

Within the last decade, European states, particularly in the post-Communist and post-Soviet region, have elected more rightist-led governments. Poland is no exception and after a surprising election in 2015 led to a Law and Justice Party (PiS) government majority in the state, questions of how this political shift in the “role model” Eastern European state could impact Polish security began to circulate. (Lupitu, 2016, p. 25) This study analyses the PiS’s security actions within its first year as the Polish government majority (2015-2016) to discern the potential agency political actors have in determining how regional security organisations function through a structure vs. agency framework. Using NATO as a unit of analysis, the study aims to synthesise regional security implications of Poland’s political shift on the Alliance. To do so, a triangulated methodology is applied to four key security events and actions PiS took within 2015-2016 using both a document and news media analyses as well as three elite interviews. These four events include a controversial pardoning of the minister responsible for all Polish Special Services, lustration activities within Polish security agencies, a controversial dismissal of the head of NATO’s Centre of Excellence in Warsaw and the Warsaw Summit of 2016. A common protocol was developed to search for documents, news articles and ask the interviewees about these four events, the results then being compared and contrasted across all methods of research to find commonalities in member state reactions, NATO’s reactions and Poland’s reactions to the four events. Through the consistent protocol, three main findings surfaced:

1. NATO is adept at maintaining its structure despite member state political shifts;
2. Individual member states like Poland have less agency in the Alliance if their internal politics result in distancing from leading member states of NATO such as Germany and France;
3. And finally, the security environment has the most agency in influencing the structure of NATO.

Further research analysing the effects of political shifts in states belonging to other regional security alliances are necessary to support these findings, as this research cannot extrapolate the results and apply them to other security alliances without more research. However, this study shows that political shifts should be monitored by security alliances due to the affect they can have on member state relations within the organisation. More importantly, the leading implication embedded in the study is that the security environment holds the most agency over

NATO and demands adaptation of NATO's structure to maintain the resilience of the Alliance's ability to provide security to its members.