9

BURDEN-SHARING

Explaining Allied Military Support to Ukraine

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Introduction

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sent shockwaves through the international community and galvanized a broad wave of support from Western countries. However, the level of support has varied significantly among Western countries, exposing political rifts and underscoring the ongoing challenges of burden-sharing. In early 2025, President Donald Trump claimed the United States spent "US$200 billion more than the European Union"; in reality, European allies have shouldered a greater share of the collective military assistance, accounting for over 51% of the bilateral military support since 2022, in contrast to the United States' 46% (Trebesch et al., 2025). Furthermore, relative to the size of their economies, countries such as Estonia and Denmark have contributed far more in military support to Kyiv than the U.S. government. Yet, by the same measure, the United States has performed much better than some other rich G7 nations, including Canada and Italy.

What explains these stark disparities? This chapter applies the concept of burden-sharing to examine the variation in military aid North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states sent to Ukraine between 2022 and 2024. It begins with an overview of burden-sharing as it pertains to the current conflict, followed by a presentation of the hypotheses and methodological approach used to assess and explain differences in weapons transfers to Kyiv. Our findings suggest that ideational and domestic factors carry significantly more weight than traditional interest-based calculations. Specifically, public opinion, threat perception, and strategic alignment emerge as the strongest predictors. We conclude by pausing over the implications for both scholarship and policy.

DOI: 10.4324/9781032670447-11

NATO Burden-Sharing in the Russo-Ukrainian War

Stephen J. Cimbala and Peter Forster (2005, p. 164) define burden-sharing as "the distribution of costs and risks among members of a group in the process of accomplishing a common goal." The definition indexes the theory of collective action, emphasizing the need to coordinate efforts toward shared objectives.

Within NATO, the burden-sharing debate has long revolved around two essential questions: what constitutes a contribution to collective defense and how to measure the fairness of each state's contribution to the common goal (Hartley and Sandler, 1999, p. 669). Put differently, though NATO has engaged in crisis management of distant conflicts (e.g., Afghanistan), its main objective has been to protect its members against external aggression, with NATO identifying Russia as the "most significant and direct threat" and calling for "solidarity" with Ukraine in 2022 (NATO, 2022). By 2024, the alliance made a set of long-term security commitments to Kyiv, including the establishment of a dedicated coordination command. The stated logic remains straightforward: assistance to Ukraine is understood as "vital" to NATO's collective defense and, therefore, for "the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area" (NATO, 2024).

Yet collective defense against Russia is both a public and a private good. This dynamic creates incentives for free riding, where some allies reap the benefits of collective security while contributing relatively little themselves. Such patterns were evident during the Cold War, when countries like Luxembourg relied on NATO's nuclear deterrent despite minimal financial or military contributions. A similar imbalance emerged during the war in Afghanistan, where allied contributions varied widely in both troop deployments and risk tolerance (Auerswald and Saideman, 2014). The Russo-Ukrainian War is no exception. Once again, some NATO members contribute less to the alliance's collective defense while benefitting from the security efforts of more engaged allies.

Effective collective action depends on group cohesion, clearly defined objectives, and strong leadership to prevent defection or shirking of responsibilities. However, member states often evaluate their contributions differently, based on varying levels of willingness and capability (Cooper and Zycher, 1989). These differences give rise to competing interpretations of what constitutes "fair and equal" contributions. Although efforts have been made to institutionalize fairness—such as NATO's new defense spending target of 3.5% of GDP by 2035—member states continue to diverge significantly in their policy preferences and defense commitments (Desmaele, 2024; Conyon, 2025).

Collective defense is not purely a public good; it also offers "private goods"—such as domestic political stability, regional influence, or benefits to the arms industry—which can either encourage or hobble meaningful contributions to shared security goals. Indeed, states' willingness to bear alliance burdens is shaped by a range of motivations. Some states are driven by perceptions of immediate security threats, others by the desire to maintain influence or reputation, and still

others by efforts to avoid the electoral costs of contributing heavily. Geography and political economy almost always play key roles: proximity to conflict and economic incentives for arms exports often increase the likelihood of engagement. The same goes for alliance politics: coercive measures—such as U.S. threats to withhold aid or arms sales—can and do bring about compliance (Blankenship, 2024), whereas domestic backlash or reputational concerns can lead to defection, as seen in the Dutch and Canadian early withdrawals from the war in Afghanistan (Massie, 2016). Either way, cost-benefit structures illuminate why some allies pursue burden avoidance, delay, or minimal engagement, while others shoulder a disproportionate share of the collective load (Sandler, 1992).

Within NATO, burden-sharing debates have traditionally focused on two forms of contributions. The first involves "inputs," measured primarily through defense spending as a percentage of GDP. Although NATO began tracking these figures in 1974, it was not until 2006 that members formally agreed to a target of 2% of GDP, aimed at reversing the post-Cold War decline in military budgets (Kamp, 2019). Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, allies reaffirmed this commitment, pledging to meet the 2% threshold within a decade to address growing capability gaps. And at the 2025 Summit in The Hague, NATO adopted a more ambitious target: 5% of GDP on defense spending by 2035, including at least 3.5% for core defense capabilities and up to 1.5% for national security and defense-related investments.

The second form concerns "outputs," such as troop deployments or specific contributions to joint operations, such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and Operation Unified Protector in Libya. Nations falling short of the 2% benchmark have often argued that outputs better reflect meaningful commitment—an outstanding case in point being Canada under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Brewster, 2018). In other words, burden-sharing comes down to how states distribute both costs and risks in pursuit of a common objective (Cimbala and Forster, 2010).

Military assistance to Ukraine has now emerged as a new collective output. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion, only about half of NATO members had supplied arms to Ukraine; afterward, virtually all did—resulting in the largest arms transfers in Europe since World War II. The considerable variation in the scale and scope of military support provided by Western allies has prompted many scholars to explain these disparities. In the following section, we outline our hypotheses, drawn from this literature, and describe our approach to measuring the key determinants of military assistance to Ukraine.

Hypotheses, Methods, and Data

We examine variation in military support to Ukraine across NATO member states between January 2022 and December 2024. The sample includes all NATO allies for which reliable and comparable data are available on both the dependent variable

and key predictors. Accordingly, four countries were excluded due to either the absence of recorded military aid in the Kiel Institute's Ukraine Support Tracker or missing values for one or more explanatory variables (Albania, Iceland, Montenegro, and North Macedonia). The final sample comprises 28 countries observed over three years, yielding a balanced panel of 84 observations.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the total value of military aid commitments to Ukraine per year between January 2022 and December 2024, expressed as a percentage of national GDP. Aid data are sourced from the Kiel Institute's Ukraine Support Tracker (Trebesch et al., 2025). When announcement dates were unclear or unspecified at the monthly level, commitments were evenly distributed across months to construct annual totals. To address right skew and ensure proportional interpretability, the variable was rescaled to a 0–1 range and then log-transformed.

Figure 9.1 illustrates military support to Ukraine from 2022 to 2024 as a share of donor countries' GDP. The Baltic states consistently led in relative terms. In 2022, Estonia (1.09%), Latvia (1.05%), and Lithuania (0.82%) topped the list, followed by Poland (0.44%), Bulgaria (0.42%), and Slovakia (0.23%). Ten countries gave between 0.1% and 0.2% of GDP, while 12 remained below 0.1%. Key Western powers, including Germany (0.08%), France (0.07%), Italy (0.03%), and Canada (0.09%), ranked lower.

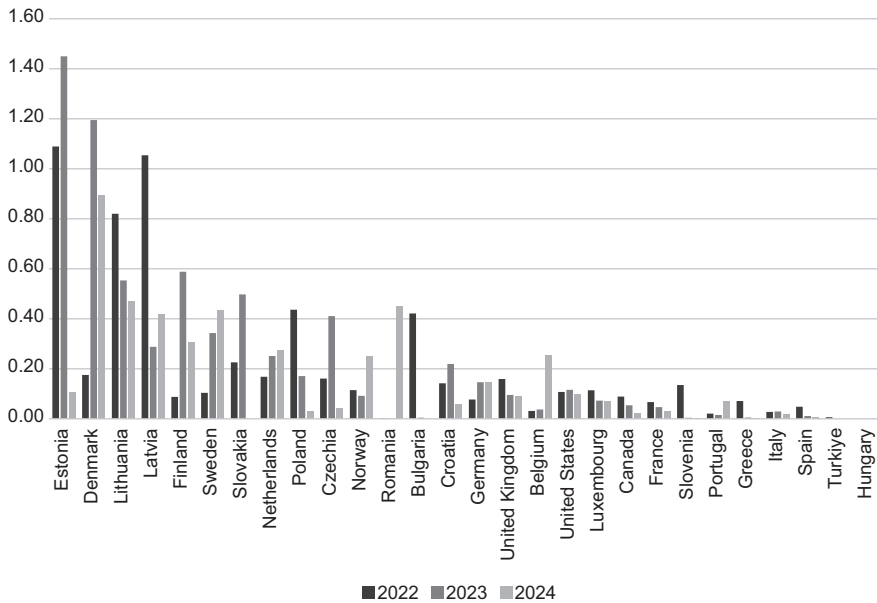

FIGURE 9.1 Military Support to Ukraine (% GDP)

In 2023, the composition shifted. Estonia remained first (1.45%), but Denmark surged to second (1.19%), and Finland rose to third (0.59%). Lithuania and Latvia's contributions dropped significantly. By 2024, no country surpassed Denmark's 0.69%. Estonia fell to 0.11%, ranking 11th. Seventeen countries gave less than 0.1%, and only nine exceeded 0.2%, suggesting a general decline in relative support.

Despite the overall trend, several countries—including Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, and Germany—increased their military aid to Ukraine over time. Only Estonia and Lithuania consistently ranked among the top contributors; others ramped up their support later, reflecting divergent motivations and timelines. Notably, some apparent declines in aid levels are attributable to GDP growth rather than actual reductions in support. Between 2022 and 2024, GDP contracted in about half of the countries analyzed, which may have inflated aid-to-GDP ratios. However, the steepest declines in support often coincided with economic growth, suggesting actual reductions in effort.

Nine countries consistently contributed less than 0.05% of GDP: Hungary, Turkey, Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia, France, and Canada. Western powers varied in their trajectories. Germany rose from 0.08% in 2022 to 0.15% in 2023, then dipped slightly to 0.14% in 2024. France (0.07%–0.03%), Canada (0.09%–0.02%), and the United Kingdom (0.16%–0.09%) all decreased over time. These patterns challenge simplistic "free rider" narratives by revealing broader variation in allied engagement, both across allies and through time.

Independent Variables

Following Massie and Tallová (2025a), independent variables were grouped into three categories: interest-based, domestic, and ideational. Interest-based or material predictors reflect the structural incentives and capabilities shaping states' ability and willingness to bear military costs. Collective action theory expects the most powerful members—those with the largest economies—to assume greater burdens due to broader interests and resources (Hartley and Sandler, 1999; Thies, 2003). These patterns are well documented by the scholarship on NATO burden-sharing, showing significant free riding by smaller members, especially after the Cold War and despite renewed Russian threats post-2014 (George and Sandler, 2022; Jakobsen, 2018).

Since 2022, empirical studies confirm a strong, positive correlation between defense spending and actual security contributions to allied missions (Becker, 2017), including support to Ukraine (Lanoszka and Becker, 2023; Haesebrouck, 2024; Massie and Tallová, 2025a). Thus, higher defense investments should also predict higher arms transfers to Ukraine.

Defense spending (see Figure 9.2) is calculated as the share of GDP allocated to two NATO-defined categories of military expenditure: operations and maintenance,

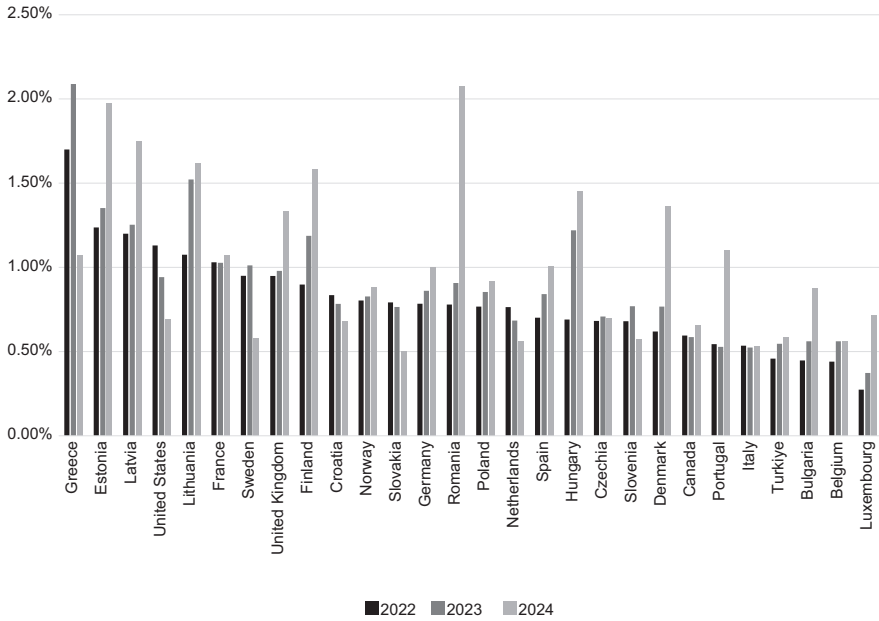

FIGURE 9.2 O&M+E Defense Spending (% GDP)

and equipment. This measure excludes infrastructure and personnel spending, which do not directly translate into greater capacity to supply weapons to Ukraine. Data come from annual defense spending reports published by the Public Diplomacy Division at NATO.

The comparison across the years 2022, 2023, and 2024 reveals substantial increases in relative defense spending in 13 countries, with the most pronounced rises observed in Romania (+1.30 percentage points), Hungary (+0.76), Denmark (+0.75), Estonia (+0.74), Finland (+0.68), Portugal (+0.56), Latvia (+0.55), Lithuania (+0.54), Luxembourg (+0.45), the United Kingdom (+0.43), Bulgaria (+0.42), Spain (+0.31), and Germany (+0.22). Eleven allies registered stable expenditures or modest changes over the same period, including Poland (+0.15), Turkey (+0.13), Belgium (+0.12), Norway (+0.08), Canada (+0.05), France (+0.04), Czechia (+0.02), Italy (−0.01), Slovenia (−0.11), Croatia (−0.16), and the Netherlands (−0.20). In contrast, only four allies decreased their relative allocation to operations, maintenance, and equipment substantially, with the most pronounced declines observed in Greece (−0.63 percentage points), the United States (−0.44), Sweden (−0.37), and Slovakia (−0.29).

A second interest-based motivation is rooted in economic stakes. Arms transfers can strengthen a donor's domestic defense industry, expand market share, and support technological advancement (Catrina, 1994; Vucetic and Tago, 2015). These benefits have been manifesting in the surge in production of U.S.-made

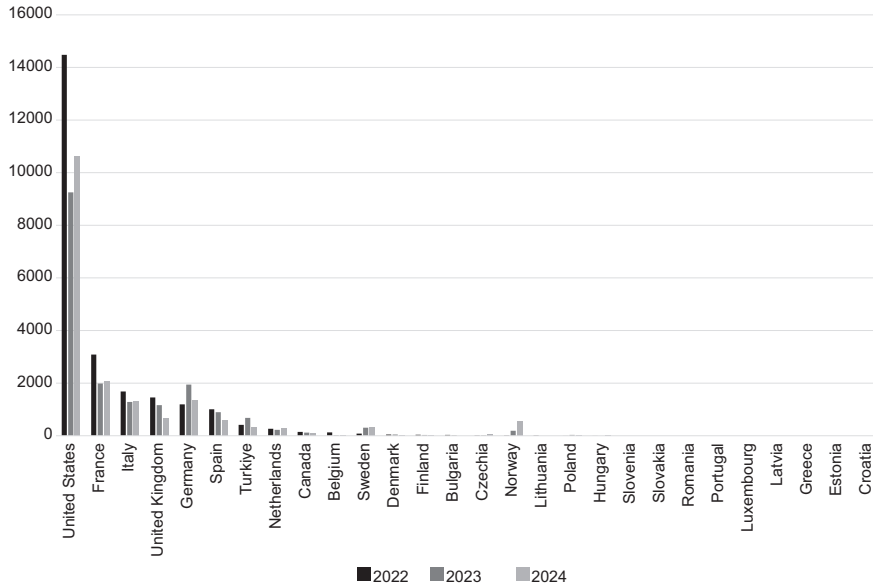

FIGURE 9.3 Arms Exports (TIV)

Patriot missile defense systems, many of which have been delivered to Ukraine. States with robust arms industries—and a stake in the economic returns of defense exports—are therefore more likely to provide military aid to Ukraine.

Data on arms exports (see Figure 9.3) are drawn from SIPRI's Arms Transfer Database and measure the volume of arms exports using SIPRI's trend-indicator values (TIVs), excluding transfers to Ukraine. Given the extreme right-skew of this variable, a natural log transformation is applied. Although a larger number of states report arms exports, many of these contributions are minimal and thus not visually discernible in the figure. As shown, the United States clearly emerges as the dominant arms exporter by a wide margin. Following it is a smaller set of significant exporters, including France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain.

A third material driver of collective action is geography. States located near conflict zones are more likely to contribute (Sandler and Hartley, 1999). Though proximity has not consistently predicted participation in overseas interventions (Auerswald, 2004; Saideman, 2016), it can influence defense spending since 2014 (George and Sandler, 2022) as well as military support to Ukraine (Massie and Tallová, 2025a).

Geographic proximity (see Table 9.1) to Russia is operationalized on a five-point ordinal scale based on physical contiguity: countries bordering Russia receive the highest score, followed by those bordering Ukraine, down to those separated by three or more borders or water bodies. This coding reflects proximity as a proxy for vulnerability and threat exposure.

TABLE 9.1 Geographical Proximity

Cases	*Proximity*	*Level*
Italy, Portugal, Spain	Greater than three borders from Russia	1
Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Slovenia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom	Three borders from Russia	2
Czechia, Germany	Two borders from Russia	3
Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, the United States	Maritime borders and Economic Exclusion Zones (EEZs)	4
Hungary, Romania, Slovakia	Land border Ukraine	5
Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland	Land border Russia	6

Domestic political factors also shape burden-sharing and may explain deviations from the logic of self-interest. They capture internal constraints and societal preferences that may enable or restrict foreign policy action. Public opinion, especially in democracies, can affect foreign commitments (Russett, 1990; Sobel et al., 2012). Elected officials may avoid costly foreign engagements if they risk electoral backlash (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992), a case in point being U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson's declaration at the Conservative Political Action Conference that "there's no appetite for another funding bill for Ukraine" (Zengerle, 2025). Studies have indeed found that public support shaped early support to Ukraine (Haesebrouck, 2024; Massie and Tallová, 2025a).

Public support for arming Ukraine is measured as the average percentage of respondents in each country who supported military assistance to Ukraine, based primarily on Eurobarometer data and supplemented with national polling sources (Angus Reid Institute and IPSOS). Responses are scaled from 0 to 1 to ease interpretation.

Figure 9.4 presents a comparison of public opinion over the three periods. On average, 66.36% of respondents in allied countries supported supplying weapons to Ukraine in 2022, with a comparable level of 65.11% in 2023. Support declined modestly in 2024, with the average falling to 61.39%. The highest levels of support in 2022 were observed in Sweden, Poland, Finland, and Lithuania, with respective support rates of 92%, 90%, 89%, and 86%. Some of the most notable shifts occurred in Norway, where support rose from 75% in 2022 to 91% in 2023, before declining to 82% in 2024. A similar upward trajectory is observed in Denmark, where support increased from 67% in 2022 to 86% in 2023 and further to 90% in 2024.

In contrast, several countries recorded substantial declines. In Hungary, support fell from 74% in 2022 to 42% in 2024. Poland experienced a moderate decrease from 90% to 80% over the same period, while support in the United States dropped from 61% to 49%. Sweden remained the most consistently supportive country,

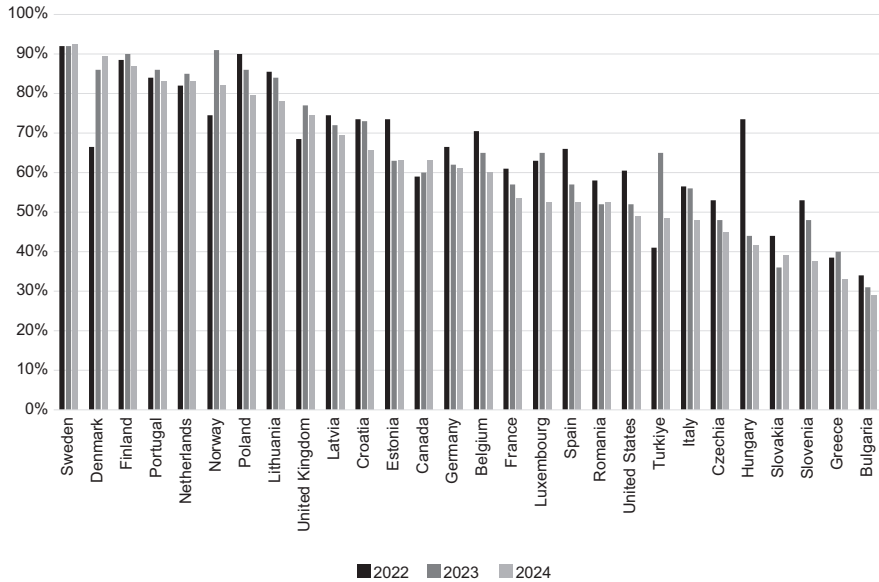

FIGURE 9.4 Public Opinion

maintaining support levels near 92–93% throughout the entire period, with Denmark joining the top tier by 2024. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Bulgaria persistently ranked lowest, with support falling from 34% in 2022 to 29% in 2024. Greece also remained among the least supportive cases. Among the most stable countries were Sweden, where support fluctuated only slightly from 92% to 93%, Canada, where support ranged between 59% and 63%, and Germany, where it declined moderately from 67% to 61%.

Another key domestic factor is executive autonomy: the degree of institutional freedom national governments have in determining foreign policy. Across NATO members, legislative constraints vary significantly, influencing how freely executives can act on international security matters (Mello, 2014). Countries with strong parliamentary oversight, such as Germany and Japan, tend to adopt more cautious foreign policy positions (Reiter and Tillman, 2002; Ruys et al., 2019). In the case of Ukraine, however, recent findings suggest a counterintuitive dynamic: higher executive autonomy has been associated with lower levels of military support (Massie and Tallová, 2025a).

Table 9.2 shows executive autonomy coded on a four-point scale, ranging from systems that require prior legislative approval to those that allow for an ex-post veto, followed by systems where executives must inform parliament without seeking approval, and finally to systems with no legislative requirements, indicating full executive control. The coding is based on original analysis of national

TABLE 9.2 Executive Autonomy

Cases	*Executive Autonomy*	*Level*
Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden	None (*ex ante* veto)	1
Spain, the United Kingdom	Partial (*ex post* veto)	2
The United States	Duty to inform the Parliament	3
Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey	Complete	4

constitutions, legal frameworks, and parliamentary oversight rules relating to the specific issue of deploying military assistance abroad.

A third domestic factor influencing collective action is the ideological orientation of governing parties. Right-leaning governments are generally more supportive of military engagement, whereas leftist and far-right parties tend to be more skeptical of the use of force (Haesebrouck and Mello, 2020; Wagner, 2020). This ideological pattern suggests that center-right governments are the most likely to provide military aid to Ukraine. Empirical support for this claim comes from Schmidt's (2023) analysis of historical aid generosity under left-leaning leadership, as well as from Massie and Tallová (2025a), who find that center-right governments were more proactive in arming Ukraine during the war's first year.

Government ideology is measured using the ParlGov database, which assigns ruling governments a score on a left–right scale from 0 to 10. This captures partisan preferences on military issues, with the expectation that center-right and moderate-right governments will be more supportive of military engagement abroad. The expectation is that governments positioned further to the right are more likely to support Ukraine through military assistance. Most parties in the sample do not occupy the ideological extremes according to ParlGov classifications (Döring et al., 2025). The only notable exceptions are Italy, with Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia, and the Netherlands, with Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom, both of which are categorized as far right. Figure 9.5 presents the ideological position of each case on a scale ranging from zero, indicating the extreme left, to ten, indicating the extreme right.

A final set of predictors involves ideational factors that shape foreign policy beyond material capacity and domestic politics. With respect to the Russo-Ukrainian War, two stand out: threat perception and strategic alignment. Threat perception is a key driver of strategic behavior—ranging from defense cooperation to military intervention—but it is often measured through indirect proxies. As Massie and Tallová (2025b) note, existing measures tend to rely on indicators such as geographic proximity, defense spending, or patterns in United Nations (UN) voting

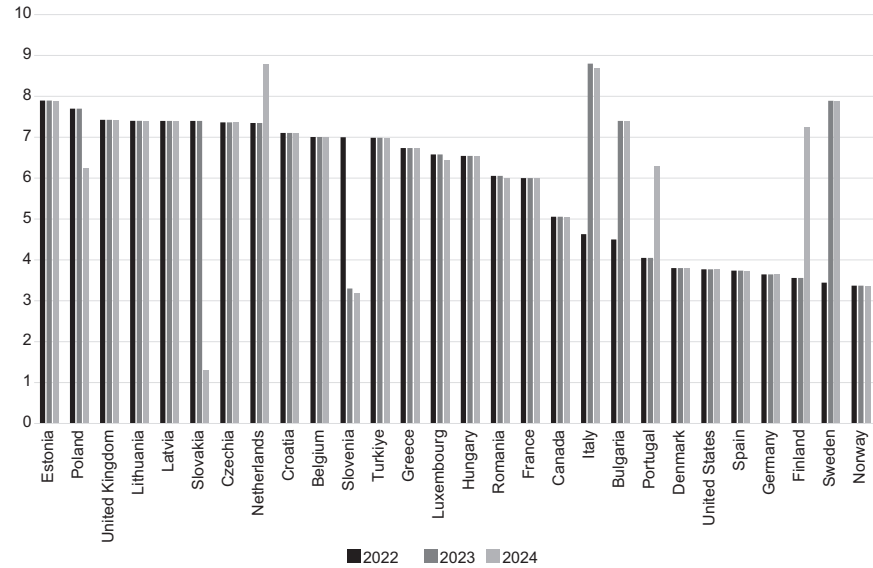

FIGURE 9.5 Government Ideology

behavior. While each provides valuable insight into how states assess security challenges, none directly captures how governments internally perceive external threats (cf. Pomeroy, 2025).

To provide a more direct and nuanced measure of threat perceptions, Massie and Tallová (2025b) developed a coding system based on content from countries' national security strategies or defense policies published before the 2022 re-invasion. These documents were coded along a spectrum ranging from depictions of Russia as a strategic partner, to a state with which dialogue is necessary, to a destabilizing actor, a geopolitical competitor, and finally, an existential threat. As Figure 9.6 shows, this scale captures increasing levels of perceived threat and reflects official national security postures toward Russia at the onset of the war.

Finally, strategic alignment represents a second measure of foreign policy preferences. A state's broader foreign policy orientation—particularly its stance toward Russia—can be inferred from its voting behavior in the UN General Assembly (Choi et al., 2022). Countries that consistently align with Russia in UN votes are expected to be less likely to provide military assistance to Ukraine, whereas those aligned with the United States are more likely to support Kyiv's defense efforts.

Strategic alignment (see Figure 9.7) is operationalized using UN General Assembly voting patterns, specifically ideal point estimates developed by Voeten et al., where higher values indicate greater alignment with the United States and smaller values greater alignment on Russia on security issues. In the absence of data for 2024, we used the same data from 2023 to 2024.

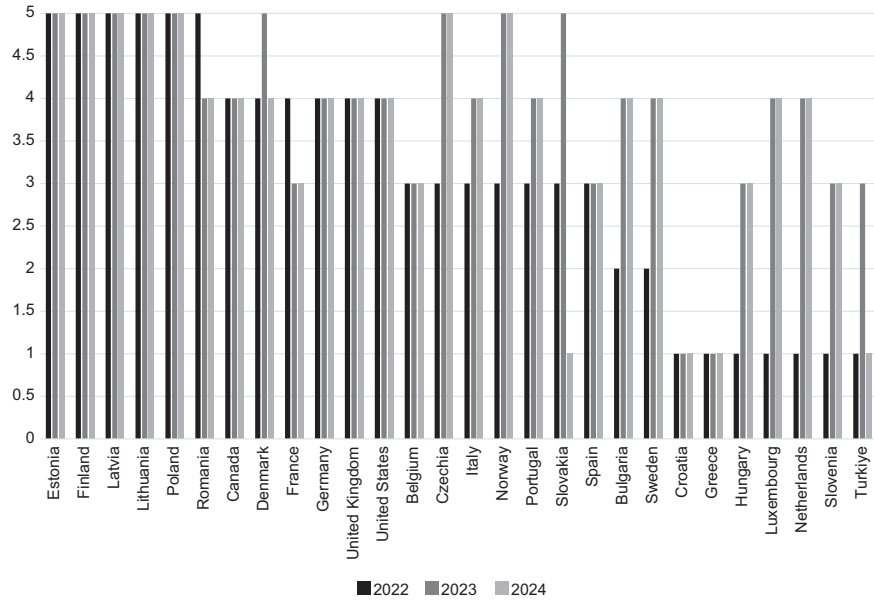

FIGURE 9.6 Threat Perceptions

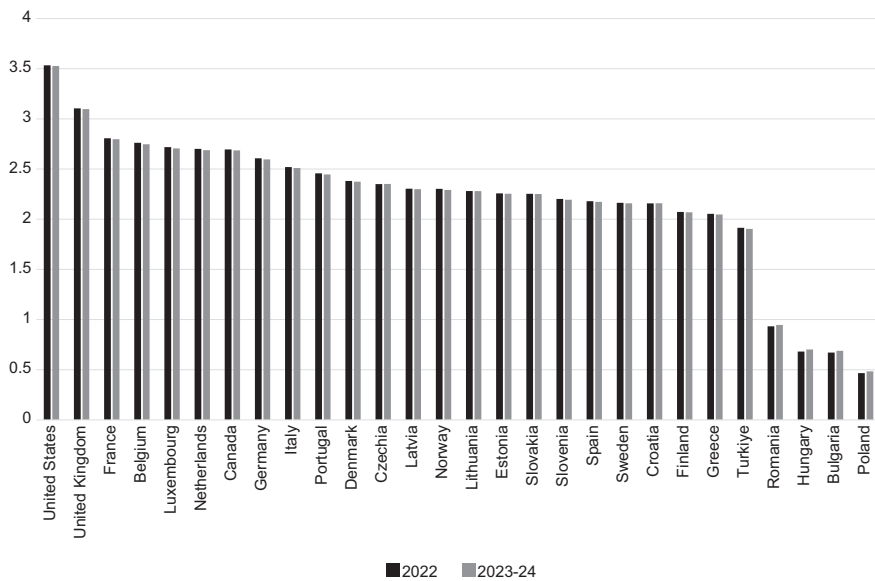

FIGURE 9.7 Strategic Alignment

Additional predictors were considered but excluded. Fossil fuel dependence was dropped due to inconsistent and incomplete reporting across countries. Similarly, institutional membership in the European Union and the former Warsaw Pact was excluded after testing revealed no substantive or statistical contribution to model fit.

Model Selection

We evaluated multiple modeling strategies to identify the best empirical approach for explaining variation in military support. Our dependent variable spans three years, but several predictors, such as geographic proximity and strategic alignment, exhibit minimal or no variation over time. This creates a trade-off between maximizing within-unit leverage and retaining substantively important time-invariant variables.

We began by estimating year-specific OLS models, which achieved high explanatory power in 2022 ($R^2 \approx 0.75$) and a moderate fit in 2023 and 2024 ($R^2 \approx 0.60$). These models demonstrate that cross-sectional predictors can explain aid patterns well within individual years. However, they preclude generalizable inferences and do not account for the panel structure of the data. We thus fitted panel models next, using both fixed effects and random effects estimators. While attractive from a theory-building perspective, the former performs poorly in our data ($R^2 < 0.30$). This is largely due to limited within-country variation across the observed period, making it difficult for the fixed effects model to detect meaningful relationships. The random effects model, which retains time-invariant predictors, performed slightly better ($R^2 \approx 0.46$) and passed the Hausman test. However, random effects estimates still underperform relative to year-by-year OLS, suggesting that pooling both within and between variation dilutes the signal from structural, persistent country-level characteristics.

In the end, we estimated a between-effects model, which regresses the three-year average of military support on the three-year averages of each predictor, treating the unit of analysis as the country rather than the country-year. This model is theoretically appropriate for our research question, which seeks to explain why some countries consistently gave more than others, rather than how support changed within countries. It also offers practical advantages: the between estimator retains time-invariant variables, accounts for panel structure, and avoids overfitting to short-term variation. Empirically, it outperforms all alternatives with an R^2 of 0.74 and a highly significant F-statistic ($p < 0.001$). The residuals are homoscedastic and symmetrically distributed, further supporting model adequacy. Given both theoretical and empirical considerations, we rely on the between estimator as our main specification. It best captures the cross-national structure of variation in military support while maintaining parsimony and interpretability.

Model Performance

The model offers a compelling explanation of variation in military support to Ukraine across NATO member states. With an R^2 of 0.74 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.63,

TABLE 9.3 Log-Linear Regression of Military Assistance to Ukraine among NATO Members (2022–2024)

Predictor	*Estimate*	*Std. Error*	t-*Value*	p-*Value*
(Intercept)	−15.42	1.43	−10.801	< 0.001 ***
Defense spending	61.15	69.48	0.88	0.390
Arms exports (log)	−0.04	0.03	−1.436	0.167
Geographic proximity	0.31	0.21	0.143	0.888
Public support	3.86	1.32	2.928	0.009 ***
Executive autonomy	0.0	0.15	−0.001	1.000
Government ideology	0.14	0.14	1.1	0.325
Threat perception	0.58	2.42	2.396	0.027 **
Strategic alignment	0.92	0.39	2.372	0.028 **
R^2	0.74			
Adjusted R^2	0.63			
F-statistic	6.80 on 8 DF			

it captures the majority of cross-national differences in burden-sharing behavior between 2022 and 2024 (see Table 9.3). The predictors are jointly significant ($F = 6.80$, $p < 0.001$), and model residuals are well behaved. Together, these indicators confirm that the model fits the data well and identifies key political and structural drivers of sustained military assistance. Among the eight predictors, three reach conventional levels of significance while the remaining variables do not emerge as significant despite theoretically plausible coefficients. Note that because we work with a log-linear model, these coefficients approximate percentage changes.

Results and Discussion

The between-effects model reveals a fundamental reordering of burden-sharing logic, where ideational and domestic factors decisively outweigh traditional interest-based calculations. With an R^2 of 0.74, the model captures the underlying structure of military support decisions, demonstrating that contributions follow predictable political patterns rather than material capacity constraints.

Traditional burden-sharing theory emphasizes material capacity and structural incentives, yet all three interest-based predictors fail to reach significance. Defense spending ($p = 0.390$), arms exports ($p = 0.167$), and geographic proximity ($p = 0.888$) show no discernible effects on military contributions. This represents a striking departure from conventional alliance theory, where capacity and direct threat exposure are understood as key drivers of burden-sharing behavior. Interestingly, the null findings for defense spending and arms exports reveal that countries are not contributing based on what they can afford or produce, but on political willingness shaped by other factors. The positive coefficient for defense spending suggests the expected relationship exists but lacks statistical precision, while

arms exports show a negligible negative effect. These patterns indicate that material capacity operates differently than conventional theory predicts. Some countries with substantial defense expenditures and arms industries remain relatively inactive, while others with modest military capabilities have stepped up significantly based on non-material considerations. Similarly, geographic proximity, traditionally viewed as a proxy for vulnerability and threat exposure, fails to predict contributions despite a positive coefficient. Countries bordering Russia or Ukraine do not systematically contribute more than those separated by multiple borders or water bodies, suggesting that physical exposure alone does not translate into political commitment without other enabling factors.

Public support emerges as the single strongest predictor among all variables, revealing the binding nature of democratic legitimacy in sustaining costly foreign military commitments. The coefficient of 3.86 implies that a 10-point increase in public support is associated with a 46% increase in the proportion of GDP allocated to military assistance. For a country contributing 0.3% of GDP, this would correspond to an increase to approximately 0.44% of GDP. This magnitude underscores how governments cannot maintain military assistance without popular backing, regardless of strategic imperatives or alliance obligations.

This democratic constraint mechanism operates as a fundamental gatekeeper, confirming that public opinion plays a central role in shaping the willingness of democratic governments to contribute to allied security efforts—even in high-cost policy domains like military aid. In contrast, executive autonomy exhibits a negative but statistically insignificant effect, suggesting that constitutional constraints and legislative oversight do not consistently determine levels of military assistance. The negative coefficient hints that executives with greater autonomy may contribute less, possibly due to reduced institutional pressure to signal alliance solidarity, though this finding lacks robust statistical support. Whether executives require parliamentary approval or act independently appears largely irrelevant once other political factors are accounted for, indicating that support for Ukraine reflects a broad democratic consensus that transcends institutional differences among allies.

The ideational dimension drives the most robust and substantively large effects. Strategic alignment produces a coefficient of 0.92, meaning that a one-unit increase in strategic alignment, reflecting closer alignment with the United States and distance from Russian voting positions at the UN, predicts a 0.92% increase in military aid, equivalent to a jump from 0.25% to approximately 1.17% of GDP. These results underscore the crucial role of overall shared geopolitical orientation in shaping states' aid behavior. Countries broadly share U.S. foreign policy preferences on a multitude of international issues are more likely to support Ukraine militarily. Conversely, states whose foreign policy preferences are mostly aligned with Russia's are expectedly less likely to aid Kyiv. This shows that military burden-sharing in the Russo-Ukrainian War reflects greater and wider geopolitical alignment in the international system and should not be examined in isolation.

Threat perception reaches statistical significance ($p = 0.027$), with a coefficient of 0.58. This means that moving one level higher on the five-point scale of perceived Russian threat is associated with a 58% increase in military support. A country viewing Russia as a competitor rather than a partner, for instance, is expected to increase its contribution from 0.2% to about 0.32% of GDP. These findings reaffirm a core tenet of alliance theory: perceived threat remains a central motivator of military engagement.

Contrary to theoretical expectations about center-right governments' greater propensity for military engagement, ideology shows no significant effect. This suggests that support for Ukraine transcends traditional partisan divides, reflecting a broader consensus among democratic governments regardless of partisan orientation.

Together, these findings reveal that military support to Ukraine operates through channels of political legitimacy and geopolitical alignment rather than traditional material calculations. The dominance of public support, foreign policy alignment, and shared threat perceptions suggests that transatlantic military burden-sharing in Ukraine flows through the overlap of democratic legitimacy and ideational predispositions toward Russia. Countries contribute not because they can, but because their political systems and international orientations create the conditions for sustained commitment. This represents a distinctly post-Cold War form of collective action where ideational factors override material incentives and constraints.

Conclusion

Challenging traditional alliance theories that prioritize material capacity and strategic exposure, the analysis presented in this chapter reveals that ideational and domestic political factors better explain the variation in NATO military aid to Ukraine from 2022 to 2024. Public opinion emerges as the most influential variable, highlighting the responsiveness of democratic governments to societal preferences—not least when engaging in costly and politically sensitive commitments like foreign military assistance. Likewise, the significance of strategic alignment with the United States and misalignment with Russia underscores the powerful role of foreign policy preferences in shaping state behavior.

The findings reveal a striking departure from the expectations rooted in collective action theory. Conventional predictors—namely, defense spending, geographic proximity, and arms export capacity—do not exert statistically significant influence on military contributions to Ukraine. This suggests that states with substantial resources or direct exposure to Russian aggression do not automatically bear greater burdens unless these material conditions are coupled with supportive political and ideational factors. In fact, countries with relatively modest capabilities often contribute disproportionately, while some more powerful allies underperform—not due to a lack of capacity but because of insufficient political will.

The significance of threat perception and strategic alignment as predictors highlights the layered and complex nature of contemporary burden-sharing. While

threat perception provides the essential rationale for engagement, it only leads to sustained contributions when combined with wider foreign policy alignment. Differently put, burden-sharing practices are deeply embedded within broader geopolitical identities and identifications (Vucetic, 2017). This embeddedness can and sometimes does foster a collective responsibility that transcends narrow national interests, reshaping both national interests and alliance dynamics to reflect contemporary security realities rather than past paradigms.

This study challenges policymakers to rethink burden-sharing not as a question of fair cost distribution based on GDP or geography, but as a reflection of political values, foreign policy preferences, and public consensus. If NATO and its partners seek to maintain cohesion in the face of long-term threats, they must recognize that sustaining allied contributions depends less on pressuring members to meet spending targets and more on fostering shared threat perceptions, geopolitical alignment, and public support. In the case of Ukraine, successful burden-sharing has relied on these political enablers—and future collective defense efforts will depend on reinforcing them. The U.S. rupture in geopolitical alignment under the Trump administration risks not only to alienate Western allies and undermine NATO's cohesion but also to reduce the level of military aid provided by U.S. allies to Ukraine.

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