

Covert Participation: How Populists Engage with International Organizations

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Populists Target IOs



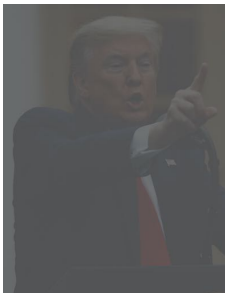
Populists Target IOs



“We reject globalism and embrace the doctrine of patriotism [...] The U.S. will always choose independence and cooperation over global governance.”¹

¹President Trump speech at UNGA, September 2018

Populists Target IOs



“We sent the muzzle back to Brussels and the leash back to the IMF.”²

²PM Orbán speech, February 2018

Project Overview



- **Question:** Does populism really sound the death knell for IOs?
- **Theory:** Populists participate in IOs in order to benefit from their resources and expertise, albeit less publicly than other leaders
- **Data:** Original data on behind-the-scenes participation by member states at the IMF

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Populists Decry International Cooperation



- Populists take a public **anti-elite** stance ([Muller 2016](#); [Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017](#))
 - Prefer “outsiders” to globalists / lifelong bureaucrats ([Busby et al. 2019](#))
 - Anti-elite stance pleases constituents who dislike experts and prefer simplistic messaging ([Gauchat 2012](#))
- IOs staffed by members of untrustworthy global elite, making them an ideal target ([Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019](#); [Voeten 2020](#))

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But Populists Gain from IOs and Vice Versa



- IOs provide public goods, furnish advice, supply economic assistance, and help resolve disputes ([Keohane 1984](#); [Chapman 2007](#))
- Populists want these benefits, but look weak and unresolved if engage publicly → turn to less public forms of participation
- IOs benefit from larger membership and populists' participation
- IOs engage populists, fearing “zombie status” and competitor organizations ([Lipsky 2017](#); [Gray 2018](#); [Clark 2021](#))

Hypothesis: *Populist leaders should participate covertly in IOs more often than non-populist leaders.*

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Focus on IMF



- New measure of covert participation: submission of **Grays**, statements IMF Executive Directors submit ahead of Board meetings
 - States can influence policy agenda — loan agreements, reforms, etc.
 - Statements only declassified after 3–5 years
- Data contain 55,000 documents spanning 99 countries over the period 1987–2017
- Despite hostile public rhetoric, many Grays from Trump, Chavez, and other populists

EDs attempt to “gloss over differences” and “try not to make enemies with staff or management” in Grays.³

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Main Analysis

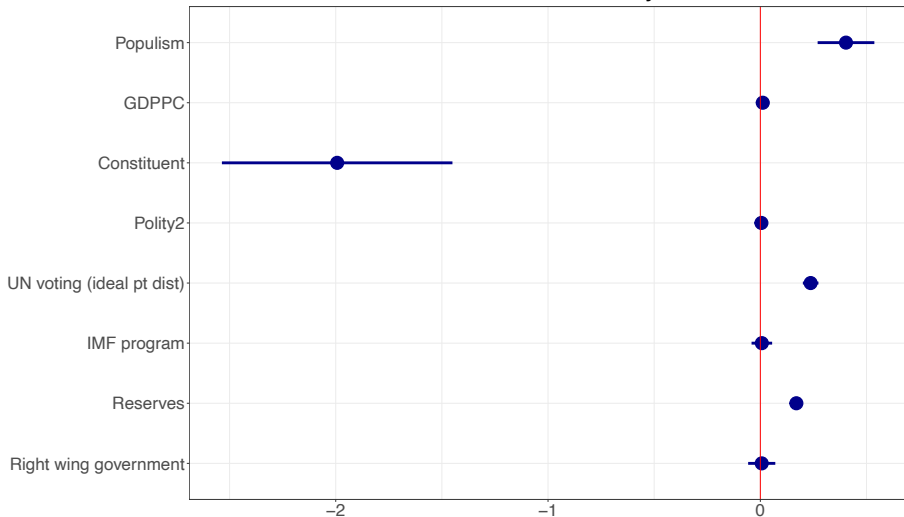


- Average number of Grays filed by populist governments is 20.5; average number for non-populists is 6.9 ($p = 0.00$)
- *Dependent variable*: Logged number of Grays
- *Independent variable*: Indicator for populist leadership 1990–2018
 - Blair Institute for Global Change
 - BYU populism database
- *Specification*: OLS; country FEs; robust SE clustered by country
- *Covariates*: Reserves; Constituent; IMF program; Polity2; GDPPC; Right-wing; UN voting distance

Main Results



DV: Number of Grays



Sentiment Analysis

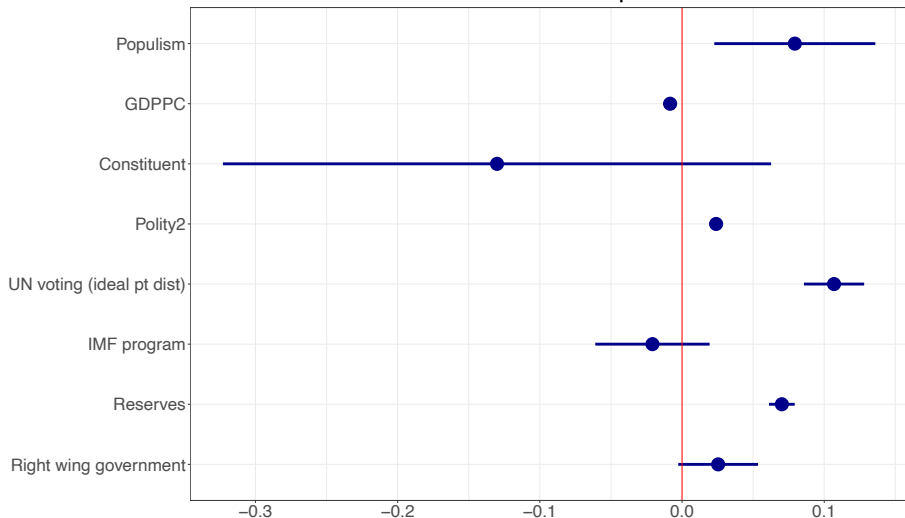


- Ensure that leaders do not simply echo criticisms of the IMF in private
- Identify positive and negative terms in the Grays, subtract negative from positive for each country-year
- Replicate main model with sentiment as our DV
- Find populists' Grays are at least as positive as those of non-populists

Article IV Robustness Check



DV: Article IV Completion



Additional Robustness Checks



- Negative binomial specification
- Additional covariates
- Imputed/non-imputed data
- Time controls
- Random effects
- Placebo test using public IMF program participation

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Summary and Contributions



Populists engage with IOs covertly despite their hostile rhetoric

Theoretical:

- Refines conventional wisdom that populists disengage from IOs ([Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019](#); [Voeten 2020](#))
- Contributes to study of secrecy in IR, when leaders act “offstage” ([McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017](#); [Carson 2020](#))

Empirical:

- Data can be used to test salience of different economic issues, types of engagement, etc.

Practical:

- LIO may remain robust despite mounting populist rhetoric ([Colgan and Keohane 2017](#); [Farrell and Newman 2021](#)), though concerns about public trust and legitimacy remain

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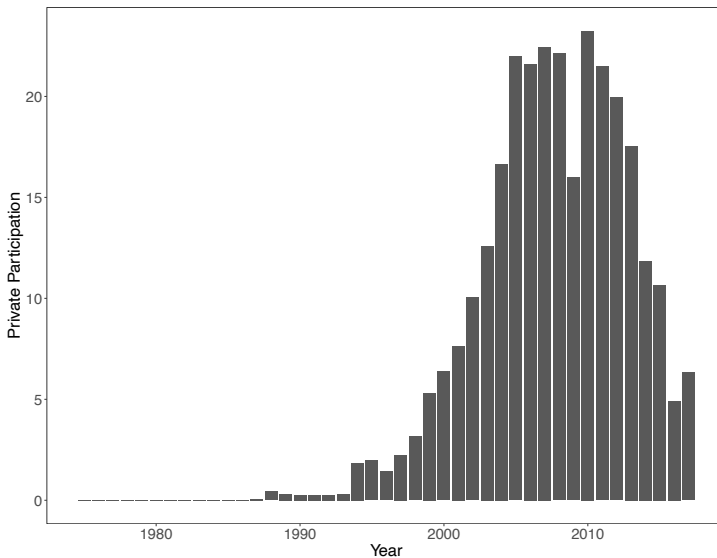
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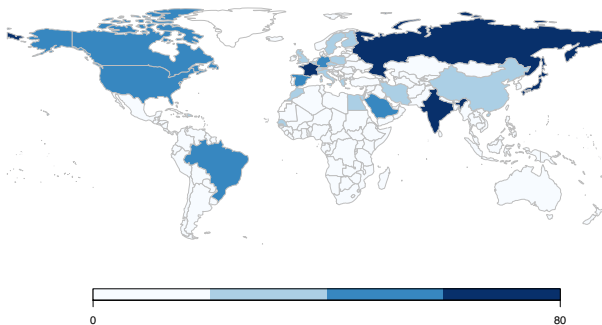
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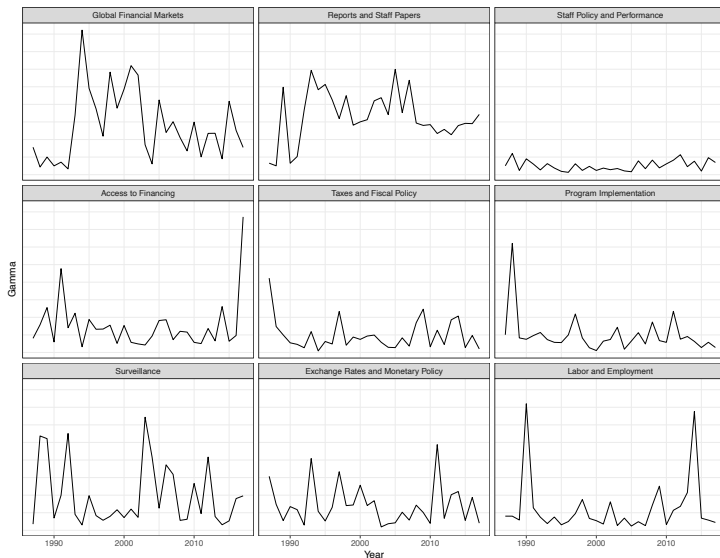
Average Grays Over Time



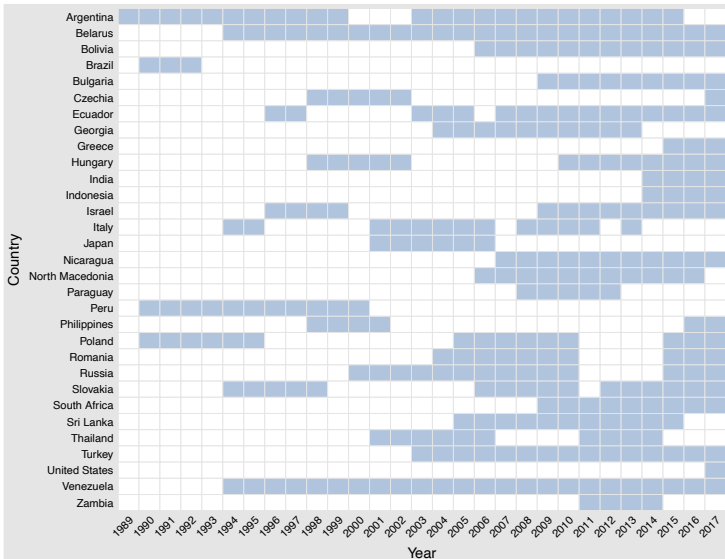
Grays by Country (2017)



Topics Over Time



Variation in Populism



	Grays participation	
	Model 1	Model 2
Populism	0.674*** (0.082)	0.403*** (0.081)
GDPPC		0.011*** (0.002)
Constituent		-1.993*** (0.330)
Polity2		0.005** (0.002)
UN voting (ideal pt dist)		0.237*** (0.022)
IMF program		0.007 (0.029)
Reserves		0.170*** (0.010)
Right wing government		0.006 (0.039)
N	7187	7187

	Article IV participation	
	Model 1	Model 2
Populism	0.239*** (0.035)	0.079** (0.034)
GDPPC		-0.008*** (0.002)
Constituent		-0.130 (0.117)
Polity2		0.024*** (0.002)
UN voting (ideal pt dist)		0.107*** (0.013)
IMF program		-0.021 (0.024)
Reserves		0.070*** (0.006)
Right wing government		0.025 (0.017)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
N	7187	7187

*** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .1

	Sentiment	
	Model 1	Model 2
Populism	0.030** (0.014)	0.001 (0.014)
GDPPC		-0.027** (0.013)
Constituent		0.103 (0.071)
Polity2		0.006*** (0.002)
UN voting (ideal pt dist)		0.027** (0.011)
IMF program		-0.017 (0.011)
Reserves		0.038*** (0.004)
Right wing government		0.035*** (0.010)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes
N	1181	1181

*** p < .01; ** p < .05; * p < .1