these strategies simultaneously. Moreover, different leaders adopt diverse approaches, subjecting IOs to a barrage of such measures.

The specific strategies chosen by a given populist are contingent on the populist's objectives and constraints. For example, state power is one important factor that shapes the form of populist resistance. Powerful states have many levers they can pull to weaken IOs, such as cutting off funds or reducing their participation in the organizations. Weaker states, meanwhile, typically affect IOs to a lesser extent. That said, small countries that oppose IOs can band together to damage organizations (Helfer 2004; Pratt 2021); for example, several smaller states joined forces to counter the International Criminal

Court (ICC), as we show in chapter 8. Defections by small states can also trigger chain reactions, and small states may possess outsize power given institutional rules such as unanimous decision making and leadership rotation (Arias, Clark, and Kaya 2024). Indeed, Hungary often blocks the EU's actions because of requirements of unanimity, and temporary members of the UN Security Council wield significant influence. 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.

1.3.1. Insights from Organizational Sociology

In exploring how populist actors resist international organizations (IOs), we draw on insights from organizational sociology, which examines how hostile participants disrupt the institutions they inhabit. These disruptions often occur through withholding critical resources and fostering toxic environments, behaviors labeled as “organizational deviance” or “workplace aggression” (Likert 1967; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). However, when applied to IOs, this framework becomes more complex, as both domestic and international dynamics come into play. This section outlines general tactics hostile actors use to harm organizations, adapting these insights to the unique context of IOs. While not exhaustive, it highlights key strategies populists use to destabilize these bodies.

It is worth noting that many of these tactics are not exclusive to populists; nonpopulist actors also employ them when they wish to weaken IOs. However, populists' resistance is often more systematic and has stronger ideological underpinnings. Their persistent willingness to challenge IOs stems from the lower political and ideological costs they face when disengaging from or undermining these bodies.

A primary way hostile actors disrupt IOs is by withholding resources, a tactic organizational sociology identifies as critical to undermining an institution's vitality. One such resource is effort—the basic engagement required for an organization to function. Hostile actors may intentionally underperform, withhold expertise, or refuse to contribute to collective goals (Robinson and Bennett 1995; Lawrence and Robinson 2007). These behaviors not only stymie productivity but also tarnish the organization's reputation and effectiveness (Fombrun and Shanley 1990; Ambrose, Seabright, and Schminke 2002).

Effort withdrawal often manifests as noncompliance, wherein actors challenge institutional authority, disregard its rules, or actively obstruct organizational processes (O’Leary 2010). This type of resistance disrupts IOs’ ability to coordinate and execute initiatives, leaving them vulnerable to both internal dysfunction and external criticism. Indeed, compliance, performance, and reputation are often tightly interconnected (Heinzel and Liese 2021).

Another critical resource in this context is information and communication, which hostile actors can exploit to create confusion and mistrust. Tactics such as spreading misinformation, circulating rumors, and selectively disclosing information undermine trust within the organization (Kramer 1999; Bordia et al. 2006). These actions fuel toxic communication patterns, ranging from passive-aggressive behavior to outright personal attacks, which foster a contentious and conflict-ridden environment (Tucker 1993; Giacalone and Greenberg 1997; Neuman and Baron 2005). As a result, interpersonal relationships suffer, organizational cohesion erodes, and collaboration is stifled (Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner 2001).

Beyond withholding resources, hostile actors amplify their impact by fostering negative environments within IOs. One effective strategy to this end is the formation of dissident coalitions, where actors ally with other dissatisfied members to mobilize opposition and promote subversive agendas (Brown 2003; Mechanic 1962). These alliances can challenge established power structures, erode leaders’ authority, and disrupt organizational hierarchies, all while advancing alternative agendas (Clemens and Cook 1999; Ezzamel, Willmott, and Worthington 2001; Fleming and Spicer 2007).

Hostile coalitions often exploit organizational vulnerabilities to great effect. They may engage in bureaucratic obstruction, procedural manipulation, or strategic nonparticipation to block decision making and sabotage initiatives they oppose (Ackroyd and Thompson 2003). By exploiting such institutional loopholes, they create inefficiencies and undermine the organization’s credibility and operational capacity.

1.3.2. *Populists as Organizational Disruptors*

Populist actors apply these tactics with a distinct intensity. Their ideological commitment to resisting globalism and their ability to rally domestic support against IOs can embolden them to take extreme measures. Unlike other actors, populists often perceive fewer costs associated with disengagement or noncompliance, enabling them to pursue disruption unfettered.

One of the most visible ways populists challenge IOs is by withholding effort. They may disengage entirely—skipping meetings, refusing to comply with IO rules, or even exiting altogether. For example, Britain’s decision to leave the EU, spurred by a populist-led referendum, highlights how domestic constituents can drive disengagement. Similarly, Hungary and Poland have actively blocked the EU’s plans under populist leaders (Kelemen 2017), while India under Modi has stalled WTO negotiations on key trade reforms.¹⁰ These actions sap IOs of critical resources and momentum, creating significant roadblocks to progress.

Populists also undermine IOs by creating competing institutions that draw away funding, influence, and participation. These rival organizations dilute the power of established IOs and complicate global governance (Alter and Meunier 2009; Clark 2022). For instance, some populist-led states have opted to support new forums that reflect their narrower national interests, leaving existing IOs to navigate diminished relevance.¹¹

Populists frequently disregard IO rules, regulations, and policies, fostering a culture of noncompliance. Such behavior can trigger a domino effect as other states become reluctant to comply, fearing they will be the sole adherents (see Barrett 2003). Under Donald Trump’s leadership, for example, the United States flouted WTO rules, which had ripple effects across the global trade regime (Carnegie and Carson 2019). Additionally, populists often exploit IOs’ decision-making rules, blocking initiatives or staffing appointments that are unaligned with their interests. They may also replace expert bureaucrats with loyalists, muting the professionalism and expertise needed for IOs to function effectively (Eichengreen 2018; Sasso and Morelli 2021; Bellodi, Morelli, and Vannoni 2024).

International organizations thrive on active member participation. Without state representatives engaging in discussions, contributing expertise, and formulating policy, IOs risk becoming “zombies”—entities that exist in name but lack meaningful influence (Gray 2018). Populists exacerbate this risk by withholding not just effort but also funding. Most IOs rely on member-state contributions, whether providing loans, deploying peacekeepers, or adjudicating disputes. The Trump administration’s decision to withdraw US funding

10. Tom Miles, “Nine reasons why India’s WTO veto shocked the world.” Reuters, August 1, 2014.

11. See, e.g., India’s co-sponsorship of the New Development Bank. On competitive IO creation, see Urpelainen and Van de Graaf (2015); Pratt (2021).

from the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic is a stark example of how financial withdrawal can cripple IO activities. Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil similarly cut funds to an array of IOs promoting environmental cooperation during his tenure as president, including the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization.

Another critical resource that populists manipulate is information. IOs depend on accurate data from member states to implement policies and ensure compliance. By withholding or distorting this information, populists hinder IOs' ability to function effectively. For example, populists like Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán have weakened scientific bureaucracies by replacing experts with loyalists, thereby obstructing data collection and undermining the flow of information to IOs (Carnegie, Clark, and Zucker 2024).

This tactic isn't limited to withholding information; populists actively weaponize communication to sow distrust in IOs. Anti-globalist rhetoric, fiery speeches, and campaigns blaming IOs for domestic problems erode public confidence in these institutions (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023; Handlin, Kaya, and Günaydin 2023). By vilifying IOs as symbols of elitism and external meddling, populists cultivate domestic backlash and raise the political costs of cooperation with these organizations.

Importantly, populists do not always disengage completely from IOs. Sometimes they stay within such institutions but seek to repurpose them to advance domestic agendas. By reshaping an organization's mandate or exploiting procedural loopholes, populists redirect IO efforts to align with their priorities, weakening the institution's broader mission (Gray 2018; Spandler and Söderbaum 2023). Orbán has sought to do so with various EU immigration initiatives, for instance.

These tactics can sow toxic environments within IOs, fostering inefficiency, division, and the erosion of legitimacy. Whether through disengagement, noncompliance, or deliberate manipulation, populists hollow out institutions, reducing their capacity to serve as effective global governance actors. However, as the following section explores, IOs are not passive in this battle; they actively develop strategies to push back against populist resistance.

1.4. IOs as Strategic Agents

The central focus of our theory and empirical analysis is to uncover how IOs respond to populist attacks. While much is known about the array of tactics countries use to defend themselves against external threats, far less attention

has been paid to the defensive toolkits possessed by IOs. What tools do these institutions wield in their efforts to counter hostility and maintain cooperation among their members? We argue that IOs' strategies diverge in important ways from those employed by states within institutions, reflecting their unique nature and constraints.

Countries enjoy a vast array of foreign policy instruments to project power and achieve their objectives. From manipulating trade policies and foreign aid to providing military protection or imposing sanctions, states can leverage both rewards and threats to influence allies and adversaries alike. Great powers often use aid or investments as carrots to secure policy alignment (e.g., aid-for-votes exchanges in the UN General Assembly; Dreher, Sturm, and Vreeland 2015), while simultaneously wielding sticks with which to punish states that stray from their agendas (e.g., through sanctions or tariffs). These tools allow states to assert dominance, build coalitions, and deter opposition.

Like states, IOs deploy a variety of tools to foster cooperation, neutralize opposition, and retain member participation. However, IOs' strategies and capabilities differ markedly from those of states. Unlike nations, IOs cannot mobilize armies or enforce their mandates through territorial control. They operate within narrower issue areas, their funding depends on member contributions, and their authority often lacks enforceability. Threats to IO budgets—such as the Trump administration's efforts to defund key institutions—underscore their vulnerability to external pressures. Indeed, by virtue of their accountability to member-state principals, IOs seemingly possess limited room in which to maneuver.

Yet IOs are not passive bystanders. Far from being mechanical responders, they possess significant agency and deploy it strategically. Scholars have examined many of the individual tactics IOs use to incentivize cooperation, such as adjusting voting rules, modifying conditionalities, or engaging in diplomatic persuasion (Copelovitch 2010; Stone 2011; Carnegie and Clark 2023). However, there is a surprising lack of research on how these tools are combined into cohesive strategies to counter threats, punish hostile members, and nurture long-term cooperation.

IOs face structural and operational constraints that limit their ability to coerce or compel. As supranational entities, they are coalitions of diverse member states, each with their own policy priorities and domestic pressures. Decision making within IOs often requires internal bargaining, making enforcement inconsistent and subject to compromise. Moreover, IOs typically

lack direct control over populations or traditional governance organs, further distinguishing their tools from those of states.

However, one overlooked dimension of IOs' power is their relationship with domestic publics. While IOs often operate out of the public eye, their legitimacy hinges on perceptions of their responsiveness and value among ordinary citizens (Dellmuth 2018; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023). Critiques of a "democratic deficit" argue that IOs are detached from the will of the people (Dahl 1999), but we build on existing work on IO legitimacy and instead contend that these institutions actively seek public buy-in, just as populist leaders often mobilize public opposition to IOs. Such institutions do so because they recognize that cultivating public support can indirectly influence state leaders, incentivizing greater engagement with global governance.

In sum, the prevailing narrative in much of the existing literature assumes that IOs are passive actors, mechanically reacting to state actions and operating within limited bounds. We challenge this assumption. IOs wield extensive agency and strategically deploy their resources to build positive relationships with member states, partner organizations, and even domestic publics. While their tools differ from those of states, IOs employ them with a similar goal: to maintain cooperation and fulfill their mandates despite opposition.

Understanding IOs as proactive, resourceful players in the international system re-frames common perspectives on global governance. Far from being mere instruments of state power, these institutions actively shape the dynamics of interstate cooperation, demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the face of populist challenges.

1.4.1. *Key Players in the Fight for IOs*

This book grapples with urgent questions: What tools do international organizations have at their disposal with which to assert authority, attract support, and rein in opposition from populist member states? How do their actions shape the broader landscape of global governance? To address these questions, we delve into the inner workings of IOs, exploring the motivations and actions of the key players within them. Four main groups shape IO behavior: IO staff and management, nonpopulist member states, populist actors, and domestic publics.

Indeed, IOs are not just collections of member states but dynamic entities driven by mission-focused bureaucrats and leaders who are deeply committed to their survival and the preservation of the international order. This

conceptualization draws on political sociology, which highlights how IO staff are socialized into their organization's unique culture and practices, transforming them into stewards of the IO's mission rather than mere representatives of their home countries (Chwieroth 2015; Honig 2018). Career concerns loom large—when populist states retreat or disengage, IOs often face resource constraints that lead to program cuts, staff layoffs, and, in extreme cases, organizational collapse (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024b). Populist obstruction also undermines field operations, as staff rely on state cooperation to achieve performance targets. For instance, World Bank staff are evaluated using quantitative benchmarks, which can become unattainable when member states refuse to share critical data or hinder program implementation.

But beyond career pressures, IO bureaucrats and leaders are ideologically driven. Many staff join IOs out of a genuine commitment to international cooperation and causes, often sacrificing higher-paying private sector opportunities (Honig 2018). Once inside, they are steeped in the organization's norms and practices, developing a deep loyalty to its mission (Weaver 2008; Clark and Dolan 2021). IO leaders, meanwhile, often pursue agendas shaped by their ideological beliefs (Copelovitch and Rickard 2021). These personal and professional motivations make IO personnel determined to resist populist efforts to undermine their institutions.

For nonpopulist member states—and especially for powerful state backers of global governance—IOs are critical tools for advancing their interests. These states often use IOs to promote economic and political liberalization in target countries, attaching policy conditions to aid or loans and socializing governments into adopting liberal norms (Li, Sy, and McMurray 2015; Kentikelenis, Stubbs, and King 2016). Such states benefit from the stability and predictability of the existing international order and have a clear incentive to maintain IOs as vehicles for their influence (Johnston 2008; Ikenberry 2011a). The United States and many Western European states, who were the primary architects of the liberal order, have historically benefited from international cooperation in these ways. Such states may thus view populist attacks on IOs as direct threats to their strategic interests. These attacks disrupt the mechanisms through which nonpopulist states exercise soft power, or influence others without resorting to coercion. This jeopardizes the benefits such states derive from the current global system.

Populists' attempts to dismantle IOs are not idle provocations; they are credible threats rooted in their pro-sovereignty, anti-elite ideology. Populist leaders are often rewarded domestically for resisting what they frame as

overreaching or illegitimate IOs, making their opposition both ideologically consistent and politically advantageous. Such domestic pushback against IOs can harm their legitimacy and limit their ability to achieve their missions, especially during periods of crisis or upheaval when IOs become particularly salient in the public's minds (e.g., the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic). Together, states and individuals that lead IOs have strong incentives to resist populist attacks, using the available tools and strategies to protect their organizations, maintain their missions, and uphold the international order.

1.5. IOs' Defensive Playbook

Given their agency and incentives, IOs are far from passive entities in the face of populist attacks. On the contrary, they possess a diverse set of tools with which to preserve their roles and influence on the global stage. While these strategies can be used against various types of opposition, this book focuses on how IOs employ them in concert to combat the unique, large-scale threat of populism. Unlike external challenges, which may call for different approaches, populism presents an internal, ideologically driven disruption that strikes at the very heart of IOs' missions.

Drawing from organizational sociology and international relations, we examine the defensive playbook of IOs, reimagining the classic tools of "carrots" (incentives) and "sticks" (punishments) for IOs. In organizational sociology, carrots and sticks are essential mechanisms for managing conflict and fostering compliance. Within IOs, these mechanisms can be tailored to meet the challenges posed by populist leaders and their constituents. Punishments are designed to sideline detractors and bring them back into compliance, while incentives aim to integrate hostile actors into the organization's norms and culture. Importantly, IOs wield these tools strategically across two key targets: populist leaders and the domestic populations that empower them. By using these strategies, IOs can neutralize opposition, foster cooperation, and adapt to evolving political landscapes.

We conceptualize IOs' defensive tactics within a framework of four strategies: sidelining or appeasing populist leaders, and sidelining or appeasing their constituents (see table 1.1). These approaches are often employed simultaneously, comprising a multifaceted response to populist challenges.

When IOs sideline populist leaders, they minimize reliance on such leaders' cooperation and proceed with reduced participation. This strategy often

TABLE 1.1. IOs' defensive toolkit

	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; empower nonpopulist actors	Cue the public; employ populist language

involves sanctions, suspensions, or other penalties to punish noncompliance and deter similar behavior from others. IOs can also strengthen their independence by developing in-house expertise or focusing on areas where they are less reliant on populist states. Further, by building self-sufficiency or fostering partnerships with nonpopulist states, NGOs, or other IOs, they mitigate the impact of populist disengagement. For example, after the first Trump administration withheld energy-related data from the World Bank, the organization turned to Arab multilateral development banks for information, bypassing the United States entirely—an example we return to in chapter 4.

Appeasing populist leaders involves concessions to these leaders, such as offering favorable terms, material benefits, or reforms that address their grievances. For instance, international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF have historically provided lenient conditions to secure populist cooperation, as we show in chapter 5. Similarly, the WTO proposed reforms to its voting and procedural structures in response to the Trump administration's criticisms. These measures aim to mollify populist leaders and prevent further disruptions to IO operations.

IOs can also sideline populists' constituents. Populist leaders often face domestic backlash for engaging with IOs, as cooperation can appear inconsistent with their anti-globalist rhetoric. IOs exploit this vulnerability by engaging populists covertly or empowering domestic actors who oppose local populist policies. For example, leaders like Silvio Berlusconi and Hugo Chávez continued to collaborate with the IMF in private while publicly denouncing it. Alternatively, IOs can strengthen domestic counterweights to populist agendas by supporting nonpopulist groups within a country. By fostering alliances with civil society organizations or subnational governments, IOs can create alternative pathways for engagement and diminish populist influence.

Finally, IOs can appease populists' constituents. To reduce populists' ability to leverage anti-IO rhetoric, organizations can work to win over domestic populations. This involves public outreach, emphasizing the tangible benefits that IOs provide, such as foreign aid, infrastructure projects, or economic support. Branding aid projects with IO logos, as seen with many UN initiatives, is one example of how organizations boost their visibility and reputation. IOs may also adopt populist rhetoric themselves, presenting their work as a defense of ordinary citizens against corrupt elites. During the eurocrisis, both the IMF and the EU emphasized how their reforms aimed to reduce corruption and protect everyday citizens in Greece, positioning themselves as allies of the public rather than as distant, elite-driven institutions.

IOs often adopt multipronged responses to populist threats. Rather than rely on a single strategy, they combine approaches in order to maximize their effectiveness. For instance, while appeasing populist leaders may preserve engagement, IOs may simultaneously sideline populist constituents to limit domestic blowback to such cooperation. Similarly, covert collaboration with populists can complement public outreach efforts that seek to boost public support for IOs over the long run.

The need for multiple tactics reflects the complexity of the populist threat. IOs often face resistance from multiple populist leaders and must adapt their strategies to suit different contexts. Internal dynamics within IOs also contribute to this variability, as staff, leadership, and nonpopulist member states may have differing priorities and preferred tactics. For example, the IMF has simultaneously provided favorable terms to populists, increased its independence from populist states, and launched public campaigns to build support among domestic audiences, as we explore in subsequent chapters.

While IOs possess a robust defensive toolkit, their ability to employ specific strategies depends on context. Appeasement may be less viable if IOs lack desirable resources to offer or if populist demands conflict with core organizational functions. Similarly, sidelining strategies are more effective when IOs have alternative sources of funding, expertise, or information available to them. Factors like organizational size, funding, and visibility also shape IO responses. Larger, well-resourced IOs have more tools at their disposal, while smaller organizations may struggle to adapt. Visible IOs, such as the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic or the IMF during economic crises, can more effectively appeal to domestic populations, while less prominent organizations may find it harder to influence public opinion given limited public awareness. These scope conditions are discussed further in the following chapter. We

do not test the circumstances under which IOs employ one strategy as compared with another; instead, we expect that IOs employ each method to some degree in order to combat populism. We highlight the general prevalence of each tactic as an essential part of IOs' multilateral toolkit.

1.6. Downstream Consequences

While IOs seek to defend themselves in order to endure populists' attacks, their actions can have far-reaching consequences, reshaping their power, agency, transparency, and legitimacy—and even influencing the trajectory of populism itself. While our analysis primarily focuses on how IOs utilize various defensive strategies, we also consider such implications for global governance. Drawing on existing literature and concrete examples, we highlight how IOs' responses to populist challenges can bolster their resilience but may also amplify the very threats they seek to neutralize.

IOs' defensive strategies often come with trade-offs that can affect their legitimacy and exacerbate the very populism they seek to counter. Populists already perceive IOs as elitist and overreaching, imposing constraints on national sovereignty. IO actions can reinforce these narratives in several ways.

First, engaging with populists behind closed doors to maintain cooperation risks making IOs appear even more opaque and unaccountable, alienating both populists and nonpopulists alike if these covert communications are uncovered.

Second, efforts to engage populists' constituents, such as using populist-friendly rhetoric or emphasizing grassroots benefits, may address transparency concerns but could alienate the IOs' traditional supporters, who may view such tactics as pandering or simplistic. Populist supporters, too, may find this rhetoric inauthentic—IOs are often perceived as untrustworthy when promoting their own brands (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023).

Third, sidelining populist leaders can validate their criticisms of IOs as elite-dominated bodies that marginalize dissenting voices. By reducing populists' ability to influence policy and access the benefits of membership, sidelining lowers the costs of noncooperation, encouraging further retrenchment.

Fourth, appeasing populist leaders with concessions or reforms may embolden them, providing public victories they can exploit domestically while fueling perceptions among nonpopulist members that the IO is unfairly biased or politically compromised.

Indeed, populism not only fractures IOs internally but also reshapes power dynamics within them. Concessions made to appease populist states—whether through reduced requirements or increased influence—often empower these actors disproportionately. Populists, in turn, can leverage this newfound power to undermine the IO's traditional objectives. For example, populist leaders may weaken enforcement mechanisms, challenge accountability measures, or reduce constraints on member states. Trump's campaign to cripple the WTO's dispute settlement system and African states' resistance to international courts exemplify this trend (see Voeten 2020). By weakening IO autonomy, populists make it easier for states to flout international norms, diminishing the authority of global governance as a whole.

Moreover, in an era of heightened geopolitical competition, IOs' actions to counter populism hold significant implications for the liberal international order. Populists' antagonism toward global governance weakens Western-led institutions and creates openings for revisionist powers like China to assert their influence. During Trump's first presidency, for instance, Chinese president Xi Jinping seized the moment to bolster China's role in the WTO and portray his country as a global leader on climate change after the United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement.¹² These dynamics reveal a dangerous paradox: While IOs work to defend themselves from populist threats, their responses can inadvertently strengthen alternative powers, both from within and beyond the institution.

The cumulative effect of these responses can reshape IOs' standing on the global stage, forcing them to walk a fine line between preserving their authority and risking unintended consequences. While appeasement and reform may preserve status quo levels of engagement, they risk compromising transparency and legitimacy. Conversely, sidelining and confrontation can isolate populist states but may deepen divisions and embolden revisionist powers. Our findings thus underscore both the resilience and fragility of Western-led organizations, as well as the stakes involved in their continued global leadership.

In the concluding chapter, we argue that IOs can mitigate these risks by carefully weighing the costs and benefits of their strategies and striving for a balanced and comprehensive approach. Flexibility and adaptability are crucial

12. "Xi Pledges More Openness as China Fulfills WTO Commitments." Xinhua Net, November 5, 2021. https://english.www.gov.cn/news/topnews/202111/04/content_WS6183dfeec6dodf57f98e4874.html.

if IOs are to endure populist episodes without compromising their legitimacy or fueling further backlash. As *Global Governance Under Fire* demonstrates, IOs possess the tools necessary to survive—but only if they leverage them strategically, judiciously, and with an eye toward long-term stability. By bending to the pressures of populism without breaking, IOs can navigate the turbulence of today's political landscape while safeguarding their role in tomorrow's global governance.

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. The book also carries normative implications and offers lessons for practitioners.

1.7.1. *Theoretical*

This book sheds light on a dimension of international organizations that is often overlooked: their ability to navigate and respond to subversive actors from within. While much of the scholarly focus on IOs has centered on their roles in addressing collective action problems—providing information, reducing transaction costs, and extending time horizons (Keohane 1984; Abbott and Snidal 1998)—these theories generally assume that IOs are coalitions of the willing. In this view, member states join because they see more benefits than costs, and when those benefits diminish, they simply exit. Alternatively, realist accounts dismiss the feasibility of cooperation altogether, offering little explanatory power for the variation in attitudes and behaviors toward IOs that we observe (Grieco 1988; Mearsheimer 1995).

Yet reality is far messier than these accounts imply. Drawing on insights from theories of domestic politics, we argue that IOs, like all institutions, are shaped by competing interests. Some of these actors seek to undermine these organizations from within, driven by ideological opposition or evolving political incentives. Members' preferences and the costs and benefits of participation are not static; they shift over time, producing friction that can lead to inefficiency, underrepresentation, and even hostility (Pratt 2021). At the international level, these dynamics are further complicated by the interplay between state representatives and their domestic constituencies, whose interests often diverge (Putnam 1988).

Existing scholarship has not fully accounted for the presence of hostile actors within IOs. Instead, the literature often assumes that member states act in good faith once they join, with poor outcomes attributed to bureaucratic overreach or isolated instances of noncompliance. These issues are thought to be correctable through internal reforms or punishment mechanisms (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Autesserre 2014).

We challenge this conventional wisdom by exploring how ideologically driven detractors actively work to undermine IOs from within, reshaping these institutions in profound ways. Far from being passive arenas for state cooperation, IOs are dynamic entities that must grapple with existential threats, including the populist wave that has swept across global politics in recent decades. By highlighting this often-neglected aspect, we contribute to ongoing debates about how political contestation shapes and reshapes organizations (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

Further, our work moves beyond the traditional focus on major geopolitical shifts as drivers of multilateral change (Wallander 2000; Ikenberry 2001). Instead, we examine how continual, incremental political shifts—such as the rise of populist leaders—can fundamentally alter the international environment and the functioning of IOs. We demonstrate that these smaller, persistent pressures are highly consequential in reshaping global governance. In doing so, we extend the literature on how political incentives influence multilateral policymaking (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Stone 2011; Clark and Dolan 2021), offering new insights into the mechanisms by which IOs adapt, resist, and survive.

While scholars have documented populists' hostility toward IOs and their efforts to dismantle these institutions (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Voeten 2020, 2021), much of this work portrays IOs as helpless in the face of such challenges. As Dijkstra et al. (2022) note, we are only beginning to understand how IOs respond to existential threats, making this study a timely and necessary contribution to the field. Our research identifies and tests the specific strategies IOs use to defend themselves against the populist onslaught. These strategies range from appeasing populist leaders to sidelining them and engaging directly with their domestic constituents. By exploring these tactics, we offer a more nuanced understanding of how IOs preserve their relevance and authority in an era of mounting challenges.

This book also addresses broader questions about the resilience of IOs and the future of global governance. As populism challenges the foundational principles of the liberal order, IOs are not mere bystanders; they actively resist and

adapt to these pressures. However, this resistance comes with trade-offs, raising questions about transparency, legitimacy, and the long-term stability of the international system.

In exploring how IOs navigate such issues, we build on and extend foundational scholarship on the liberal order and its discontents (Borzel and Zürn 2021; Farrell and Newman 2021; Weiss and Wallace 2021). By focusing on the agency of IOs and their ability to pursue their goals even when those goals conflict with member-state preferences (Vaubel 1991; Johnson 2014; Clark and Zucker 2024), we illuminate the practical realities of global governance in an age of upheaval. Ultimately, this work underscores the stakes of understanding IOs not just as facilitators of cooperation, but as actors navigating a turbulent political landscape. By theorizing and testing how IOs defend themselves, we provide a road map for preserving the liberal order in the face of unprecedented threats, offering critical insights into the future of international cooperation.

1.7.2. *Empirical*

This project makes several important empirical contributions, shedding new light on how IOs respond to populist challenges and supplying scholars with valuable data to explore related questions in future research. By documenting how IOs use appeasement and sidelining strategies to counter populists, we reveal the creative and often underappreciated ways these organizations maintain their relevance and authority. To accomplish this, we collected and analyzed several novel datasets.

One such contribution lies in the use of a unique data source: Grays, or written submissions by states filed ahead of IMF board meetings. Secretive interactions between states and IOs are notoriously difficult to study because of their inherent opacity. Yet these submissions provide an unprecedented glimpse into behind-the-scenes diplomacy: Grays remain confidential for years after their initial filing (Carnegie, Clark, and Kaya 2024). Our analysis reveals that populist leaders—despite their public antagonism toward the IMF—engage covertly with the organization more frequently than their nonpopulist counterparts. These findings not only enrich our understanding of populist behavior but also offer a valuable resource for future studies on covert diplomacy in international relations.

We also conducted an original survey experiment on a diverse sample of Americans to examine how IOs might engage skeptical domestic audiences.

Drawing inspiration from real-world IO rhetoric, identified through elite interviews and social media analysis, we tested whether populist-style messaging could sway public opinion toward a hypothetical development IO. The results are striking: IOs can effectively garner support by adopting populist rhetoric, emphasizing their role in helping ordinary people rather than elites. This experiment is paired with new data on IOs' social media strategies, creating a valuable resource for scholars interested in how multilateral institutions navigate public skepticism and build legitimacy among domestic audiences. The findings also open doors for further research on the efficacy of rhetorical strategies in reshaping public perceptions of IOs.

Another key contribution is a dataset on information-sharing agreements between IOs. These agreements, which are especially prevalent among international financial institutions, allow IOs to pool their data and overcome information gaps caused by populist obstruction (Clark 2021, 2025). Our analysis demonstrates that the rise of populism drives IOs to strengthen ties with one another, broadening their access to critical information. Given that each IO draws on a unique blend of data sources—including states, NGOs, private actors, and independent surveillance—these agreements enable organizations to sideline populists and maintain operational capacity. This dataset offers fertile ground for future exploration of the conditions that foster IO collaboration and the consequences of such linkages for global governance.

We also utilize a dataset on the quality and origins of information supplied to IOs (Carnegie, Clark, and Zucker 2024) revealing that populist leaders are significantly less likely to share information compared with their nonpopulist peers. This insight is crucial, as information serves as the lifeblood of IOs, underpinning their ability to function effectively. While much of the existing literature has focused on democracy as a determinant of information sharing (Vreeland, Hollyer, and Rosendorff 2011; Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland 2018), our data open new avenues for examining additional political factors, such as populism's disruptive role in global governance.

Our analyses rely on a diverse suite of empirical strategies, including descriptive analysis, difference-in-difference designs, text analysis, elite interviews, surveys, and case studies. Interviews with IO officials provided firsthand insights into how populists engage with (or obstruct) these organizations; we include in the appendix a summary table of those we interviewed. Meanwhile, our case studies illustrate the breadth of IOs and populist leaders covered by our theoretical framework, grounding our arguments in real-world

contexts. Finally, systematic regression analyses allow us to examine trends across countries and over time, ensuring the robustness of our findings.

By employing this multi-method approach, we demonstrate the generalizability of our framework across diverse IOs and political environments. We hope these data and methodologies will inspire future work on IO resilience, populist disruption, and the broader dynamics of international cooperation. In the concluding chapter, we outline potential directions for future research, emphasizing how our datasets and theoretical contributions can inform the study of populism, IO behavior, and global governance more broadly. By capturing the nuanced interplay between populist actors and multilateral institutions, this project not only advances our understanding of a pressing global issue but also provides tools for scholars to deepen their exploration of these dynamics.

1.7.3. *Practitioners*

Our study examines the defensive measures that IOs deploy to counter populist pressures, holding implications for how IOs can prepare for challenges in the present and future. As populist movements continue to hold sway in diverse political contexts, it is imperative for IOs to strengthen their defenses proactively. We thus offer practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners committed to preserving and enhancing the role of international institutions. By clarifying the trade-offs of various strategies and proposing a cohesive approach, we offer suggestions to help IOs move toward long-term resilience.

Drawing on the framework of defensive strategies outlined in this book, we argue that IOs should adopt tools from all four categories of responses in concert: sidelining populist leaders, appeasing them, sidelining their constituents, and engaging their constituents. While some strategies are well established in IO playbooks, others have been underutilized, often dismissed as too costly, counterproductive, or unfeasible. However, we contend that a balanced and integrated use of these tools offers the best path forward, providing numerous ideas and examples. Much of this discussion appears in chapter 9.

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 by defining our

main ideas and discussing the conditions under which our theory applies. We lay out the main tenets of populism and explain why populists present a problem for global governance institutions. We then describe the features of IOs that allow them to push back on populist threats, providing specific examples and explaining IOs' options in depth. We discuss the scope conditions, or broad applicability, of the argument and conclude the chapter by deriving our empirical expectations regarding which features IOs adopt to counter populism; these guide the empirical analyses presented in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 explores the tactics populists use to undermine IOs. We explain how populists often withhold resources like effort and information as well as engage in toxic communication that can tarnish IOs' reputation and legitimacy. 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 that of nonpopulists. We then demonstrate that populists engage less with IOs in public forums than other leaders.

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, and appeasing populists' constituents. Chapter 4 analyzes how IOs sideline populists, focusing on the case of information sharing among IOs in particular. Because populists often seek to undermine IOs directly by restricting the flow of information or indirectly by degrading domestic information-collection bureaucracies, we argue that IOs often broaden their information bases by exchanging information with one another. We test our argument using an original dataset of information sharing among IOs that provide development finance to their member states. 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.

Chapter 5 pivots to a different method IOs employ to combat populist attacks: appeasing populists. In this chapter, we look at how IOs make targeted concessions that benefit populists to mollify them and retain their participation. While a large literature examines when IOs make concessions to allies and friends of leading stakeholders, we analyze when such breaks are awarded to populists. We 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 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 6 examines a third way in which IOs protect themselves from populists: sidelining populists' constituents. We argue that while populists often take aggressive anti-IO stances in public forums, 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 publicly criticize IOs while privately leveraging them to advance their economic and foreign policy agendas. To test our hypothesis, we collected new archival data on states' private participation at the IMF. We find that populists participate more than other types of leaders in these opaque contexts and that their interactions are just as positive in tone as nonpopulists' interactions. This evidence suggests that IOs can increase populist participation by offering covert venues for them to engage, with important implications for institutional design.

In chapter 7, we shift to studying the effects of IO efforts to appease populists' constituents. We focus on how IOs mirror populists' rhetorical style to convince the public that IOs are not distant elites and instead have the people's interests in mind. To test whether such rhetorical tactics work, we ran a survey experiment that manipulates 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 interviews with IO officials who worked in particularly contentious states, and extensive data from Twitter/X, we examine an array of cases in which IOs used this proto-populist strategy and show how it can boost support for multilateralism.

Next, chapter 8 provides real-world examples to illustrate how populists undermine IOs in practice, and how IOs respond to these efforts. This chapter serves to illuminate the generalizability of our argument, as we offer cases from a range of IOs, issue areas, and populist countries. In doing so, the chapter shows that populist attacks span the globe and that IOs use remarkably similar strategies to defend themselves across contexts. It also traces the processes through which IOs have battled populist resistance to demonstrate that these strategies can work in practice.

Chapter 9 concludes the book 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 may provide reforms and resilience, but they may inadvertently fuel additional resistance. We provide practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to preserve the world order. Finally, we delineate the expectations of our framework for the future of global governance and the liberal international order that undergirds it.

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