Attitudes, Interests, and the Politics of Trade

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IN 2016, FOR THE FIRST TIME in at least 75 years, major candidates for the presidential nomination of both political parties ran on platforms that were explicitly hostile to international trade, and to international economic engagement more generally. One, of course, won the nomination of his party and became the forty-fifth president. In office, Donald Trump was true to his word, pursuing the most aggressively protectionist policies in modern American history.

This shocked many longtime analysts of American trade policy. We were used to trade politics being conducted in the shadows, involving only special-interest groups representing industries and labor unions. Not since the debates over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had trade been the subject of mass politics, and even then, both the level of hostility to trade and the popularity of this hostility had been an order of magnitude lower.

Scholars who have studied this backlash against globalization in the United States, and analogous instances of a similar backlash elsewhere, have largely followed two broad strands of analysis. One finds a powerful impact of economic trends on political behavior: regions of the United

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States hit hard by imports, and those that have lost substantial numbers of manufacturing jobs, are more likely to have become more protectionist, to have voted for Trump or Bernie Sanders, and to have switched from the Democratic to the Republican Party. Other scholars have found similar relationships elsewhere, especially in Europe, where analogous economic trends have been associated in particular with hostility to European integration.

The second type of analysis focuses on the level of the individual, not the region, and Diana Mutz is perhaps the most prominent exponent of this approach. Mutz finds little or no support for economic sources of protectionist, anti-globalization, or pro-Trump attitudes. Her view is summarized in the subtitle of her book *Winners and Losers: The Psychology of Foreign Trade*. As she puts it, attitudes toward trade are the result of "largely expressive and symbolic reasons such as high levels of nationalism, racial prejudice, competitiveness, and the general desire to 'win' and dominate others."[1]

In this essay, I address the apparent contradiction between these two well-developed strains in the literature. I suggest that both findings may be accurate. On the one hand, most individuals' views on trade may reflect only the vaguest connection to their own economic interests and be driven by other less direct considerations. On the other hand, the impact of trade (and related economic trends) on recognizable regions may have a real impact on the attitudes of the people in those regions, even if they are not directly affected. Individuals live in communities, towns, and cities, and their attitudes are almost certainly influenced by their surroundings. The research frontier, I believe, is to analyze the relationship between geographical socioeconomic and political trends and their expression in the views and behavior of individuals.

WINNERS AND LOSERS SUMMARIZED

Winners and Losers is a tour d'horizon of Mutz's substantial research on public attitudes toward trade and trade policy. I come neither to bury nor to praise (unreservedly) Mutz's work, as it is largely a jumping-off point for my broader purpose; nonetheless, it is useful to provide a quick summary of the book. She starts with a helpful compendium of American attitudes, measured both quantitatively and with an illuminating array of open-ended survey responses.

[1]Diana Mutz, *Winners and Losers: The Psychology of Trade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), 18.

Mutz then turns to one of the more startling aspects of trade-related attitudes, the turnaround in partisan opinion. It has been widely noted that while Republicans had typically been more positive about trade than Democrats for decades, this changed dramatically during and after the 2016 election. Pew Research Center data show, for example, that although Democrats and Republicans in 2014 had very similar—and strongly positive—views on free trade agreements, by 2017–2018, there was a massive difference: more than two-thirds of Democrats were positive, while barely one-third of Republicans were.[2] For Mutz, the reason for these shifts, and in particular the "actual causes of trade opposition" in 2016, is that "white voters in 2016 were expressing a fear that their status in the world as well as their status within the country was suffering."[3] Mutz argues that Republicans eventually turned positive, suggesting that this was because, given their concern for social dominance, with President Trump at the helm they now associated trade with "a competition that we are 'winning.'"[4]

Mutz turns next to exploring how Americans think about the costs and benefits of trade. She presents the results of a survey experiment done in 2013–2014 in which respondents were given choices among agreements in which gains were distributed differently between the United States and a trading partner. The results, she argues, suggest that Americans value their relative position with respect to another country more than they value absolute gains. That is, they would be willing to forgo gains to America in order to limit gains to another country. Mutz emphasizes that Republicans exhibit this tendency more strongly: "Republicans care about dominating."[5]

Views on trade, Mutz continues, vary by trading partner. Americans are much more positive about trade with Europe than they are about trade with China (although many would be surprised to know that a majority—58 percent—thought that trade with China was a good or very good idea). She argues that variation in ethnocentrism, feelings of psychic closeness, and racial or ethnic prejudice have a strong impact on attitudes

[2]Bradley Jones, "Support for Free Trade Agreements Rebounds Modestly, but Wide Partisan Differences Remain," Pew Research Center, 25 April 2017, accessed at https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/25/support-for-free-trade-agreements-rebounds-modestly-but-wide-partisan-differences-remain/, 20 April 2022.
[3]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 264.
[4]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 69.
[5]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 89; see also Ryan Brutger and Brian Rathbun, "Fair Share? Equality and Equity in American Attitudes toward Trade," *International Organization* 75 (Summer 2021): 880–900, for an interpretation of similar findings as based on concerns about fairness.

toward trade. Canadian respondents, less competitive and less ethnocentric, were less likely to harbor anti-trade attitudes.

Mutz then turns to the electoral connection. She surveys several theoretical approaches that might connect trade to voting behavior, concluding that we do not yet have compelling evidence in favor of any one theory. The 2016 election, then, provides her with an excellent testing ground. And here she argues that the dominant reason for anti-trade voting was "ingroup status threat." She notes that "not long before the 2016 election…white Americans were told that they would soon be the minority race." In this context, "white male Christians…have the most to lose psychologically if they perceive America and/or men and whites to be no longer dominant."[6]

The book concludes with some suggestions about how politicians and others could overcome opposition to trade. Mutz suggests that they focus on trade as cooperation, not competition, and on the similarities we share with those with whom we trade, rather than the differences.

Overall, *Winners and Losers* is a weighty argument for psychological and other noneconomic sources of American attitudes toward international trade. It is a worthy representative of one pole in ongoing discussions over American political behavior, and in particular political behavior toward international economic and political integration. Similar debates have been going on about analogous behavior in other advanced industrial countries, prompted by the upsurge in politicians, political parties, and political movements that have—like Trump and Sanders—expressed hostility toward international and regional economic and political integration. Brexit, populist Euro-skepticism, and related movements all seemed to surge at roughly the same time as the rise of Donald Trump, and this phenomenon remains a topic of lively scholarly investigation.

For the purposes of this essay, what matters is the broad sweep of the argument by Mutz and others: many surveys and survey experiments at the individual level show little or no connection between individual-level economic factors and political attitudes—including toward Donald Trump and toward trade. However, before moving on to consider this, and alternatives, some comments on *Winners and Losers* may also be helpful, inasmuch as they often apply to other work of this type.

RESERVATIONS

My principal purpose in this essay is to suggest a way forward that does not require us to reject any of the relevant findings on the politics

[6]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 231–232.

of trade. However, given the forcefulness with which Mutz rejects findings and views other than her own, it is worth laying out why I think that she falls short of providing a satisfactory, self-contained, explanation of the relationship among sociocultural, economic, and political factors in the formation of political attitudes and behavior. I leave aside the glaring fact that she completely ignores the candidacy of Bernie Sanders, whose rhetoric in opposition to globalization and trade was virtually indistinguishable from that of Donald Trump, and whose supporters presumably differed in important psychosocial ways from those of Trump.

Mutz is quite insistent about the core arguments of the book. I found it troubling, however, that she does not adequately recognize the enormous quantity of scholarship that might call her argument into question. Here I mean not only criticisms of her own work,[7] but also two important and very large bodies of work. The first is made up of scholarship that, like Mutz's, uses individual-level studies—typically surveys and survey experiments—but arrives at different conclusions. There are some classic studies along these lines, and a whole host of more recent ones.[8] Perhaps just as important, a number of rigorous studies look explicitly at the interaction of economic and psychological (or more broadly sociocultural) factors. Indeed, a recent (purely theoretical) article by two of the world's leading trade theorists develops a theory of trade policy preferences in which "assessments of wellbeing include both material and psychosocial components."[9] Even more relevant, perhaps, are empirical studies that have found important effects from the *interaction* of eco-

[7]For example, Stephen L. Morgan, "Status Threat, Material Interests, and the 2016 Presidential Vote," *Socius* 4 (January 2018), https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023118788217.

[8]For the former, see Kenneth F. Scheve and Matthew J. Slaughter, "What Determines Individual Trade-Policy Preferences?," *Journal of International Economics* 54 (August 2001): 267–292; and Anna Maria Mayda and Dani Rodrik, "Why Are Some People (and Countries) More Protectionist than Others?," *European Economic Review* 49 (2005): 1393–1430. For a sample of the latter, see Erica Owen and Noel P. Johnston, "Occupation and the Political Economy of Trade: Job Routineness, Offshorability, and Protectionist Sentiment," *International Organization* 71 (Fall 2017): 665–699. For an intriguing analysis of the political impact of NAFTA that relies on a raft of measures, including surveys, see Jiwon Choi, Ilyana Kuziemko, Ebonya L. Washington, and Gavin Wright, "Local Economic and Political Effects of Trade Deals: Evidence from NAFTA" (Working Paper 29525, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 2021), accessed at https://www.nber.org/papers/w29525, 16 May 2022. There is indeed a plethora of survey-based studies whose conclusions are far more nuanced and ambiguous than those of Mutz; see, for example, Sungmin Rho and Michael Tomz, "Why Don't Trade Preferences Reflect Economic Self-Interest?," *International Organization* 71 (April 2017): S85–S108; and Lena Maria Schaffer and Gabriele Spilker, "Self-Interest versus Sociotropic Considerations: An Information-Based Perspective to Understanding Individuals' Trade Preferences," *Review of International Political Economy* 26, no. 6 (2019): 1266–1292.

[9]Gene M. Grossman and Elhanan Helpman, "Identity Politics and Trade Policy," *Review of Economic Studies* 88 (May 2021): 1101–1126.

nomic and noneconomic considerations. One such article, for example, finds evidence that "economic change can shape peoples' values and value change may be an important mechanism linking economic change with opposition to economic integration."[10] Many studies by political scientists and others use individual-level data, like Mutz, in both the United States and elsewhere, and arrive at very different conclusions about the impact of economic factors on relevant attitudes. It is up to others to adjudicate among these studies, but it is not helpful or appropriate simply to ignore them.

The second broad category of studies that is in need of much more serious consideration—and whose existence Mutz does, in fact, acknowledge—is the truly enormous body of work that explores the impact of regional economic trends on regional political behavior. Perhaps the best-known class of such studies are those that have grown out of the "China shock" approach innovated by David Autor and colleagues,[11] but there are many others. A 2021 survey cites more than 150 studies,[12] and there are many more. This research finds systematic impacts of economic trends on political behavior. Typically, the work connects increased import competition from low-wage countries to a loss of many of the region's unskilled and semiskilled manufacturing jobs, which leads to a turn toward more populist and protectionist behavior. The behavior measured is usually voting but also includes legislative behavior by representatives of these regions[13] and survey responses.[14] Importantly, there are studies along these lines of the United States and many other developed societies, suggesting the scope for both broader empirical regularities and theoretical conclusions.

This work cannot be dismissed, for several reasons. First, it is enormous in its volume and in the similarity in results over time, across countries and regions of countries, and using many different

[10]Cameron Ballard-Rosa, Mashail Malik, Stephanie Rickard, and Kenneth Scheve, "The Economic Origins of Authoritarian Values: Evidence from Local Trade Shocks in the United Kingdom," *Comparative Political Studies* 54 (November 2021): 2321–2353.

[11]David H. Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon H. Hanson, "The China Syndrome: Local Labor Market Effects of Import Competition in the United States" *American Economic Review* 103 (October 2013): 2121–2168; and David Autor, David Dorn, Gordon Hanson, and Kaveh Majlesi, "Importing Political Polarization? The Electoral Consequences of Rising Trade Exposure," *American Economic Review* 110 (October 2020): 3139–3183.

[12]See the citations in Stefanie Walter, "The Backlash against Globalization," *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 421–442.

[13]For example, James Feigenbaum and Andrew Hall, "How Legislators Respond to Localized Economic Shocks: Evidence from Chinese Import Competition," *Journal of Politics* 77 (October 2015): 1012–1030.

[14]For example, see Choi et al., "Local Economic and Political Effects of Trade Deals."

methods—all of which, however, are at the level of a geographic region (county, legislative district, commuting zone, etc.). Second, and perhaps more important, many, if not most, of these studies can make a serious claim for causal identification. This is because—as in the canonical China shock papers—they typically explore the impact of a plausibly exogenous event like the creation of NAFTA or the entry of China into the World Trade Organization upon the political behavior in question.

The strength of the causal claim here is especially important because the survey-based scholarship of Mutz and others *cannot* make similar causal claims. As is well known, survey research effectively measures the correlation of attitudes with other attitudes (nationalism with protectionism, for example) and *cannot* claim to have uncovered any causal relationship. Indeed, one obvious interpretation of these attitudinal correlations is that they are both due to a third causal factor: perhaps economic distress caused by imports causes both nationalism and protectionism. In fact, Mutz is not careful on this score; *Winners and Losers* is full of causal claims that cannot be supported. The only cause possible in her research is with survey *experiments*, and then all that we can say is that a prime or prompt caused respondents to change their responses to a survey researcher. This is a very weak reed to hang an argument on, as it is measuring survey responses rather than such consequential behavior as voting or legislative action. One of Mutz's reactions is peculiar, when she writes "as with many observational analyses, it is difficult to make strong causal arguments because so many other characteristics also vary among communities."[15] Surely the answer is not to rely solely on surveys and survey experiments that cannot make *any* causal arguments about actual political behavior. It is true that we need to be careful about inferring a mechanism from a demonstrated causal relationship; but it is also true that we may not get much usefully measured information about a possible mechanism from correlations such as those drawn from surveys. I return to this later, because I believe that a constructive and important goal for scholars is trying to figure out—with the help, I hope, of survey researchers—what mechanisms do lie beneath these demonstrated causal relationships.

[15]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 206.

To be sure, there are plenty of potential objections to these studies of aggregate behavior at the regional or community level, even leaving aside any debates about the strength of the causal claims. Mutz quite rightly highlights the principal weakness of these regional studies. Noting that "communities don't vote; people do,"[16] she writes, "the mechanism producing these aggregate-level observational relationships is either unclear and/or inconsistent with much of what is known about voting behavior."[17] When she acknowledges "aggregate-level data showing that… whites concentrated in manufacturing areas, were more likely to vote for Trump," she quite reasonably tempers this with the observation that "this relationship…is subject to many alternative interpretations."[18]

Mutz is exactly right that the gaping hole in our understanding in this realm is about the mechanism.[19] Those who posit an impact of import competition and job loss have trouble explaining how aggregate regional trends affect individual behavior—especially when survey and other individual-level studies tend not to show a strong direct impact of these trends. Scholars who focus on the regional aggregates may be aware that there is not a very strong relationship between individual experiences and individual political attitudes and behavior, but they have no real explanation as to how socioeconomic trends at the regional level affect individuals.[20] The same, of course, is true of individual-level studies, which cannot explain why aggregate outcomes are not observed at the level of the individual.

This, I believe, points us in the direction that our research should go. Rather than engage in another fruitless round of debates, with political economists and survey researchers flinging results at each other, we should address a problem that is common to all the work in this area. We have powerful evidence that economic events at the regional level have important effects on political behavior at the regional level, and we have powerful evidence that individual attitudes and behavior do not seem to respond directly to these economic events. There is a fundamental, theoretically crucial aggregation problem, and I think it will require both types of researchers to address. I now turn to what I hope are some more

[16]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 206.
[17]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 214.
[18]Mutz, *Winners and Losers*, 267.
[19]Scheve and Slaughter, "What Determines Individual Trade-Policy Preferences?," suggest one mechanism tying regional attitudes to trade shocks, even for those who are not in the affected sector—home ownership.
[20]Alexandra Guisinger, *American Opinion on Trade: Preferences without Politics* (New York:Oxford University Press, 2017), probably goes the farthest in this direction in the extant literature.

constructive observations on the problems we face as we go about this task.

THE MEANING OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD TRADE

First let me make clear that while Mutz's book is almost exclusively about trade, very similar findings prevail with respect to virtually every measure of international economic engagement: finance, investment, immigration, regulation, and beyond. In the United States, trade and globalization seem to be the most common topics; in Europe, it is some combination of immigration and European integration writ large. The objections (and support) expressed are very similar, and while it will certainly be important for scholars to differentiate as necessary, I am going to elide the component parts for the purposes of generalization. In what follows, I make some observations about the state of our knowledge and understanding of public opinion on trade and its implications for the politics of trade more generally.

Importance for Policy

Most scholars of trade politics think of policy as largely driven by special interests. The canonical Grossman-Helpman model[21] has a black-boxed government weighing the demands of concentrated industrial lobbies—both management and labor—against the government's concern for aggregate social welfare. There is no particular treatment of the role of the electorate: somehow the government is expected to internalize society's interests and counterbalance them against the special-interest pressures (and campaign contributions) to which it must also attend.

While this highly stylized picture is almost a caricature, it is not too far from the reality of most scholars' views of the trade policymaking process. The mass public has little or no understanding of trade—with good reason. The impact of trade on most Americans is very limited. Manufacturing and agriculture, the two principal traded goods activities, account for about 10 percent of employment, and many portions of even these sectors are unaffected by exports or imports. Modern trade theories, in fact, focus on firms rather than industries, for the vast majority of American trade involves a tiny minority of its firms—even in the more trade-oriented and trade-affected industries. Certainly trade has been a boon to consumers, but the standard view among students of

[21]Gene M. Grossman and Elhanan Helpman, "Protection for Sale," *American Economic Review* 84 (September 1994): 833–850.

trade policy is that the concentrated interests of exporting and import-competing firms matter far more than the diffuse interest of consumers.[22]

This is almost certainly an accurate depiction of the politics of trade at most times, in most countries. The intricacies of trade policy, especially in a modern international economy dominated by intra-industry and intra-firm trade in complex supply chains, are far beyond the ken of all but the most engaged citizens. The average, or median, citizen-voter has no reason to care about the latest anti-dumping suit or World Trade Organization dispute. Almost all the time, we can explain actual trade policy in the United States—and elsewhere in the developed world—pretty much entirely on the basis of special-interest politics. Those who focus on popular attitudes toward trade do not normally dispute this, but it is worth remembering that these attitudes do not typically have much impact on the making of trade policy.

This reality is tempered in two ways. First, citizen-voters may well care about aspects of trade that directly affect them or their local community. There are indeed many millions of Americans in firms and on farms that either rely on exports or are subject to potential damage from imports. When trade policy matters to these workers, managers and union representatives typically make sure they know about it. While much of the literature focuses on lobbying and campaign contributions, most politicians are probably particularly susceptible to the possibility that a contingent of voters in their district expect to be harmed by trade or a trade measure. Granted, this is a small minority of voters, but it can be a substantial mass of voters in districts—such as congressional districts—in which manufacturing or farming are important. So while the median American voter rarely thinks about trade, and what that voter thinks is largely irrelevant to the making of trade policy in any case, the median voter in some trade-exposed areas may think about and care about trade policy, and these views may have an impact on policymakers.

The second way that opinions on trade may matter is when trade does in fact become a nationally prominent issue. This happens rarely—in the United States in recent memory, it has only really been the case around NAFTA and in 2016. More general cross-national studies indicate that trade comes to the fore primarily when there is a significant trade treaty

[22]For a finding that is in line with the standard view, see Timm Betz and Amy Pond, "The Absence of Consumer Interests in Trade Policy," *Journal of Politics* 81 (April 2019): 585–600; for a different perspective from the developing world, see Andy Baker, "Who Wants to Globalize? Consumer Tastes and Labor Markets in a Theory of Trade Policy," *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (October 2005): 924–938.

or agreement being negotiated or ratified.[23] Certainly the 2016 election campaign, and the subsequent policies of the Trump administration, are important examples of how trade can rise to the top of the national political agenda. Scholars may long debate the causes of this rise, but there is no doubt that the fact that trade was a central issue in 2016 and after means that public opinion on trade was consequential. It is certainly not clear *how much* public opinion mattered to the ultimate evolution of trade policy, even in 2016 and after, but this was one of the rare instances in which the politics of trade emerged from the special-interest shadows to take center stage in national political debates. While this highlights the potential importance of understanding public opinion on trade, it is worth keeping in mind that trade policy is not normally subject to such attention and is not normally affected by it.

Even when trade does become a topic of general interest, its impact is mediated through the often complex electoral and legislative institutions of the society in question. The American trade policymaking process is complicated and highly bureaucratized, in ways that can affect outcomes even in the context of an all-out trade war, such as with the tariff exclusion process.[24] More broadly, scholars have analyzed the impact of the wide variety of political institutions across the developed world, with the general conclusion that similar public and electoral pressures can lead to very different policy outcomes in, for example, parliamentary and presidential systems.[25] Certainly students of American politics know that the House of Representatives, the Senate, the president, and the trade bureaucracy are likely to have very different responses to electoral and special-interest pressures on trade policy.

The institutions and realities of American democracy may indeed have played a role in encouraging politicians to focus on trade in recent years. As American politics became more and more polarized after the early 1990s, with most states solidly Democratic or solidly Republican, the Industrial Belt was significant as a region in which states might go one way or the other. This made them central to the politics of trade policy. To take one example, the four states with the most steel employment in

[23]Jeffry Frieden, Jorge Cornick, Mauricio Mesquita Moreira, and Ernesto Stein, eds., *The Political Economy of Trade Policy in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, 2022).

[24]Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Zhiyao Lu, "The USTR Tariff Exclusion Process: Five Things to Know about These Opaque Handouts," Peterson Institute for International Economics, 19 December 2019, accessed at https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/ustr-tariff-exclusion-process-five-things-know-about-these, 20 April 2022.

[25]Stephanie Rickard, "Electoral Systems and Trade," in Lisa Martin, ed., *Handbook of the Political Economy of International Trade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), is an excellent survey.

the United States are Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Three of these four are swing states, whose voting behavior has a notable impact on national—especially presidential—electoral outcomes. The median voter in the median state may not be the country's overall median, and in 2016, the pivotal voters in pivotal states may well have been trade-sensitive voters in the Industrial Belt. The country's attitudes toward trade may not have mattered much, but attitudes in the swing states may have been crucial to Donald Trump's victory.

Popular Understanding of Trade

No scholar believes that the average voter has anything like an economist's view of the impact of trade. The concept of comparative advantage is hard enough for undergraduate economics majors to master; it is not a commonplace of popular wisdom.

Nonetheless, popular attitudes toward trade are not that different from what we might call a "folk economics" view. Mutz provides a useful summary of such a view. She shows, as have others, that Americans generally think trade is good for the country but that it endangers jobs. Mutz refers to the tendency toward a zero-sum attitude, thinking that the United States will lose jobs as a result of trade and other countries will gain them.

Although the view that trade is bad for jobs is hardly textbook economics, it is not foolish in the American context. Indeed, America's factor endowments—poor in unskilled and semiskilled labor, rich in capital and human capital—imply that trade, especially with poor countries, will be bad for unskilled and semiskilled workers. To be sure, trade also creates many jobs, but these are typically—given the country's endowments—for highly skilled individuals. Generally speaking, we expect trade to lead employers to substitute away from labor and toward capital and skilled labor—as in fact they have. When Americans are asked about trade and jobs, they presumably do not focus on the creation of (prospective future) jobs for software engineers and biochemists, instead recognizing that working people are likely to lose their current jobs. Generation after generation of scholarly study has shown just this, whether about NAFTA or the entry of China into the World Trade Organization. While average Americans do not understand the intricacies of trade theory, they appear to have a reasonably good sense of some of the principal effects of trade, both on the general economy (good) and on jobs (not so good).

This issue is related to one that also makes understanding public opinion on trade complex, the role of "sociotropic" attitudes. These are attitudes based on understandings about the implications of a phenomenon, such as trade, for society (hence "socio"), rather than the individual.

Admittedly, there are many different interpretations of sociotropic attitudes. Some regard them as pure altruism: people care about their fellow citizens. Other see them as about information: citizens use national economic conditions to draw inferences about how they will fare.[26] A view that trade is good for the country but bad for jobs is ambiguous, so citizens have to decide whether they think the information about the job impact is more relevant to them than the information about aggregate welfare.

This is especially the case inasmuch as Americans emphasize the impact of trade—like so much else—on their own region of the country. It is reasonable for individuals to use information about regional effects of economic trends—such as trade—to try to anticipate more direct effects on themselves. And some regions of the country have clearly gained from trade, while others almost as clearly seem to have lost. Notably, many of globalization's "winners" are found in the prosperous, solidly Democratic Northeast and Far West, along with the prosperous Democratic urban areas in between. While many traditional Republican areas have also done well, the politically contested Industrial Belt is where the country's globalization "losers" are concentrated.

In this context, even sociotropic attitudes are likely to be affected by *regional* trends and realities. There is evidence, indeed, that voters pay special attention to their near surroundings, and form their attitudes accordingly. Such "geotropic" views—emphasizing developments in a surrounding area smaller than the country but larger than the individual—may well explain a great deal of relevant public opinion.[27] The regionally specific nature of attitudes toward trade—and toward economic and political integration more generally—is hardly a solely American phenomenon. Throughout the developed world, support for political movements, parties, and candidates who express hostility toward trade, international and regional economic and political integration, immigra-

[26]D. R. Kinder and D. R. Kiewiet, "Sociotropic Politics: The American Case," *British Journal of Political Science* 11 (April 1981): 129–161. For a powerful argument on the limits of "sociotropic" conclusions, see Gerald Kramer, "The Ecological Fallacy Revisited: Aggregate- versus Individual-Level Findings on Economics and Elections, and Sociotropic Voting," *American Political Science Review* 77 (March 1983): 92–111. This is, of course, the problem addressed by Gary King in *A Solution to the Ecological Inference Problem: Reconstructing Individual Behavior from Aggregate Data* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[27]Stephen Ansolabehere, Marc Meredith, and Erik Snowberg, "Mecro-Economic Voting: Local Information and Micro-Perceptions of the Macro-Economy," *Economics and Politics* 26 (November 2014): 380–410. James Bisbee shows that geographical proximity to trade shocks affects political attitudes; he labels his perspective a "spatiotropic" framework. See Bisbee, "What You See Out Your Back Door: How Political Beliefs Respond to Local Trade Shocks" (working paper, 17 October 2019), accessed at https://www.jamesbisbee.com/research, 16 May 2022.

tion, and the like are very noticeably concentrated in specific geographical regions. I now turn precisely to the connection between these regional trends and individual attitudes and behavior.

TRADE AND POLITICS: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY

Regions that have been hard hit by the loss of manufacturing jobs are at the center of popular skepticism about international trade and other international economic relations. This has been the conclusion of literally hundreds of scholarly articles, in dozens of countries. Some use the "China shock" instrument pioneered by David Autor, David Dorn, and Gordon Hanson,[28] but there is a very wide variety of methods, all pointing in the same direction. It is true of Western European countries generally, of France and Sweden specifically, and of the British referendum to leave the European Union ("Brexit").[29] It is also true of analogous trends in American politics: hard-hit regions have become more politically polarized since 2000, their legislators have tended to vote in more protectionist directions, and they were more likely to swing their votes for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election.[30]

The consistent findings of a strong—many would argue demonstrably causal—relationship between regional economic shocks and regional political behavior are a given. Their claims can be questioned or weakened on many grounds. Trade is almost certainly a less important factor in deindustrialization than skill-biased technological change (automation). In countries other than the United States, the target of skeptics is

[28]Autor, Dorn, and Hanson, "The China Syndrome."

[29]Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig, "The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior in Western Europe," *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (October 2018): 936–953; Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig, "The Surge of Economic Nationalism in Western Europe," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33 (Fall 2019): 128–151; Ernesto Dal Bó, Frederico Finan, Olle Folke, Torsten Persson, and Johanna Rickne, "Economic and Social Outsiders but Political Insiders: Sweden's Populist Radical Right" (working paper, August 2021), accessed at https://eml.berkeley.edu/~ffinan/Finan_SwedenDemocrats.pdf, 16 May 2022; Clément Malgouyres,"Trade Shocks and Far-Right Voting: Evidence from French Presidential Elections" (Working Paper 2017/21, European University Institute, 2017), accessed at https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/45886, 16 May 2022; and Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig, "Global Competition and Brexit," *American Political Science Review* 112 (May 2018): 201–218.

[30]David Autor, David Dorn, Gordon Hanson, and Kaveh Majlesi, "A Note on the Effect of Rising Trade Exposure on the 2016 Presidential Election" (Working Paper, Massachusetts Insittute of Technology, revised 2 March 2017), accessed at https://economics.mit.edu/files/12418, 16 May 2022;Feigenbaum and Hall, "How Legislators Respond to Localized Economic Shocks"; J. Bradford Jensen, Dennis Quinn, and Stephen Weymouth, "Winners and Losers in International Trade: The Effects on U.S. Presidential Voting," *International Organization* 71 (Summer 2017): 423–457; and Leo Baccini and Stephen Weymouth, "Gone for Good: Deindustrialization, White Voter Backlash, and US Presidential Voting," *American Political Science Review* 115 (May 2021): 550–567.

rarely trade itself, more commonly taking the form of anti–European Union or anti-immigrant sentiment. The political responses in questions vary greatly, as do their reflection in a variety of political systems. Economic factors may interact with nonmaterial ones. There are reasonable methodological challenges to some of the stronger causal claims, and to the size of the effects. And, as previously noted, the mechanisms that connect regional causes to individual-level effects are rarely if ever specified, let alone demonstrated. Nonetheless, the strength and extent of these findings mean that we should simply take these very strong regional connections as given.

However, these findings do not demonstrate direct connections between economic shocks and political behavior at the individual level. This is the point made by many survey researchers and showcased in *Winners and Losers*. There is a wide variety of approaches to the issue, many of them discussed in Mutz's book. Some emphasize the role of partisan politics; others focus on cultural, ethnic, and other nonmaterial factors. Others emphasize deep-seated moral features of individuals, or groups of individuals, that may be shared by people in a community or region.[31] And, like the regional findings, these individual ones should be taken as given.

The challenge, then, is to understand the relationship between the regional and individual causes and effects. This, I submit, is the clear research frontier for those interested in this very wide range of political and political economy issues. Indeed, it is not only relevant to attempts to understand the backlash against globalization, but rather implicates the politics of international and domestic economic policymaking more generally. Economic differences among regions appear to have grown significantly in past decades across the developed world, and the political implications of this divergence promise to be a central issue in politics and political economy for a long time to come.

In the American context, a starting point to understanding this complex reality is to look at the recent history of these regional trends.[32] Manufacturing employment began to decline in the United States in the early 1970s. Technological change was an important source of this decline, but so, too, was the entry into world markets of a phalanx of

[31]Benjamin Enke, "Moral Values and Voting," *Journal of Political Economy* 128 (October 2020): 3679–3729. Brutger and Rathbun, in "Fair Share?," focus on how concerns about fairness affect attitudes toward trade.

[32]For more details on what follows, see J. Lawrence Broz, Jeffry Frieden, and Stephen Weymouth, "Populism in Place: The Economic Geography of the Globalization Backlash," *International Organization* 75 (Spring 2021): 464–494.

low-wage developing countries in East Asia and Latin America. In this period, for the first time, developing countries began emphasizing the production of manufacturing goods for export to rich nations (where they had previously exported primary products and focused their industrialization drives on their domestic markets). China and several other East Asian countries came relatively late to this process, but their full-scale entry into international trade accelerated the trend.

The impact of manufacturing job loss was especially severe for small cities and towns that did not have a diversified economic base. Large cities lost manufacturing jobs, of course—the massive manufacturing complexes of New York and Los Angeles collapsed—but employment was picked up in other sectors. In smaller cities and towns, the loss of a few manufacturing plants, or a single large one, could be devastating. And the economic decline fed on itself. As employment and income fell, so did housing values; local tax revenue declined, and the ability of local governments to provide local public goods suffered. The manufacturing decline associated with increased manufactured imports, then, fed through to local spending on public welfare, public transport, and public housing; to increased crime; and increased class sizes in public schools.[33] Eventually economic decline contributed to broader social problems, as documented by Anne Case and Angus Deaton in their work on "deaths of despair" due to alcohol and drug abuse and suicide.[34] Reduced opportunities in trade-affected areas led better-educated residents to leave and were associated with increased levels of enlistment in the armed forces by those who remained.[35]

For many regions of the United States, deindustrialization has been an extended, agonizing downward spiral. It was a spiral in which many individuals found themselves stuck. Regional mobility in the United States has declined dramatically, in large part because of soaring housing-price differentials between booming and struggling areas. For

[33]Leo Feler and Mine Z. Senses, "Trade Shocks and the Provision of Local Public Goods," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 9 (November 2017): 101–143; and Yuan Xu, Hong Ma, and Robert C. Feenstra, "Magnification of the 'China Shock' through the U.S. Housing Market" (Working Paper 26432, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA, 2019), accessed at https://www.nber.org/papers/w26432, 16 May 2022.

[34]Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2020); see also Adam Dean and Simeon Kimmel, "Free Trade and Opioid Overdose Death in the United States," *SSM—Population Health* 8 (2019): 100409; and Justin R. Pierce and Peter K. Schott, "Trade Liberalization and Mortality: Evidence from US Counties," *American Economic Review: Insights* 2 (March 2020): 47–64.

[35]Adam Dean, "NAFTA's Army: Free Trade and US Military Enlistment," *International Studies Quarterly* 62 (December 2018): 845–856; and Adam Dean and Jonathan Obert, "Shocked into Service: Free Trade and the American South's Military Burden," *International Interactions* 46, no. 1 (2020): 51–81.

lower-wage workers, such as those hit by manufacturing job losses, the ability to move to more promising areas is strictly limited by the exorbitant cost of housing in the prosperous big cities.[36] And it is well-known that the declining regions of the country are precisely those where *social* mobility is lowest as well.[37]

For our purposes, the important thing about these powerful and disturbing regional realities is that, to a great extent, they affect *everyone* in a region. Certainly the factory workers who lose their jobs as industry declines are on the front lines, but eventually the kind of community decay that these studies describe has an impact on everyone in the area. Out-migration of the more promising young people, a deterioration of social services, and a rise in social ills are *community* problems. And such community problems will be a prominent feature in the lives of local schoolteachers, dentists, and shopkeepers, along with the directly affected factory workers.

This can be an important starting point to understanding how regional economic problems translate into individual political beliefs and behavior. It is only a starting point, and there are many directions worth exploring. Does the nature of the economic trends or shocks (automation or trade, for example) matter? How about the length of time the decline has been in train? Do local social networks mitigate the blow of economic distress—or, perhaps, magnify it? Do local political leaders address the problems effectively, or ignore them? Are the region's representatives at the state and federal level focused on the problems, or do they turn their attention to their more prosperous constituents? Do local social and political leaders suggest narratives to explain the problem—and potential solutions? How realistic are the explanations and the solutions—and to what extent do they focus on assessing blame as opposed to addressing

[36]Peter Ganong and Daniel Shoag, "Why Has Regional Income Convergence in the US Declined?," *Journal of Urban Economics* 102 (November 2017): 76–90; and Philip Hoxie, Daniel Shoag, and Stan Veuger, "Moving to Density: Half a Century of Housing Costs and Wage Premia" (working paper, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC, 2020), accessed at https://www.aei.org/research-products/working-paper/moving-to-density-half-a-century-of-housing-costs-and-wage-premia-from-queens-to-king-salmon/, 16 May 2022.

[37]Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez, "Where Is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129 (November 2014): 1553–1623. For an interesting ethnographic survey of the resentments of residents of one region, see Katherine Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016). James Bisbee and B. Peter Rosendorff conduct a survey-based study that emphasizes the local impact of economic insecurity; see "Anti-Globalization Sentiment: Shocking the Insecure" (working paper, 10 May 2021), accessed at https://s18798.pcdn.co/gripe/wp-content/uploads/sites/18249/2021/05/bisbee_rosendorff_anti_globalism_USA-V6.pdf, 16 May 2022.

alternatives? All of these questions, and many more, are relevant to trying to figure out the transit from regional economic trends through to individual (and thence regional, again) political behavior and outcomes.

This work can best be carried out with *collaboration* among researchers who focus on the regional factors and those who emphasize the individual ones, among those who incline toward economic causes and those partial to nonmaterial ones. All serious scholars understand that *all* of these dimensions matter, even if we do not know how. It is in all our interests to figure out the relationships in question.

WHY IT MATTERS

These questions are extraordinarily and inherently interesting, which is why so many scholars have been working on them. But they are also extremely important for the future of our societies. Political leaders, movements, and parties that question most aspects of international economic (and political) integration and cooperation remain powerful in most developed, and many developing, societies. Most scholars, I think, believe the policies that these populist and related movements propose are both damaging and unlikely to do anything to ameliorate the problems they purport to address. Yet it is not clear that existing governments and mainstream political parties have much of an answer to the discontent populist movements appear to have harnessed.

In this context, it is particularly important to have a clear diagnosis of the source of the discontent. To state my concern along these lines explicitly, I find it troubling that some of the survey-related analyses of the past decade seem to take as given that working-class supporters of Donald Trump, or Marine Le Pen, or Brexit are ignorant racist yahoos whose support for anti-elite, populist candidates is an expression of their psychosocial hatred for others. Whatever the accuracy of these beliefs, they have trouble with powerfully anti-globalization left populists such as Bernie Sanders, and with the fact that millions of white working-class Americans voted for Barack Obama twice, then for Donald Trump. But more to the point, they seem to simply write off a large segment of American society (and others), and they also seem to imply that their grievances are not legitimate. These are positions that I find questionable, if not dangerous.

The two mainstream American political parties have indeed, in my view, too long ignored the real and serious concerns of regions of the country and portions of the working class, who have been facing real hardship as manufacturing declined. This decline was almost certainly inevitable; it was counterbalanced by rapid growth and prosperity

elsewhere, and the trade and technological changes that caused it were beneficial to the country as a whole. Nonetheless, this is not moral or ethical justification for disregarding the very real suffering that economic decline and social dysfunction have created in large swaths of the industrial Midwest and South.

Perhaps more important, if we continue to ignore the plight of those disfavored by past and ongoing socioeconomic change, we will almost certainly see a continuation and intensification of the kinds of populist movements that have grown rapidly in the past decade. The fact that the policy proposals of these movements are misguided is unfortunate; the fact that many of these movements have taken increasingly authoritarian turns is alarming. This makes it urgent to develop a realistic and effective way of addressing the sources of support for authoritarian populism.

Those who see the supporters of Trump, Brexit, Le Pen, and others as morally reprehensible and politically hopeless must hold out little prospect for defusing or redirecting their anger and concern. But these views —to return to our analytical focus—appear to ignore the regional economic realities these supporters face, whatever their individual fortunes.

To emphasize that entire regions of the United States—and other countries—have been "left behind" over the past few decades is to insist that policymakers should pay more attention to "the politics of place." American attempts to address the damage trade may have done have been almost exclusively at the individual level, and there are continuing debates over how effective they have been—or can be.[38] Whatever the reality about individual compensation, there is a strong view emerging that "place-based policies" are the best way to address these problems.[39] Inasmuch as *regional* factors affect *individual* political behavior, a realistic and reasonable response to regional economic distress may well have an impact on the regional political environment.

This is where scholarly research remains crucially important. A fuller understanding of *how* regional economic developments affect politics within a region—whether the region is a town, county, or state—is central to understanding how policy can appropriately address the concerns of troubled regions in ways that are both economically, socially, and

[38]Dani Rodrik, "Too Late to Compensate Free Trade's Losers," Project Syndicate, 11 April 2017, accessed at https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/free-trade-losers-compensation-too-late-by-dani-rodrik-2017-04, 20 April 2022.

[39]Jay Shambaugh and Ryan Nunn, eds., *Place-Based Policies for Shared Economic Growth* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018); and Benjamin Austin, Edward Glaeser, and Lawrence Summers, "Saving the Heartland: Place-Based Policies in Twenty-First Century America," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, Spring 2018, 151–232.

politically constructive. As always, if our diagnosis is flawed or incomplete, our prescriptions will be inadequate to the task—and the prognosis will be pessimistic.

CONCLUSION

Diana Mutz's *Winners and Losers: The Psychology of Trade* is a worthy continuator of ongoing discussions about the sources of political attitudes toward trade, as well as toward other aspects of international economic engagement. It makes a forceful argument for noneconomic, and more broadly nonmaterial, factors in affecting the way that American think about trade and the international economy. Other scholars have made equally forceful arguments for economic causes of political attitudes and behavior. A striking feature of scholarly debates is that those who focus on nonmaterial influences largely rely on individual-level studies, especially opinion surveys and survey experiments, while those who focus on economic influences largely look at causes and effects at the level of such geographically specific regions as counties, commuting zones, or legislative districts.

It seems clear that regional economic developments, such as deindustrialization, have an impact on the politics of the regions in question —such as spurring anti-trade or populist sentiment. It also seems clear that the responses of individuals, even in these regions, are not so easily explained on the basis of their personal economic experiences and expectations.

The research frontier in this important area of political economy, I suggest, is to analyze the relationship between geographically specific economic trends and individual responses to those trends. These responses are undoubtedly mediated through the social, political, economic, and other characteristics of the region in question. But the way in which this mediation takes place, and the features that matter to it, are still very much a mystery. Both our understanding of the contemporary domestic politics of international economic relations, and policymaking in this realm, depend on clearing up this mystery.*

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