

## Book Review

**Alexandra Guisinger (2017) *American Opinion on Trade: Preferences without Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780190651831. 328 pp. Hardcover US\$99; softcover US\$39.95**

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What do people think about international trade? What is their opinion about trade agreements? Why do some people support trade liberalisation? Why do others support protectionism? Alexandra Guisinger's book *American Opinion on Trade: Preferences without Politics* reports a meticulous research that addresses these questions. With a focus on the United States after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the author detects new predictors of citizens' opinions on trade, and analyses the causes and consequences of people's preferences regarding trade policy. In particular, she finds support for overlooked variables that determine trade policy preferences, namely race and gender.

With sophisticated empirical methods, and utilising both surveys and experiments, Guisinger, an associate professor at Temple University, finds support for her theoretical model of citizens' preferences on trade. This model suggests that opinions on trade policy depend on the impacts of trading activities at different levels: individual, communal and national. She starts from the observation that globalisation and the related structural changes in the world economy have made it difficult for individuals to discern where goods and services are produced and assembled. Guisinger then argues that people's perceptions about the impacts of trade are based on their beliefs and considerations of trade's costs and benefits for the community and the country, rather than on economic self-interest.

The book main argument, that citizens' trade opinions are influenced by factors at both individual and communal level, is informed by a combination of insights from the literature on international political economy (IPE) and on comparative political economy (CPE). The IPE literature is focused on the individual level and look mostly at the factors that influence one's support for trade protection or liberalisation. The works in this field dissect individual economic circumstances and their impacts on individual opinions emphasising class interests, individual connections to specific industries and economic self-interest. The CPE literature looks instead at community characteristics highlighting that support for public policy is often determined by the demographic composition of communities and regions. Observing that the latter results have not yet been explored in relation to trade policy opinion, Guisinger builds a theoretical model explaining the determinants of individuals' opinion about trade policy which includes the findings of both IPE and CPE literature.

The book is composed of nine chapters. In the introduction, Guisinger explains the relevance of her work and the contribution of the book. Chapter Two describes the changing landscape of trade, characterised by increasing complexity and a shift of the geographic

distribution of specific industries within the United States and around the globe. In this chapter, the author explores how information shapes political behaviour and demonstrates that there is an information deficit on trade, due to economic and political uncertainties, which consequently led to a diminished political salience. In Chapter Three, the author investigates the connection between trade and employment. Globalisation has led to a disconnect between the two and subsequently brings citizens to include different factors in their belief formation – aspects such as the perceptions of the impacts of trading activities on the community in which individuals live. It is in this chapter that Guisinger develops her novel theoretical model explaining trade preferences. This model assumes that preferences regarding public policy are based on one's expectations of costs and benefits for her/himself, for the people around them, and for the country (p. 55). In Chapter Four, the author finds that gender and race are significant aspects influencing trade preferences, in that women and racialised minority groups express more protectionist sentiments. This finding reflects structural biases within the economy and the different economic vulnerabilities. Chapter Five examines the effects of meso-level variables on trade opinions. In this chapter, the author finds that residential turnover and the share of import-competing industries are important predictors of trade preferences. Higher mobility levels and lower concentrations of manufacturing industries lead to higher levels of uncertainty, less support for protectionism and a generally lower interest in trade policy. The meso-level effects of community compositions are analysed in Chapter Six. Here, the author finds that, in communities with a higher degree of ethnic diversity, a racial component appears to influence public opinion on trade. In this case, the higher the diversity of a community's population, the more white citizens preferred protectionist policies, because they believed that trade liberalisation was related to redistributive welfare mechanisms that benefitted mostly non-white US citizens. In Chapter Seven, the author explores additional sources of trade preferences, with an emphasis on the effects of mass media and political campaigns. Starting from the puzzle that working-class people are generally more sceptical about trade liberalisation than elites, Guisinger analyses television news coverage and political campaign ads. In the last two decades, both national media and political campaigns have focused conspicuously on negative aspects of trade such as job losses and other employment-related risks. In other words, the framing of trade in public discourse is negative. Chapter Eight examines whether more positive messages would lead to shifting public opinion. With three different experiments, Guisinger shows that positive information would indeed lead to higher support for trade liberalisation. However, this increased support would not suffice to shift public opinion towards a majority, a reason why politicians tend not to embrace positive messages on trade.

The book is driven by a dissatisfaction with existing theories about public opinion and trade. Crucially, public opinion scholars have long found that sociotropic concerns – that is, apprehensions about the benefits and risks of others in relation to public policies, and variables such as race and gender – are important determinants for individuals' preferences. These findings have been overlooked in the political economy of trade so far. This book brings this unexplored area to the forefront of the research agenda on public opinion and trade policy. With very innovative and advanced methods, the author shows the role of gender, race and community diversity in shaping preferences. In addition to offering new predictors of individuals' preferences regarding trade protection and their potential for political mobilisation, the combination of observational data from different surveys with experiments is also to be praised.

The results of the book are of course being tested by the most recent developments in trade policy, with the tit-for-tat instauration of tariffs by the major economies worldwide. In the book it has been observed that trade is a relatively irrelevant political theme in the United States post-

1994. The increased salience in the 2016 presidential elections partly challenges the book's findings and underlying logics. The author could not have predicted these developments, as she acknowledges in the conclusion: "One of the hazards of academic publishing is the long delay between a manuscript being finished and appearing in print" (p. 258). Nonetheless, she critically re-assesses her theory in light of the 2016 US election in the conclusion. On the other hand, the book highlights that protectionism has always found support among certain segments of the population, even in the heydays of trade liberalisation during the 1990s and early 2000s. As the author excellently illustrates, protectionist sentiments are linked to the ethnic and racial composition of the US population. This important finding demonstrates the success of exploiting trade-related economic anxieties with identity politics, as it was apparent in 2016.

Trade is considered as having a minimal political influence. The author argues that this is because voting cleavages around trade and based on gender and race are not politically organised. There are no special interests structured around these cleavages. The subtitle of the book, "Preferences without Politics", derives from this argument and the fact that political parties are not differentiated on trade (p. 29). With the latest political developments around the world, in which economic anxieties are exploited by politicians as a way to mobilise targeted ethnic groups, this is perhaps changing, and further research will have to assess whether Guisinger's results will continue to hold.

The question at stake here is that of the changing positioning of the United States in the twenty-first century in relation to the rest of the world. In this respect, the title of the book is already revealing of these developments. The title refers to "American opinion on trade" while the book addresses preferences of individuals and groups in the United States. The rhetorical use of the synecdoche to denote the continent America for one of its parts, the United States, is widespread. Thus, this use of the term America in the title highlights a non-recognition of the shifting position of the United States in the world system.

The book is a great addition to the literature on public opinion and trade policy. It is also a useful addition to the most recent developments on foreign policy analysis and the role of public opinion in shaping international relations (Kertzer and Zeitzoff, 2017), which goes against the idea that international relations are just elite-driven. The book also reflects the growing importance of political psychology in international relations (Kertzer and Tingley, 2018). In this respect as well as methodologically, the book is very much state-of-the-art, and it is recommended for scholars and policy-makers interested in penetrating the detailed nuances of preferences about trade policy.

## REFERENCES

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