Athina Economou and Christos Kollias*

In NATO We Trust(?): The Russian Invasion of Ukraine and EU27 Citizens’ Trust in NATO

https://doi.org/10.1515/peps-2023-0029
Received May 26, 2023; accepted May 27, 2023

Abstract: Institutional trust is trust in state’s institutions and organizations. Institutional trust also involves trust towards international and intergovernmental organizations such as the UN, the EU and NATO. Institutional trust includes citizens’ trust towards the national security apparatus or security providing organizations such as NATO. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a major event with wide-ranging momentous political, economic and strategic ramifications. The latter affect European states’ security and defence. Such important events impact citizens’ risk-perceptions (in)security sentiments and hence their trust towards institutions assigned with the task of providing security. The paper examines how the Russian invasion has affected European citizens’ trust towards NATO. To probe into the issue, it uses data from two Eurobarometer surveys. A survey that took place just before the invasion in January and February 2022 and a survey that took place in June and July. A similar to regression discontinuity empirical setup is adopted to examine how European citizens’ trust towards NATO was impacted by the invasion. The empirical findings reported herein are not uniform across all EU member-countries and indicate noteworthy differences on trust towards NATO as a result of the Russian invasion. Nonetheless, on balance, a statistically significant effect is traced by the estimated regressions.

Keywords: institutional trust; NATO; regression discontinuity; Russian invasion

JEL Classification: F52; D74

*Corresponding author: Christos Kollias, Laboratory of Economic Policy and Strategic Planning, Department of Economics, University of Thessaly, 28th Octovriou str. 78, 38333, Volos, Greece, E-mail: kollias@uth.gr. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2876-4304
Athina Economou, Laboratory of Economic Policy and Strategic Planning, Department of Economics, University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece

Open Access. © 2023 the author(s), published by De Gruyter. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
1 Introduction

It is well established that trust, a core element of social capital, is of paramount importance for the smooth and effective functioning of a social system (inter alia: Baronchelli 2022; Becchetti, Conzo, and Romeo 2014; Bjornskov 2006; Newton 2001). The relevant literature identifies two distinct but nonetheless interlinked types of trust. Political trust with its major constituent component of institutional trust and interpersonal or social trust (inter alia: Newton and Zmerli 2011; Paldam 2000; Uslaner 2008). Although conceptually different, essentially, both refer to the same behavioral propensity. The latter, also known as horizontal trust, pertains to trust in other people and is founded in some kind of ‘moralistic’ faith in others on the basis of society’s underlying core values (inter alia: Uslaner 2002; Uslaner 2008; Alesina and La Ferrara 2002). The former, also referred to as vertical trust, is trust in government, state institutions and organizations. As stressed by Van der Meer (2010), political trust is both “the glue that keeps the system together and [...] the oil that lubricates the policy machine” (p. 76). Additionally, Harteveld, Meer, and Vries (2013) note that political trust helps solve collective action problems and reduce transaction costs of public policy. In a similar vein, the OECD, emphasizes that trust in institutions is important for the success of government policies and programs that invariably depend on cooperation and compliance of citizens and hence is conducive to growth. This type of trust depends on and is influenced by the perceptions and experiences citizens have regarding how well state institutions and organizations perform their functions (inter alia: Rothstein 2000; Keele 2007; Rothstein and Stolle 2008; Welch et al. 2005).

Institutional trust also involves trust towards international and intergovernmental organizations such as the UN, the EU and NATO (inter alia: Arpino and Obydenkova 2020; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Harteveld, Meer, and Vries 2013; Kiratli 2022; Schlipphak 2015). As pointed out by Torgler (2008), trust in international organizations can be seen as a sub-category of international trust (Brewer et al. 2004; Brewer, Aday, and Gross 2005). The latter, i.e. international trust, also includes trust towards other nations. Arpino and Obydenkova (2020) note that public’s trust towards political institutions, national or international, is the foundation of their legitimacy. For instance, in the case of the UN, Giray (2022) reports findings indicating that local citizens’ viewpoints and trust towards UN peacekeeping missions as security providers is an important determinant of the violence UN peacekeepers experience during their missions.

1 Defined as “features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam 1995, pp. 664–665).
A cohort of demographic characteristics, individual traits and preferences including ideological and political orientations as well as partisan affiliations determine citizens’ levels of institutional trust; defined by Delhey and Newton (2005) as people’s belief that a country’s institutions will not, at worst, knowingly or willingly do them harm, and will, at best, act in everybody’s interests. Institutional trust includes trust towards the state’s security apparatus such as the police and the armed forces. Similarly, when it comes to international trust or trust in international organizations such as the UN, the EU and NATO, it has been shown that it is associated with and affected by the levels of trust in national political institutions, the domestic and international political environment, opinions and political judgments about world affairs, foreign policy preferences, the organizations’ capacity to effectively deliver on its mission, the degree to which a country’s foreign policy preferences converge with the other members of the organization (inter alia: Harteveld, Meer, and Vries 2013; Torgler 2008; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Kiratli 2022).

It has been shown that major security-threat generating events, such as for instance the recent pandemic, terrorist attacks, conflict and war affect citizens’ institutional trust. Such events impact citizens’ risk-perceptions, (in)security sentiments, policy preferences, voting behavior, values and behavioral attitudes towards state institutions, often generating a rally around the flag effect (inter alia: Bove and Di Leo 2020; Bozzoli and Müller 2011; Economou and Kollias 2015, 2019; Berrebi and Klor 2008; Arvanitidis, Economou, and Kollias 2016; Geys and Qari 2017). The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a major, watershed event with wide-ranging momentous political, economic and strategic ramifications (inter alia: Bunde 2022; Farzanegan and Fischer 2022; Biscop 2023). The shockwaves of the Russian invasion have shaken the European post-bipolar security settings highlighting the need for greater coordination and enhanced integration in defence and security (inter alia: Mogherini and Katainen 2017; Genschel 2022; Bosse 2022; Howorth 2014; Tardy 2018). The invasion and the ongoing fighting represent a historical turning point for European security the central pillar of which has been NATO and the transatlantic strategic alliance throughout both the bipolar as well as post-bipolar periods (inter alia: Hartley and Sandler 1999; Kim and Sandler 2020; Calmels 2020; George and Sandler 2022; Howarth 2017; Sperling 2017; Ringsmose and Webber 2020). Given NATO’s fundamental role for European security, in what follows we examine how the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022 has impacted EU27 citizens’ trust towards NATO. The data and methodology adopted to probe into the issue at hand are presented in the next section. Section three includes the presentation and discussion of the findings from the estimated models that draw from the regression discontinuity design employed by Finseraas, Jakobson, and Kotsadam (2011). Finally, section four concludes the paper.
2 Data and Methodology: A Primer

As previously noted, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a defining event for European history and for European security (Bosse 2022; Costa and Barbé 2023; Genschel 2022; Magula, Rouland, and Zwack 2022). As pointed out by Fiott (2023) the invasion has upended the European security order. The cornerstone of Europe’s security is NATO on which the European states are heavily dependent hence the burden sharing issues that have often dominated the Alliance’s agenda (inter alia: Kim and Sandler 2020; Arvanitidis, Kollias, and Messis 2017; Kivimäki 2019; Bogers, Beeres, and Bollen 2022; Haesebrouck 2022).

To examine how the Russian invasion of Ukraine impacted EU27 citizens’ trust towards NATO, data are drawn from two successive Eurobarometer surveys. They were conducted before and after the invasion. Eurobarometer survey 96.3 was conducted in January-February 2022 a few days before the invasion of Ukraine and Eurobarometer survey 97.5 was conducted in June and July 2022. In the empirical analysis that follows in the next section we focus on the EU27 member states out of which eight were not NATO members when the two surveys were conducted: Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden. Subsequently, as a result of Russia’s invasion, Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership. The latter joined the Alliance in 2023 while Sweden’s application is still pending since it has not been ratified by all NATO member states. The rest of the EU27 were all NATO members having joined at different points in time.3

For our purposes here, the main indicator of interest is the survey question that asks respondents whether they trust NATO. The respective answers offered as choices to the respondents are “tend to trust” and “tend not to trust”. In line with the relevant literature, in the regressions estimated in the next section, several demographic and socio-economic indicators are included to control for the cohort of other possible factors that affect the respondents’ answers. They include age, gender and marital status. Additionally, educational level, occupational status and the respondent’s household’s financial situation are also included in the analysis since it has been shown that also bear an effect on institutional trust levels. Moreover, other factors that may affect individual trust in NATO include respondents’ political orientation and awareness about the current domestic and international political setting. Thus, an indicator of self-assessed political interest and dummies for individual political self-placement are also included in the regressions. Table 1 offers a summary of the variables introduced in the estimations. The potential individual determinants of trust described above are in

---

Table 1: Definition of variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable names</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust: NATO</td>
<td>1: Respondent tends to trust the NATO, 0: Respondent tends not to trust the NATO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Age in years (15–94 years of age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1: Respondent is male, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Married/living together</td>
<td>1: Respondent is married/living with a partner, 0: Otherwise (Reference category, omitted from regressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Single</td>
<td>1: Respondent is single/living alone, 0: Otherwise (Reference category, omitted from regressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Divorced/widowed/separated</td>
<td>1: Respondent is divorced/widowed/separated, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational status</td>
<td>1: Respondent belongs in high educational class (level 6 and above in ISCED educational classification), 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Self-employed</td>
<td>1: Respondent is self-employed, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Managers</td>
<td>1: Respondent is manager, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Other white-collars</td>
<td>1: Respondent is employed in other white-collar occupations, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Manual workers</td>
<td>1: Respondent is manual worker, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: House persons</td>
<td>1: Respondent is a house person, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Unemployed</td>
<td>1: Respondent is unemployed, 0: Otherwise (Reference category, omitted from regressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Retired</td>
<td>1: Respondent is retired, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Students</td>
<td>1: Respondent is a student, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household financial situation</td>
<td>1: Household’s financial situation is “very good/rather good”, 0: Household’s financial situation is “rather bad/very bad”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>1: High political interest, 0: Medium/low political interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale:</td>
<td>1: Respondent belongs on the left of the political self-placement scale, 0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left</td>
<td>0: Otherwise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale:</td>
<td>1: Respondent belongs on the centre of the political self-placement scale, 0: Otherwise (Reference category, omitted from regressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>1: Respondent belongs on the left of the political self-placement scale, 0: Otherwise (Reference category, omitted from regressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>1: Respondent belongs on the right of the political self-placement scale, 0: Otherwise (Reference category, omitted from regressions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of days before and after the invasion date</td>
<td>Number of days before and after the first day of the Russian invasion in Ukraine of 24th of February 2022 (−38 up to 156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian casualties</td>
<td>Number of civilian casualties during the war in Ukraine (daily estimates)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data on individual characteristics and personal preferences are drawn from the Eurobarometer Surveys of 2022. Data on daily number of civilian casualties are drawn from the Statista database from the United Nations: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights periodical reports.
widely used in previous studies and the findings indicate systematic differences in institutional trust between individuals of different demographic, socioeconomic and political strata (inter alia: Kıratlı 2022; Harteveld, Meer, and Vries 2013; Arpino and Obydenkova 2020; Schoon and Cheng 2011; Torgler 2008).

To examine how trust towards NATO was affected by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, two different indicators are used. The first metric that we introduce in the regressions is the number of days before and after the invasion, based on the date of each respondent’s Eurobarometer survey interview. This indicator ranges from 38 days before the onset of the military operations up to 156 days after the first day Russia invaded Ukraine. The second metric is drawn from the Statista database, based on United Nations periodical reports, on the number of daily civilian casualties during the fighting for the aforementioned period. An indicator of the cumulative number of civilian casualties is then calculated. It aims to capture how public sentiment is affected, since the number of fatalities is being globally disseminated through the media and such information can provoke a behavioural response that impacts institutional trust as for instance is shown by Casey (2023) in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The methodological approach adopted herein resembles the regression discontinuity design, as employed by Finseraas, Jakobson, and Kotsadam (2011) and Jacobsson and Blom (2014). In the estimated regressions the respondents that were interviewed days immediately before and after the first day on the invasion are included in the analysis. The first day of the war, that is the 24th of February 2022 is set as the day “zero” and individuals that participated in the survey right before make-up the treatment group, whereas individuals participating in the survey the days after this date comprise the control group. The regression discontinuity approach explores whether a discontinuity exists in the mean trust to NATO before and after the date of interest. The following logistic regression model, with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors, is estimated:

\[
P(y = 1|x) = G(\beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot x_1 + \ldots + \beta_k \cdot x_k)
\]

Where \(y\) is the binary indicator of individuals’ trust to the NATO and \(x\) is the set of the \(k\) independent variables, with the main variables of interest being the “number of days” and the “civilian casualties”.

3 In NATO We Trust(?) : Findings and Discussion

Figure 1 presents the mean percentages of individuals that “tend to trust NATO” based on their responses, for each day of the interview. For most of the period before
the onset of the war, respondents who tend to trust the NATO, range 48% up to 64%. In general, the mean trend seems to be around 56%. For the June and July 2022 period, the mean trend is at 58%. While the general mean percentage seems unaffected at first glance, between the two respective time periods, there are two interesting findings. In the beginning of July 2023, there is a sharp drop in trust to NATO as low as 35% on average, while a similar pattern is also observed at the last days of July, with trust towards the NATO dropping sharply at around 30% on average. These sharp changes in NATO trust levels might be result of key events such as the shelling of a mall center in Kremenchuk (27th of June 2022) and the shelling of the second largest city in Ukraine, Kharkiv on 21st of July 2022. Both events resulted in many civilian fatalities and injuries and attracted worldwide media attention. A cautious and tentative explanation of this sharp drop maybe that these events shook EU citizens’ trust in NATO’s and in broader terms in the West’s ability to prevent such civilian casualties by effectively intervening in the ongoing conflict. It has been shown that trust in institutions and organizations is affected by the public’s perceptions regarding how well they perform their functions and on whether they can effectively deliver on their mission (inter alia: Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Rothstein and Stolle 2008; Keele 2007; Welch et al. 2005).

We now turn to the findings yielded from estimating (1) for each individual country separately. The results for EU27 members that are also NATO members are reported Table 2 while the findings for Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden that were not members of NATO at the time the two surveys were conducted\(^4\) are shown in Table 3. As a broad general observation, the estimated effects of the two main independent variables of interest – that is the days following

---

\(^4\) As already noted, Finland joined in 2023 while Sweden’s membership application is still pending.
### Table 2: Logistic regression models, trust in NATO, Odds Ratio - in bold the main variables of interest (members of NATO).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Bulgaria</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Denmark</th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>France</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>1.011***</td>
<td>0.996</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td>0.981***</td>
<td>1.007</td>
<td>1.010**</td>
<td>1.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td>1.110</td>
<td>1.107</td>
<td>1.106</td>
<td>1.207*</td>
<td>1.259</td>
<td>1.310**</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Married/living together</td>
<td>1.186</td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>1.007</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>1.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Divorced/widowed/separated</td>
<td>1.210</td>
<td>0.781</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>1.260</td>
<td>1.109</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>1.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational status</td>
<td>1.426***</td>
<td>1.266*</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>1.482***</td>
<td>1.507**</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>1.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Self-employed</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td>2.452***</td>
<td>0.680</td>
<td>1.441</td>
<td>1.401</td>
<td>1.110</td>
<td>0.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Managers</td>
<td>1.254</td>
<td>2.112**</td>
<td>0.779</td>
<td>1.224</td>
<td>1.867</td>
<td>1.599</td>
<td>1.304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Other white-collars</td>
<td>1.049</td>
<td>1.454</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>1.068</td>
<td>1.526</td>
<td>1.143</td>
<td>1.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Manual workers</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>1.592*</td>
<td>1.138</td>
<td>1.087</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td>0.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: House persons</td>
<td>0.747</td>
<td>2.145*</td>
<td>0.956</td>
<td>1.631</td>
<td>1.465</td>
<td>1.249</td>
<td>0.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Retired</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td>2.451***</td>
<td>1.179</td>
<td>1.056</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>1.529</td>
<td>1.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Students</td>
<td>2.658***</td>
<td>2.272**</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>1.415</td>
<td>1.292</td>
<td>2.940***</td>
<td>1.761*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household financial situation</td>
<td>2.296***</td>
<td>2.108***</td>
<td>3.072***</td>
<td>2.145***</td>
<td>1.545**</td>
<td>2.967***</td>
<td>2.327***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>0.763*</td>
<td>1.240</td>
<td>1.090</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>1.028</td>
<td>1.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale: Left</td>
<td>1.077</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>0.971</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.793*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale: Right</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td>1.643***</td>
<td>1.498***</td>
<td>2.597***</td>
<td>1.248</td>
<td>2.047***</td>
<td>0.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of days before and after the invasion date</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.020</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>0.982</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.983</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.976</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.031</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.013</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.006</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians casualties</td>
<td><strong>0.823</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.219</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.200</strong>*</td>
<td><strong>1.305</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.764</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.861</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.956</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi-square</td>
<td>120.22***</td>
<td>115.15***</td>
<td>132.13***</td>
<td>187.77***</td>
<td>66.27***</td>
<td>167.07***</td>
<td>111.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1389</td>
<td>1762</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>1737</td>
<td>1451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>Luxembourg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>1.008**</td>
<td>1.011*</td>
<td>0.994</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.998</td>
<td>0.996</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Males</strong></td>
<td>1.160*</td>
<td>1.048</td>
<td>1.213*</td>
<td>1.089</td>
<td>0.826*</td>
<td>1.117</td>
<td>0.776*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Married/living together</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>1.403**</td>
<td>0.743*</td>
<td>0.668*</td>
<td>1.319</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status: Divorced/widowed/separated</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>Luxembourg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.793</td>
<td>0.757</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>1.293</td>
<td>0.641**</td>
<td>0.608*</td>
<td>1.550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational status</td>
<td>1.480***</td>
<td>1.148</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>1.384**</td>
<td>0.968</td>
<td>1.428***</td>
<td>0.918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Self-employed</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>1.234</td>
<td>0.533*</td>
<td>1.115</td>
<td>1.243</td>
<td>1.502</td>
<td>1.289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Managers</td>
<td>1.258</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td>0.691</td>
<td>1.358</td>
<td>1.629*</td>
<td>1.068</td>
<td>1.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Other white-collar</td>
<td>0.836</td>
<td>1.232</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>1.703**</td>
<td>1.166</td>
<td>0.931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Manual workers</td>
<td>0.754</td>
<td>0.933</td>
<td>0.735</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>1.150</td>
<td>1.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: House persons</td>
<td>1.018</td>
<td>1.212</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>0.960</td>
<td>1.339</td>
<td>0.383*</td>
<td>1.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Retired</td>
<td>0.704</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>1.148</td>
<td>0.974</td>
<td>1.849**</td>
<td>1.908**</td>
<td>0.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Students</td>
<td>1.629*</td>
<td>1.832</td>
<td>1.102</td>
<td>1.681*</td>
<td>3.336***</td>
<td>1.926</td>
<td>4.581***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household financial situation</td>
<td>2.831***</td>
<td>2.082***</td>
<td>2.743***</td>
<td>2.712***</td>
<td>2.431***</td>
<td>1.964***</td>
<td>0.582***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>1.948***</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>1.025</td>
<td>0.983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale: Left</td>
<td>1.024</td>
<td>0.666**</td>
<td>1.498***</td>
<td>1.623***</td>
<td>0.556***</td>
<td>0.668***</td>
<td>1.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale: Right</td>
<td>0.715***</td>
<td>1.807***</td>
<td>0.964</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>2.386***</td>
<td>1.775***</td>
<td>1.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days before and after the invasion date</td>
<td>0.988*</td>
<td>1.011</td>
<td>1.058***</td>
<td>0.963***</td>
<td>1.013</td>
<td>1.022***</td>
<td>1.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian casualties</td>
<td>1.157**</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>0.569***</td>
<td>1.459***</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td>0.814*</td>
<td>0.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.066</td>
<td>0.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi-square</td>
<td>175.80***</td>
<td>121.93***</td>
<td>114.89***</td>
<td>173.15***</td>
<td>186.36***</td>
<td>109.87***</td>
<td>44.85***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2575</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>1632</td>
<td>1691</td>
<td>792</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.012**</td>
<td>1.014**</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td>0.990*</td>
<td>0.995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>1.094</td>
<td>1.023</td>
<td>1.141</td>
<td>0.947</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>0.108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Married/living together</td>
<td>1.055</td>
<td>1.318</td>
<td>0.921</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td>0.638***</td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Divorced/widowed/separated</td>
<td>1.400</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>1.176</td>
<td>0.689</td>
<td>0.677*</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational status</td>
<td>1.406***</td>
<td>1.296</td>
<td>1.057</td>
<td>1.062</td>
<td>1.357**</td>
<td>0.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Self-employed</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td>1.101</td>
<td>1.112</td>
<td>1.777</td>
<td>0.785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status: Managers</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.344</td>
<td>1.461</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td>1.141</td>
<td>1.661</td>
<td>1.251</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Other white-collars</td>
<td>1.548</td>
<td>1.493</td>
<td>1.256</td>
<td>1.542</td>
<td>1.331</td>
<td>1.075</td>
<td>0.683*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Manual workers</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>1.119</td>
<td>1.182</td>
<td>1.049</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td>0.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: House persons</td>
<td>0.445*</td>
<td>1.647</td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td>1.161</td>
<td>1.449</td>
<td>1.038</td>
<td>0.621*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Retired</td>
<td>0.763</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>1.058</td>
<td>1.519</td>
<td>2.215**</td>
<td>1.516</td>
<td>0.701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Students</td>
<td>1.521</td>
<td>1.523</td>
<td>1.372</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>1.918*</td>
<td>2.029**</td>
<td>1.500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Household financial situation | 1.902*** | 3.199*** | 2.907*** | 2.070*** | 3.103*** | 1.586*** | 1.996*** |
| Political interest | 1.340** | 1.051 | 1.264 | 0.821 | 0.901 | 1.143 | 1.157 |
| Political self-placement scale: Left | 1.077 | 1.218 | 0.650*** | 0.750** | 0.511*** | 0.612*** | 0.686*** |
| Political self-placement scale: Right | 0.899 | 1.206 | 0.835 | 1.413*** | 1.698*** | 1.908*** | 1.687*** |

| No. of days before and after the invasion date | 0.981** | 1.021* | 1.017 | 0.990 | 1.023** | 0.971*** | 0.990 |
| Civilian casualties | 1.213* | 0.851 | 0.808* | 1.134 | 0.810** | 1.335*** | 1.138 |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.038 | 0.088 | 0.092 | 0.049 | 0.185 | 0.056 | 0.047 |
| Wald chi-square | 71.82*** | 164.35*** | 156.74*** | 113.12*** | 330.34*** | 121.32*** | 99.82*** |
| Observations | 1814 | 1729 | 1520 | 1835 | 1771 | 1798 | 1637 |

Statistical significance is denoted by *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01. Regressions are estimated with heteroskedasticity – robust standard errors.
Table 3: Logistic regression models, Trust in NATO, Odds Ratio - in bold the main variables of interest (not members of NATO).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Malta</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.979**</td>
<td>1.007</td>
<td>1.006</td>
<td>1.003</td>
<td>1.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>0.818</td>
<td>1.386***</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.719*</td>
<td>0.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Married/living together</td>
<td>1.058</td>
<td>1.489</td>
<td>1.268</td>
<td>0.874</td>
<td>0.842</td>
<td>1.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: Divorced/widowed/separated</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>1.564</td>
<td>1.191</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>1.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational status</td>
<td>2.321***</td>
<td>0.739</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>1.429***</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>1.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Self-employed</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>1.026</td>
<td>1.114</td>
<td>3.187</td>
<td>0.659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Managers</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>1.610</td>
<td>1.572</td>
<td>5.658**</td>
<td>0.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Other white-collars</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.698</td>
<td>1.517</td>
<td>1.865**</td>
<td>3.798*</td>
<td>0.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Manual workers</td>
<td>1.207</td>
<td>0.457</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td>1.292</td>
<td>3.284</td>
<td>0.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: House persons</td>
<td>1.119</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>0.541</td>
<td>1.951**</td>
<td>4.024*</td>
<td>0.962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Retired</td>
<td>1.584</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>1.068</td>
<td>1.925*</td>
<td>7.449***</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status: Students</td>
<td>1.444</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td>1.565</td>
<td>3.356***</td>
<td>3.065</td>
<td>0.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household financial situation</td>
<td>1.179</td>
<td>6.850***</td>
<td>2.141***</td>
<td>2.637***</td>
<td>1.841***</td>
<td>2.073***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>1.619***</td>
<td>1.584**</td>
<td>1.598***</td>
<td>0.946</td>
<td>5.717***</td>
<td>0.517***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale: Left</td>
<td>0.689***</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>0.662***</td>
<td>0.708***</td>
<td>1.531**</td>
<td>1.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political self-placement scale: Right</td>
<td>0.736**</td>
<td>3.606***</td>
<td>1.496***</td>
<td>1.290</td>
<td>0.981</td>
<td>1.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of days before and after the invasion date</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>1.063***</td>
<td>1.003</td>
<td>1.008</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>1.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian casualties</td>
<td>1.147</td>
<td>0.554***</td>
<td>1.062</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>1.093</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>0.115</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald chi-square</td>
<td>83.85***</td>
<td>94.70***</td>
<td>216.49***</td>
<td>87.16***</td>
<td>83.62***</td>
<td>108.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>1823</td>
<td>1575</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistical significance is denoted by * p < 0.1; ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01. Regressions are estimated with heteroskedasticity – robust standard errors.
the first date of the war onset and the number of civilian casualties – are not uniform. They exhibit notable divergence between respondents of the different countries.

Focusing on the EU members that are also NATO members (Table 2), three distinct country groups can be identified. The first consists of seven countries where the number of days before and after the onset of the war is negatively related to trust towards NATO whereas the number of civilian casualties is positively related to trust levels. These countries are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and, Slovenia. In these cases, the findings indicate that as the number of days elapse since the first day of the Russian invasion, respondents have lower odds to trust NATO. On the other hand, however, an increase in the number of civilian casualties is associated with higher odds to trust NATO. The first finding may tentatively be construed as a sign of the respondents’ disapproval of NATO’s inability to have an effective role in the fighting by supporting Ukraine or deterring Russian aggression. The latter indicates a “rally around the flag” effect on respondents since they seem to increase their trust towards institutions in times of intense psychological shocks, such as the loss of human lives. In this case civilians being killed by the fighting. Perhaps it is interesting to note that none of the countries in this group have direct borders with Russia and/or Ukraine.

In the second country group, the reverse pattern is observed. As days elapse since the first day of the war, respondents are at higher odds to trust NATO. At the same time, an increase in the number of civilian casualties is associated with lower odds to trust NATO. The countries that exhibit this pattern in the estimated findings are also seven: Belgium, Denmark, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland (a significant positive relationship is observed only for the number of days), Portugal (only the number of civilian casualties is statistically significant in this case) and Slovakia. Among these countries, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia share common borders with Ukraine. The findings for these countries indicate a “rally around the flag” for the number of days metric used in the estimated regressions. As days pass by, respondents are at higher odds to exhibit higher levels of trust towards NATO. On the other hand, however, an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the war is associated with lower odds to trust NATO. As the duration of the war is prolonged, respondents tend to show greater support towards NATO, but their trust is hampered when by the losses in human lives.

The third group is also comprised by seven countries, for which the main relationships of interest – i.e. the two metrics used to capture the impact of the invasion on trust towards NATO – are not statistically significant. In this case, for Estonia, France, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania and Spain, neither the prolongation of the war nor the number of casualties seem to affect trust levels towards NATO. It is worth mentioning that Estonia and Latvia share common borders with
Russia, while Romania is sharing common borders with Ukraine. It should be mentioned here, that no effect does not imply absence of trust but simply that the estimated results do not trace an impact on existing trust levels.

Finally, turning to the group of countries that were NATO members during the surveys (Table 3), the results indicate that in five out of the six countries included, no significant effects of the war are detected upon NATO trust levels. This is the case for Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden. Interestingly, as a result of the invasion Sweden and Finland abandoned the neutrality status and applied for NATO membership. Nonetheless, absence of a statistically traceable effect does not imply low trust towards NATO. In the non-NATO members EU countries, only in the case of Cyprus there appears to be a statistically significant effect of Russia’s invasion on trust towards NATO. In Cyprus’ case, as the fighting is prolonged it increases trust levels. However, the civilian casualties metric seems to exert a negative effect on trust towards NATO.

The findings concerning the remainder of the trust determinants variables introduced in the regression in broad terms seem to follow conventional wisdom. The general conclusion drawn is that older respondents, single, of higher educational status, either employed or retired, students and of well-off households are at higher odds to trust NATO. Similarly, respondents who are interested in political matters and more informed than the rest also exhibit higher odds to trust the NATO. Finally, as one would intuitively expect, leftists have lower odds to trust NATO while respondents that a rightist political self-placement are at higher odds to trust NATO, in comparison to centrists.

4 Concluding Remarks

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the continuing fighting is a major event with momentous political, economic and strategic consequences. The invasion has shaken the post-bipolar European security order (Bosse 2022; Costa and Barbé 2023; Fiott 2023; Genschel 2022). As it has been shown in the extant literature, such watershed events have the potential to affect citizens’ institutional trust levels (Arvanitidis, Economou, and Kollias 2016; Bozzoli and Müller 2011; Economou and Kollias 2015, 2019; Geys and Qari 2017). Using two different metrics – the number of civilian casualties and the days that elapsed from the February 24th, 2022 invasion – the paper set out to examine how EU27 citizens’ trust towards NATO, the central pillar of European security, was affected. To probe into the issue at hand, the paper used data from two Eurobarometer surveys conducted just before and just after the invasion and adopted a regression discontinuity design as employed by Finseraaas, Jakobson, and Kotsadam (2011) and Jacobsson and Blom (2014).
Albeit not uniform across all countries examined, in broad terms for the majority of the countries included in the analysis, significant effects are found for both the duration of the war and the casualties metrics used in the estimations. However, the results do not allow for unequivocal inferences to be drawn. For some of the countries involved, a “rally around the flag”, that is increased trust towards NATO, is found for the days elapsed since the invasion variable. For other countries, the “rally around the flag” if found in the case of the civilian casualties variable. Jointly, these findings indicate that individuals tend to increase their trust levels of NATO as a response to the invasion without this support being directly related to the performance of the institution examined (Knudsen, Nordø, and Iversen 2023). However, this is not uniform. In a number of cases, no statistically significant effect is traced while in others trust levels are negatively affected. We tentatively suggest that unobserved heterogeneity due to the different cultural, behavioural and institutional frameworks among the countries, is a possible factor that at least partially explains the divergence in the observed responses.

References


