Public Opinion on Geopolitics and Trade: Theory and Evidence*

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Abstract

This paper provides a systematic examination of the role of security considerations in shaping mass preferences over international economic exchange. We employ multiple survey experiments in the United States and India, along with observational and case study evidence, to investigate how geopolitics affects voters’ views of international trade. We show first that respondents consistently—and by large margins—prefer trading with allies over adversaries. Negative prior beliefs about adversaries, amplified by concerns that trade will bolster the partner’s military, account for this preference. Yet we also find that a significant proportion of the public believes that trade can lead to peace, and that the peace inducing aspects of trade can cause voters to overcome their aversion to trade with adversaries. Our framework helps explain when and why governments that are constrained by public opinion pursue economic cooperation in the shadow of conflict.

Keywords: trade, globalization, alliances, security, public opinion
Critical elections around the world have hinged on voters’ preferences toward trade policy and international economic cooperation. Politicians routinely highlight geopolitical concerns in political rhetoric over trade, and public opinion frequently shapes and restricts politicians’ decisions to engage in economic statecraft. Understanding how citizens interpret the linkages between geopolitics and trade can contribute to our understanding of when governments will or will not embrace international economic exchange in the shadow of conflict. Yet while trade is a central pillar of cross-border cooperation, our knowledge of whether and how geopolitical factors inform popular support for trade with other nations remains sharply limited.

A vast body of scholarship in international and comparative political economy examines the determinants of public opinion on trade policy, citing the importance of economic and cultural factors. Separately, the security literature establishes voter preferences as a key determinant of foreign policymaking related to matters of war and peace. Yet answers to fundamental questions about the links between these two international policy domains remain uncertain. Do geopolitical considerations shape mass preferences on trade policy? Are voters more likely to prefer trade with allies over adversaries, and why? What factors do citizens consider when evaluating tighter economic linkages with countries that do—or do not—present security threats?

This paper presents theory and evidence to demonstrate that geopolitics matter critically for public opinion on trade; a priori beliefs about the geopolitical relationship with a foreign country

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1 Following World War II, for example, mass preferences influenced American foreign policy deliberations, which oscillated between employing trade restrictions to eliminate Germany’s capacity to wage war and fostering economic integration with Germany. President Roosevelt’s decision to embrace the latter option was “an example of an increasingly vehement president being reigned in by a more prudent public” (Casey 2001, 162-195; Beschloss 2002). The 2016 American presidential election centered on pledges to abrogate the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and reset trade relations with China. During the primary debates, candidates advocated for the TPP by arguing that it would allow the U.S. to create “strategic alliances against the Chinese...[who] are certainly not our friend” (The Washington Post, November 10, 2015; Green and Goodman 2016); similarly, the U.S. Secretary of Defense declared publicly that the TPP “makes strong strategic sense” and that “passing TPP is as important to me as another aircraft carrier” (Carter 2015). For political rhetoric linking security and trade, see also Bailey (2003, 152).

2 Scheve and Slaughter (2001); Mayda and Rodrik (2005); Hainmueller and Hiscox (2006); Mansfield and Mutz (2009); Margalit (2012); Rho and Tomz (2017); Guisinger (2009, 2017).

3 Russett and Oneal (2000, 274); Baum and Potter (2015); Peterson (1995, 10-11).

4 As Kuo and Naoi (2014, 109) write: “Although studies linking trade and security alliances abound...[f]ew studies directly examine how voters view the effects of forming trade agreements on their economic and security welfare.” See also DiGiuseppe and Kleinberg (2019); Kleinberg and Fordham (2013); Chen, Pevehouse and Powers (2019); Spilker, Bernauer and Umana (2016).
are key determinants shaping whether voters wish to trade with that partner. Following Blackwill and Harris (2016, 24), we conceptualize geopolitics as the “the art and practice of using political power over a given territory,” which includes consideration of “what constitutes this power, and how it is increased and spent down.” Our contention is that public perceptions of power relations between nations structure popular support for international commercial exchange.

We theorize that geopolitics affects voters’ attitudes on trade through a process of motivated reasoning, in which underlying affective factors are moderated by more logical considerations to shape aggregate preferences. This approach incorporates within one framework both psychological and rational-strategic determinants that have been highlighted in different strands of scholarship.

The starting point of our theoretical analysis is the extensive literature in political psychology and social psychology that finds that voters’ prior beliefs about a given object (e.g., a politician or political party) shape a host of their other attitudes regarding that object. Applying this insight to the study of public opinion on trade, we conjecture that voters’ attitudes about economic exchange with a foreign country stem from their prior beliefs about the country.

Citizens have distinct sets of beliefs about foreign nations with different geopolitical profiles. Adversaries typically provoke heightened perceptions of threat, based on factors such as fear or even racial or ethno-religious competition. This leads the public to view adversaries unfavorably—triggering an automatic, affective response that in turn leads citizens to oppose granting trade benefits to them. Symmetrically, allies are deemed to be worthy commercial partners because citizens hold them in a positive light. This emotive logic accords with ample evidence suggesting that public attitudes toward trade are informed not only by pure economic considerations, but also by core values, morals, or similar affective responses.

Psychological responses explain why public support cleaves for trade with allies and adversaries, yet we also expect strategic factors to influence individuals’ preferences for trade with different geopolitical partners, as the scholarship in international relations would suggest. Our theo-

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5 Achen and Bartels (2016); Kinder and Kam (2010); Lenz (2013); Zaller (1992).
6 See, e.g., Rathbun et al. (2016); Herrmann, Tetlock and Diascro (2001); Wu (2019); Margalit (2012); Mansfield and Mutz (2009); Mutz and Kim (2017); Mayda and Rodrik (2005); Kaltenthaler and Miller (2013).
retical framework elucidates how rational considerations can alter—by amplifying or attenuating—mass support for trade. Extensive evidence exists that motivated reasoning leads individuals to accept new information if it matches their preexisting ideas; citizens update their beliefs asymmetrically, trusting information that conforms with their priors and discounting it otherwise. In this case, the motivated reasoning process affects whether or not citizens desire to trade with partners when they consider the channels through which trade may alter dyadic power relations.

We consider first the theory of security externalities, which argues that nations prefer trade with allies over adversaries because trade is anticipated to augment the partner’s military capabilities. On our account, public opposition to trade with adversaries should heighten when the security dimensions of trade are invoked. At the same time, we expect that rationalist concerns will weaken individuals’ prior beliefs. Insights from the liberal peace theory prompt us to anticipate that citizens previously opposed to trade with adversaries can begin supporting trade cooperation if they anticipate that trade will promote peace. While considerable studies in psychology illustrate the difficulty in convincing people to alter beliefs, we argue that learning that trade can advance peace leads members of the public to overcome some of their preexisting hostilities toward adversaries.

Focusing on the United States and India, the world’s two largest democracies, we marshal a wide range of empirical evidence—gleaned from observational analyses, vignette and conjoint survey experiments, and historical case studies—to test these ideas rigorously. Our observational investigation examines whether in the absence of any primes geopolitical factors feature prominently in the public’s evaluation of trade with adversaries. The vignette experiments allow us to isolate the primary effect of a partner’s ally/adversary status, as well as the additional effects of the security externalities and peace mechanisms, on respondents’ trade attitudes. The conjoint experiment asks respondents to select their preferred trading partner between pairs of countries with various economic and geopolitical attributes, permitting us to manipulate many other trade partner characteristics identified in prior work as important determinants of trade policy preferences.

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7 Robert (1976); Kertzer, Rathbun and Rathbun (2020); Mercer (1996); Tetlock (1998).
9 Nyhan and Reifler (2010); Taber and Lodge (2006).
These methods facilitate comprehensive tests of competing hypotheses, while the case studies demonstrate the real-world relevance of our claims.

Previewing our findings, a preponderance of evidence demonstrates that geopolitics is a central determinant of public opinion on trade. In the vignette experiment, only 39% of respondents support trade with adversaries, indicating that referendums on trade agreements with geopolitical rivals lack majoritarian support; by contrast, 58% of respondents favor trade with allies, all else equal. Security considerations perceptibly alter voters’ trade attitudes. When informed that trade will increase the partner’s military capabilities, a mere 30% of respondents express willingness to trade with adversaries. Nevertheless, support for trade with adversaries rises to 65% when voters expect trade to foster peace, provided it will not increase a partner’s military.

Our conjoint experiment benchmarks the magnitude of geopolitical determinants of trade attitudes. Public support for trade agreements falls by a sizable 27 percentage points when the partner is an adversary compared to an ally, overshadowing by a large margin the treatment effect of individuals’ preferences for trade with other democracies relative to non-democracies (13 percentage points). Moreover, this magnitude is as large as the size of sociotropic economic determinants of trade preferences that have been well-established in prior work—indicating that the vast empirical literature on trade attitudes has overlooked a key impetus of international economic cooperation.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that geopolitical factors operate in a systematic manner and in ways that are consistent with our theoretical microfoundations. This paper thus brings to bear new theory and evidence to explain how power relations between nations shape mass attitudes toward globalization. Forming a more complete understanding of public opinion in this arena both extends the international relations literature about the drivers of globalization, and informs many public policy debates about economic cooperation. For example, policymakers seeking to encourage liberalization may wish to consider the triggers and influences of mass support for such policies. More broadly, our findings help explain why governments constrained by public opinion at times choose trade cooperation, while at other times inhibit economic exchange.
How Does Geopolitics Impact Public Opinion on Trade?

We develop a theoretical framework that draws on both psychological and rational-strategic determinants to explain how geopolitical factors impact mass preferences on trade with allies and adversaries. Psychological constructs such as prejudice, ethnocentrism, and national superiority are known to influence a wide range of socio-political attitudes. The trade preferences scholarship has also established that individuals are prone to evaluate international economic linkages in “us-versus-them” terms, with in-group favoritism triggering opposition to trade with foreign partners. Mutz and Kim (2017) shows that Americans support trade the most when other Americans are the primary beneficiaries, and when the trading partner loses more than Americans do from the deal. Here, interest in “relative gain” drives voters to privilege trade policies that hurt out-groups over policies that generate mutually beneficial exchange for both partners.

But does support for trade shifts depending on the geopolitical profile of the trade partner in question, and if so, why? There are compelling reasons to believe that perceptions of out-groups vary according to whether the foreign nation is an ally or an adversary. Individuals typically view adversaries in an antagonistic light, perceiving them as enemies that are hostile, strange, and generally bad. Adversaries may evoke fear based on military histories or the threat of future hostilities. In cases where adversarial relations are prefaced by cultural conflict (e.g., ethno-religious strife), inter-group competition might undergird perceptions of threat. Affective reactions shape a host of attitudes. We predict, correspondingly, that enemy perceptions inhibit support for international economic exchange. By contrast, allies evoke positive associations, leading individuals to instinctively support trade with confederates. This claim fits with Rose (2016)’s conclusion that countries tend to trade more with other countries that are admired by their citizens, as well as DiGiuseppe and Kleinberg (2019)’s finding that individuals prefer to sign trade agreements with allies.

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10Kinder and Kam (2010).
11Mansfield and Mutz (2009); Mayda and Rodrik (2005); Margalit (2012); Mutz and Kim (2017).
12Silverstein (1989).
13Achen and Bartels (2016); Lenz (2013); Zaller (1992).
14DiGiuseppe and Kleinberg (2019) manipulates different aspects of a conjoint experiment on a U.S. sample to show that people support trade agreements that promise to bolster America’s global influence. This finding opens new questions—for example, do psychological or strategic mechanisms shape the relationship between security and trade?
We theorize that emotive reactions toward trade with foreign partners with particular geopolitical profiles can be moderated by more rationalist concerns. Through a process of motivated reasoning, individuals accept logical considerations that corroborate their prior beliefs, amplifying in turn the strength of their preexisting attitudes. For example, upon learning that trade will bolster an adversary’s military capabilities and enhance its probability of prevailing at war, individuals will evince more pronounced opposition to trade, we predict. Here, strategic estimations buttress preexisting ideas about the foreign nation, additionally influencing willingness to establish trade relations with it. At the same time, we contend that logical concerns hold the possibility of attenuating prior beliefs. The argument that closer commercial linkages help promote peace between nations will weaken opposition to trade with adversaries, for instance, if individuals judge peaceful relations with enemies to be materially beneficial, and update their trade preferences accordingly.

Based on what rational considerations, then, do individuals interpret linkages between geopolitics and trade? We now draw on two prominent strands of international relations scholarship on the geopolitical determinants of trade—security externalities and the liberal peace. Although both theories have conventionally served as state-centered approaches to trade politics, they have important implications for understanding individual-level preferences, as we now elaborate.

The first theory argues that international commerce between rivals creates negative security externalities because it allows an adversary’s domestic resources to be used with greater efficiency and permits the economic gains from trade to be diverted to military use. States fear that their adversaries will become stronger and, in turn, have an increased probability of victory in potential future conflicts. States with dissimilar interests may face particular incentives to renege on their agreements, because doing so can harm their trading partners by preventing the partners from obtaining military resources and lessening their economic might.

Are security considerations salient in citizens’ mind when not explicitly primed? How does this relationship travel outside America’s unique geopolitical context?—that motivate our analysis.

15 Robert (1976); Kertzer, Rathbun and Rathbun (2020); Mercer (1996); Tetlock (1998).
17 Trade inevitably benefits one adversary more than another. Thus, when states are concerned about relative gains, the state that benefits relatively less from trade will not support trade with its partner.
By contrast, trade with states that have similar security interests carries positive security externalities, since states seek to bolster the military capabilities of their allies, giving them a stake in ensuring that their agreements are honored. A powerful indicator of similar security interests is the presence of a military alliance, as alliance commitments are typically made between states with common security concerns. Additionally, alliances are costly to reverse due to the domestic and international punishments for abrogating commitments, as well as the threat of retaliation. If citizens understand the logic of this argument, they should prefer trade with allies over adversaries; thus, the more trade helps an adversary, the more citizens favor limiting trade with that state.

However, rationalist considerations also provide theoretical grounds for an opposite prediction. The liberal peace hypothesis predicts that international trade causes peace by fostering economic interdependence, which then creates incentives to avoid war since conflict would disrupt profitable connections. Under most versions of the liberal peace hypothesis, public opinion is assumed to play a key role in the causal chain. Disputes are thought to harm commercial arrangements since the gains derived from trade are threatened by conflict. Citizens and economic agents such as firms therefore have motivations to lobby their governments to refrain from costly conflicts with trading partners. Moreover, trade leads to greater contact and communication between citizens across borders, creating shared communities and values and leading citizens to push for policies that engender peace. Political elites depend on citizen support and lobbying contributions from firms to stay in office, and thus follow suit.

This logic has a rich intellectual history and remains so prevalent that it has been used frequently to support liberalization between states, and between adversaries in particular. For example, in its mission statement, the World Trade Organization states that by increasing free trade, the

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20 Fearon (1994); Tomz (2007).
22 Oneal et al. (1996); Oneal and Russet (1997).
23 Hegre (2000, 6).
24 Russett and Oneal (2000).
institution will “foster peace and stability.” Furthermore, the establishment of the European Economic Community, the U.S.’s decision to cultivate trade with China, and a variety of other policy decisions have been premised on the logic that trade would bind adversaries together in order to prevent war.\textsuperscript{28} Overall, then, advocates of the liberal peace theory argue that, all else equal, citizens should support free trade with all states, including adversaries with whom trade could help nurture peace. Moreover, citizens could favor trade with adversaries if they prioritize curbing hostilities.

A priori, it is not clear whether incentives to avoid or promote trade with adversaries should dominate. Citizens on average gain economically from trade by receiving cheaper prices for goods or by experiencing relative wage increases from exports, incentivizing them to prefer avoiding disputes with trading partners. At the same time, citizens pay costs for fighting wars, whether through increased taxes and forfeited revenues that could have been spent on public services, or through conscription and war casualties.\textsuperscript{29} This could thus lead them to eschew economic agreements that they perceive will benefit adversaries.\textsuperscript{30} Whether and how these rationalist considerations alter affective negative beliefs about adversaries remain open empirical questions. Our research design and experiments adjudicate between these competing theoretical possibilities.

**Surveys and Samples**

To test how geopolitics influences trade preferences, we administered a series of surveys. The first is an observational study which elicited, without any prompting, open-ended answers about respondents’ trade preferences; the second is a vignette experiment which gauged support for trade with a country with different geopolitical characteristics; and the third is a conjoint experiment, in which respondents were asked to compare two hypothetical trading partners with randomly varying attributes and select the one that they preferred. The research design of these studies are described


\textsuperscript{29}They may even obtain utility from winning wars, since they experience economic benefits from wartime settlements, as well as other moral gains.

\textsuperscript{30}Gowa (1994).
in more detail subsequently.

To conduct these tests, we recruited participants using the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) platform. We chose the MTurk platform because of its cost and efficiency gains relative to other convenience samples. MTurk samples are more representative of the broader population than in-person convenience samples, though less so than internet-based panels or national probability samples.\footnote{Berinsky, Huber and Lenz (2012).} Correlations between MTurk samples and those of nationally representative samples are high,\footnote{Mullinix et al. (2015).} and many studies employing MTurk have replicated findings from nationally representative surveys, especially in the domain of trade preferences.\footnote{Huff and Tingley (2015).} Of particular relevance to our study, Huff and Tingley (2015) demonstrate that MTurk respondents are employed in similar industries and live in similar geographic regions on the rural-urban continuum to those found in nationally representative surveys.

However, MTurk survey samples are not nationally representative. For example, using a benchmark comparison of the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, Huff and Tingley (2015) show that MTurk samples underrepresent “older racial categories,” especially African Americans. To account for these imbalances, we applied survey weights using entropy balancing to our sample and re-ran our analyses.\footnote{We re-weighted our data using national level data for the following demographic variables: gender, age, and race/ethnicity (in particular, white, Black, Asian, and Hispanic).} We found no substantive or statistically meaningful differences in any of the treatment effects reported subsequently. Also, for all of the well-known and justified critiques that have been made of MTurk samples, the main findings that we present below are so large and statistically significant, there is good reason to expect them to hold in nationally representative samples. Moreover, we ran sensitivity tests in which we compared respondents with more or less education and found no differences in treatment effects.

Finally, we note that MTurk samples may be more technologically literate than the general population, which could result in a greater awareness of globalized economics. However, insofar as this group represents those who are likely to matter when it comes to formulating policy regarding...
trade with adversaries, it is a sample of particular interest in our context. We also highlight the fact that our study is interested in experimental effects/differences rather than levels, and that these do not change across groups.\textsuperscript{35} We return subsequently to discuss claims regarding generalizability.

**Open-Ended Survey Evidence from Two Democracies**

We seek to determine whether and how the public thinks about the tradeoffs inherent in trade with adversaries, and the degree to which individuals’ preferences are malleable, by turning to the world’s two largest democracies. The U.S. and India are ideal cases to test our theoretical conjectures given their importance to global trading networks and roles in global and regional geopolitics. We start by providing survey-based evidence to demonstrate that geopolitical considerations affect trade attitudes in both countries and that security and peace considerations appear to be prevalent in voters’ minds. In addition, Supplemental Appendix A details how similar perspectives appear commonly in political rhetoric and public discourse in both countries.\textsuperscript{36}

To discern the extent to which geopolitics matter in determining public opinion on trade with adversaries, we administered a short survey. We focused on U.S.-Russia and India-Pakistan trading relations, as these represent two long-lasting and salient adversarial relationships. We ran our survey on a convenience sample of 200 American adults and 200 Indian adults in May 2016.\textsuperscript{37}

We began by asking respondents whether they support increasing trade with Russia (for American respondents) or Pakistan (for Indian respondents) and requested that they write three-to-five sentences explaining their answer. Because we queried respondents at the beginning of the survey, we did not prime respondents in any further way. We then hand-coded the responses based on whether they cited security externalities as the reason for opposition, peace as the reason for opposition, or other reasons.

\textsuperscript{35}See Mullinix et al. (2015) for details on why MTurk samples can pose a problem when a study is particularly interested in heterogeneous treatment effects when variance on the moderator is low.

\textsuperscript{36}While we examine observational evidence regarding trade between adversaries, evidence also exists that our predictions hold more generally between allies. For example, the fact that the United States and South Korea are close allies helped convince the public in South Korea to favor the passage of the free trade agreement between the two countries (Park and Park 2014).

\textsuperscript{37}Note that these surveys were administered separately from the surveys containing the main experimental results reported subsequently in the paper.
support, lack of trust as the reason for opposition, economic rationales, other geopolitical reasons, other non-geopolitical reasons, or whether there wasn’t enough information provided to determine the category under which the response fell. Responses could fit into multiple categories if several factors were mentioned and therefore do not sum to the number of respondents. There were two coders with high inter-coder reliability; if a disagreement in coding arose, we flagged the observation for further discussion until agreement was reached. These results are summarized in Table 1, which presents the raw counts of how many respondents’ answers fell into each category.

Table 1: Reasons for Trade with Adversaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security Externalities</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Geopolitical Rationale</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Rationale</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Rationale</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot Be Determined</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Sample size: 200 Americans and 200 Indian adults. Responses can fall into more than one category, so that summing across all responses does not give the total number of respondents. Table shows that most responses fit within our theoretically-identified geopolitical categories, indicating that geopolitical concerns feature saliently in citizen’s minds.

The first thing to note is that geopolitical concerns cited by our respondents dwarf economic considerations. In the U.S. sample, citizens cited geopolitical issues 152 times compared to 82 times for economic factors. In the Indian sample the difference was even more pronounced, as people mentioned geopolitical factors 168 times, while they only noted economic concerns in 50 instances.

Next, the vast majority of responses corresponded to the geopolitical categories identified in our theoretical framework. Within the Indian sample, 73 people mentioned security externalities, and 74 believed that increased trade would lead to peace. For example, one respondent noted: “As the people of India seeing Pakistan as enemy country, I want to support the foreign trade to lessen this enmity. As the trade flourishes, the friendship between the country also flourish.” Another
respondent argued that “it would reduce the hostility between the two countries. It would prompt Pakistan businessmen to invest in India too. Once the trade and investment reaches higher levels snapping relations with India will not be easy.”

In contrast, security externalities arguments focused on terrorism, as many people feared that boosting trade would allow more terrorist attacks. For example, according to one respondent, “Pakistan is a worst country in the world. Pakistan support terrorists and working against towards India. So foreign trade help them to grow their military. That is a threat to India.” These opinions are illuminating as they suggest that concerns about absolute versus relative gains appear to be quite salient in the minds of individual voters in this context.

Similarly, in the U.S. sample, 33 responses cited security externalities, while 70 mentioned that trade would likely lead to peace. On the security externalities side, one person stated, “I dislike Russia’s foreign policy with neighboring countries. I believe that the way to control Russia’s ability to expand their empire is to limit them financially. I believe that the US has manipulated oil prices down to this end. We should restrict trade with Russia and isolate them to limit their global power.” Another opined: “They are our enemy. They dont support anything we do. They are hostile in Ukraine. Russia will use the money for its army against us.”

However, others thought that peace would grow as a result, and some even mentioned both factors as a trade-off. For instance, one subject noted, “Trade would be beneficial to both parties involved. While Russia might increase its military powers with the additional funds created through trade, they could enhance the lives of citizens through more programs and funding to help the poor. This would benefit and strengthen our relationship with Russia, leading to less threats of war and violence.”

These opinions suggest that citizens care about the effect of trade on geopolitical outcomes—at least for the highly salient, adversarial partners of each country we sampled. Yet, whether respondents’ views would change if they could be persuaded that trade’s effects are either more or less beneficial than they previously thought remains an open question that we address presently.

38We also performed this analysis using a structural topic model and find that broadly similar themes emerge. See Supplemental Appendix B for details.
Moreover, many respondents drew on “enemy” language, plausibly implying a moral argument about the adversary, while others used security externalities as justifications. Even in the latter case, it is unclear whether they were offering a post hoc rationalization of judgments they had already formed. To help tease out whether and how geopolitical considerations influence respondents’ emotive responses to trade with adversaries and allies, we next turn to our survey experiments.

**Experimental Tests of the Impact of Geopolitics on Trade**

We now examine our key theoretical conjectures through a series of survey experiments, allowing us to circumvent common problems of endogeneity, and permitting us to manipulate variables that would otherwise be difficult to disentangle from the effects of geopolitical factors. For example, since allies of the United States tend to be democracies, observed predilections for trade with allies could capture individuals’ desire to cooperate with nations that hold free and fair elections rather than those with shared security commitments. Our research design allows us to parse out the effect of correlated factors such as these and guard against information equivalence.

**Vignette Experiment Design**

We first employed a vignette experiment in which respondents were provided with information in a manner similar to what they might encounter in a newspaper article, commentary piece, or political speech. The purpose of the experiment was to study how individuals respond to theoretically-grounded geopolitical triggers of trade preferences that might arise in real-world political discourse. The experiment allowed us to probe how respondents evaluated the positive and negative geopolitical effects of trading with an adversary when both mechanisms are made salient, as they often are in public debates on the issue.

We ran our vignette experiment on a sample of 1,208 American adults in March 2016. The ex-

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41 See also Tomz and Weeks (2013).
experimental treatment was implemented at the start of the survey directly after respondents provided informed consent. We presented subjects with the following scenario:

An article in a major national newspaper recently stated that the U.S. is considering enacting a free trade agreement with another country. Trade will strengthen the U.S. economy, although some Americans will lose their jobs as a result of free trade.

The other country in the free trade agreement [is / is not] a democracy and has a large military. Importantly, the other country is an [ally / adversary] of the U.S., meaning that it is considered to be [friendly with / hostile to] the U.S.

In addition, the article makes two key predictions about how trade with the U.S. will impact the other country. First, trade [will / will not] benefit the other country’s military. Second, trade [will / will not] help ensure peace by reducing the possibility of a conflict between the other country and the U.S.

After presenting this scenario, we immediately asked the question: “Given the facts described in the article, do you support increasing trade with this country?” As indicated by the brackets in our prompt, our experimental manipulations comprised four sets of treatments. First, we varied whether the country was a democracy or not in order to directly provide information about an important characteristic of the country that respondents might plausibly have associated with America’s allies and adversaries. If respondents conflated allies with democracies, for example, the effect of the allies treatment might have captured individuals’ preferences for trading with democracies. By establishing the nature of the country’s government, we effectively controlled for this correlated threat to inference. Moreover, this treatment permitted us to compare the magnitude of the effect of our primary variable of interest with a well-known benchmark in the trade preferences literature.42

Our main experimental manipulation pertained to the country’s status as an “ally” or “adversary.” We explained that allies are considered to be “friendly” with, whereas adversaries are considered to be “hostile” toward, the U.S. because the words “allies” and “adversaries” might have been unfamiliar to some respondents.43 This variable allowed us to test whether geopolitical

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42 According to some scholarship on the democratic peace theory, e.g. Russett and Oneal (2000), democracies forge economic connections with one another. Our goal was to compare respondents’ preferences for trade with allies with their known proclivity for establishing trade with democracies.

43 Our preferred approach was to avoid any ambiguity in the interpretation of the treatment. Note that these experimental results may be evaluated in conjunction with our observational survey evidence, in which respondents—without any priming—overwhelmingly cited geopolitical factors when evaluating trade with allies and adversaries.
determinants are broadly important in shaping individual attitudes.

We next explicitly tested the role of security externalities and the liberal peace theories in moderating attitudes. The security externalities theory argues that these externalities represent “the most critical aspect of free trade agreements in the anarchic international system”; increased efficiency resulting from trade “itself frees economic resources for military uses” and “enhances the potential military power” of trading partners. Our third treatment allowed us to test this claim explicitly.

We revealed to respondents that trade either “will” or “will not” benefit the other country’s military. If the security externalities theory operates, respondents should de-emphasize trade with an adversary and elevate trade with an ally. Following the liberal peace hypothesis, our fourth treatment thus tested whether citizens are more likely to prefer trade when trade is expected to promote peaceful ties. We informed voters that trade either “will” or “will not” decrease the possibility of conflict between both nations.

A few additional points about our vignette are worth noting. First, we clarified that the potential trade partner has a large military. This is an important feature of Gowa and Mansfield (1993)’s security externalities theory, and we did not want subjects to differentially attribute military sizes to allies and adversaries based on pre-existing associations. In addition, we highlighted the fact that trade would have economic ramifications. By stating that “trade will strengthen the U.S. economy, although some Americans will lose their jobs as a result of free trade,” we attempted to provide a balanced and holistic picture about the costs and benefits of free trade; a vignette discussing the impact of trade in America that contained no reference to economic factors might have appeared incongruous to some respondents. Finally, the information in the vignette was sourced to a major national newspaper, providing the content an aura of authenticity and suggesting that the deliberation over the free trade agreement was consequential to public discourse.

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44 Gowa and Mansfield (1993, 408).
45 Doyle (1997).
46 Our randomizations resulted in observably similar groups of respondents across each of the four treatment conditions (see Supplemental Appendix C). As we might expect by chance when considering a large set of statistical comparisons, one pre-treatment variable (religion) is significant in two treatment conditions. The inclusion of pre-treatment controls to correct for this slight imbalance does not alter any of our substantive findings.
Vignette Experiment Results

We begin by scrutinizing the effect of the geopolitical profile of the U.S.’s potential trading partner. Figure 1 presents the results of this analysis, indicating support for increasing trade with the country described in the newspaper article. By simply replacing the word “ally” with the word “adversary” and explaining that this implies that the other country is either “friendly with” or “hostile to” the U.S., support for trade with the country decreases by 19 percentage points.47 Notably, while a majority of citizens prefer trade with allies, a similar majority wishes to cut off trade with adversaries. This aversion to economic integration with adversaries relative to allies is consistent with the psychological pathways by which geopolitics was theorized to shape trade attitudes. Voters view adversaries in a negative light, and appear to automatically oppose granting trade benefits to them. Overall, we find compelling evidence that respondents on average prefer to trade with America’s allies, while simultaneously attaching a trading penalty to its geopolitical rivals.

What are the effects of the securities externalities, liberal peace, and democracy treatments, and do these effects vary depending on the geopolitical profiles of potential trading partners? Figure 2 visualizes the findings from these three experimental treatments in the full sample. Table 2 presents the mean levels of support for trade in each treatment cell, along with the estimated treatment effects, both for all partners and conditional on the partner being either an ally or an adversary. We analyze these findings to adjudicate between the theoretical mechanisms presented earlier.

First, we test whether the mechanism specified by Gowa and Mansfield (1993)—namely, that voters privilege trading with allies over adversaries due to the “knock-on effects” of trade on military sizes—resonates with respondents in our sample. To do so, we analyze the effect of the treatment in which we specify that trade will strengthen the other country’s military. Table 2, row b, shows that the security externalities mechanism has a large and statistically significant impact. Respondents are less likely to favor free trade when told that trade will augment the militaries of America’s trading partners. The magnitude of this effect is larger when we restrict our sample

47Supplemental Appendix D shows a qualitatively similar result whether we use a binary outcome measure and no controls, add a vector of pre-treatment covariates, or use an ordered outcome measure of support for trade.
to countries that are considered adversaries (row e), as support for free trade falls by 18 percentage points in these instances. We thus find support for the prediction that citizens do not wish to promote trade when trade will help the militaries of their adversaries.

That logical concerns about the effect of trade on the partner’s military capabilities percepti-
bly amplify antipathy toward trade with adversaries is consistent with the theoretical claim that a process of motivated reasoning leads individuals to accept new information that reinforces prior beliefs. We previously showed that Americans have an affective negative reaction to trading with rivals. Providing rational-strategic information that trade helps the adversary militarily provides more fuel to bolster opposition to economic integration.

We next study the effect of this treatment on America’s allies. A corresponding key prediction of the security externalities theory is that countries are expected to desire more trade with allies in order to build their coalition’s strength and maximize their joint war-fighting capacity. Here, a different pattern emerges: There is no statistically significant effect when respondents consider the effect of trade on the military sizes of allies (row f). The lack of a similar penalty among allies shows that citizens do not blindly find the association between trade and military sizes unappealing; instead, they are thoughtful in their answers and distinguish between partners based on geopolitical...
Our lopsided finding on allies suggests an important scope condition of the security externalities theory. It is plausible that voters formulate opinions on trade policy differently for “high salience” and “low salience” geopolitical issues; we discuss issue salience in the domain of geopolitics and trade in more detail subsequently. A claim that would be consistent with our experimental findings is that citizens consider geopolitical concerns to be much more salient when they contemplate trade with adversaries. By contrast, they might view allies as less salient security partners, preferring to evaluate trade with friendly countries in “business as usual” terms. We view this interpretation as speculative, but we note that it supports observational evidence that trading relations between adversaries is a subject on which the public tends to have well-formed views.\textsuperscript{48} Overall, these findings suggest that the security externalities theory primarily sways the public through its effect on adversaries rather than through its effect on allies, which implies that the public’s concerns about geopolitical factors are likely more salient and intense for trade with adversaries.\textsuperscript{49}

Second, we examine whether voter preferences regarding trade with adversaries shift when trade holds the prospect of inducing peace. Table 2 shows that by replacing “trade will” with “trade will not” in the statement about trade reducing the possibility of conflict between the U.S. and its trading partner, we trigger a sharp effect among respondents. Row c shows a 31 percentage point increase in support for free trade in the full sample. Rows g and h break down these results among respondents who are told that the potential trading partner is an adversary (33 percentage points) and an ally (30 percentage points), respectively. While baseline support for free trade is much lower for adversaries than for allies, respondents upgrade their evaluations of free trade agreements when informed that trade will help ensure peace not only for allies, but also for adversaries. Evidently, when trade reduces the possibility of conflict, many voters who would be averse to trade with adversaries now prefer increased economic integration.

\textsuperscript{48}See Verdier (1994, 43) and Bailey (2003, 148).

\textsuperscript{49}Note that the constant value for the military treatment is higher for allies (0.60) than for adversaries (0.48). There could exist a ceiling effect, such that support for allies is already higher than support for adversaries, making it harder to find a positive significant effect for allies. That said, such an effect would support our primary argument that geopolitics is a key driver of trade attitudes.
It is noteworthy that information about the peace-inducing aspects of trade attenuates aversion toward trade with adversaries. Individuals’ underlying antipathy toward trade with adversaries may be based on emotive responses. Nevertheless, we find here that logical arguments can lead individuals to overcome their hostilities toward adversaries, a finding that goes against studies in psychology that illustrate how difficult it typically is to convince people to alter their prior beliefs.\(^{50}\)

Finally, Table 2 also reports the results of the democracy treatment. As row d shows, the positive effect of the trading partner being a democracy (a treatment effect of 8 percentage points) is substantially smaller in magnitude than the effect of the trading partner being an ally. Additionally, the treatment effect when the other country is considered to be an adversary (row i) is insignificant, while the treatment effect when it is an ally (row j) achieves significance. In conjunction with the evidence presented previously, Table 2 indicates that geopolitical considerations are significant predictors of individuals’ opinions on trade policy, and are orthogonal to a trading partner’s status as a democracy.

As an illustrative exercise, we can now compare the effect of a trading partner that is an adversary with respondents’ willingness to trade under different treatment conditions. When a trading partner is an adversary, a minority (only 39%) of respondents prefer increased trading relations; by contrast, a majority—a full 58%—of respondents prefer to trade when the partner is an ally. As expected by the security externalities theory, the effect of switching from an ally to an adversary on support for trade is negative and significant, but this preference grows larger in magnitude when trade is expected to increase the partner’s military capabilities. In this scenario, only 30% of citizens express support for trade with an adversary.

However, our results also provide supportive evidence for the liberal peace hypothesis. When informed that trade with an adversary will both bolster its military and reduce the possibility of conflict, 46% of respondents (a greater proportion than before, although still a minority) now support increasing trade. This support increases substantially when we look at the “best case” scenario for trade with adversaries—that is, when trade does not increase the size of the adversary’s

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\(^{50}\)Nyhan and Reifler (2010); Taber and Lodge (2006).
military yet is expected to foster peace. In these instances, average levels of support reach 65%, indicating that a potential referendum on such a trade agreement would pass muster.

A feature of our results is that it is difficult to shift people’s preferences about trading with adversaries relative to allies. This underscores the durability of psychological factors such as morals and values in shaping mass preferences. Even when we consider the “best case” scenario discussed above (i.e., when trade does not increase the size of the partner’s military yet reduces the chance of a conflict breaking out), more respondents prefer trading with allies (74%) than with adversaries. The strength of the negative penalty that adversaries receive relative to allies can be evaluated in Figure 3, which presents two-way interactions between the adversary treatment and the military treatment (3a) and between the adversary treatment and peace treatment (3b).

Figure 3

(a) Interaction with Military Treatment

(b) Interaction with Peace Treatment

Taken together, these findings indicate that mass preferences on geopolitics and trade are more nuanced than what current theories would suggest; public opinion hews to the predictions of the security externalities hypothesis, but is also determined by peaceful inclinations. The vignette analysis allows us to focus exclusively on—and establish—the impact of geopolitical determinants.

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51 Tables 4 and 5 in Supplemental Appendix D present the results of models used to estimate Figure 3a and Figure 3b, respectively. Table 3 in Supplemental Appendix D additionally presents the results of a three-way interaction model for the adversary treatment, military treatment, and the peace treatment.
on trade attitudes, as respondents were provided with a limited set of additional factors to consider. How do these geopolitical determinants fare when geopolitics are but one of a range of theoretical determinants that are predicted to influence support for trade? To answer this question and explore the role of potential alternative explanations, we turn to our conjoint experiment.

**Conjoint Experiment Design**

We next ran a conjoint survey experiment on a sample of 1,208 American respondents that we recruited in March 2016. Conjoint methods present two or more hypothetical options to respondents and ask them to choose between and rank the choices according to their preferences. In our survey, subjects were shown characteristics of two randomly-generated hypothetical trading partners and were asked to select the partner with which they would rather see the United States trade.

The conjoint design offers several advantages in the context of this study. First, while the order of the treatments was held fixed in the vignette experiment, we randomized the order of attributes in the conjoint study to prevent ordering effects and to facilitate comparisons of the magnitudes of treatment effects with the vignette experiment.52 Second, because respondents rated and ranked multiple attributes simultaneously, we could assess a number of causal hypotheses both independently and interactively, and evaluate the relative explanatory power of each. Third, the conjoint design allowed us to assign different levels to each theoretical attribute and study how individuals’ attitudes varied according to attribute levels.

Unlike the vignette, which presents respondents with a description of a single country, the conjoint presents a pair of countries. After a brief introduction, respondents were shown a screen with the two countries’ profiles and were asked to choose the one with which they would prefer to trade the most.53 We then coded the responses as a binary variable that indicated whether a particular country was preferred or not. In forcing respondents to choose a trade partner, we explicitly required them to make trade-offs and express a preference. This has the advantage of

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52 We find no evidence that the order had any effect on the outcomes.
53 Details on the administration of the survey, survey design, construction of variables, and coding are provided in Supplemental Appendix E. Supplemental Appendix J provides the exact wording of survey questions.
neutralizing attitudes about trade in general, allowing us to zero in on what makes one country a more attractive trading partner than the other. Additionally, respondents rated each country individually in terms of how likely they would support trade with the country. We provided each subject with five sets of such comparisons. Therefore, 1,208 subjects rated two countries in five conjoint comparisons, which gives us a total of 12,080 rated countries.

We experimentally varied six attributes of the trading partners. We began by indicating whether a partner was an ally or an adversary, but we also specified whether the other country was a democracy or not, because the democratic peace literature predicts that democracies seek to forge economic relations with each another. Next, we explained that the military size of the other country was either “much smaller” or “a little smaller” than America’s military. According to Gowa and Mansfield (1993), the larger a trading partner’s existing military size, the greater the security externalities that emerge from trade. The treatment seeks to test this hypothesis in the American context.

Our fourth treatment indicated whether trade would increase the size of the other country’s military. Respondents were given one of the following attributes: “no change in size,” “a little,” and “a lot.” Our goal was to study how variation in the levels of these theoretical attributes would impact respondents’ preferences. We also specified that because of trade, the likelihood that the other country would engage in a conflict with America would either “stay the same,” “decrease a little,” “or decrease a lot.”

Finally, we varied whether trade would “help,” “hurt,” or “neither help nor hurt” the U.S. economy in order to compare the magnitudes of potential geopolitical effects with those of sociotropic economic effects. An additional benefit of this treatment is that it allows us to address the concern

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54 At the same time, our vignette design offered a different set of advantages. For example, the vast quantity of information presented to respondents in the conjoint analysis could potentially induce cognitive burdens that are different from those presented in a simple newspaper article like the one included in our vignette setting. Additionally, the vignette design allowed us to study attitudes without probing the ranking or rating of alternatives.

55 We did not include options indicating that the military was equal in size to, or larger than, the U.S. military. Such options would have been unrealistic; it is well known that the U.S. has the largest military in the world.

56 We restricted two attribute profile combinations; when the trading partner was an ally, we did not allow trade to decrease the likelihood that the country would engage in conflict with the U.S. by either “a little” or “a lot” as allies would not typically be expected to enter into military conflicts with one another.

57 Mansfield and Mutz (2009). Our treatments related to the geopolitical and economic effects of trade are intention-
that some respondents may believe that trade with an ally could provide greater economic benefits than trade with an adversary, a possibility that may arise if alliances are themselves endogenous to economic benefits.

Our research design fully randomized the six theoretical attributes of the free trade agreement under consideration. The values for these six dimensions were randomly assigned for each potential trade partner to ensure that the treatment groups are comparable on both observable and unobservable criteria. Thus, even if respondents subjectively interpreted some of the information that we provided differently, any potentially confounding variables would have been distributed uniformly across treatment groups, and our estimates of treatment effects would remain valid. We use a linear probability model to estimate the marginal effects of each of these features.\(^{58}\)

**Conjoint Experiment Results**

Figure 4 reports our estimates of the influence of the geopolitical and economic determinants of trade preferences on public support for free trade, each of which should be interpreted relative to the attribute’s reference category.\(^{59}\) We find that geopolitical considerations have a qualitatively large impact on public opinion, as moving from an ally to an adversary decreases public support for an agreement by 27.4 percentage points. The sheer magnitude of this effect is worth acknowledging. Respondents penalize adversaries more than twice the amount that they reward democracies (12.8 percentage points).

By way of comparison, the literature on trade preferences has established that trade’s perceived impact on the national economy is a key determinant of individual opinions on trade policy.\(^{60}\) Indeed, when we shift from telling respondents that trade “helps” the U.S economy to trade “hurts”

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\(^{58}\) For each trade partner that a subject contemplated, we created a variable which takes a value of 1 if the partner was selected and 0 otherwise. We regress this variable on dummy variables for values of the trade agreement in order to non-parametrically estimate the effect of variation in each feature on support for free trade. Our results remain unchanged when re-estimated using a probit model.

\(^{59}\) Supplemental Appendix E presents the full results in tabular format.

\(^{60}\) Mansfield and Mutz (2009).
the U.S economy, support for the trade agreement falls by 27.0 percentage points. The effect of security externalities thus appears to be similar to that of sociotropic economic concerns.\textsuperscript{61}

Next, we find that on the one hand, when informed that trade will increase the size of the other country’s military by “a lot” compared to the baseline level of inducing no change, respondents become 16.8 percentage points less likely to support trade. On the other hand, they are 18.4 percentage points more likely to support the trade agreement when trade decreases the likelihood of conflict between the other country and the U.S. by “a lot.”\textsuperscript{62} The peace-inducing properties of trade have a nearly equal and opposite impact on preferences toward trade with geopolitical partners when compared to the negative military-related externalities potentially generated by trade. Finally, we find that the military size of the trade partner has a significant effect on support for trade with the partner: partners with militaries that are “much smaller” than the U.S. military are preferred to those whose militaries are “a little smaller” than the U.S. military, although the magnitude of this effect is small (2.7 percentage points increase in support for trade).

Note that Figure 4 shows us that the effect of being an adversary is negative, and that this impact can be mitigated—but not eliminated—when trade is expected to reduce conflict by “a lot”. This suggests that even in a potentially “best case” scenario for adversaries, citizens would likely still prefer to trade with allies. However, our respondents’ opposition to adversaries is not inflexible, as resistance to trade with adversaries diminishes when respondents are informed that trade agreements will induce peace between nations.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{61} Our experimental design did not intend to comprehensively test security considerations against individual-level economic drivers of trade attitudes (Scheve and Slaughter 2001), a task that future work should consider.

\textsuperscript{62} Recall that we restricted by design the decrease in the possibility of conflict only to instances in which the other country was an adversary. As explained earlier, it is improbable that trade reduces the prospect of conflict between allies that already enjoy friendly relations.

\textsuperscript{63} The effects across the vignette and conjoint experiments are quite consistent, and reasonably precise, generating considerable confidence in our results. For example, moving from an ally to adversary decreases support by 19 percentage points in the vignette versus 27 percentage points in the conjoint experiment; learning that trade will strengthen the partner’s military decreases support by 11 percentage points in the vignette and 17 percentage points in the conjoint; discerning that trade induces peace improves support by 31 percentage points in the vignette and 18 percentage points in the conjoint experiment; and moving from a non-democracy to a democracy improves support by 8 percentage points in the vignette and 13 percentage points in the conjoint experiment.
Figure 4

Effect of Trade Partner Attributes on Support for Trade

Government Type:
- Not a democracy
- Democracy

Alliance Type:
- Ally
- Adversary

Trade Increases Military By:
- No change in size
- A little
- A lot

Influence of Trade on Conflict:
- Likelihood stays the same
- Likelihood decreases a little
- Likelihood decreases a lot

Military Size of Other Country:
- A little smaller than U.S. military
- Much smaller than U.S. military

Impact on U.S. Economy
- Helps a little
- Neither helps nor hurts
- Hurts a little

Change in Pr(Trade Agreement Selected)

Note: n = 12,080 trade partners.
Generalizability

We now turn to considering the generalizability of our findings. First, we explore whether our findings vary according to respondent subgroups, including those with various demographic and political characteristics. We then reflect on whether our findings could be driven by potential alternate determinants of preference formation. Finally, we explore whether our results are likely to carry over to other countries and time periods.

We start by examining whether different types of citizens attach distinct weights to the military and peace-inducing properties of trade. To explore this possibility, we analyze our results by subgroups, distinguishing between respondents classified as hawks versus doves, liberals versus conservatives, and Republicans versus Democrats.64 Our findings are reassuring insofar as they document differences in responses to the ally/adversary treatment that conform to conventional wisdom.

Individuals categorized as hawks are much more likely than doves to penalize potential trading partners that are adversaries; while hawks evince a 31 percentage point decline in support for trade with adversaries relative to allies, the corresponding figure for doves is 23 percentage points. A congruent pattern emerges when we partition our sample by self-identified liberals and conservatives, with the latter group more likely to eschew trade with adversaries than the former. The adversary treatment results in a 31 percentage point decline in support among conservatives, but a 24 percentage point decline in support among liberals. The adversary treatment similarly results in a 30 percentage point decline in support for trade among Republicans, but a 24 percentage point decline in support for trade among Democrats.

This treatment heterogeneity tends to lean in the direction of what we would expect from research on values and ideology. That some segments of the population place greater emphasis on geopolitics than others is in line with prior work which shows that “us-versus-them” attitudes vary according to respondents’ ideological leanings. That said, it is notable that the direction of the treatment effects are identical for each subgroup.

64 We followed existing scholarship to construct these variables; see Supplemental Appendix F for details.
One might question whether the treatment effects registered in our experiments are capturing alternate determinants of attitude formation. For example, people who have more negative feelings toward out-groups might be more likely to oppose trade with adversaries. Anticipating this possibility, we designed our survey to include a battery of attitudinal measures to capture the following behavioral traits that have been shown to influence foreign policy preferences related to globalization: (a) ethnocentrism, (b) nationalism, (c) isolationism, (d) internationalism, and (e) interest in foreign affairs.

On partitioning our results according to these behavioral traits, we see a strikingly consistent set of patterns. Across all five classifications, the subgroups have treatment effects that are statistically indistinguishable from one another (see Supplemental Appendix F). Individuals who evidence greater out-group bias, for instance, are neither more nor less likely than their counterparts to penalize trading partners that are adversaries. Although these analyses are not causally identified, they provide suggestive evidence that many alternate drivers of policy preferences do not explain our findings.\(^{65}\) We note that we are unable to test all possible alternative explanations, though taken together with the other findings presented in this study, we view the evidence in favor of our preferred interpretation to be compelling.

Next, we turn our attention to India, where geopolitical considerations have routinely been invoked by political elites when discussing foreign economic policy (see Supplemental Appendix A for an overview). We replicated our vignette experiment on a sample of Indian respondents recruited in April 2016. Our design was identical to the U.S. vignette experiment, save for minor context-specific variations.\(^{66}\)

Figure 5 presents the results of this experiment, illustrating support for trade with partner nations that are either allies or adversaries. We draw attention to the striking similarity of the results to our U.S. vignette experiment. When informed that the other country is an “adversary or oppo-

\(^{65}\)Alliances may be more common between countries that have greater degrees of intra-industry trade, which might generate fewer distributional consequences compared to trade based on comparative advantages. Alliances may then serve as a proxy for fewer adjustment costs from trade. However, in Supplemental Appendix F, we partition our sample according to respondents with higher and lower incomes, and respondents reporting higher and lower levels of job insecurity. We find few qualitative differences in the treatment effects.

\(^{66}\)Supplemental Appendix G provides details on the survey wording and design.
Figure 6 documents the effects of the three other treatments. Similar to their American counterparts, Indian respondents attached a negative penalty to trade—with a treatment effect of 9.4 percentage points—when trade was expected to increase the military size of the partner. However, when trade enhanced the prospects of peace, respondents were 21.7 percentage points more likely to value trade with the other country. That the geopolitical effects uncovered in our U.S. sample parallel the findings in a democratic setting with markedly different socio-economic and demographic characteristics is telling. It indicates that country-specific features cannot account for the relationship between geopolitics and trade policy support that we have documented in this paper. That said, we note that the democracy treatment—which had a significant positive effect in the
U.S. sample—is statistically insignificant in the Indian context. This lack of a treatment effect may be evaluated in the context of democratic erosion in South Asia in recent years, a possibility that warrants interrogation in future work.

Finally, we examine whether the trends identified in our experiments have been salient in other time periods by using historical survey data and case study evidence from the India-Pakistan, Taiwan-China, and South Korea-North Korea cases (see Supplemental Appendix H). We find support for the claim that citizens routinely think about trade in line with the predictions of our theory, at least when evaluating salient geopolitical rivals. We also find evidence of the generalizability of our effects when we revisit the results of our first, open-ended survey. Respondents were asked whether and why they supported trade with geopolitically salient pairs of countries. We observe that they tend to explain their answers in geopolitical terms, underlining the importance of peace and security externalities in determining their attitudes; Supplemental Appendix I provides further
details. This suggests that people think about trade with a variety of partners in the manner we highlight in our theory.

**Policy Implications**

Having empirically examined the determinants of public opinion on trade, we now consider the relevance of this line of inquiry for policy outcomes. Indeed, recent research argues that citizens often do not possess detailed knowledge on the subject of trade, and that trade is frequently a low salience issue even when they do. In such cases, individual attitudes may not represent a meaningful determinant of policy outcomes. Nevertheless, there are compelling theoretical reasons to expect that geopolitical factors have strong effects on citizens’ trade attitudes, and that these mass preferences translate into policy outcomes when important security goals are at stake.

Scholars have documented that public opinion has the greatest impact on policy when issue salience is high. Even if voters consider routine trade policy to be a topic of relatively low salience, they typically view geopolitical factors pertaining to war and peace in highly salient terms. Therefore, linking matters of national security to trade effectively elevates the issue salience of trade policymaking. Verdier (1994, 42) makes this point clearly when arguing:

“The security dimension of trade—that is, the fact that trade can be used to reward allied countries and penalize rivals—has made national security the issue most consistently and effectively paired with the trade issue. When security becomes a salient, consensual issue, trade is likely to follow it in its wake. Voters are thus rallied as a nation on one side or the other of the trade debate; and either protectionists or free traders are offered a unique opportunity to rout the other side.”

Put simply, when geopolitical concerns are priorities for voters, voters formulate opinions on foreign policy measures that impact national security, including those related to trade and eco-

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69 For a contrasting perspective, see Scheve and Slaughter (2001).
70 See Jacobs and Page (2005, 109), which argues that the “general public should have its greatest impact on highly salient issues that draw intense attention from the media and voters and thereby pose the most direct threat of electoral punishment for government officials who are unresponsive.”
nomic statecraft. Moreover, it is precisely during these periods that the public exerts considerable influence over trade policymaking debates. As Bailey (2003, 148) notes, the electoral process translates security imperatives into trade policy outcomes because “when the public is deeply concerned about foreign policy, the preferences of the public permeate and dominate the entire system. Under these circumstances, Congress—and, in turn, the nation—can engage in politically difficult policies. This strategic ability is not due to the machinations of bureaucrats or lobbyists but to politicians responding to clear public concerns.”

When geopolitical concerns are ingrained in voters’ minds, political representatives face clear electoral imperatives to formulate trade policies that advance national security interests—even if the policies are unpalatable to special interests or elite factions. In the presence of external threats, “the foreign policy establishment...enjoy[s] the popular support necessary to take trade policy out of its domestic format” and turn it into a national security concern.71 Indeed, historical and contemporary examples abound in which the geopolitical dimensions of trade with allies and adversaries swayed mass attitudes regarding decisions to foster trade with particular partner countries—including whether to grant Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to them, sanction them, sign Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) and other preferential agreements with them, or allow them to accede to multilateral organizations.72

Notably, even when geopolitical considerations are not particularly salient, public opinion may still matter in some cases. Scholars argue that public opinion routinely influences foreign policy outcomes even when voters have low levels of information about particular international affairs debates. Across a diverse range of foreign relations domains, studies show that when voters “lack

71 Verdier (1994, 43).
72 For the role of public opinion in U.S. trading relations with adversarial partners, see Yergin (1977); Romberg (2014); Kwon (2014). Similar dynamics are apparent in other cases. For example, in India, when public opinion has rallied against Pakistan, political elites have been forced to adopt a harder line on trade and economic cooperation. See, e.g., “India and Pakistan: Why This Reconciliation Could Be Different.” Stratfor, December 10, 2015. Likewise, negotiations of trade agreements between Taiwan and China have proven to be politically challenging, in part because voters in Taiwan have been skeptical of closer economic relations with China (Romberg 2014). Similar dynamics regarding public opinion are apparent in South Korea, at times when the government has debated whether to increase trade with North Korea (Kwon 2014). Note that the existence of multiple policy mechanisms means that public opinion has the potential of influencing trade policy outcomes even in environments in which trade is regulated by multilateral fora.
highly specific knowledge about foreign policy, they can nonetheless be capable of making reasonable judgments about foreign policy.”

Correspondingly, representatives face incentives to respond to diffuse public opinion as a preemptive measure if they anticipate that other actors such as political competitors, interest groups, or the media have the potential of mobilizing uninformed voters in the future, particularly if electoral competition is high.

This discussion highlights why the mass public has strong opinions and policy influence on trade relations when economic integration is paired with statecraft, underscoring the importance of theoretical and empirical analyses of public opinion on geopolitics and trade.

**Conclusion**

This paper demonstrated that geopolitics constitutes a strong predictor of citizens’ attitudes toward trade policy. Building from the literature in political psychology, we hypothesized that voters’ prior beliefs about a given country influence their views on whether—and to what extent—they wish to forge closer trade relations with it. We focused in particular on whether voters consider the relationship between trade, security externalities, and peace, and how these linkages might influence their opinions regarding potential trading partners.

We tested our hypotheses using novel survey experiments in the United States and India. Our surveys demonstrated that individuals routinely evaluate trade in geopolitical terms, and in ways that are consistent with our proposed theoretical framework. We found that respondents preferred trade with allies over adversaries; however, many preferred increasing trade with adversaries when they were informed that trade would serve as a conduit to peace.

Potential scope conditions to our argument exist that are worth explicating. For example, issue

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75 Verdier (1994). Candidates who propose policy platforms that resonate with the preferences of constituent groups frequently induce policy shifts among other candidates running for office, which can systematically shape policy platforms across political spectrums. In the 2016 presidential primaries, for example, protectionist trade policy platforms by candidates in both the Democratic and Republican parties shifted the political rhetoric and policy offerings of candidates who were initially proponents of free trade (see, e.g., “After Michigan Loss, Hillary Clinton Sharpens Message on Jobs and Trade,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 2016).
salience might be an important factor mediating the relationship outlined in this paper. There is much evidence that the public’s concern about security swayed trade policy outcomes in salient historical cases.\textsuperscript{76} However, the importance of public opinion for trade policy outcomes in low salience security issues is an open question that future research should confront. It is also possible that other factors—such as territorial size or proximity, the severity of military threats, or the historical nature of the relationship between adversaries—mediates the salience of geopolitical concerns in the minds of voters. Additionally, public opinion on trade with adversaries might not be static, since perceptions can be influenced by both the character and the actions of the adversary’s regime. We view this over time variation as an exciting avenue for future research. Finally, our finding that learning that trade induces peace can sway respondents’ opinions about whether to trade with a particular partner warrants further consideration. After all, ex ante, it is not possible to know whether trade will or will not foster peace with another country; additionally, interstate wars have become increasingly uncommon. Yet, as we show, politicians frequently evoke themes of peace when promoting closer trade relations with adversaries. How the public evaluates the prospective versus retrospective relationship between trade and peace is a topic of considerable importance in evaluating dynamics such as America’s evolving trading relationships with countries like China, Russia, or Iran—a topic that future work should consider.

Our paper makes several contributions both to the international relations scholarship on trade and security, and to public policy debates on global economic cooperation. First, we show that the literature on public opinion on trade policy has largely overlooked a key determinant of citizens’ attitudes: geopolitics. That public opinion on trade is molded by geopolitical considerations previously unacknowledged in the literature is significant; it might help explain why prior studies have at times registered findings that appear to be incongruent with existing political economy models of the determinants of trade preferences. It also indicates that scholars seeking to understand the role of geopolitics in international economic exchange should pay attention to both the security externalities and peace-inducing features of trade; a sole focus on either mechanism can generate

\textsuperscript{76}Bailey (2003).
misleading inferences about how trade impacts statecraft.

Second, our study points to public opinion as an important area of inquiry that can help explain when and why states are able to cooperate in a global economic order that is characterized by anarchy. Future work can test whether similar dynamics operate in other areas of global cooperation, such as foreign investment and aid, as the core propositions of our argument plausibly apply to a host of additional policy domains related to international economic exchange. It should also interrogate whether our theory applies differently across industries and across democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Finally, our results speak to many contemporary policy debates about trade agreements and policy negotiations in which geopolitical considerations have weighed heavily in the public eye. While existing scholarship offers few guidelines to help make sense of such mass preferences, our paper proposes a simple yet coherent framework to explain these trends. Voters are skeptical of trade with adversaries due to prior beliefs amplified by concerns that closer economic linkages will strengthen their rivals. At the same time, our findings show that a significant portion of the population responds positively to the idea that trade leads to peace. Policymakers seeking to advance trade agreements could thus benefit from clarifying the positive geopolitical consequences of tighter trade linkages.

References


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