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## Economics, security, and individual-level preferences for trade agreements

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### ABSTRACT

Empirical research on the determinants of individual-level support for trade liberalization has focused almost entirely on the economic effects of trade. Yet, international relations scholarship has long recognized that commerce also has a variety of security implications. This paper explores if and when security considerations influence individual attitudes toward trade. In this study, we ask two questions: First, to what extent do expectations about the security implications of trade affect individual-level attitudes toward trade agreements? Second, does the introduction of security concerns into the discussion of trade agreements influence how heavily individuals weigh their economic costs and benefits? We employ an original experiment embedded in a conjoint survey to investigate the relative impact of a variety of economic and security considerations on respondents' support for trade. Our findings suggest that security information matters and undermines the appeal of some, though not all, economic arguments for trade liberalization among our respondents.

### KEYWORDS

Alliances; public opinion; trade


The number of preferential trade agreements has grown steadily over the past 30 years.<sup>1</sup> Yet, trade liberalization efforts have often been controversial among the US public despite the enthusiasm of economists and of a majority of policymakers. This skepticism has consequences for policymaking. During their 2016 presidential campaigns, both major party candidates vowed to defeat the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral trade deal that had been championed by the two previous administrations. Some have even argued that the recent surge in popularity of protectionist rhetoric may be part of a new wave of globalization backlash.<sup>2</sup> An important issue for the future direction of

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Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at [www.tandfonline.com/gjini](http://www.tandfonline.com/gjini).

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<sup>2</sup>"Globalization Backlash 2.0" *The Economist*, July 27, 2016.

 Supplementary material for this article can be accessed [here](#).

the global economy is whether increasingly skeptical publics will be willing to support new (or even existing) trade agreements and under what conditions.

Seeking to sell an increasingly skeptical public on the TPP in 2015, the Obama administration framed the trade agreement's benefits not only in economic terms but also explicitly pointed to its foreign policy implications: the TPP would provide an American counterweight to growing Chinese influence in the region. Similarly, though with decidedly opposite goals, recent political campaign ads featuring anti-China messages and menacing imagery have combined concerns about the economic effects of outsourcing with broader concerns about China's rise as a global power to rival the United States (Weinger 2012).<sup>3</sup> Nor are appeals to national security concerns during trade debates limited to China-bashing. In the 1980s, political sparring over trade with Japan often invoked old World War II hostility, including its racist overtones.<sup>4</sup> The perennial debate over US dependence on Middle Eastern oil also frequently includes concerns about financing "unstable or hostile nations."<sup>5</sup>

This study asks two questions: First, do expectations about the national security implications of trade affect attitudes toward trade agreements? Second, does the introduction of national security concerns into the discussion of trade agreements influence how heavily individuals weigh their economic costs and benefits? We argue that the answer to both questions is yes. Concerns about security and global influence can make some agreements more attractive than others and even diminish the effect of economic considerations.<sup>6</sup>

The salience of national security arguments in public debates on trade has certainly varied over time. Examining US foreign policymaking in the early Cold War period, Bailey (2003) argues that widespread consciousness of geopolitical challenges among the American public allowed Congress to pursue trade and foreign aid policies that would have been politically difficult otherwise. In contrast, when US public debate over the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) reached a fever pitch in the early 1990s, both proponents and opponents framed their arguments in terms of jobs and growth. That the agreement was also fundamentally a means for supporting a friendly government, whose survival was in the foreign policy interest of the US, was an "uncomfortable truth" less widely discussed on the

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<sup>3</sup>Research on congressional elections and policymaking also suggests that China-bashing campaign rhetoric is not merely cheap talk; successful candidates for office are also more likely to sponsor legislation hostile to China (Weiss and Wichowsky 2013, *unpublished manuscript*).

<sup>4</sup>During one such debate, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) had this to say about the Japanese: "They skinned us many a time. They skinned us real bad in December 1941, and they are skinning us with the FSX." (Cited in Brock 1989: 30).

<sup>5</sup>Senator Barack Obama (D-IL), campaigning for the presidency in July 2008 continued: "[this money] also funds both sides on terror, paying for everything from the madrassas that plant the seeds of terror in young minds to the bombs that go off in Baghdad and Kabul." CBS News, July 11, 2008.

<sup>6</sup>We focus on trade agreement features tied to state-level security, leaving aside for now human security and other "non-traditional" security concerns such as terrorism and transnational crime. The latter issues present natural extensions of our argument for future research.

public stage (Krugman 1993). Recent debates, such as over a possible renegotiation of NAFTA, frequently include references to US national security interests.<sup>7</sup> If security cues are only sometimes present in public debates over trade, the question of what happens when they are introduced – whether by objective necessity or political calculus – becomes important for scholars of foreign policy public opinion and policymakers alike.

Despite the recent proliferation of studies investigating the determinants of public attitudes toward international trade, we still know relatively little about how broader foreign policy concerns shape public opinion on trade.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have largely focused on the role of economic self-interest, linking the distributional effects of trade liberalization and “globalization” to respondent characteristics such as income, education, gender, and asset ownership (Mayda and Rodrik 2005; Scheve and Slaughter 2001a). Recently, researchers have begun to move beyond the focus on narrowly conceived economic interest to investigate the role of economic ignorance (Rho and Tomz 2017), altruism and xenophobia (Mansfield and Mutz 2009), and notions of reciprocity and fairness (Chilton, Milner, and Tingley *Forthcoming*; Jensen and Shin 2014; Lü, Scheve, and Slaughter 2012). Other studies consider the influence of additional factors such as national attachment (Kalthenthaler, Gelleny, and Ceccoli 2004) and environmental concerns (Bechtel, Bernauer, and Meyer 2012). Broader foreign policy considerations, such as those related to the national security implications of trade, have received much less attention.

This gap in our understanding of trade policy preferences is curious given the large scholarship in international relations that investigates the security implications of trade (Hirschman 1980 [1945]; Oneal and Russett 1997; Tanaka, Tago, and Gleditsch 2017), links between economic interests and the formation of military alliances (Fordham 2010; Gowa and Mansfield 1993; Lee 2013), the diversionary use of force in times of economic distress (Ostrom and Job 1986; but see Levy 1989), and the extent to which trade and trade agreements follow the flag or reflect political preferences (Davis and Wilf 2017; Dixon and Moon 1993; Keshk, Pollins, and Reuveny 2004). To the extent that foreign policy, and foreign economic policy specifically, is shaped at least in part by constituents’ interests and preferences, we may wonder about the role that national security considerations play at the level of individual and the general public.

We focus on two features that may influence whether a proposed trade agreement is perceived as contributing to the home country’s national security or detracting from it: the state of political relations with prospective trading partners and the impact of selective new trade ties on the country’s geopolitical

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<sup>7</sup>“Trump links US border wall to NAFTA renegotiation, warns Mexico “must stop drug, people flows” *CNBC*, April 1, 2018.

<sup>8</sup>For a systematic overview of this scholarship, see Kuo and Naoi (2015).

influence. We expect that individuals will be more likely to support trade agreements involving allies than ones involving rivals, and more likely to support agreements that promise to enhance the country's influence. We also expect that these considerations, when made salient in the discussion of a proposed trade agreement, will significantly diminish the effect of purely economic concerns, such as consequences for economic growth and employment.

We test these propositions using an original conjoint survey experiment administered to 2,512 US respondents in July 2016. Our results suggest that national security considerations indeed have a significant effect on individual-level support for trade agreements. These effects vary, however, depending on the type of security consideration and whether a particular trade agreement promises to enhance rather than diminish the state's national security. Moreover, we find that whether or not people are made aware of national security implications affects the weight that people attach to some – though not all – economic factors when evaluating proposed trade agreements.

Our findings have a several noteworthy implications. For scholars of public opinion on international commerce, they provide further evidence of an important role for non-economic considerations. They also suggest that how information about international trade is framed, and what issues are raised in the process, can modify the link between economic interests and trade policy views. This has consequences for policy and the global economy as well. Over the past decades, policymakers have been consistently more favorable toward liberalized trade than members of the general public (Holsti 2004: 112: 293). More recently, however, increasingly nationalist and protectionist political forces have contested the political status quo in the US, Europe, and elsewhere. Those who seek to further expand US trade with other countries cannot afford to ignore public sentiment completely and have both motive and opportunity to attempt to influence it. This is equally true for forces pushing in the opposite direction. Our initial findings suggest that there is some room for shaping views through the introduction of national security cues. At the same time, we uncover evidence indicating that political actors aiming to derail trade liberalization using such cues may have an easier time than those trying to build support for it.

### **National Security and Attitudes toward International Trade Agreements**

Despite a growing interest in non-economic determinants of public opinion on trade, systematic work on the influence of national security considerations remains limited. An early study by Herrmann, Tetlock, and Diascro (2001) examines to what extent general dispositions and mental models corresponding to neorealist, constructivist, or liberal institutionalist ideas affect views of

trade liberalization. Using a series of survey experiments, the authors find that the public respond more negatively than elites to potential national security threats that may arise from closer trade ties. More recently, a study by Spilker, Bernauer, and Víctor (2016) finds that, among other factors, the presence of a military alliance with a prospective trading partner has a positive effect on public support for a hypothetical trade agreement, albeit only in one of the three countries (Costa Rica, Vietnam, Nicaragua) investigated in the authors' survey experiment.

Our study addresses several questions that these studies leave unanswered. First, how heavily do different types of security and economic implications weigh on popular support? "Allies" and "enemies" do not exhaust the range of political relations that may exist between prospective trading partners, nor are relative gains the only type of security concern that expanded trade relationships are likely to raise. Second, how do individuals assess trade agreements that involve clear trade-offs, such as economic growth bought with greater vulnerability to potential military rivals or gains in national security at the price of economic disruption? Many trade agreements are likely to simultaneously generate costs and benefits in different policy domains. Such trade-offs are at the heart of policymaking, including foreign economic policy.

Arguments about national security enter public trade policy debates in a variety of ways. Some trade agreements either include security provisions or are concluded explicitly for the purpose of enhancing existing security partnerships. In the case of the United States, some have dated the rise of the "securitization" of trade agreements to the 1985 Israel–US free trade agreement, with a significant increase in such agreements since the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 (Capling and Ravenhill 2012: 292; Higgott 2004). Explicit linkage of trade and security also underlies many trade agreements in East Asia, driven in part by the rivalry between two global economic powers, China and Japan (Koo 2013; Lee 2013). Security considerations can be expected to arise as part of the policy dialog about such complex trade agreements.

National security concerns can also enter the debate because interested parties and policymakers seeking public support for their preferred policy position choose to draw attention to them (Guisinger 2017: 185). Policy entrepreneurs may instrumentally link trade to broader foreign policy considerations, portraying some trading partners as more threatening than others, playing on existing threat perceptions and tendencies toward ethnocentrism. Whether it occurs incidentally or intentionally, highlighting the security implications of increased trade may reinforce existing support for (or opposition to) a trade agreement, sway those who are undecided based on the agreement's other merits, and possibly balance out (or distract from) arguments about the agreement's expected economic effects.

## Security Implications of Trade

IR theory has long been interested in the interaction between economic ties and interstate conflict and cooperation. Our study focuses on three characteristics of preferential trade agreements that may have national security implications in the eyes of citizens: the identity of prospective trading partners, the balance of gains generated by the trade agreement, and the effect of new trade ties on the home country's global influence.

### *Political Relations*

In the discussion of any proposed trade agreement, the identity of the trading partner will be of special consequence. The prospect of increased trade ties and mutual economic gain is likely to appear more or less ominous depending on the state of political relations with the prospective trading partner, and on expectations of future conflict in particular. Most broadly, we expect that future trade partners with similar political interests should make a trade agreement more attractive as a security asset (or at least less objectionable as a security risk).

We follow previous studies in distinguishing between prospective trading partners who are military rivals or military allies (Herrmann et al. 2001). Scholarship on military alliances and trade has drawn attention to the security externalities that arise as gains from trade can enhance the capabilities of allies or make potential enemies more threatening (Dixon et al. 1993; Gowa et al. 1993).<sup>9</sup> To the extent that public attitudes conform to this conjecture, trade agreements that contribute to wealthier, stronger allies should be more desirable than those that create wealthier, stronger rivals.

Yet, many potential trading partners do not fit neatly into categories of "friends" and "foes," especially in the minds of a mass public that is often only vaguely aware of the state of relations between their home country and all but a small handful of highly salient neighbors and enemies. We thus consider two additional categorizations of trading partners that capture less direct but still politically consequential relations: states that maintain hostile relations with one's enemies and states that maintain cooperative relations with one's enemies. These capture interstate relations that are perceived as less salient or more temporary (for example, "our allies in the War on Terror" or "state sponsors of terrorism"). We expect arms-length relations with partners described as "enemies of our enemies" or "friends of our enemies" to exercise a similar, though less strong, influence over trade agreement preferences. Lastly, we consider states that are neutral as a baseline to compare the other four relationships. In sum, we expect that individuals are likely to prefer trade agreements with countries that have similar political interests to their own country.

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<sup>9</sup>Other studies find no support for such a link or suggest reverse causality (Morrow, Siverson, and Tabares 1998).

## Global Influence

In addition to contributing directly to military capacity, gains from trade give rise to economic dependencies that governments can use to exercise influence over trading partners.<sup>10</sup> Work on international bargaining and the use of economic sanctions suggests that trade ties may also allow governments to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence (Crescenzi 2003; Oneal et al. 1997). Survey evidence suggests that Americans are cognizant of the role that economics plays in world politics. Asked “which is more important for a country’s overall power and influence in the world,” 71% of respondents chose economic strength over military power (28%) (CCGA 2016). Further, two CCGA polls of US respondents in 2015 and 2016 asked if “signing free trade agreements with other countries” was effective at “achieving the foreign policy goals of the United States.” On the whole, 65–68% of respondents agreed with the statement. This is comparable to the 65% of respondents from the same surveys who think that maintaining military superiority is an effective way to achieve foreign policy goals.<sup>11</sup>

American foreign economic policy after World War II provides another useful illustration. The global influence enjoyed by the US in this period arose not only from its military superiority but from its market power and initiative in creating a set of international economic institutions that structured much of the global economy in ways that advanced US interests. The pursuit of trade liberalization, among other policies, not only benefitted US firms and industries directly; increased economic integration also provided an avenue for the “soft power” of US liberal capitalism and democracy (Pollard 1985).

That said, not all trade agreements inevitably enhance a state’s influence. Influence is a two-way street and increased trade ties can make a country more vulnerable to foreign influence even as they contribute to national growth (Crescenzi 2003; Hirschman 1980 [1945]). Moreover, new trade agreements can be used to reorient trade toward a smaller number of trading partners or favor existing ties over acquiring new trading partners. Such geopolitical retrenchment may well diminish the reach of a country’s global influence even as the volume of trade increases overall, providing an example of the trade-off between economic gains and security losses we wish to investigate. We expect that individuals will prefer trade agreements that promise to increase the country’s political influence over those that maintain the status quo or promise to diminish the country’s political influence.

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<sup>10</sup>For a seminal discussion of these dynamics, see Hirschman (1980[1945]).

<sup>11</sup>Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2015 Biennial Survey, May 2015 ( $N = 2034$ ) and Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2016 Biennial Survey, June 2016 ( $N = 2033$ ).

### **Relative Gains**

A final security-relevant feature of trade agreements arises directly out of expected economic gains from trade, and specifically out of the balance of gains from trade. IR theory has long been interested in how the distribution of gains from cooperation, such as trade, affects relative power and the associated risk of conflict (Gowa et al. 1993). Trade might be mutually beneficial but gains in absolute terms add little to security if the trading partner's gains are significantly larger. Uneven gains can shift the balance of power between the two trading partners. At the individual level, lopsided gains from trade may appear threatening when the balance is unfavorable to one's home country. We expect that such agreements, despite promising absolute gains through economic growth, will be unpopular as they also promise to diminish a country's relative power and thus its security. Further, this effect of relative gains perceptions should be most prominent when the potential trade partner has dissimilar political interests to the home country.

### **Shifting Priorities?**

As noted earlier, the salience of national security arguments in debates about trade has varied greatly over time. Even if, as we argue above, concerns about political influence and future conflict affect people's support for particular trade agreements, it is not obvious what form this effect takes. National security arguments may plausibly serve as a tie-breaker. In debates over international trade that often feature a wealth of competing and contradictory economic arguments, any additional information might tip the balance of support for or against a trade agreement. Security-related information then simply reduces noise and eases decision-making but may be only of secondary importance for most of the public.

Alternatively, national security concerns may be important enough to affect how much weight people attach to the other implications of a potential trade deal. Here, we are interested in how introducing national security-relevant cues changes the impact of economic considerations on support for trade agreements. If security concerns are substantively important once they are made salient, individuals may be willing to forego economic gains if they are bought with increased risks to national security. They may even be willing to accept economic losses in exchange for the greater security offered by closer ties with military allies or increased influence in the world. There are several reasons to expect such an effect.

First, existing findings by Herrmann et al. (2001) suggest that the members of the mass public are liable to be "intuitive neorealists" rather than "intuitive economists" in their assessment of trade: sensitive to disadvantageous relative

gains and hostile to trade with potential enemies. The authors conceive of these responses as the product of dominant mental models used to resolve complex trade-offs created by environmental conditions.<sup>12</sup> In the context of our study, introducing information about relevant environmental conditions (the security implications of a trade agreement) would activate a respondent's "intuitive realist" and give security concerns precedence over economic rationales.<sup>13</sup>

A second reason arises from the nature of modern trade relations. As Guisinger shows, the decline of US manufacturing, the rise of service and intra-firm trade, increasing geographic dispersion of trade-related production, as well as the decline of trade as a partisan issue in US politics have combined to make trade a less visible and less salient issue for many regular Americans today. People are now less certain about the benefits and costs of trade (Guisinger 2017:13–22). More broadly, historically low tariff rates make it likely that the overall impact of new trade agreements on economic growth and employment will be smaller than in the past. New efforts to liberalize commerce also increasingly focus on non-tariff barriers, intellectual property rights, and similarly obscure issues. National security implications may be easier to grasp and generally less ambiguous, especially when presented in terms of friend/foe or strength/weakness dichotomies, as they often are in public discourse. Enemy images, in particular, can serve as a potent simplifying device in this context (Converse 1964; Lippmann 1955).

Finally, the notion that security concerns matter more for policymaking than economic ones when both are present can be found in IR scholarship as well. Consider variants of the diversionary war literature, which suggest that leaders may respond to declining popularity at home by engaging in foreign policy actions, whether to distract constituents from other issues, to demonstrate competency, or to otherwise improve their odds for political survival at home. For example, Oneal and Tir (2006) found that democracies experiencing weak economic growth were somewhat more likely to initiate militarized disputes. Theoretical arguments that posit military adventures as a way to shift constituents' attention imply that security concerns can at least rival economic ones in salience, if not overwhelm them outright.

## **Economic Considerations**

Classic arguments for trade liberalization point to a wide range of economic benefits expected to arise from lower trade barriers and specialization of production based on comparative advantage, including lower prices for

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<sup>12</sup>Herrmann et al. (2001).

<sup>13</sup>See also Brewer (2006): 90–91.

consumers, as well as higher quality and greater variety of consumer goods, technological innovation, and overall economic growth. At the same time, increased trade is also associated with economic disruption as less competitive firms and industries falter. We evaluate the effect of our national security considerations (political relations, global influence, relative gains) against two of the most widely discussed economic implications of trade: national economic growth and income effects due to changes in employment.

### ***Economic Growth***

How much any given trade agreement can be expected to contribute to national economic growth depends on a variety of factors, including the size of the trading partner's economy and the existing level of trade barriers. The effect can also vary over time, with significant effects materializing only in the medium to long term. While the economic effects of additional trade liberalization are complex, its benefits often concentrated, and sometimes quite limited (given historically low tariff rates), "economic growth" remains a useful shorthand for many of the positive effects governments and citizens envision from increased trade. We expect agreements that promise (or are portrayed as likely) to generate significant growth to be more popular than agreements that promise less growth overall.

### ***Income and Employment***

The impact of economic globalization on incomes and employment is doubtless its most controversial aspect in the eyes of the public. While trade has the potential to raise incomes and expand employment, such as in export-oriented industries and firms, prominent examples of negative effects are not hard to find. NAFTA has been held responsible for the decline of American manufacturing in the 1990s, especially in the textile industry. Research also suggests that the explosive growth of US trade with China has had profound and geographically concentrated negative effects on the US labor market in trade-exposed industries (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2013). It is telling that a significant majority (73%) of Americans surveyed by the Chicago Council of Global Affairs (CCGA) in 2016 viewed "protecting the jobs of American workers" as a "very important" goal of US foreign policy, ahead of both "combating international terrorism" (72%) and "maintaining superior military power worldwide" (55%).

For the purpose of this study, we focus on assessments of net employment effects at the national level: does an agreement promise to create jobs or destroy them on balance? Our rationale is twofold: First, recent work has cast doubt on the extent to which individual-level economic interest, narrowly conceived, can serve as a predictor of trade policy views. Researchers have

noted that trade preferences may form primarily on the basis of information about national-level effects of trade, generating views that are socio-tropic rather than narrowly egocentric (Mansfield et al. 2009:423; but see Fordham and Kleinberg 2012). This work echoes similar findings on attitudes toward other public policies, which suggests that the concerns about often national well-being dominate concerns about personal well-being (Funk and García-Monet 1997; Kinder and Roderick Kiewiet 1981). Focusing on people's response to national-level effects of trade agreements, such as net employment effects, is a reasonable first step in determining the relative importance of economic and security considerations in individuals' trade policy views. We expect trade agreements that promise to create jobs to receive more support than trade agreements that do not create jobs or lead to job losses.

## Research Design

We design a conjoint choice-based survey experiment to examine respondent preferences for hypothetical trade agreements. The conjoint choice design is widely used in marketing research to examine which product features have the strongest influence on consumer choice. It has recently gained prominence in studies on public opinion on politics and trade (Chilton et al. *Forthcoming*; Hahm, Osnabrügge, Frech, and Thomas 2016; Heinrich, Kobayashi, and Peterson 2017; Spilker et al. 2016; Spilker, Bernauer, and Víctor 2018). Conjoint choice survey experiments typically present respondents with two profiles that include two or more randomly ordered characteristics in which the attributes of each characteristic are randomly assigned. After reviewing the profiles, the respondents are asked to select their preferred profile. The randomization of multiple treatments enables researchers to address potentially confounding effects, test multiple causal hypotheses with a single experiment, and examine complex interactions between treatments (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). Thus, the conjoint design allows us to examine the relative importance of a range of agreement characteristics linked to economic impacts and national security, examine the interaction between them, and address potential confounding factors.

Each respondent in our study received a short introduction and was then presented with five pairs of hypothetical trade agreements that differed from one another on several characteristics of interest.<sup>14</sup> The order in which these characteristics were presented was randomized across respondents. For each

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<sup>14</sup>Introductory Vignette: "The United States often negotiates international trade agreements with other countries. One purpose of such trade agreements is to make it easier for producers from other countries to sell their goods and services in the United States (imports), and to make it easier for the producers based in the United States to sell their goods and services in other countries (exports). These agreements have different characteristics and the expected effects of these agreements differ on many dimensions." We provide a full description of the vignette and instructions in the Supplemental Materials (Appendix A).

	<i>Trade Agreement A</i>	<i>Trade Agreement B</i>
<b>Other Country's Political System and Economy</b>	Poor and undemocratic	Middle-income and undemocratic
<b>Effect on US Jobs</b>	Creates many jobs	Creates some jobs
<b>Effect on US Growth</b>	Significantly grows the US economy	No effect on the US economy
<b>Effect on Trading Partner's Growth</b>	Significantly grows their economy	Somewhat grows their economy
<b>Other Country's Relationship to the United States</b>	US military ally	Not a US military ally but has hostile relations with our adversaries

Which trade agreement do you prefer?	Trade Agreement	Trade Agreement
	A	B
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Figure 1.** Conjoint-choice experiment example (political relations treatment group).

of the five pairs of trade agreements presented, we asked the respondent to indicate which trade agreement they preferred. **Figure 1** provides an illustration of the choice task our respondents were asked to complete.<sup>15</sup>

We modified the standard conjoint-choice design to include an additional experiment to allow us to evaluate the degree by which national security concerns can overwhelm the economic elements of trade agreements. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three subsamples. The first subsample of respondents, our control group, received economic information about the hypothetical trade agreements. The remaining two subsamples are our treatment groups; respondents assigned to them received the same information as the control group plus information about one of two different security characteristics, political relations and global influence effects. Together, the three experimental subsamples allow us to investigate the impact of economic characteristics in isolation, the impact of different security characteristics when they are offered, and the impact of security cues on the relative importance of economic considerations for overall support for a trade agreement.

Respondents in all three subgroups also received information about three additional trade agreement characteristics suggested by previous research. The first, partner's economic growth, allows us to test the relative gains argument outlined above. The other two, the prospective trading partner's

<sup>15</sup>While the vignette does not state it explicitly, the hypothetical trade agreements in our experiment appear as bilateral rather than multilateral. This design choice was made for ease of presentation. It also plausibly covers multilateral agreements by focusing attention on net effects regarding national security and economic impacts. It is of course possible that our findings would be different with explicitly multilateral hypothetical agreements. This is an empirical question we set aside for future research.

regime type and level of economic development, potentially confound the effects of both the economic and security elements of the hypothetical trade agreements. By including them as randomized treatments, we estimate their effects separately and can thus be confident they are not working through the key variables of interest (Hainmueller et al. 2014).

The regime type, specifically the distinction between democracies and non-democracies, and the level of economic development of prospective trading partners, could influence public support in several ways. Democracies may be perceived as less threatening in their interstate relations and as more likely to “play by the rules” in political transactions than non-democracies (Spilker et al. 2016; Tomz and Weeks 2013). Respondents in democratic states may also prefer democratic trading partners because they are perceived as possessing similar value systems, including respect for property rights and the rule of law. Comparable levels of economic development may provide additional cues about shared interests and values (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales 2009; Spilker et al. 2016). Empirical studies have indeed found that democracies are significantly more likely to enter trade agreements with other democracies than with countries that do not share these institutions (Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse 2008). Table 1 summarizes the trade agreement attributes used to capture the security and economic characteristics outlined in our theoretical argument and hypotheses.<sup>16</sup>

We recruited 2,512 respondents, located in the United States, from Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) crowd sourcing platform to participate in our conjoint choice experimental survey. While population-based surveys are generally considered the “gold standard” in experimental research, a growing number of studies rely on MTurk recruits as a cost-effective alternative. MTurk is desirable when large sample sizes and long formats, as we require here, make representative surveys prohibitively costly for most scholars. The MTurk platform provides researchers with a larger and more diverse pool of respondents than undergraduates on college campuses, which have long been used in lab and survey experiments.

Like other convenience samples, the MTurk samples raise concerns about external validity and quality. It is important to note that our goal here is to examine how cues about national security and economic implications affect decision-making about trade agreements, not to estimate average population effects or heterogeneous group effects. While it is plausible that variation in respondent characteristics will have subtle effects on our causal mechanism, we are interested first in establishing its plausibility and leave more detailed analysis for future study. Nevertheless, recent studies argue convincingly that concerns about the external validity of analyses using MTurk samples are

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<sup>16</sup>We include information about the prospective trading partner’s regime type and level of economic development in the control group setup as well as in the treatment groups in order to minimize the difference in the number of traits between control and treatment groups.

**Table 1.** Trade agreement attributes and values.

Attribute	Values
Effect on US jobs	Creates many jobs Creates some jobs No impact on jobs Costs some jobs Costs many jobs
Effect on US growth	Significantly grows the US economy Somewhat grows the US economy No effect on the US economy
Effect on trading partner's growth	Significantly grows their economy Somewhat grows their economy No effect on their economy
Other country's political system and economy	Poor and democratic Middle-income and democratic Wealthy and democratic Poor and undemocratic Middle-income and undemocratic Wealthy and undemocratic
Global influence effect <sup>a</sup>	Increases US global political influence Diminishes US global political influence Maintains US global political influence
Other country's relationship to the United States <sup>b</sup>	US military ally US military rival Neither a US military ally or rival Not a US military ally but has hostile relations with our adversaries Not a US military rival but has cooperative relations with our adversaries

<sup>a</sup>Attribute included in Global Influence treatment group only.

<sup>b</sup>Attribute included in Political Relations treatment group only.

overstated. Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz (2012) and Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, and Freese (2015), for example, find that the MTurk platform provides more representative samples than traditional convenience samples and that treatment effects from experimental studies using MTurk samples are very similar to those produced using population-based samples.<sup>17</sup> Validation studies also suggest that the attentiveness of MTurk respondents is similar to high-quality convenience samples and commercial samples (Thomas and Clifford 2017).

To further increase quality, we provided a competitive compensation to our respondents that exceeded the federal minimum wage. Each respondent was compensated \$0.75 for their time and the average time respondents spend on each survey was 5 minutes. Further, we deployed our experiment over the course of five days (July 15–19, 2016) and staggered the release over time to limit the number of surveys taken on a single day of the week or specific time of day.<sup>18</sup>

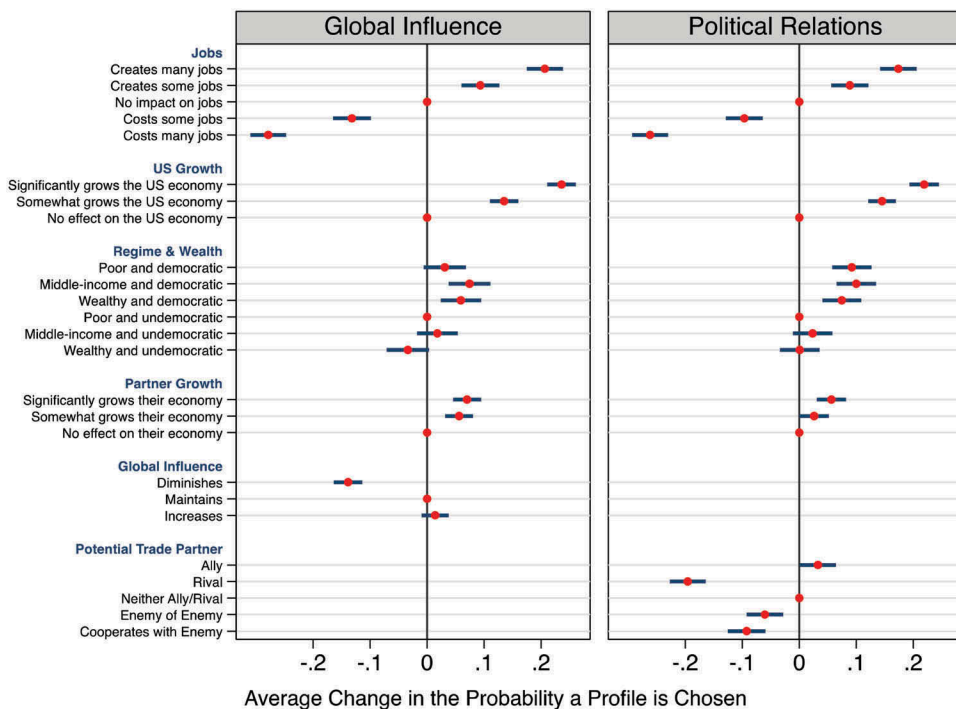
<sup>17</sup>Huff and Tingley (2015: 6) find that employment in specific industries by percentage and geographical dispersion (urban–rural) are very similar among MTurk respondents and samples from nationally representative surveys.

<sup>18</sup>We provide a comparison of our sample with a nationally representative sample in the Supplemental Materials (Appendix C). We also present additional analyses that suggest our results are consistent across important sub-samples (party, income, education) (Appendix D.5).

## Results

To estimate the impact of trade agreement attributes on a respondent's decision to choose one hypothetical agreement over another, we estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE) for each attribute value using a non-parametric linear probability model following Hainmueller et al. (2014).<sup>19</sup> The AMCE represents the average change in the probability that a particular trade agreement is preferred when it includes a specific variant of an agreement attribute relative to a baseline variant. Our estimates include robust standard errors clustered by respondent to account for possible correlation among the five separate choice tasks performed.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 2 presents the AMCEs for the two subsamples of respondents that received information about the economic as well as the security implications



**Figure 2.** Economic considerations (average marginal component effects). *Note:* These plots show the estimates of the effect of the randomly assigned trade agreement attributes on the probability of being chosen from the two subsamples ( $N_{\text{Glob.Infl.}} = 8,300$ ,  $N_{\text{PolitRel.}} = 8,310$ ). The estimates are based on a linear probability model with standard errors clustered by respondent. The red points indicate the point estimates and the bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals. The baseline attributes are indicated by the red circle without confidence intervals.

<sup>19</sup>See Hainmueller et al. (2014) for a discussion of the identification of the AMCE and its estimation using a non-parametric linear probability model.

<sup>20</sup>We conducted additional tests to investigate whether the ordering of attributes in the trade agreement profiles or the order of tasks performed by respondents affected our findings. The results, provided in the Supplemental Materials (Appendix E.3, E.4) suggest that these concerns are unfounded.

of sets of hypothetical trade deals. The subsamples are labeled “Global Influence” (left panel) and “Political Relations” (right panel), respectively.<sup>21</sup> The bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals around the AMCE point estimate. Each effect is assessed relative to the baseline variants that are represented by a dot without confidence intervals.

The extent to which economic considerations influence public support for trade agreements provides a useful baseline for our analysis. As expected, we find that the anticipated impact on US employment and economic growth significantly influence whether respondents prefer a proposed trade agreement. For example, as shown in left panel an agreement that *costs many jobs* reduces the probability of being chosen by 28%, compared to a 21% increase for those agreements that purportedly *create many jobs*. Note that the absolute effect of expected job losses is larger than that of expected job gains. With regard to anticipated consequences of new trade agreements, our respondents appear to be loss averse in line with earlier findings on attitudes toward international trade (Scheve and Slaughter 2001b: 20; see also Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

Our main hypotheses concern whether national security implications of trade influence support for hypothetical trade agreements. The findings suggest that this is indeed the case, though the effect varies depending on the way in which a trade deal could affect the home country’s security. The bottom left panel of Figure 2 presents results for the subsample of respondents that received information about trade agreements’ effects on US global influence. Respondents were 14% less likely to choose a hypothetical trade agreement that would likely diminish US influence in the world, compared to an agreement that promised to merely maintain US influence. Compared to the same baseline, our respondents showed no significant preference for trade agreements that were expected to increase US influence in the world.

Two possible interpretations suggest themselves. First, this finding points again toward a broader tendency of our respondents toward loss aversion. A second explanation may arise more narrowly from the perceived dominance of the US in world affairs. It points to the possibility of diminishing marginal returns to further increases in global influence. Our American respondents may conclude that little additional benefit can be gained from expanding the country’s already considerable global influence, all else equal. As a result, information about projected gains in influence would do little to make a trade agreement more attractive, especially compared to information about other costs or benefits it might entail.

The right panel of Figure 2 presents findings for different characterizations of political relations between the prospective trading partners. While the effects of both allies and rivals are statistically significant, the substantive effects differ greatly. We find that friendly relations only modestly increase support for closer

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<sup>21</sup>We present independent estimates for the two treatment groups in the Supplemental Materials (Appendix D.1).

economic ties. Respondents were 3% more likely to prefer trade agreements that are described as involving military allies than agreements involving states with whom relations are merely neutral. In contrast, respondents were 20% less likely to prefer agreements that involve a state described as a military rival rather than as a neutral party. One implication of this finding for policymaking is that governments will have a difficult time completing trade agreements with states that the public, correctly or incorrectly, perceives as potentially hostile. When such agreements, and their national security implications, become salient to the public, it may well foreclose the option of increased trade as a means for gradually improving relations with current adversaries.

Our findings here echo those of earlier studies regarding the attractiveness of allies (Spilker et al. 2016) and rivals (Herrmann et al. 2001) as prospective trading partners. In addition, we again find indications of loss aversion: the prospect of security losses, here through closer trade ties with a military rival, looms larger for respondents' trade agreement preferences than the prospect of security gains through increased trade with military allies. At the same time, parallel to our finding regarding global influence, this effect may be driven in part by the logic of diminishing returns: if our respondents perceive the US as overwhelmingly powerful, additional security gains from closer relations with military allies may do little to make a trade agreement more attractive. Further research will be required to disentangle these potential causal mechanisms.

Our findings also indicate that political relations matter beyond simple distinctions between military allies and rivals. Respondents were roughly 10% less likely to prefer agreements with states that have "cooperative relations with our adversaries" compared to agreements with neutral states. One implication of this finding is that politicians may have a tougher time building public support for trade liberalization when the political relations with a prospective trading partner are seen (or portrayed) as not entirely cordial. Contrary to our expectations, however, respondents were also 6% less likely to choose agreements with states that are described as having *hostile relations with our adversaries*. We intended this attribute to capture a positive security benefit, akin to the logic that the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" and expected to find a positive effect. It is possible that respondents interpreted the prompt as an indication that the prospective trading partner is generally hostile in its foreign relations, making them less attractive overall. It is also possible that result stems from comprehension as this characteristic had the longest text description. We are cautious about drawing conclusions from this result.

Next, drawing on classic arguments about relative gains and their impact on interstate relations, we hypothesized that respondents may be less likely to support new trade agreements when the balance of benefits favors a potentially hostile trade partner. To test these expectations, we estimate a model using responses from our "political relations" treatment group. We interact each of

the variants on the “trade partner growth” indicator with each of the variants of “political relations.” Our findings, which we summarize here but present in more detail in the Supplemental Materials (Appendix D.4), suggest that respondents were no more likely to support an agreement with an ally if his/her economy grew as a result of the agreement. Nor were they significantly less likely to support agreements with rivals that benefitted the rival’s economy relative to those where the rival had no gain.

These results appear to run counter to some existing work on relative gains in IR. One possible explanation is that our experimental design requires respondents to engage in fairly complex calculations that combine different agreement attributes: they must draw conclusions from the fact that an agreement provides significant economic gains to the trading partner and that the trading partner has hostile relations with the United States.<sup>22</sup> A setup that presents the security externalities of relative gains more concisely might be more likely to elicit responses in line with our expectations. Interestingly, this also means that if policymakers’ relative gains concerns have a basis in general public opinion, they either require sophisticated and knowledgeable publics or appropriate elite cues.

The findings regarding the impact of our additional control variables, regime type and level of economic development, are mixed. We find that our respondents were indeed somewhat more welcoming toward trade agreements with other democracies than those with non-democracies. Interestingly, the preference for democracies held across different levels of economic development of potential trade partners. Variation in wealth did not significantly affect trade agreement choice in our analysis.

## **Does Security Trump Economics?**

The second part of our argument focuses on the impact that national security considerations have on the weight respondents attach to economic effects of trade agreements. Specifically, we test the conjecture that when national security-relevant features are introduced into the description of a proposed trade agreement, the impact of economic concerns on respondents’ support for the agreement will diminish. We subset the data to include the control group and observations from the treatment groups where the trade agreement profile included the security attribute of interest. We then regress each of the economic attributes in the control group, a dummy variable indicating the presence of the relevant security condition (0 = the control group), and interactions between those dummies with each of the economic attributes on the respondents’ choice of the specific trade agreement. The interaction term coefficients indicate to what extent each security attribute decreased or

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<sup>22</sup>We tried to ease this burden by always positioning the “Trade Partner Growth” and “Political Relations” categories next to each other in our presentation to respondents.

increased the effect of the corresponding economic attribute relative to that economic attribute's baseline (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2018).

Table 2 presents the findings of this analysis. For ease of comparison, we include the AMCE for the different variants of our two core economic considerations, national growth and employment effects, in the left-most column. The AMCE coefficients in this column are derived from linear probability models estimated on our control group. The remaining columns in Table 2 present the interaction term coefficients between the economic attribute and the dummy variable indicating the relevant security attribute's inclusion from eight different models, each employing a different security attribute. Where the interaction is statistically significant in a one-tailed test (indicated in bold), we also note in parentheses the percent change in the AMCE resulting from the intervention.<sup>23</sup>

The findings suggest that the intervention of several security attributes influence the weight our respondents attach to different economic characteristics of the trade agreements they evaluated. First, we find that the prospect of diminished global influence decreases the positive impact of economic growth expectations on respondents' support for a trade agreement. The negative and significant difference in the intervention effect associated with this attribute in Column 3 of Table 2 indicates that the average marginal component effect of *Some US Growth* moves closer to zero [from 0.170 to 0.118 (0.17–0.052)] when respondents are presented with information that the agreement will also likely diminish US global influence. Overall, *Diminishes Influence* reduces the AMCE of *Some US Growth* and *Significant US Growth* by 30% and 20%, respectively. Put differently, the suggestion that a proposed trade agreement might diminish US political influence in the world caused our respondents to be swayed significantly less by the positive effect an agreement might have on economic growth.

Similarly, information about a potentially hostile relationship with the future trading partner undermines the positive draw of economic growth. The impact of *Significant US Growth* and *Some US Growth* on respondent support for a trade agreement is diminished by 20% and 41%, respectively, when the description of the agreement notes that the partner may be a political rival. This effect extends even beyond rivals to prospective trading partners that may have cooperative relations with rivals.

The employment effects of increased trade are often the main focus of public debates. Here, our findings suggest that projected job gains not only make a trade agreement significantly more attractive – this effect is also largely impervious to the introduction of negative information about national security concerns.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>We employ a one-tailed test as our hypothesis is directional and we have no expectation that the effects of the economic variables will increase rather than decrease when security information is introduced. In the Supplementary Materials, we provide a table that indicates the sample size for each cell in Table 2 (Appendix E.5).

<sup>24</sup>The exception is the "Enemy of My Enemy" condition. Here, the difference in intervention effects suggests that the introduction of this information diminishes the positive effect of "Creates Some Jobs." Given our already mentioned concerns about respondents' comprehension of the agreement attribute, we refrain from drawing strong conclusions about its effect here.

**Table 2.** Difference in intervention effects for specific security attributes.

	Control group	AMCE	Global political influence				Security relationship			
			Increase	Diminish	Maintain	Ally	Rival	Neutral	Enemy of enemy	Coop. w/Enemy
Creates many jobs	<b>0.19*</b>	0.02	0.02	0.00	-0.00	-0.03	-0.01	0.02	-0.06	
Creates some jobs	<b>0.11*</b>	-0.00	-0.05	-0.01	-0.01	-0.04	-0.00	<b>-0.08*</b> (67%)	0.00	
Costs some jobs	<b>-0.17*</b>	0.03	0.04	0.04	<b>0.10*</b> (58%)	<b>0.11*</b> (67%)	0.06	0.03	0.06	
Costs many jobs	<b>-0.31*</b>	0.02	<b>0.06*</b> (20%)	0.02	<b>0.07*</b> (20%)	<b>0.10*</b> (32%)	0.03	0.05	0.01	
Sig. US growth	<b>0.26*</b>	-0.04	<b>-0.05*</b> (20%)	0.02	-0.05	<b>-0.05*</b> (20%)	-0.03	-0.00	<b>-0.06*</b> (25%)	
Some US growth	<b>0.17*</b>	-0.02	<b>-0.05*</b> (30%)	-0.03	-0.00	<b>-0.07*</b> (41%)	-0.01	0.02	<b>-0.06*</b> (33%)	

Note: The second column presents the AMCEs from the control group (economic information only). The remaining columns present the difference in intervention effects (DIEs) and where the DIEs are significant at the 10% level (\*), the percent change in the effect resulting from the DIE (in parentheses). DIEs are based on a linear probability model using the binary choice outcome.

Neither the prospect of closer economic ties with a potential rival nor the possibility of diminished global influence significantly decreases respondents' preferences for agreements that promised to create at least "Some" new jobs. In contrast, while our subjects are more likely to reject trade agreements that are described as likely to harm employment, this negative response is tempered when additional information indicates that the prospective trading partner is an ally, by 58% (*Costs Some Jobs*) and 20% (*Costs Many Jobs*), respectively.

Introducing negative security information even diminished the effect of prospective economic losses on respondents' choice of trade agreements. Compared to our control group, the effect of *Costs Many Jobs* shrinks by 20% when respondents in a treatment group received a prompt that an agreement would "Diminish Political Influence" of the US.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the addition of a prompt suggesting that the new trading partner might be a hostile power significantly reduces the weight our subjects attach to prospective job losses, by 67% (*Costs Some Jobs*) and 32% (*Costs Many Jobs*), respectively. While the overall effect of both economic and national security implications on support for a trade agreement runs in a negative direction in these cases, respondents who encounter negative information about the nature of the trading partner or of broader foreign policy impacts appear to give less weight to negative economic considerations than those who are not given explicit security-relevant information. This dynamic will require further investigation.

Overall, the results of Table 2 indicate that the effects of the security attributes in our primary analysis are not simply an afterthought or a product of a low information environment.<sup>26</sup> The effect of many of our security attributes is partially driven by the displacement of economic concerns. Substantively, national security concerns do not wash out economic concerns, but our evidence suggest that at least among our subjects, they have a non-trivial impact on respondent's economic assessments of trade agreements.<sup>27</sup>

## Discussion and Implications

We undertook this study with the goal of answering two questions: First, to what extent do expectations about the national security implications of trade affect individual-level attitudes toward trade agreements? Second, does the introduction of national security concerns into the discussion of trade agreements influence how heavily individuals weigh their economic costs and benefits?

<sup>25</sup>Note that the positive difference in the intervention effect coefficient indicates that the negative AMCE of "costs many jobs" is brought closer to zero and thereby diminishes its negative effect.

<sup>26</sup>One concern is that our findings may simply be picking up effect of the additional cognitive burden of comparing profiles across 5 rather than 4 trade agreement attributes. In this case, we would expect to see diminished effects for all economic attributes in our models. We find instead that introducing security-relevant information has no impact on coefficients of economic neutral categories and does not consistently alter the effects of trade partner growth or regime type and level of economic development (omitted here but available in Appendix D.2).

<sup>27</sup>With few exceptions, the coefficients of our economic attribute variants remained statistically significant at the 95% level even when the inclusion of a security attribute reduced their size.

We argued that answering these questions is important not least because existing research on trade policy attitudes has largely ignored the national security implications of trade, even though the link between commerce and conflict/cooperation has been central to several strands of IR scholarship.

Our findings, derived from a conjoint choice-based survey experiment, suggest that security concerns indeed matter for individual-level attitudes toward trade. They also suggest that responses to different types of security-relevant factors can be quite nuanced. The prospects of closer economic ties with a potential political rival or diminished global influence greatly reduce support for trade agreements; the prospect of closer ties with a friendly state increases support only marginally. Moreover, information about national security implications of trade appears to do more than just reduce noise in the decision-making process of our respondents. It diminishes the extent to which information about projected economic effects influences respondents' preferences for some agreements over others. Put another way, our findings indicate that when prompted to do so, individuals to some extent trade-off gains and losses in different, if related, domains.

Another noteworthy finding is that whether it comes to economic impacts or security concerns, loss aversion is an important driver of attitudes toward international trade. The subjects in our experiments consistently respond more strongly to cues about losses than to those about gains. The likely causes are not mysterious: a general tendency toward loss aversion is bound to be amplified by fact that most people receive their information about foreign policy, including the global economy, from mass media whose reporting on is dominated by negative coverage. At the same time, the appeal of negativity to consumers of news gives political elites and news outlets incentives to frame stories accordingly (Guisinger 2017: 47: 179).

The results of this study have implications for both scholarship and policy-making. The sources of individual preferences for economic policy are a vibrant area of research in international political economy. Broader foreign policy considerations, especially non-economic factors, play an important but underappreciated role in how these preferences are formed. Here, we have drawn on arguments widely discussed in the IR scholarship on conflict and cooperation to derive expectations about two considerations related to national security. Naturally, global influence and dyadic conflict expectations do not exhaust the universe of security concerns linked to commerce. Future research might investigate further to what extent issues like transnational crime and food security influence views on trade and trading partners.

A second area for additional work suggested by our study is the framing of trade-related information (Hiscox 2006; see also Rho et al. 2017). In our experiment, we selectively provided information about economic and national security implications of trade agreements; in reality, the sources of information will vary: media outlets of different political hues, trusted politicians, unions,

etc. How such information is presented and by whom may affect its impact on people's views and on the relative importance of economic interests.

Studies of public opinion on foreign economic policy inevitable raise the question whether mass opinion matters. A sizable body of research shows that average person knows little about trade or foreign policy more broadly (Carpini, Michael, and Keeter 1996; Guisinger 2009). If trade policymaking, including the negotiation of trade agreements, is dominated by industry lobbies and the executive, and if the average person is largely in the dark about trade, what role can public opinion play? We submit that the public nevertheless has effective veto power: they can threaten to punish any policymaker or party for supporting an undesirable trade deal. While the economic costs and benefits of trade, increasingly obscure as they are, may not move people at the ballot box, trade-related concerns about national influence and security very well might.

That the public is ill-informed and apathetic about foreign policy, including trade, has long been a source of concern to champions of democratic politics (Lippmann 1955). The benefits of trade liberalization are further obscured for most people by recent developments in the global economy, such as the proliferation of multilateral free trade agreements covering increasingly complex regulatory issues benefitting narrow economic interests. Nor is this state of affairs unique to the United States. In such an environment, political actors seeking to drum up public support for new trade agreements – and some seeking to stir public opposition – have incentives to draw attention to other aspects of trade that are easier to explain and may have a broader appeal. National security considerations, invoking images of competition and survival, fit that bill.

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