# Free Trade's Organized Progressive Opposition

**Abstract**

Populist, protectionist, and progressive opposition to globalization is renascent among voters and politicians, but which of these ideologies have successfully inspired interest group mobilization? To answer this question, we collect original data on thousands of groups' participation in highly organized coalitions opposed to US trade policy and globalization. Examining the types of groups that compose coalitions, variation in activation across issues, and coalitions' written statements, we find that their motivations are mainly progressive, focused on the environment, human rights, economic justice, and reducing corporate power. We also focus on progressives' labor union allies, showing that their participation in anti-trade coalitions is driven by both sincere progressive and classic protectionist motives. Thus, a progressive-labor alliance espousing mainly demands for fair trade, not plain protectionism, dominates public activism against US trade agreements. This interest group opposition has no match on the political right, suggesting that the recent efflorescence of populist anti-globalization may not last, even as progressive fair traders use their superior mobilization to endure.

Anti-globalization ideologies are resurgent in American politics. On the right, populist economic nationalism stormed to power in the Republican party and the presidency in 2016; on the left, progressive anti-globalization has been highlighted in presidential campaigns and mass movements. The impact of these ideological currents have been investigated among voters and politicians. But trade politics is a classic site for the influence of special interests, and anti-globalization interest groups have received comparatively less attention in recent scholarship on trade. We therefore examine which anti-globalization ideologies have managed to generate successful interest group mobilization. To do so, we collect the largest ever dataset of non-business interest group coalitions around trade and test three competing theories of their origins.

Our theory of anti-globalization coalitions begins with the importance of organization. Interest groups provide a link between public opinion and public policy. While disorganized interests can sway elections, voters' preferences are often inchoate and trade may not be a salient issue. Interest groups shape and activate voters' interests, and contribute to politicians' election performance through mobilization and campaign financing. Interest groups also play a fundamental role *between* elections by supplying work and information to policymakers. They hold politicians to account by monitoring policy developments and threatening to activate opposition. The 'group' in 'interest groups' is particularly important: successful mobilization signals preference intensity and organizational acumen. Politicians listen when organized groups speak.

But what are they saying? We outline three theories of opposition to trade among non-business interest groups. Populist opposition to globalization comes from right-wing and nationalist groups concerned about economic independence and sovereignty.[1] Labor protectionism comes from unions focused on jobs, deindustrialization, and compensation, especially in industries where workers face import competition or offshoring. Unilateral liberalization and trade agreements with competitive partners are particularly opposed.[2] Progressive anti-globalism comes from the political left, and includes a constellation of anti-globalization, environmental, human rights, religious, and other identity groups.[3] It focuses on human rights, the environment, corporate power, and economic justice, and so may support unilateral or development-focused forms of trade liberalization even as trade with countries with weak records on the environment and human rights is abjured. For each theory, we develop observable implications if that motive is driving interest group organization. These implications focus on the types of groups that compose coalitions; variation across issues in coalition activation; the content of coalitions' texts; and the special role played by labor unions.

[1] Hafner-Burton, Narang and Rathbun (2019); Goldstein and Gulotty (2019); Owen and Walter (2017); Ballard-Rosa et al. (2020).

[2] Hafner-Burton (2011); Lechner (2016); Raess, Dür and Sari (2018); Ahlquist, Clayton and Levi (2014); Owen and Johnston (2017).

[3] Ehrlich (2010, 2018); Hafner-Burton (2005); Morin, Dür and Lechner (2018); Bastiaens and Postnikov (2020).

To test the relative importance of these competing theories, we assemble a new dataset of anti-globalization activity by non-business interest groups in the US. Our original data describes significant coalitional activity among nearly 6000 unique non-business groups. We code the groups' primary interests to understand the composition of coalitions. We also explore variation in coalition activity across US trade agreements and other major policy developments, and then examine the coalitions' own descriptions of their motivations in their letters to politicians and the public. Finally, we use the coalitions data to build a panel of labor union participation in anti-trade activities which allows us to explore in depth the determinants of unions' anti-trade activity.

Our findings point strongly in one direction: progressive anti-globalism is the primary motivant of collective interest group opposition to trade. Coalitions opposed to globalization are populated by unions; environmental groups; progressive groups; liberal religious organizations; and identity groups. Coalitions are highly organized around the US's free trade agreements – especially with small trade partners with known human rights or environmental concerns – and strikingly absent on development-focused programs where the US unilaterally cuts tariffs. Textual evidence from coalitions reflects progressive motivations: the environment, reining in corporate power, economic justice, and human rights. Import competition is not a main focus. Our new data on coalitions and their texts therefore provides rich quantitative description of the diversity of left-wing groups that have recently opposed free trade, complementing work that has examined demands for 'fair trade' among voters on the political left (Ehrlich, 2010; Bastiaens and Postnikov, 2020).

Detailed analysis of labor unions' participation in coalitions reinforces the importance of progressive motivations, though protectionism is also operative. Unions express protectionist concerns around jobs, and oppose trade deals when workers are exposed to foreign competition. However, they also articulate a range of progressive critiques of globalization concerning human rights, green issues, inequality, and foreign development. They reveal their sincere support for these issues through their alliances with progressive groups and their opposition to trade agreements with uncompetitive countries with weak labor rights and environmental standards. Labor unions are therefore an important part of demands for 'fair trade'. These findings contribute to an ongoing debate about whether unions' demands for strong labor, environmental, and human rights chapters are disguised protectionism (Raess, Dür and Sari, 2018; Lechner, 2016; Postnikov and Bastiaens, 2020). Our findings suggest that sincere support for these causes is operative alongside the search for protection (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Ahlquist, Clayton and Levi, 2014).

While the composition of anti-free trade coalitions provides clear evidence of organized opposition from the progressive left, we uncover no equivalent mobilization on the right. Only a tiny sliver of groups in our coalitions represent right-wing ideologies; no effective coalitions have been formed with a populist nationalist orientation. Right-wing populists opposed to trade suffer from a severe deficit of organization. Given the importance of interest group mobilization in trade politics, this calls into question the long-run effectiveness of anti-trade populism on the right. We conclude

that the activities of left-wing – particularly progressive – anti-globalization groups represent the most enduring interest group opposition to globalization in the US.

Our paper proceeds as follows. In Section 1, we introduce our theory, describing the importance of organization, and three theories of what motivates coalition-building: populist nationalism, labor-focused protectionism, and progressive calls for fair trade. Each theory has corresponding observable implications around: the types of groups forming coalitions, variation in size of coalitions across issues, the topical content of coalitions' statements, and on the participation of labor unions. In Section 2, we present our original data on anti-globalization coalitions, and consider each of the first three empirical implications. In section 3, we consider the fourth empirical implication, examining whether unions' coalition participation is driven by protectionist or progressive concerns. In section 4, we summarize our main findings and offer suggestions for future scholarship on trade.

# 1 Anti-Globalization Ideologies and Interest Group Organization

The 2016 US presidential election and subsequent trade war dramatically raised the profile of ideologies hostile to free trade. These ideologies have been examined among voters. For example, a lively debate has ensued over the role of material and non-material interests in the populist wave.[4] Voters' preferences are also shaped by progressive concerns about trade (Ehrlich, 2010, 2018; Bastiaens and Postnikov, 2020). Politicians' and parties' role in activating anti-trade sentiment have also been investigated (Eichengreen, 2018). Global capitalism's extremes provide fertile ground for political entrepreneurs advocating anti-globalism from both the right and left (Frieden, 2018).

In comparison with the focus on voters and politicians, interest groups have received much less coverage in investigations of the recent anti-trade wave. This may be perfectly reasonable given the popular nature of right-wing nationalism and left-wing anti-globalization. On the other hand, trade politics is the paradigmatic site for interest group politics (Krueger, 1974). It is therefore critical to examine the following question: *how successful have anti-trade and anti-globalization ideologies been in mobilizing non-business interest groups against contemporary trade policy*?

We limit our investigation of this broad question in two ways, leaving open many avenues for further scholarship. First, we concentrate on a public and collective form of interest group mobilization: the creation of temporary and permanent coalitions. Collective organization is a key objective for interest groups across many issues, including trade. Coalitions unite groups with disparate agendas but shared interests. Coalition formation influences politicians by signaling preference intensity and organizational ability (Kollman, 1998). Coalitions also conduct public

[4] Ballard-Rosa et al. (2020); Owen and Walter (2017); Mutz (2018); Nguyen (2017); Goldstein and Gulotty (2019).

campaigns targeting voters, politicians and other groups; coordinate strategy and the sharing of information; and build organizational knowhow, political capital, and infrastructure.

Second, we have chosen to focus on non-business groups' engagement in collective mobilization because firms and industry associations have already received sustained investigation. Pro-trade forces have been shown to dominate in these areas. Ad hoc coalitions of pro-trade firms and associations were created to support liberalization on every major US trade issue of the past three decades.[5] A recent study counted 42 such coalitions, and a further 10 permanent coalitions of firms and associations that support trade and globalization (Osgood, 2020). Publicly pro-trade firms dominate lobbying on trade and corporate campaign contributions, too.[6]

In contrast, anti-trade firms and associations have mostly failed to create large public coalitions. Over 1991-2016, anti-trade firms and associations formed a total of only four ad hoc or permanent coalitions. The total numbers of unique firms in anti-trade coalitions are exceeded by the number of firms in pro-trade coalitions by an order of magnitude (Osgood, 2020). Anti-trade firms also account for vanishingly small shares of trade lobbying (Blanga-Gubbay, Conconi and Parenti, 2020). We use these extant findings on business groups as benchmarks for our original findings on non-business groups opposed to trade. The striking weakness of anti-trade business interests in coalition-building also motivates our search for opposition to trade from other sources.

We therefore explore the overlap between resurgent anti-globalization ideologies and the renewed focus on organized special interests in trade. Have non-business interest groups mastered the political tools, particularly coalitions and public campaigns, used so successfully by pro-trade firms and associations? And if so, what motivations have inspired these efforts? To answer this second question, we develop three theories of the origins and motivations of anti-globalization coalitions: populist right-wing nationalism; labor-centered protectionism; and progressive anti-globalization.

## 1.1 Populist nationalist opposition to trade and the right

Populist economic nationalism elevates the nation – its people, economy, and institutions – above all others. It has intellectual roots in mercantilist, autarkic, and isolationist ideologies, though in America it is most clearly founded on the commercial protectionism that thrived from the founding of the Republic to the second World War. It is also defined in opposition to the dominant internationalist discourses of political and economic elites.[7]

Contemporary populist nationalist opposition to globalization is a blend of economic and

[5] Baccini, Osgood and Weymouth (2019); Osgood (2020).

[6] Kim (2017); Blanga-Gubbay, Conconi and Parenti (2020).

[7] Populist backlash is the subject of a rich recent literature (Goldstein and Gulotty, 2019; Owen and Walter, 2017; Ballard-Rosa et al., 2020, e.g.). See Hafner-Burton, Narang and Rathbun (2019); Walter (2021); Mansfield, Milner and Rudra (2021) for reviews.

identity-based concerns (Frieden, 2018). It employs mercantilist tropes about the importance of national production and trade surpluses. Commercial exchange and trade negotiations are something that the nation either 'wins' or 'losses' (Carnegie and Carson, 2019). Economic nationalists emphasize self-reliance and view importing and offshoring as unpatriotic. Nationalism seeks to preserve US sovereignty and limit international cooperation. It is also founded on cultural chauvinism and hostility to foreigners (Inglehart and Norris, 2016, p. 7).

Nationalist opposition to trade and globalization mostly comes from the American right. Most recently, nationalist opponents of globalization achieved signal victories with Donald Trump's election and the subsequent initiation of a multi-front trade war (Hafner-Burton, Narang and Rathbun, 2019). Trump mobilized anti-globalization voters by expanding the playbook developed in the populist campaigns of Ronald Reagan and Patrick Buchanan (Irwin, 2017, chs. 12-13). It is important to note, however, that the periodic moments of economic nationalism from the Republican Party are the exception to the rule. The party has generally supported trade owing to its close connections to big business and internationalists supportive of an American-led world order.

While Trump's role in activating voters and redefining the Republican party's coalition is relatively clear, the role of explicitly populist nationalist interest groups opposed to trade and globalization is not. Coverage of such groups has been limited in both academic scholarship and the press. The apparent lack of activity by nationalist interest groups may be a perfectly logical result of the 'popular' nature of populism (which relies more on parties and politicians), or might be due to the only recent resurgence of populist nationalist themes (which went dormant in US trade politics after the NAFTA/WTO debates). We also highlight that some groups that might, in theory, employ populist nationalist rhetoric, like labor unions, have not been found to do so in the extant literature on their trade activities. Instead they have emphasized the protectionist and progressive motives described below (Lechner, 2016; Hafner-Burton, Mosley and Galantucci, 2019; Raess, Dür and Sari, 2018, eg). We thus are not optimistic *a priori* about finding significant mobilization of populist anti-globalist economic groups. But we keep an open mind as we collect and analyze our data, and use our investigation of non-business groups' opposition to trade to investigate the extent of nationalist opposition to trade among American interest groups.

What would we see if popular nationalist motives were a driving force among politically active interest groups? We develop a set of four observable implications concerning *membership*, *issues of interest*, *texts*, and the *participation of unions* among anti-trade coalitions [see Figure 1].[8] First, if anti-trade coalitions are driven by nationalism, members will come from self-identified right-wing groups or groups with explicitly nationalist or xenophobic agendas. Second, nationalist opponents

[8] Not all of the implications of the competing theories differ across all theories. For example, both populists and protectionists oppose unilateral liberalization with developing countries. However, because progressives support such programs, this theoretical implication helps us distinguish progressive from non-progressive opposition.

Table 1: Implications of competing theories of anti-globalization interest group mobilization

| | **Theory of non-business interest group opposition to trade**: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Empirical implication** | **Populist nationalism** | **Protectionism** | **Progressivism** |
| *Membership*: types of groups that compose coalitions | Economic nationalist groups allied to right-wing, chauvinist, anti-immigrant, or culturally conservative groups. | Labor unions and locals (possibly allied to anti-trade producer groups). | Left-wing anti-globalization groups allied to progressive, environmental, human rights, left-religious, identity groups. |
| *Issues of interest*: variation in coalition mobilization across issues. | Opposition is uniform across trade agreements, or strongest for big multilateral agreements or unilateral liberalization. | Strong opposition to broadest or most economically impactful trade agreements. No support for unilateral liberalization. | Support for unilateral or pro-development programs. Fiercest opposition to countries raising progressive concerns (e.g. on environment or labor rights). |
| *Texts*: topical content of letters/policy statements | Self-reliance/economic independence; patriotic or xenophobic themes; sovereign independence; opposition to international cooperation. | Jobs, job loss and wages; offshoring and outsourcing; deindustrialization and economic harms; consequent non-economic harms. | Human/labor rights; environmental concerns; corporate or elite power; inequality and economic justice. |
| *Participation of unions*: variation across unions and agreements in joining coalitions. | Union participation is not driven by partner features, but by extent of right-wing nationalist views among members. | Unions participate more when facing import-competition and threats from offshoring especially if work is routinized or blue collar. | Unions more active when partner countries have poor labor rights or environmental records, especially unions with concerns on these issues. |

of trade should be particularly opposed to unilateral or unequal forms of liberalization where market access in the United States is not reciprocated in the partner market. Nationalist opponents of trade might oppose trade agreements more generally, as infringements on sovereignty. Third, the textual content of their opposition to trade should focus on national self-reliance; American identity or superiority; the importance of sovereign independence; and the limited value of international cooperation. Finally, participation among unions will not be driven by trade *per se* but by the extent of right-wing or nationalist political ideology among union leaders or membership.

## 1.2 Labor-based protectionism and the left

Protectionism among workers or unions is a second potential driver of non-business interest group mobilization. This 'labor-based protectionism' is founded on workers' or labor unions' demands for relief from the negative effects of foreign competition. These effects may include downward wage pressures, lost jobs, factory closures, and broader impacts on communities and industries. Of course, not all global competition is from foreigners: formerly domestic firms that have moved offshore particularly excite opposition to globalization (Owen, 2017; Margalit, 2011).

Two key issues arise in the study of labor-based protectionism, both of which bear on our research question. First, protectionist motives may be described in terms of fairness or rights, making it hard to distinguish protectionism from progressivism. For example, opposition to trade may be justified in terms of unfair foreign wages, mistreatment of workers, weak environmental standards, or illegal trade practices, rather than in terms of foreign competitors' comparative advantage or legitimate differences in productivity. Labor unions have employed concerns about human and labor rights to moderate or stymie liberalization (Hafner-Burton, 2011, pgs. 57-59), and demand stronger human rights and environmental protections when wage pressures are highest (Lechner, 2016; Raess, Dür and Sari, 2018). Demands on human and labor rights may also reflect broader concerns over a 'race to the bottom' in labor standards with unfavorable competitive implications (Hafner-Burton, Mosley and Galantucci, 2019, p. 1260-61). At the same time, labor's concerns with social standards may also reflect sincerely held other-regarding values (e.g. worker solidarity) and not protectionism (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Ahlquist, Clayton and Levi, 2014). We return to this issue of motivations in the next section, and for now highlight that a 'protectionist' account of labor's preferences emphasizes self-regarding evaluation of trade's direct consequences on domestic workers. In this account, and regardless of what they say, unions and workers should be most active in opposing trade where import competition and job loss are most threatening.

A second axis of debate around 'labor-based protectionism' concerns which types of workers will oppose trade. The simplest approach is a 'mobile factors' model focusing on disputes between white collar and blue collar workers. Because the US has white collar workers in relative abundance, blue collar workers, who are more likely to be unionized, are expected to oppose trade (Scheve and Slaughter, 2001). The leading alternative is the 'specific factors' model: workers of all types in

comparative advantage industries will support trade while workers of all types in comparative disadvantage industries will oppose trade. While these models differ on trade cleavages, they both predict that workers/unions in import-competing industries will be more opposed to trade, though that is only 'on average' in the mobile factors model.

Recent work suggests that labor's material preferences over trade may be even more highly articulated. First, exposure to offshoring varies substantially across professions and types of jobs, and has no one-to-one relationship with skill level. Owen and Johnston (2017) argues that workers in the US performing routinized work that is offshorable are particularly susceptible to job loss. Second, firm-level drivers of workers' preferences are operative (Dancygier and Walter, 2015). Workers employed in larger export-competitive firms may be less threatened by trade, for example, although those same large firms are more likely to offshore production. These multi-faceted effects of trade policy may inform the debate described above on the relative importance of material/egoistic and non-material/sociotropic preferences, because the latter may thrive where policy effects are complex. But again, the protectionist account is squarely focused on the material/egoistic side, particularly the issues of industrial competitiveness and offshorability.

Workers and unions typically turn to parties of the left to represent their views on trade. For example, the US Democratic Party has long-running links to the labor movement, and unions are core constituencies and sources of organizational strength for the party. As a consequence, labor-centered protectionism represents one important strand of anti-trade ideology on the political left. This generality requires two qualifications. First, centrist or internationalist Democrats have forcefully supported trade. Second, some Republican politicians have used anti-trade appeals to secure union votes. Reagan Democrats and the Trump presidential campaign are examples. Thus, not all union opposition to trade is 'left-wing' although the links between unions and the Democratic party are vastly stronger and more enduring than with the Republican party.

Scholarship on workers, unions, and trade comprise a 'protectionist' theory of non-business opposition to trade. If interest group trade opposition fits this labor-protectionist model, several patterns in the mobilization of interest group coalitions should arise. First, opposition to trade should be concentrated among workers and unions. Second, protectionist opponents of trade should be particularly opposed to liberalization with large and competitive economies, and should also oppose unilateral or unequal forms of liberalization, especially with developing countries with large endowments of (unskilled) labor. Third, the substantive content of opposition to trade should feature concerns about import competition, offshoring, job loss, and wages, though concerns over human rights or the environment may be mentioned to hide protectionist motives. Finally, opposition to trade should be concentrated among unions representing particular types of workers (e.g. performing routine jobs in offshorable industries) or workers in import-competing industries.

## 1.3 Progressive opposition to free trade

Progressive opposition to trade arises from a commitment to reform the global economy in line with left-wing, progressive values. These are commitments to economic justice and reduced economic inequality domestically and globally; to human rights, in particular labor rights and the protection of disempowered minority groups; to reduce the political and economic power of large corporations and other capitalists; and, to the protection of the environment. While one approach has been to view these commitments as a stalking horse for protectionism, contemporary scholarship emphasizes the sincere belief of left-wing voters and groups in these goals (Ehrlich, 2018; Bastiaens and Postnikov, 2020). In this way, preferences over trade are truly multidimensional (Ehrlich, 2010).

Progressive opposition to particular trade agreements or globalization *as currently practiced* is not opposition to all trade. Instead, progressives argue that globalization has been designed to further the interests of elite corporations. Trade liberalization (and changes in the regulation of foreign investment and capital movements) have empowered large corporations at the expense of SMEs and family farms, and so contributed to the concentration of economic and political power. Globalization has also allowed MNCs to avoid proper taxation, and contributed to other regulatory arbitrage. Trade may also reinforce global inequality, particularly where trade rules are written to deny access of developing markets to the developed world (as in agriculture) or to strengthen the property rights and legal-institutional advantages of large corporations.

Progressives highlight the benefits of 'fair trade' (Ehrlich, 2018). This includes efforts to grant special access to the developed world markets through the Generalized System of Preferences or a re-designed WTO approach focused on development. Fair trade also takes a micro-level approach, focused on cultivating smaller or family-owned businesses in the developing world or on the proper remuneration of developing world workers and entrepreneurs.

Progressives have also focused on the use of trade policy to further human rights. Workers' rights are a particular focus: labor unions and human rights groups have played key roles in demanding protections for foreign workers in trade agreements.[9] Efforts to tie preferential trade agreements to human rights are also encouraged by progressive groups (Hafner-Burton, 2005). Progressive voters and organizations also make protection of the environment a core feature of their calls for a revised globalization. The environmental movement has sought stronger environmental standards in trade agreements (Morin, Dür and Lechner, 2018; Bastiaens and Postnikov, 2020).

Progressive opposition to free trade is a feature of the American left, particularly the progressive wing of the Democratic party and a variety of much smaller alternatives like the Green Party. Their anti-globalism is well-represented in the recent presidential campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, but also in the earlier campaigns of Ralph Nader and Howard Dean. Anti-capitalist/anti-globalization mass movements received significant attention in the US and global

[9] Hafner-Burton (2011); Raess, Dür and Sari (2018); Lechner (2016).

debates on the creation of the WTO. One particularly interesting question is what role labor unions might play in 'progressive opposition'. Union opposition to trade motivated by protectionism is not 'progressive' as we have defined it. However, one strand of literature has argued that unions' concerns about human rights, the environment, and development reflect deeply held values (Ahlquist and Levi, 2013; Ahlquist, Clayton and Levi, 2014). Where trade's effects are heterogeneous or many-layered – an apt description of contemporary globalization – unions and their members may weigh non-material or sociotropic considerations more strongly. Thus it is important to critically assess whether unions are an integral part of, or just a strategic and occasional ally of, the groups that oppose globalization from a progressive perspective.

What empirical implications follow if opposition to globalization among interest groups is driven by progressive motives? First, progressive organizations, rights groups, environmental NGOs, and left-wing identity groups should predominate in coalitions. Second, progressive opponents of free trade will be more concerned about a partner country's performance in human rights or the environment than about their economic size or competitiveness. They also might favor lopsided or unilateral forms of liberalization with developing countries designed to pursue a development agenda. Third, the textual content of opposition to globalization should feature discussion of economic inequality, human and labor rights, the environment, and other concerns with social/economic justice. Finally, opposition from 'progressive' unions should not be driven by import competition or offshorability. Instead, unions will activate over trade liberalization with countries with weak social standards regardless of their competitiveness.

To sum up, we have identified three alternative motivations for non-business interest group mobilization against contemporary globalization. Populism, labor-protectionism, and progressivism generate differing observable implications across four areas if they are the drivers of mobilization. These areas are: the composition of public coalitions; variation in mobilization across issues; the topical content of coalitions' texts; and on the activation of labor unions across coalitions. We focus on the first three of these in the next section. We then evaluate our fourth implication, on variation in labor union's participation in anti-trade activity, in section 3.

# 2 Trade Opposition among American Interest Groups

Our empirical investigation begins with collection of a new dataset on membership of interest groups in coalitions opposed to US trade agreements or globalization, more generally.[10] As described above, permanent and issue-specific coalitions are commonplace among pro-trade producers in American trade politics. Anti-trade producers have not come close to matching these efforts. The state of play among non-business groups is, by contrast, not well understood. To resolve this, we set out to collect

[10]We describe these coalitions, and the data cleaning and coding, in greater detail in Appendix A.

information on any public anti-trade coalition from 2000-present with significant membership of non-business groups, including issue organizations, political groups, charities, religious groups, labor unions, and other membership organizations. In so doing, we uncovered a rich vein of coalitional activity among these groups which has not been previously described.

At least one coalition of groups formed to oppose the following trade agreements: the Singapore and Chile FTAs; the Peru-US agreement; the (proposed) Free Trade Agreement of the Americas; AUSFTA; CAFTA-DR; the Oman FTA; the Colombia, Panama, and South Korea FTAs; the Trans-Pacific Partnership; the USMCA; and the proposed Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).[11] We found no organized opposition to the trade agreements with Jordan, Morocco, and Bahrain. Looking beyond trade agreements, we found no coalitions opposing major trade initiatives like Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for any state, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and the Generalized System of Preferences. However, we did find organized campaigns against Trade Promotion Authority in 2002, 2007, and 2015.

In addition to issue-focused coalitions, we found four permanent national anti-globalization organizations that are constituted as coalitions: the Citizens' Trade Campaign (CTC), Coalition for a Prosperous America, Alliance for Responsible Trade, and the Blue Green Alliance. The CTC is particularly important in anti-globalization advocacy and mobilization. It organized several of the largest *ad hoc* coalitions opposed to trade agreements that appear in our data. We also include an item in our data for groups that appeared in the CTC's state organizations committee, which is separate from its ordinary membership. Finally, we also uncovered 16 regional, state, or municipal anti-trade or fair trade coalitions which we incorporate as separate items in our data.[12]

The campaign against the Trans-Pacific Partnership illustrates our data. The largest organization opposed to the agreement was a coalition formed by the Citizens' Trade Campaign. This coalition included over 1500 unions, NGOs, charities, religious organizations, and political groups. The coalition sent letters to members of Congress on the likely impacts of TPP on US jobs; the environment; food safety; access to medicines; human and political rights; and the power of investors. In addition to this main coalition, we found several other much smaller coalitions (e.g. of environmental groups, agriculture and food groups, and public health groups). Overall, 2519 separate groups joined coalitions opposing the agreement.

Our resulting data set is structured as a cross-section of groups, where each row represents an individual group, e.g. Iron Workers Local 397 or the Sierra Club. We then have 38 columns which record if the group joined a coalition opposing one of the issues noted above or any of the permanent groups. We assigned by hand one or several of 21 group type labels to our groups depending on

[11]We also include a 2018 coalition which issued a letter identifying priorities for a renegotiated NAFTA as a separate item.

[12]We describe contrasts between permanent and ad hoc coalitions below and in Appendix B.

Table 2: **Most-active opponents of trade agreements in non-business coalitions**

| Group | Num. | Type(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Friends of the Earth | 16 | environment |
| AFL-CIO | 15 | union |
| Communications Workers of America (CWA) | | union |
| International Brotherhood of Teamsters | | union |
| Sierra Club | | environment |
| United Methodist Church General Board | | religious |
| United Steelworkers | | union |
| Global Exchange | 14 | humanrights |
| National Family Farm Coalition | | farming |
| Public Citizen | | progressive;antiglob |
| Western Organization of Resource Councils | 13 | progressive;environment |
| Inst. for Agriculture and Trade Policy | 10 | farming;foodsys |
| Int. Assoc. of Machinists and Aerospace Workers | | union |
| National Farmers Union | | farming |
| Progressive Democrats of America | | progressive |
| Texas Fair Trade Coalition | | fairtrade |
| UNITE HERE | | union |
| Alliance for Democracy | 9 | progressive |
| Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) | | progressive |
| Citizens Trade Campaign | | antiglob |
| Defenders of Wildlife | | environment |
| Family Farm Defenders (WI) | | farming |
| International Brotherhood of Boilermakers | | union |
| International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers | | union |
| Jobs With Justice | | laborrights;religious |
| United Students Against Sweatshops | | laborrights |
| Witness for Peace | | forpolicy |

*Notes*: Groups ranked according to number of trade agreements and TPA authorizations for which they joined anti-trade coalitions plus one if they ever joined the Citizens Trade Campaign.

the main focus of their interests and political activities. We evaluated these interests by accessing the groups' website or other online materials, such as Facebook pages or public documents. These labels – 'union' for labor unions; 'environmental' for groups focused on the environment – allow us to summarize the types of groups that have joined coalitions. The complete set of labels is reported in Table 3; some groups with mixed interests have two or more labels.[13]

To illustrate this data, Table 2 lists the 27 most active groups. We rank these groups by how many of the 17 trade agreements or fast track/TPA votes on which they joined coalitions, along with whether they ever joined the CTC. The most active group is Friends of the Earth, an environmental organization joined by the Sierra Club in the top 10. Other highly active groups include labor unions (Communications Workers of America, AFL-CIO, Teamsters, and United Steelworkers); religious groups (the United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society); human rights NGOs (Global Exchange); and general progressive groups (Public Citizen).

[13]Where we provide counts of groups by group type, we 'divide' up groups that have multiple labels to form the counts. For example, if a group was coded as both a religious group and a labor rights group, this group would contribute 1/2 each to the counts for Religious and Labor rights groups in Table **??**. Counts are rounded.

Table 3: **Group types across anti-trade coalitions**

| | Number of groups |
|---|---|
| **Labor organizations**: | 37.6% / 42.6% |
| Union locals and branches | 2086 |
| National labor unions | 132 |
| **Identity groups**: | 19.5% / 19.6% |
| Progressive | 546 |
| Religious | 304 |
| Ethnocultural | 229 |
| Women's rights | 72 |
| **Environment**: | 16.8% / 16.5% |
| Environmental | 715 |
| Farming | 168 |
| Food systems | 108 |
| **Rights groups**: | 6.2% / 7.2 % |
| Labor rights | 190 |
| Human rights | 174 |
| **Domestic development**: | 5.7% / 5.0% |
| Community development | 212 |
| Public health | 85 |
| Consumer | 39 |
| **Foreign policy**: | 3.6% / 4.5% |
| Foreign policy | 125 |
| Anti-globalization | 47 |
| Foreign development | 41 |
| **Foreign development**: | 2.0% / 3.0% |
| Fair trade | 76 |
| Foreign development | 41 |
| Company | 348 |
| Trade associations | 42 |
| Other | 70 |
| Total | 5906 |

*Notes*: Percentage figures are percentage that ever joined any anti-trade coalition (on left); and, percentage weighted by the number of issues/permanent coalitions on which active (on right). The (rounded) counts include fractional distribution of groups with multiple types.

Table 3 summarizes our data in its entirety. 5906 unique groups joined coalitions opposing US trade agreements and globalization, or in support of fair trade policies, from 2000 to the present. Because some oppose multiple issues or join multiple organizations, our data represent 9650 separate instances of anti-trade activity. These numbers show the great scope of groups that have opposed globalization in the US. We also see significant breadth across issues, for example, 2519 groups opposed the TPP and 1038 joined the coalition calling for NAFTA reform. 831, 371, 384, 369, and 421 opposed the Colombia, Korea, CAFTA-DR, Panama, and Oman agreements respectively. Less than 100 joined each of the remaining coalitions opposed to trade agreements. The three TPA coalitions from 2002, 2007, and 2015 had 9, 725, and 2229 members respectively. These numbers reflect a general ramping up of organized activity over the time period we examine.

## 2.1 Composition of coalitions by group types

We begin our comparison of the three competing explanations for interest group mobilization against trade and globalization by looking at the types of groups that compose our coalitions. To do so, we examine the broad categories of groups described in Table 3. Unions are the most common group that has opposed trade representing 37.6% of all groups in our data. Much of this size is driven by local chapters of a small set of large, politically active national unions. 877 chapters of the United Steelworkers joined coalitions, for example.

Second most active are groups representing political, religious, ethnic, and gender identity-based interests. These are 19.5% of the data. For example, the subcategory of broadly progressive-oriented political groups includes includes chapters of Occupy Wall Street; Americans for Democratic Action; Democratic Socialists of America; and the Green Party. Interestingly, we see a lot of activity from left or progressive-oriented religious groups, for example, Methodist, Presbyterian and Unitarian congregations or national organizations. Groups representing specific ethnicities or immigrant communities are also highly active, particularly on trade agreements with relevant home countries.

Third largest are groups from the environmental movement. (We include groups interested in farming and food systems under this umbrella, too.) Environmental NGOs, which are the second most active subcategory, play a fundamental role in populating and driving the interests of these coalitions as we show below. Rounding out the groups participating, we see significant action in human and labor rights (6.2% of total); domestic development and public health (5.7% of total); and groups with interests in foreign policy and foreign development (3.6% and 2%, respectively).

Looking over these groups, and considering the important role of the Citizens Trade Campaign and other left-wing national organizations, the dominance of left-oriented groups is evident. In particular, we see an alliance of fundamentally progressive groups from across the issue spectrum, aligned with a subset of national labor unions a few of whom bulk out coalitions with vast numbers of local chapters.[14]

It is also worth highlighting what we did not find: organized right-wing, populist, or nationalist opposition to globalization. None of the coalitions that we uncovered in our investigation were primarily organized or composed of groups representing the American right.[15] We did locate a few

[14]In the online appendix (Table B1), we examine whether there are significant differences between issue-specific coalitions and permanent coalitions. We find that there are no fundamental differences in their memberships with strong implications for our competing theories. For example, unions are roughly equally represented (and populist groups equally unrepresented) in both types. We do, however, see a pattern wherein permanent coalitions attract more groups that are narrowly focused on globalization issues (groups in the anti-globalization; labor rights; foreign development; and fair trade movements). Environmental and human rights groups are less prevalent among permanent coalitions.

[15]The Coalition for a Prosperous America (CPA) perhaps comes closest. It has been loudly supportive of the China trade war and has some member groups espousing nationalist opposition to trade. But ultimately, we concluded that CPA is mainly driven by businesses seeking protectionism. Its position statements are

organizations within our data with a nationalist slant, e.g., the American Jobs Alliance or the Made in America Movement. However, these groups were only a small subset of the anti-globalization groups in our data, were often explicitly non-partisan, and lack the resources and recognition of our most active left-wing groups.

## 2.2 Variation in mobilization across issues

Our second category of empirical implications from Table 1 considers variation in the level of organization across issues. A first observation is that trade agreements with developing countries (at least among the partners) seem to spark greater activity than agreements with developed countries only. The TPP, NAFTA/USMCA, and the Colombia FTA particularly stick out, while the Australia FTA provoked a very small coalition and the South Korea FTA generated a half-hearted effort compared with the Colombia agreement. A second observation is that plenty of trade agreements with small markets generated significant mobilization: Colombia, but also Oman and CAFTA-DR. The role of concerns about labor and environmental standards, and the effects of IP provisions and exposure to competition with the US were clear in these cases. That being said the Jordan, Bahrain and Morocco agreements generated no coalitions.

Another striking feature of the data is the issues that generate no coalitional activity. No coalition arose to fight the African Growth and Opportunity Act or Generalized System of Preferences, two legislative efforts that involve the US unilaterally reducing tariffs with developing country partners. We also do not find any significant coalitional activity to oppose extension of Permanent Normal Trade Relations to major developing economies, like China and Vietnam (though some unions and human rights groups strenuously opposed PNTR for China on their own). Overall, then, the broad variation in activation across issues appears consistent with a progressive theory of opposition to free trade.

## 2.3 Textual evidence on the interests of the coalitions

We now consider our third empirical implication, concerning the textual content of the letters or statements which coalitions generally release. We found 41 such letters across the ad hoc coalitions contained in our data. In order to examine the content of these letters, we coded each paragraph

narrowly focused on trade issues, particularly unfair trade practices and restoring American manufacturing. Its membership is overwhelmingly businesses with clear protectionist interests, like steel and machine tools companies. We also reexamined the websites of the few other viable business coalitions opposed to trade (that are not included in our data because they lack significant numbers of non-business groups). We similarly found that these groups are focused on narrowly economic and protectionist rationales for opposing US trade policy and trade agreements; and that their memberships make sense in light of US comparative disadvantage in intermediate manufacturing. We therefore do not see anti-trade business groups as loci of populist opposition to trade, despite a small number of nationalist groups in their ranks.

Table 4: **Topical content of anti-globalization coalition letters**

| | % pars | Rank | | % pars | Rank |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Environment, farming and food**: 20.8% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Environment | 16.6 | 1 | SPS/food safety | 1.6 | 16 |
| Farmers | 2.1 | 12 | Food systems | 0.5 | 37 |
| **Trade agreement creation and enforcement**: 16.1% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Process (Fast Track/input) | 13.1 | 2 | Benchmark | 1.4 | 18 |
| Enforcement | 1.6 | 17 | | | |
| **Corporate power**: 14.3% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Dispute/ISDS | 6.3 | 3 | Corporate power | 3.6 | 8 |
| IP rules | 4.5 | 5 | | | |
| **Economic justice**: 12.0% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Foreign development | 3.8 | 7 | Small businesses | 0.8 | 30 |
| Immigration | 2.5 | 11 | Community dev. | 0.7 | 32 |
| Poverty | 2.1 | 14 | Economic growth | 0.5 | 35 |
| Inequality | 1.3 | 20 | Downstream industries | 0.4 | 40 |
| **Human rights**: 9.2% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Labor rights | 5.1 | 4 | Racial justice | 0.9 | 28 |
| Human rights | 1.7 | 15 | Women's rights | 0.4 | 39 |
| Indigenous peoples | 1.2 | 21 | | | |
| **Sovereignty concerns**: 8.6% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Regulatory sovereignty | 3.2 | 9 | Tax havens | 0.8 | 29 |
| Finance/banking | 1.4 | 19 | Capital controls | 0.5 | 36 |
| Govt procurement | 1.2 | 22 | Harmonization | 0.4 | 38 |
| Privatization | 1.1 | 24 | | | |
| **Competition and protectionism**: 7.4% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Jobs | 2.7 | 10 | Import competition | 1.1 | 26 |
| Foreign investment | 1.2 | 23 | Offshoring | 0.8 | 31 |
| Wages/pay | 1.1 | 25 | Currency manipulation | 0.5 | 34 |
| **Public health**: 5.9% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Pharma/Medicines | 3.8 | 6 | Public health | 2.1 | 13 |
| **Other topics**: 1.6% of paragraphs | | | | | |
| Consumers | 1.0 | 27 | Security implications | 0.6 | 33 |

*Notes*: Paragraphs are assigned one or more of 69 substantive topics (multiple topics are allocated proportionally). '% of pars' indicates the percentage of all paragraphs focused on a given topic; rank indicates the ranking of that topic among all topics. Only the top 40 most-discussed topics are provided (which are 97% of all substantive discussion).

of the letters with at least one of 76 possible topical tags [See Appendix A3]. These tags include mentions of substantive issues (e.g. import competition, jobs, the environment, human rights, tax havens) but also non-substantive material like group introductions or general statements of positions which we do not include in our analysis of topical content. To facilitate presentation, we bunch the 69 substantive tags we examine into nine thematic categories.

The results from this investigation are presented in Table 4 which lists the 40 most common tags. Most discussed is the environment, and related concerns about farms, SPS measures, and food systems. Procedural concerns around Trade Promotion Authority and the process of collecting input from stakeholders were also widespread. The next most common issues are progressive cri-

tiques around corporate power, economic justice, human and labor rights, and national sovereignty (in regulatory affairs particularly). Strikingly, only in 7th place do we see discussion of foreign competition, which is most heavily focused on concern about jobs and wages, especially the threat of offshoring. That being said, we acknowledge that discussion of environmental or labor standards may reflect protectionist motives. We find the overwhelming focus of these letters on progressive concerns to be striking but not surprising given the membership of the groups described above.

Surveying our evidence on groups opposed to trade in the US, we advance the following conclusions. Collective mobilization of non-business groups to oppose trade is widespread and significant over the past two decades. This opposition has primarily come from unions and other groups with a leftward bias in their interests or that are traditional Democratic or progressive constituencies. These groups have shown considerable organizational skill in opposing international trade, forming over 40 ad hoc coalitions and 20 permanent alliances.

The general orientation of the groups and the textual evidence show they are primarily concerned with what we have termed progressive opposition to globalization rather than opposition rooted in protectionist fears of import competition. Right-wing nationalist concerns are almost totally absent among the members of coalitions, and no coalition has formed with a specifically nationalist orientation. It is striking the extent to which these groups have not mobilized on unilateral US liberalizations (GSP, AGOA), and were extremely mobilized on liberalization with countries that are no major trade threat but which provoked concerns on labor rights (Colombia, Oman) and the environment (CAFTA-DR). We therefore refer in short to the set of organized anti-globalization coalitions among non-business groups as 'free trade's progressive opposition', though this summary glosses over important protectionist inclinations which we now examine.

# 3 Unions: Protectionism, Progressivism, or Both?

Our findings on the importance of progressive motives in special interest groups' anti-free trade activity are very striking. Someone who considered only the first three empirical implications of our theory might be convinced that progressive motives are utterly dominant in generating successful public mobilization against US trade policy. The only reservation would be the following: why are so many unions involved in these coalitions? For this reason, it is imperative that we consider the fourth empirical implication of our competing theories from Table 1. Are the unions joining these coalitions truly motivated by the progressive themes highlighted in the coalitions' communications? If so, then the case for a 'progressive' theory of interest group opposition to free trade is overwhelming. If, however unions are driven by protectionist motives, and alliances with progressive groups are tactical, arising from shared ends (e.g. defeating US trade agreements) but not shared values, then our conclusions would be more nuanced. In that case, we might argue that

interest group opposition to trade is fundamentally a progressive-protectionist alliance.

To answer this question, we collect information on unions (e.g. do they represent offshorable workers, and do they support strong environmental/labor standards in trade?) and on US trade partners (e.g. are they competitive or uncompetitive, and do they have strong or weak social standards?). We then examine variation in union participation in coalitions that were opposed to US free trade agreements, looking to see if unions' decisions on joining coalitions are driven by concerns over trade competition and jobs, or by concerns around labor and environmental standards. We conduct this analysis on two samples: all unions that have ever joined a coalition; and, a smaller panel of national union HQs which allows us investigate politically active and dormant unions from a well-defined sample. We find that unions are driven by both progressive and protectionist motives.

## 3.1 Politically active unions' participation in coalitions

Labor unions differ strikingly in their participation in anti-trade agreement coalitions. For example, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union joined coalitions opposing the free trade agreement with Colombia but not the TPP. To understand what drives this variation, we use our coalitions data to construct a panel of all unions – whether national or local – which ever joined one of our anti-trade agreement coalitions. For each union, we record whether it joined a coalition on each of the trade agreements in our data. Our outcome is therefore dichotomous and the unit-of-analysis is the union-agreement. We call this variable *Joined opposing coalition*$_{ua}$ where $u$ represents a politically active union and $a$ a particular trade agreement. The data has 28769 observations (2213 unions or locals $\times$ 13 trade agreements), and *Joined opposing coalition*$_{ua} = 1$ in just under 8% of observations.[16]

Our first explanatory variable is an indicator for whether a union's industries are net-importing or net-exporting in relation to the trade agreement's partner(s). To construct this measure, called *Net-importing*$_{ua}$, we use data on bilateral imports and exports of all of the union's 4-digit industries with all of the partners in a trade agreement.[17] A union is net-importing if the sum of its industries' imports from all agreement partners exceed exports. The use of industry trade data restricts this analysis to the goods-producing industries only, represented as 'G' in the 'Sample' row of the tables.

Following Owen and Johnston (2017), we also construct union-level measures of *Offshorability*$_u$

[16]Because union branches and locals might be seen as an undue inflation of our sample size, we reexamine all models using national union HQs only. These models are in Table B2.

[17]Trade data are from https://relatedparty.ftd.census.gov/ and are summed over all years between 2005 and 2014. Codings of union industries were done by the authors. Labor federations or coalitions, like the AFL-CIO, cover a broad array of industries and are not given individual industry codes. We call these 'peak' unions. Some unions cover a broad array of industries but also have clear current or historical industrial relationships, for example, the United Steelworkers or United Auto Workers. For these unions, we employ codings of their main industries to match them to industry-level data.

and *Routinization*$_u$. Owen and Johnston (2017) argue that workers' opposition to trade is an interactive function of these variables: workers performing non-routine tasks are relatively abundant in the US compared to the rest of the world, and benefit from trade even more as jobs are 'onshored' to the US. Workers performing routine tasks are vulnerable to trade competition, and doubly so if their jobs are easy to offshore. The original measures of these concepts from Acemoglu and Autor (2011) are occupation-level; we map them to the finest level of NAICS industry possible (usually 6-, 4- or 3-digit) using industry occupation matrices supplied by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. We then average these industry measures across all industries covered by a union's membership. Note that these measures do not vary across trade partners and are not available for 'peak' unions representing a broad array of industries. We therefore test the impact of these union features on unions serving clearly delimited goods and services industries ('G+S' in the tables).

We also include in our models measures of the trade partners' labor rights practices and environmental standards. Our measure of country labor rights practices (*Partner labor rights*$_a$) comes from Mosley (2010). We use the composite labor rights measure ('LaborRightsPos'), which is greater as labor rights improve. Our measure of environmental performance comes from Esty and Porter (2005), from which we use the 'env_rank' variable, which is reversed so higher values indicate better environmental regulation.[18] Both variables are normalized to lie on a unit interval with the minimum country score at 0 and the maximum at 1. In cases of trade agreements with multiple partners, we use the lowest score among the trade partners. Because these variables are agreement partner features, we can analyze goods, services, and 'peak' unions covering broad arrays of industries ('G+S+P'). We estimate models with these two country-level features separately due to our small sample of agreements, and address increasing the identifying variation in the next section. To ease interpretation, particularly in light of the many dummy variables and variables normalized to fall on the unit interval, we employ linear probability models in all specifications.

The results from our models are presented in Table 5. We find that import competition is a correlate of unions' participation in anti-trade agreement coalitions. A given goods industry union in our data is around 8% more likely to oppose an agreement when it is net-importing relative to the agreement partner(s). The results on offshorability and routinization are somewhat inconsistent across specifications, but the most common pattern in the results is that offshorability and routinization are jointly related to opposition to trade from unions, as argued in Owen and Johnston (2017). Overall, we conclude that unions have been more likely to join anti-trade agreement coalitions where competition from foreign workers and producers is stronger.

At the same time, we also see that progressive motives are operative. Participation in coalitions occurs at lower rates when the agreement partner's labor rights are strong or when environmental standards are high. The effects of these variables are large. For example, moving *Partner labor*

[18]This measure is not available for Oman.

Table 5: **Protectionist and Progressive Motives among Politically Active Unions**

| | Joined opposing coalition$_{ua}$ | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Panel of national and local unions that joined opposing coalitions: | | | | | | |
| Net-importing | 0.08*** | 0.08*** | | | | |
| | (0.00) | (0.00) | | | | |
| Offshorability | 0.78*** | 0.56* | −0.24*** | −0.25*** | | |
| | (0.20) | (0.21) | (0.06) | (0.06) | | |
| Routinization | 0.47*** | 0.29+ | −0.07+ | −0.07+ | | |
| | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.03) | (0.03) | | |
| Offshor. · Rout. | −1.31*** | −0.92** | 0.36*** | 0.39*** | | |
| | (0.31) | (0.32) | (0.09) | (0.09) | | |
| Partner labor rights | −0.16*** | | −0.16*** | | −0.16*** | |
| | (0.01) | | (0.01) | | (0.01) | |
| Partner env. standards | | −0.11*** | | −0.10*** | | −0.10*** |
| | | (0.01) | | (0.01) | | (0.01) |
| Intercept | −0.16+ | −0.08 | 0.19*** | 0.17*** | 0.14*** | 0.12*** |
| | (0.08) | (0.08) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.00) | (0.00) |
| N | 15223 | 14052 | 25051 | 23124 | 28769 | 26556 |
| Sample | G | G | G+S | G+S | G+S+P | G+S+P |

*Notes*: $^{***}p < 0.001, ^{**}p < 0.01, ^{*}p < 0.05$. Outcome variable is *Joined opposing coalition*$_{ua}$ measuring whether union $u$ joined a coalition opposing trade agreement $a$. All models are linear probability models using OLS. G = unions representing (at least some) goods industries; S = unions representing service industries only; P = 'peak' unions representing a broad array of industries. National and local unions joining coalitions are any union HQ, branch, local, or committee that joined at least one of the opposing coalitions in our data.

*rights* from its highest to its lowest value in the data (1 to 0) increases the predicted chance of participating in an anti-trade agreement coalition by 16%. While it is possible that these associations might arise from fears about lower regulatory standards, these relationships hold conditional on net-importingness of the union relative to that trade partner. They are also identical in unreported models using continuous trade measures. We also examined models interacting partner labor or environmental standards with net-importingness of the industry [reported in Appendix B]. We found no consistent evidence net-importing industries are especially vocal about opposing agreements when labor rights are poor, for example.

## 3.2 Extension to all national unions

In this section we address important extensions of the above analysis. First, we include unions who have never joined an anti-trade coalition. Their non-participation may reveal further information about union attitudes on trade. Second, we collect data on additional union-level features that might drive political engagement but which are only available for national unions in the US. Third, we incorporate inter-union variation in self-expressed progressive motives in order to expand our identifying variation for testing a progressive theory of union anti-trade activity.

Accomplishing these goals required construction of an alternative panel of national unions. To do so, we employed data provided by the Office of Labor-Management and Standards at their Online

Public Disclosure Room portal.[19] We queried the database for all union national headquarters active after 2011, and then restricted that sample to national unions with either 100 recorded members or $10000 in receipts. This left 138 unions as the foundation for our panel which we then matched to data on coalition memberships across trade agreements. Note that we have unions incorporated into our sample who have never politically engaged on trade issues. The OLMS-OPDR data also provide us with important union features which might predict political activity: total union receipts, number of members, and whether the union has a PAC.

We then used the websites of these unions to understand their specific interests in trade issues. Only 38 of the 138 national unions had any mention of trade issues on their websites. 19 of these mentioned labor rights issues as a specific concern around globalization. 15 of these mentioned environmental concerns in the context of their positions on trade.[20] We use these web mentions to construct two variables: *Website labor rights*$_u$ is a dichotomous variable equal to 1 if the union mentioned labor rights concerns around globalization. *Website environment*$_u$ is defined analogously. We then ask the following question: are the labor unions that express an interest in labor rights issues more likely to oppose trade agreements with partners that have worse labor rights records? If so, then we argue that these statements are likely sincere expressions of concern about these issues, particularly conditional on import competition and susceptibility to automation and offshoring.

The results from this analysis are contained in Table 6. As in our previous results, we find that net-importingness is a positive correlate of participation in anti-trade agreement coalitions. Offshorability and routinization also jointly predict opposition to trade. We again find that worse partner labor rights or environmental standards are linked to a greater chance of opposition. Moreover, the effects of weakened standards are particularly strong for unions that have expressed concerns about labor rights or environmental standards on their websites. In other words, particular American unions are self-describing labor rights and the environment as motivating concerns, and those unions are especially likely to oppose trade agreements with partners with poor records on those dimensions. These patterns hold when controlling for important features of unions' exposure to trade competition. The simplest interpretation of these findings is that some labor unions have genuine progressive concerns around labor rights and the environment which drive, in part, their opposition to US trade agreements.

## 3.3 Textual evidence on unions

To further investigate the motives of America's national unions in participating in trade politics, we do a detailed investigation of textual evidence of their trade positions. We scoured the 138 national unions' webpages focused on pages labeled 'issues', 'public policy', 'campaigns', 'activism', and so

[19] https://olms.dol-esa.gov/olpdr/.

[20] 30 of 38 mentioned concerns about jobs or wages and 14 mentioned offshoring specifically.

Table 6: **Protectionist and Progressive Motives among Panel of National Unions**

| | Joined opposing coalition$_{ua}$ | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Panel of national unions: | | | | | | |
| Net-importing | 0.08* | 0.10** | | | | |
| | (0.03) | (0.03) | | | | |
| Offshorability | −0.48 | −0.46 | −0.23* | −0.27* | | |
| | (0.48) | (0.52) | (0.10) | (0.11) | | |
| Routinization | −0.02 | 0.12 | −0.27*** | −0.23*** | | |
| | (0.32) | (0.33) | (0.06) | (0.06) | | |
| Offshor. · Rout. | 1.00 | 0.92 | 0.76*** | 0.85*** | | |
| | (0.87) | (0.93) | (0.18) | (0.19) | | |
| Website Labor Rights | 0.42*** | | 0.28*** | | 0.32*** | |
| | (0.07) | | (0.03) | | (0.03) | |
| Partner labor rights | −0.05 | | −0.08** | | −0.07** | |
| | (0.06) | | (0.02) | | (0.02) | |
| Web LR · Partner LR | −0.60*** | | −0.25*** | | −0.25*** | |
| | (0.12) | | (0.06) | | (0.06) | |
| Web Environment | | 0.32*** | | 0.21*** | | 0.24*** |
| | | (0.09) | | (0.04) | | (0.03) |
| Partner env. standards | | −0.06 | | −0.05 | | −0.05+ |
| | | (0.06) | | (0.03) | | (0.02) |
| Web Env · Partner env. | | −0.37+ | | −0.18* | | −0.16* |
| | | (0.17) | | (0.07) | | (0.07) |
| ln Receipts | 0.02* | 0.02* | 0.01** | 0.01** | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.00) | (0.00) | (0.00) | (0.00) |
| ln Members | 0.03* | 0.04** | 0.01 | 0.01* | 0.01*** | 0.01*** |
| | (0.01) | (0.01) | (0.00) | (0.00) | (0.00) | (0.00) |
| Has PAC | −0.12+ | −0.13 | 0.05* | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.01 |
| | (0.06) | (0.07) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) | (0.02) |
| Intercept | −0.45** | −0.54** | −0.07 | −0.12* | −0.11** | −0.13*** |
| | (0.16) | (0.16) | (0.04) | (0.04) | (0.03) | (0.03) |
| N | 377 | 348 | 1430 | 1320 | 1794 | 1656 |
| Industries | G | G | G+S | G+S | G+S+P | G+S+P |

*Notes*: $^{***}p < 0.001, ^{**}p < 0.01, ^{*}p < 0.05$. Outcome variable is *Joined opposing coalition*$_{ua}$. All models are linear probability models using OLS. G = unions representing (at least some) goods industries; S = unions representing service industries only; P = 'peak' unions representing a broad array of industries. National unions are national union HQs based in the US with at least 100 members or $10000 in receipts, and operating after 2011.

on for general positions about international trade and globalization issues. If we were unable to find positions on trade generally, we searched for statements on one of three recent issues: the TPP, the USMCA, and the China trade war. As noted above, we found statements from 38 unions. We then topically coded the documents in exactly the same manner that we did the coalition letters examined in Table 4.

In Table B3, we find that concerns about foreign competition are preeminent in labor unions' discussions of trade issues, particularly a heavy focus on jobs, offshoring, and concerns about pay. Perhaps unsurprisingly, labor rights and concerns about corporate power are also major topics. We see significant secondary discussions of issues around economic justice, sovereignty, the environment, human rights, and public health that are consistent with progressive critiques of globalization.

We advance the following summary conclusions. Unions' decisions about which coalitions to join

reflect a mix of both protectionist and progressive motives. On one hand, they are more active in opposing agreements when their industry is at a comparative disadvantage, and unions whose members are more vulnerable to offshoring are more active, too. Unions' web statements on trade and globalization highlight most prominently their concerns about jobs, offshoring, and foreign competition. However, unions are also active in opposing agreements with countries with poor labor and environmental standards even conditional on the competitiveness of those partners. Unions have been very active in opposing trade issues where foreign competition is not a plausible concern but progressive concerns about human and labor rights are, and they describe these concerns in some detail on their websites. They have not formed coalitions to oppose unilateral pro-development forms of liberalization. Perhaps most importantly, they have closely allied themselves with progressive groups in order to oppose trade and they have allowed a progressive message to take center stage in those coalitions' communications.

# 4 Conclusion

We conclude by summarizing our main contributions, describing their connections with ongoing debates in the literature, and discussing some limitations to our approach. We then follow up with tentative answers to two remaining questions – why have progressives been so successful, and does it matter? – highlighting these as areas for future research.

We began by emphasizing the importance of public coalitions in contemporary trade politics, while identifying a gap in the literature: the causes and extent of these coalitions are not clear among non-business groups. We developed three competing theories of the genesis of these coalitions: populism, protectionism among workers, and progressive calls for 'fair trade'. We found that populism is largely not a driver of anti-trade coalitional activity among interest groups. While recent literature has highlighted the role of populism among voters, it is striking that there is no corresponding development of right-wing interest groups articulating nationalist themes around trade. Given the importance of interest groups in highlighting issues and holding politicians accountable, this raises doubts to us about the durability of the 'populist backlash' against globalization. A movement heavily centered on a single politician and voters' interest in trade policy is on shaky foundations. It will be interesting to see if right-wing interest groups or the Republican party take up the populist mantle (as some members of Congress appear wont to do).

Rather than reflecting right-wing populism, the coalitions opposed to US trade policies and globalization generally have progressive features. They are populated with a wide variety of left-wing groups, and activate to oppose trade agreements with uncompetitive countries (while supporting or not opposing programs of unilateral liberalization to facilitate development). They heavily emphasize progressive themes in their letters and other public commentary. It is striking how little

jobs and wages are discussed by these coalitions given their heavy union membership. These observations lead to our second main conclusion: non-business opponents of globalization pushing a progressive program around labor and human rights, foreign development and sovereignty, and the environment, are highly organized in the US and represent the dominant strand of public activism against globalization. We call these groups "free trade's progressive opposition". Our work complements scholarship on demands for fair trade among voters (Ehrlich, 2010).

Finally, the strong emphasis on progressive themes in these coalitions raises questions about labor unions, progressives' stalwart allies. The recent literature on unions and trade has often emphasized that unions support labor rights, human rights, and environmental protections for tactical reasons, whether it is to disguise overt protection directed against a specific trade agreement partner or to avert a general collapse in global standards (Lechner, 2016; Raess, Dür and Sari, 2018; Hafner-Burton, 2011). Alternatively, some have argued that unions have sincerely held beliefs in progressive causes (Ahlquist, Clayton and Levi, 2014). Our findings support both accounts. On one hand, unions *are* more active in joining coalitions to oppose agreements with competitive trade partners (and if their workers are more vulnerable to offshoring). On the other hand, unions seem to be strongly motivated to fight against agreements with countries with weak records on the environment or labor rights. This includes prominent examples where protectionist motives are implausible. They mention these concerns on their websites, and they are happy to cede territory on protectionist concerns to progressive notions in coalitions' letters. The most sensible interpretation of these facts is that some US labor unions have abiding and genuine interests in fairer trade, including trade that benefits foreign workers and foreign development.

We highlight several weaknesses in our approach and some opportunities for further research. First, we focus mainly on public coalitions. These coalitions are only one facet of interest group activity in US trade politics, and so it would be useful to consider how our findings travel to other domains such as lobbying, notice & comment, and advisory committees. Second, our study of variation in activity across agreements is limited by the number of trade agreements. Scholars should seek out sites for trade politics where more trade partners are under consideration to test theories of interest groups in trade. Third, data on non-union interest groups is generally quite limited, and in many ways hard to conceptualize because the features and interests of non-union groups are so disparate. For this reasons, we have been forced to reserve our regression-based tests for unions only, and our analysis of non-union groups is more descriptive in nature. Fourth, an interesting set of questions arise from our investigation about the differences between issue-specific and permanent coalitions. We described some of these differences in Appendix B, but highlight this question about organizational *duration* as an interesting site for future research.

Finally, we turn to two unanswered questions: why are progressives better organized, and does it matter? We hope that our tentative answers will spark interest in future research.

We see two advantage for progressives which relate to classic themes in the study of collective

action. First, the spine of free trade's progressive opposition is a group of very large union and non-union organizations with huge budgets. As seen in Table 2, they repeatedly turn out to organize collective opposition to liberalization. They are then supplemented by a vast array of smaller groups whose participation is less reliable and whose political resources are fewer. Thus, progressive groups have benefitted from heterogeneities in size within their ranks as smaller organizations can rely on bigger organizations. Second, contemporary globalization is multifaceted and complex in its effects and preference intensity is generally low on trade issues. This is (counterintuitively) advantageous because the major progressive groups that have opposed free trade have built themselves in issue areas with higher preference intensity (the environment, human rights, identity politics) and/or arise in spheres where selective benefits prevail (labor, religion). Particular elements of the expanded trade agenda then lead to their involvement in the complex politics of trade.

Populist nationalism doesn't have these advantages. It lacks a well-organized set of highly resourced groups focused on anti-globalism, and it also does not benefit from well-organized interest groups from other domains in right-wing politics who might dip into anti-trade politics. Socially conservative groups, gun rights groups, and right-wing churches have no stake in trade politics, while right-wing business groups, anti-tax groups, libertarians, think tanks, and general conservative groups are pro-trade. Ultimately, economic nationalism is a mass movement, so populism probably needs a party. The long-run durability of right-wing economic nationalism probably depends more on the coalitional politics within the Republican Party, an uneasy fit for economic populists given Republicans' historic links to corporate America and laissez faire economic ideologies.

Have progressives impacted policy? We examine a proximate outcome in the appendix, where we match our data on coalition participation to data on lobbying and PAC contributions. We find that groups that have joined our anti-trade coalitions account for more than 60% of all lobbying on trade by non-business groups, and 46.4% of all non-business group PAC contributions. These facts suggest that politicians are motivated to listen to progressives and unions when they speak on trade issues, and are actively responding to them and working with them.

Anecdotal evidence of progressives' influence on trade policy are also available. First, trade's progressive opponents and allied unions have cultivated representation in the Congress and the Democratic Party. The House of Representatives, in particular, has a significant share of members that vote in a progressive fashion on trade issues. Second, free trade's progressive opponents have shaped the trade agenda of the Congress and the Democratic Party. Progressives successfully fought to make labor standards and the environment principle trade negotiating objective in the Trade Act of 2002. The TRADE Act and "Better Deal" economic blueprint are more recent efforts by Democrats to reshape trade policymaking. Finally, progressive concerns have had a tangible impact on the content of US trade agreements. The "May 10th agreement" led to fully enforceable labor and environmental provisions in US trade agreements of the Obama era. Modernizing these provisions was a focus of the TPP and USMCA negotiations. Progressives have successfully fought

against extensions of IP or dispute settlement rights for corporations. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that anti-trade progressives have had fewer outright victories than America's pro-globalization firms and industries. Their record of organizational success and ongoing, but modest, political impact suggests that they will continue to work as the most vital ideological component among America's anti-trade interest group coalitions.

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