



**FROM THE EDITORS**

This issue of *The Political Economist* inaugurates a new editorial team based at Michigan State University. We intended to begin our editorship with an issue devoted to the political implications of China’s rise as an economic power. The issue delves into that topic, though not quite on the terms we had expected. In a way that mirrors all else over the past 3 months, our issue on China became, at least in part, an issue on COVID-19.

COVID-19’s partial consumption of our theme is an apt metaphor for its relationship to geopolitics. Nothing fully escapes it. It demands that new questions be asked and that old questions be reappraised in its light. That is especially true as it relates to China. Not only because of the pandemic’s origin in the city of Wuhan, China, but because the political and economic response to the pandemic threatens the global supply chains and trade that have underpinned China’s rise.

We therefore find ourselves reading the three essays in this issue for answers to questions we never actually asked our authors to address. Do our pre-COVID frameworks for understanding the politics of China’s rise survive into the post-COVID world? Are the enabling political conditions of China’s rise stable enough to survive the pandemic? What role will COVID play in the November elections, and how will it affect US-China relations beyond them?

Perhaps unintentionally, the three essays point to a common theme: Fear. Not fear of anything in particular, but fear in a more general sense. Fear as a social backdrop against which the US – China relationship will evolve, and as a force with its own political implications.

Mutz provides an image of fear-based politics that threatens the international institutions and economic globalization that have, to this point, fueled China’s ascent. Mutz’s data suggests Americans have long been skeptical of China. So much so that the current administration’s hostility to China is better understood as an acquiescence to public opinion than an attempt to lead it. And if American policy vis-a-vis China now more closely follows American public opinion, we can expect a more fearful citizenry to push political leadership farther in its skepticism of China and its role in the world. That is surely heightened to the extent that Americans affix their COVID-related fears to China, but it may not be critical that they do. Mutz notes that fear’s political implications “need not be rational” and often lead to inward orientations and resistance to international cooperation, regardless of the fear’s source.

Ballard-Rosa’s essay considers fear-based politics as a byproduct of the US-China trade relationship and does so in ways that may point to the politics of a post-COVID future. Specifically, he discusses the link between rising Chinese import competition and authoritarian tendencies amongst those displaced or threatened by it. He argues that economic self-interest and sociocultural values jointly explain the rise of authoritarian politics and recent support for rightwing populism. As the material conditions of the in-group decline, they prioritize social conformity and the authoritarian politics that champion it. In that sense, the political consequences of the “China Shock” may be a preview of coming politics if current labor market conditions persist.

Kim and Cheong point to the scale of what is currently unknown about COVID-19, and to a myriad of things to be fearful of. Their essay conveys the frantic questions and search for answers that most of us have been engaged in for the past 3 months.

The common point emerging from these essays is that we should consider how the fearfulness of our present will shape the way China and its political challenges are perceived and how they will translate politically. Considering that, it becomes important to draw lessons not only from obviously similar historical episodes such as the 1918 flu, but from the broader spectrum of events in which the people driving politics were scared, and equipped, as they are today, with more questions than answers.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE		
<b>FROM THE EDITORS.....1</b> CRISTINA BODEA, ANDREW KERNER & SHAHRYAR MINHAS	<b>SECTION ORGANIZATION.....2</b>	<b>FEATURE ESSAY.....7</b> CAMERON BALLARD-ROSA
	<b>FEATURE ESSAY .....2</b> DIANA C. MUTZ	<b>FEATURE ESSAY.....12</b> SOO YEON KIM & DARREN CHEONG
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## FEATURE ESSAY

### The China Threat in the American Mind

Diana C. Mutz, University of Pennsylvania

The US relationship with China has loomed large in political discourse over the past five years. China remained prominent in the news during the 2016 presidential campaign and throughout all four years of Trump's presidency. For the most part, Trump is known for his hardline stances against China. He has used extreme language to describe US-China relations, arguing that, "We can't continue to allow China to rape our country, and that's what they're doing. It's the greatest theft in the history of the world."<sup>1</sup> Further, he has presented himself as the solution to making sure the US dominates this relationship: "We don't have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don't have them. When was the last time anybody saw us beating, let's say, China in a trade deal? They kill us. I beat China all the time. All the time."<sup>2</sup>

Given the obvious tensions in US-China relations, it is natural to wonder whether public opinion toward China will play a role in the 2020 presidential election. Using panel data tracking changes in support for the two major party candidates from 2012 to 2016, I find evidence that both trade policy and Americans' attitudes toward the China threat play significant roles in increasing support for Trump during the 2016 election.<sup>3</sup> The supporters of Obama from 2012 who changed their vote choice to Trump in 2016 are those whose positions on trade were better reflected by the new, more extreme, Republican positions on trade and China widely promoted by Donald Trump.

Many suggest the same may happen in the 2020 general election this coming November. In this brief essay, I draw on additional panel data to speculate about just how likely or unlikely it is attitudes toward China will play a role in deciding the coming presidential election. To do so, I rely on panel studies of American attitudes toward China, all drawn from representative national probability samples.<sup>4</sup>

The standard item asked about China in these surveys asks,

*These days there are different views about China. Some people see China as more of an opportunity for new markets and economic investment, while others see it as a threat to our jobs and security. Still others are somewhere in between. Which view is closer to your own?*

Respondents choose among three possible answers, including 1) China is an opportunity for new markets and investment, 2) China is a threat to U.S. jobs and security, or 3) Somewhere in between. In most waves of the survey, those who chose one of the first two options are then asked a follow-up question about whether they held their stated position strongly or only somewhat. This series of questions results in a 5-point scale of attitudes toward China, ranging from those who felt strongly that China was a threat to US jobs and security, to those who felt strongly that China represented an economic opportunity for the US.

1 <https://www.politico.com/blogs/2016-gop-primary-live-updates-and-results/2016/05/trump-china-rape-america-222689>

2 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/06/16/full-text-donald-trump-announces-a-presidential-bid/>

3 Mutz, Diana C. 2018. Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 115 (19) E4330-E4339.

4 Data were collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago for 2016 through 2020 using address-based sampling. Earlier data were collected by GfK, Ltd.

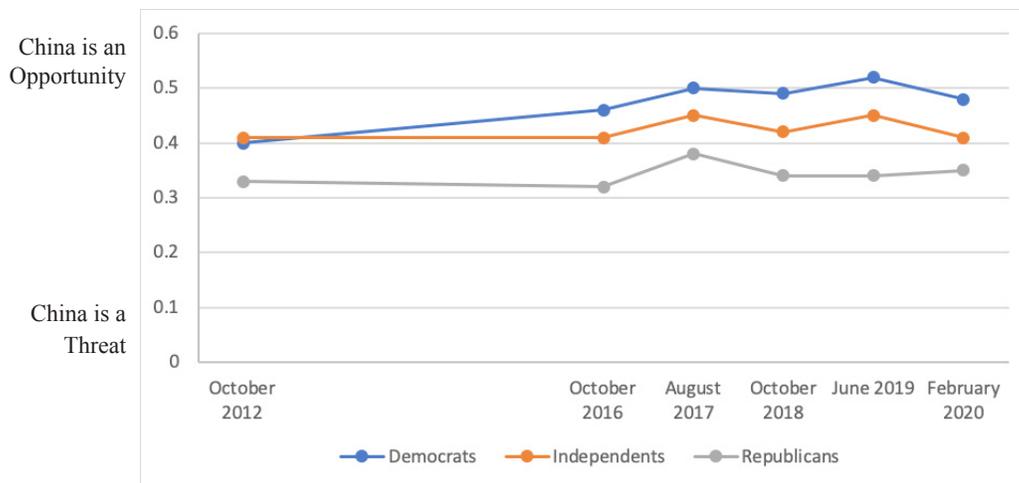
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Mutz Feature Essay...continued from page 2

## Trends in Mass Opinion toward China

Figure 1 illustrates the trend over time in attitudes toward China as a threat versus an opportunity, broken down by whether the respondent is a self-identified Republican, Democrat or Independent. The first thing to note is that on average, most of the time, regardless of political party, the tendency is toward perceiving China as more of a threat than as an opportunity. Only once, in 2019, and only among Democrats, has the mean level of support exceeded the level representing the midpoint of “Somewhere in between.”

**Figure 1. Change over Time in Mass Opinion Toward China by Party Identification, 2016-2020**



**Note:** Data from 2016 forward is from representative national probability samples collected by NORC/Amerispeak for the Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics. 2012 data is from GfK, Inc. Responses have been rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Surveys occurred before the November election in each year noted.

Despite this skew toward generally negative views of China, overall, these three lines suggest a slight upward trend toward more favorable attitudes toward China among all three groups from 2012 through 2017. Perhaps surprisingly, given the tone of Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign, attitudes toward China improved across the board between 2016 and 2017 among all partisan groups.

In 2018 and 2020, these trends flatten out and stabilize. Nonetheless, what is perhaps most notable and surprising about Figure 1 is that despite all of the extreme rhetoric and the US trade war with China, opinions have not changed a great deal, and they have certainly not changed in a direction suggesting Americans find China *more* threatening than they did before Trump was elected to office.

The trend toward slightly more favorable views of China is especially evident among Democrats. One might expect Trump as president to have led Republicans toward greater hostility to China once elected, but there is no evidence of opinion leadership in the direction of increasingly negative views.<sup>5</sup> What is notable in Figure 1 between 2012 and 2016 is increasing polarization, with a widening gap between how Republicans and Democrats report their views over time that continues thereafter. Republicans and Democrats are currently further apart on this issue, as they are on many issues, but mass polarization alone does not suggest that China will make a good wedge issue during campaigns. When people’s partisanship is largely redundant with their issue positions, issues provide little motivation to change the party they will support for the White House. It is when there are issues that are not already neatly aligned with party identification that they have the potential to swing votes.

If China were to play a role in changing people’s preferences this fall, several conditions would need to be met. Most importantly, the public would need to see distinct differences between where the two parties stand on China. In Figure 2, I illustrate the results of asking Americans where the Republican and Democratic parties stand on China, using the same scale on which they reported their own personal opinions, immediately before the fall election in each case. What is clear in Figure 2 is that the public at large has views of China that now more closely align with the Republican than the Democratic Party. This is the change that Trump both engineered and benefitted from in the lead up to the 2016 election. Before 2016, the public

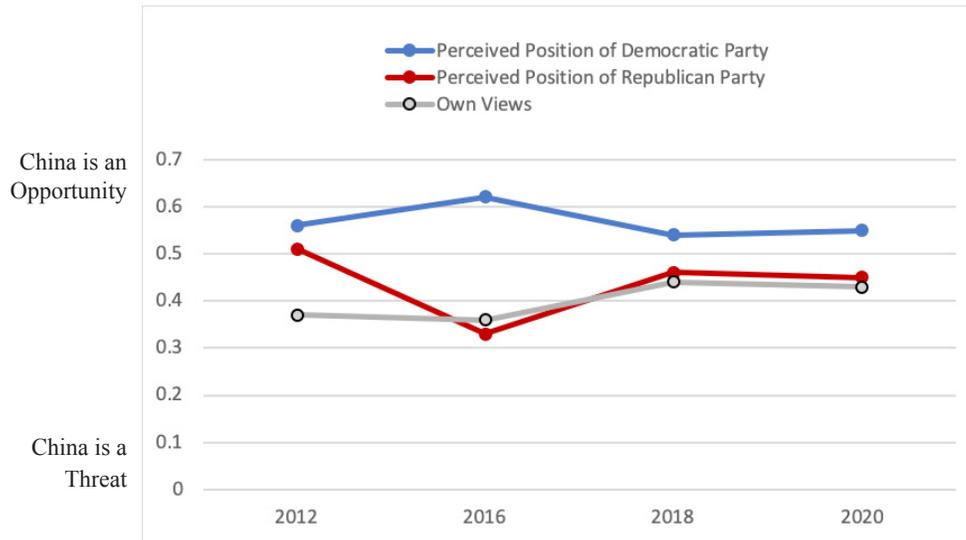
<sup>5</sup> Martin, Elizabeth and Diana Mutz, 2019. Failures of Opinion Leadership in the Trump Presidency. Paper presented to the 2019 meetings of the American Political Science Association.

*continued on page 4*

Mutz Feature Essay...continued from page 3

perceived little difference between where the Republican Party stood on China, and where the Democratic Party stood. But that had changed dramatically by 2016. Trump’s strong rhetoric moved perceptions of the Republican party to a far more anti-China position, thus moving them closer to the views of average Americans.

**Figure 2. Americans' Views on China as Threat versus Opportunity, along with their Perceptions of Where the Major Parties Stand on China, 2012-2020**



**Note:** Data from 2016 forward is from representative national probability samples collected by NORC/Amerispeak for the Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics. 2012 data is from GfK, Inc. Responses have been rescaled to range from 0 to 1. Surveys occurred before the November election in each year noted.

Since 2016, this same alignment has persisted. Although neither the public’s views nor people’s perceptions of the Republican Party are quite as negative as they were immediately preceding the 2016 election, Republicans still have a clear advantage when it comes to representing the American public’s views of China as threatening to the US. The Trump campaign appears ready to capitalize on this fact. Taking a page from 2016, they already have produced advertisements emphasizing Democrats are soft on China.<sup>6</sup>

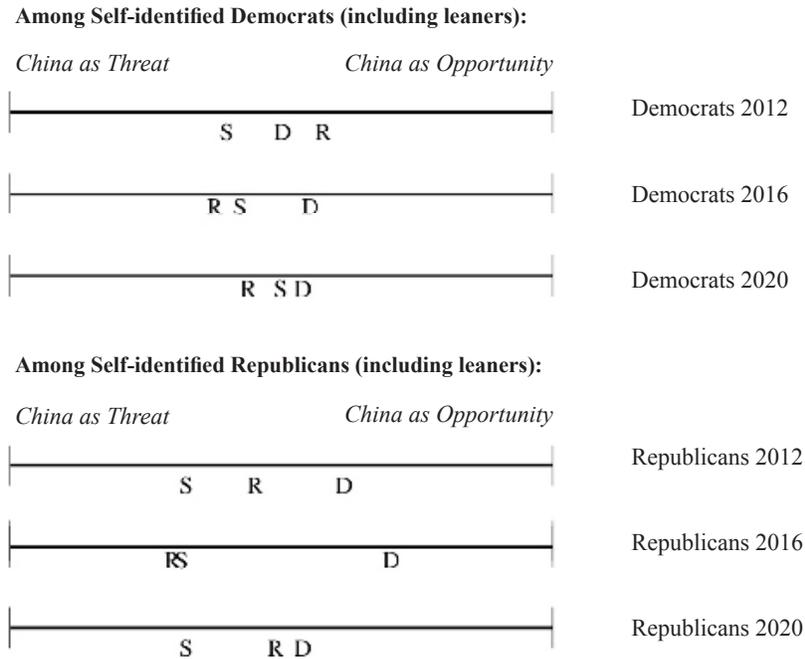
Figure 3 further breaks down these views on China among members of the public (S) and their perceptions of the two parties (R, D), broken down by the respondent’s party affiliation. Since over 90 percent of Americans vote for the candidate of their own political party come hell or highwater, single issues like China must present a stark difference between the candidates that appeals to those relatively few voters who can be persuaded to change their usual preferences. The 2012 election did not meet those conditions, despite plenty of China-bashing ads by both Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. The problem in 2012 was that neither party was seen as sufficiently anti-China. Instead, the elites of both parties were perceived to be significantly more pro-China than the public. By 2016, Trump had successfully relocated the Republican party to precisely where most Republicans were. What is interesting in Figure 3 is that Americans views on China did not change much at all. Even Republicans’ opinions remained unchanged on average. What changed by 2016 was Republicans were now seen as the China threat party, whereas Democrats were perceived as increasingly pro-China. What changed was not public opinion, but the positions of the two political parties.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, Jonathan, and Maggie Haberman. “A Key GOP Strategy: Blame China.” New York Times, 4/18/2020.

*continued on page 5*

Mutz Feature Essay...continued from page 4

**Figure 3. Issue Positions of Citizens on China (S) and their Perceptions of the Major Political Parties' Positions on China (R, D), 2012-2020**



**Note:** S represents the average citizen opinion on China on a 0 to 1 scale. R represents their perceptions of where the Republican Party stands on this same scale. D represents their perception of where the Democratic Party stands.

To what extent does the China threat offer potential as a voter changer in 2020? Based on Figure 3, it appears we have reverted to the 2012 pattern of perceived party positions, when China was not a political issue that effectively changed votes.<sup>7</sup> Members of the public, whether Republicans or Democrats, are once again more anti-China than they perceive the political parties to be. This reversion to seeing Trump as less anti-China is interesting in light of events during the Trump administration. Because Trump was attempting to sign a trade deal with China in the months leading up to the explosion of the coronavirus, his rhetoric has been toned down a great deal. Clearly the Republican party is no longer perceived as quite rabidly anti-China as they were in 2016. In fact, they are only weakly distinguishable from Democrats as of February 2020. If this were the public as of October 2020, I would doubt China would play an important role in persuading voters.

However, there is an elephant in the room. The survey data from 2020 precedes widespread awareness of coronavirus in the US. Because our survey project was simultaneously designed to study change over time in Democrats' primary preferences, we released the sample in two randomly assigned halves, one beginning the day after the New Hampshire primary on February 11, and the second on the day after Super Tuesday on March 3. Given that respondents were randomly assigned, the two halves should report roughly the same views if public opinion is not changing on this issue. Not surprisingly, there was a significant change over time even within these few weeks. Most notably, the Republican party increasingly came to be perceived as the anti-China party as Trump began to call COVID-19 an "Asian disease" and actively blamed China for both initiating and spreading the disease. Individual opinions on China had not yet changed significantly by the end of our survey, although they appeared to be heading in that general direction. As in 2016, public opinions were not shifting so much as were perceptions of where the Republican party stands on this issue. But some more recent surveys from April 2020 suggest that opinions of China are also becoming more negative as a result.

Obviously COVID-19 was not what most people were thinking about when answering our China threat question. But what we know from past research is that human beings seldom carefully compartmentalize threats. The desire to hunker down when threatened, either mentally or physically, has unexpectedly little to do with obtaining actual protection from a specific threat. Likewise, the tendency to turn inward in times of crisis and to focus on domestic concerns has little to do with addressing a

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 11 in Mutz, forthcoming. *Winners and Losers: The Psychology of Attitudes Toward Trade* (Princeton University Press).

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

*Mutz Feature Essay...continued from page 5*

specific crisis. For example, during The Great Recession, Americans became systematically less supportive of international trade even though they did not believe trade played any role in causing the recession.<sup>8</sup> Further, those who believed trade was good for the economy declined in support for international trade just as much as those who thought it was bad for the economy, despite the fact that this was a time when the economy could surely have used a boost. Likewise, horror movies have been found to induce greater financial risk aversion by temporarily increasing fear.<sup>9</sup>

These examples illustrate the fact that reactions to the COVID-19 threat or the economic fallout from it need not be rational. If candidates take their cues from the public, this will probably result in an increasingly domestically-focused election. The more people turn inward, the more they will want candidates to address issues at home. On the other hand, a virus is obviously a highly unusual form of threat, one for which we have little previous research experience that tells us what to expect.

To the extent COVID-19 comes to be viewed as a foreign threat, it has implications not only for further retrenchment of globalization, but also for domestic American relationships. Multiple experimental studies now suggest China-bashing ads such as those aired by Romney and Obama in 2012 damage not only white Americans' views of China and the Chinese, but also their views of Americans of Asian descent more generally.<sup>10</sup> Should the China threat become a battleground issue for presidential candidates this fall, it will further fan the flames of racial intolerance.

<sup>8</sup> Mansfield, E., Mutz, D., & Brackbill, D. 2019. Effects of the Great Recession on American Attitudes Toward Trade. *British Journal of Political Science* 49: 37–58.

<sup>9</sup> See Levine, Adam Seth. 2015. *American Insecurity: Why Our Economic Fears Lead to Political Inaction* (Princeton University Press) or Guiso, Luigi, Paola Sapienza, and Luigi Zingales. 2013. Time Varying Risk Aversion. Working Paper No. 19284. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>10</sup> One such study appears in Silver, Laura Ruth. 2016. *China in the Media: Effects on American Opinion, 2016* (Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania). Another is featured in Chapter 10 of my forthcoming book.



## FEATURE ESSAY

### Trade Shocks, Authoritarian Values, and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism

Cameron Ballard-Rosa, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Even prior to the current shock of the novel coronavirus, the past several years have repeatedly blindsided academics and pundits alike. A growing series of shocking electoral outcomes include the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, the election of a complete political outsider to the presidency of the United States, and the rise of a multitude of previously fringe right-wing populists from the AfD in Germany to Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. While each case has its particularities, observers have pointed to similarities across the multitude of countries where groups once considered largely outside the ambit of regular politics have suddenly surged to popular success. At the center of these accounts has been a debate about the role of two potentially competing sets of explanatory factors: economic self-interest and sociocultural values.

Proponents of the former camp argue that support for right-wing populists has arisen due to economic dissatisfaction, particularly among those “left behind by globalization.” Christine Lagarde—previously head of the IMF and current president of the European Central Bank—notes the modern era of global economic integration has generated tremendous gains for some, but, in places where these gains have not been equitably distributed, has also led to “rising anger and frustration combined with a backlash against globalization”<sup>1</sup>. This growing popular frustration is argued to have been channeled effectively by politicians campaigning against a “global elite” of “cosmopolitans” whose footloose tendencies generate questions about their loyalty to a nation’s own people.

Perhaps nowhere has the economic threat from global integration found more empirical support than in work linking the rise of China as a major exporter to significant economic dislocation for local communities competing with a surge of cheap imports. Much of this research draws on an empirical design proposed originally by Autor, Dorn & Hanson (2013 - ADH), which demonstrates that local labor markets in the US more heavily exposed to Chinese import competition experienced lowered wages and rising unemployment. These negative consequences have been extended by others to include evidence of negative public health outcomes such as suicide (Pierce & Schott 2016) as well as lowered rates of fertility and marriage among men (Autor, Dorn & Hanson 2018).

In political science, several recent studies have adopted the ADH strategy for identifying geographic exposure to Chinese imports in order to investigate the political effects of local economic decline. Within the US context, this has included findings that legislators in commuter zones more exposed to Chinese imports have been more likely to take anti-trade votes in Congress (Feigenbaum & Hall 2015), and that congressional districts more exposed to the “China shock” are more likely to elect Democrats to office, who are presumed to be more opposed to free trade (Che et al. 2016). Work by Autor and coauthors (2017) also finds that regions more exposed to import competition demonstrate more partisan polarization in the electorate. In a similar vein, employing a different empirical strategy to identify regional exposure to trade, other work has found continued evidence for anti-incumbent voting in the US in places harder hit by trade competition (Jensen, Quinn & Weymouth 2018). Outside the US, several additional studies have linked rising trade exposure to support for rightwing nationalist parties (Colantone & Stanig 2018a; Hays, Lim & Spoon 2019), as well as voting Leave in the Brexit referendum (Colantone & Stanig 2018b). Thus, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting individuals living in regional economies decimated by trade competition have indeed been more likely to vote against incumbent politicians, and, often, in favor of more radical populist challengers.

Yet, while Trump might be taken as the quintessential anti-globalist candidate, with frequent and explicit denunciation of trade and immigration, it is less clear that many other successful insurgent campaigns from the right have necessarily been against all forms of global integration. For example, while proponents of the Leave campaign in the UK were clearly opposed to the free movement of people, many British citizens who cast a vote for Brexit were nonetheless favorable towards a future for the UK that involved more, not less, trade and investment flows.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Jair Bolsonaro’s successful campaign in Brazil involved several standard free market policies, including expanding the free trade zone in Mercosur to include Asian economies as well.<sup>3</sup> And while the AfD in Germany campaigned against the TTIP in 2016, it also went out of its way to clarify in public statements that the party was not opposed to free trade itself, but rather worried about regulatory overreach in the deal.<sup>4</sup>

In noting that many of the recent successful populist campaigns have not been directly centered around policies to address the economic losers from globalization, a second body of work has emerged emphasizing instead the importance of sociocultural

1 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/11/when-history-rhymes/>

2 Ballard-Rosa, Rickard & Scheve (2018).

3 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brazil-trade/brazil-aims-to-forge-more-trade-accords-as-bolsonaro-heads-to-asia-idUSKBN1WU328>

4 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/germanys-afd-now-stresses-financial-credentials-and-ttip-opposition/>

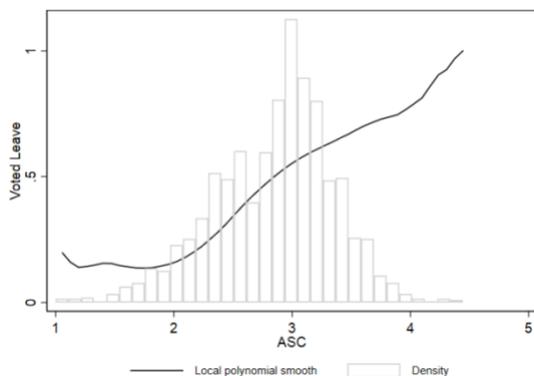
*Ballard-Rosa Feature Essay...continued from page 7*

values in explaining popular support for more extreme rightwing candidates. For example, Mutz (2018) emphasizes the role of “status threats,” rather than economic anxieties arising from global integration, as the primary driver of electoral support for Donald Trump. In particular, the rise of a multicultural society in America (along with shifting global supremacy of the US) has challenged the traditional social dominance of whites. Echoing accounts developed by Sides, Tesler & Vavreck (2019), it is this perceived loss of status within the social hierarchy that made white Americans particularly attuned to Trump’s messages of racial grievance. Similarly, Jardina (2019) highlights the growing importance of white identity as a distinct political phenomenon. While separate from racial resentment, white identifiers have been shown to be significantly more likely to support Trump. And, of course, perhaps the single unifying policy goal of populists around the globe has been a sustained effort to limit immigration, which helps assuage concerns among xenophobic populations feeling like “strangers in their own land.”

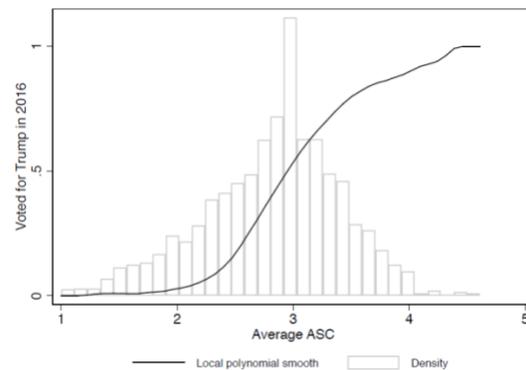
How are we to square the growing body of empirical work demonstrating a strong connection between economic dislocation from trade competition and populist support with separate accounts emphasizing instead identity-based explanations for the rise of extreme rightwing parties across the globe? Rather than seeing the “values-based” and “materialist” arguments as opposing camps, we argue in new research that these are better seen as complementary explanations focusing on different stages of the causal chain. In particular, we emphasize the importance of considering the interplay between contemporary economic conditions and a particular set of individual values - the “authoritarian personality”. A long line of research has consistently identified this set of bundled personality traits as politically important, particularly in support of more anti-liberal politicians and platforms. We borrow directly from Altemeyer’s (1981) influential conceptualization of these values as centering primarily on a demand for obedience to authority and conformity to social norms, coupled with a predilection for the threat of violence against non-conformists and outgroups.

As evidence these values may be salient in understanding voter support for rightwing populist platforms, we demonstrate in Figures 1 & 2 the simple bivariate relationship between a measure of individual authoritarian values and the likelihood of voting Leave in the Brexit referendum (Figure 1) and voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup> While respondents at the lowest levels of authoritarianism voted Leave approximately 20% of the time, those at the highest levels of authoritarianism voted Leave nearly 100% of the time. Similarly, the least authoritarian respondents in the US voted for Trump with close to zero probability, whereas the most authoritarian respondents almost always voted for him.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



While these data suggest an extremely strong association between authoritarian tendencies and voter support for non-traditional campaigns, it is not necessarily clear where these preferences come from in the first place. Much prior work has viewed an individual’s authoritarian values largely as a function of insecurity during her formative years. Recent work by Norris & Inglehart (2019), for example, finds strong age cohort effects on average authoritarianism among publics across the globe, which they argue corresponds to groups born during historical periods of greater insecurity. Other scholars have also demonstrated such values may be activated during times of contemporaneous security threats, presumably since citizens may favor a strong leader who “makes the trains run on time” when disorder and violence are rampant (Perrin 2005; Lavine et al. 2005).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Ballard-Rosa, Malik, Rickard & Scheve (2017) and Ballard-Rosa, Jensen & Scheve (2019) for details.

<sup>6</sup> See also MacWilliams (2016) and Norris & Inglehart (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Note that Hetherington & Suhay (2011) suggest security threats may serve to make non-authoritarians’ preferences align more closely with those of authoritarians, rather than changing the underlying values per se.

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# THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

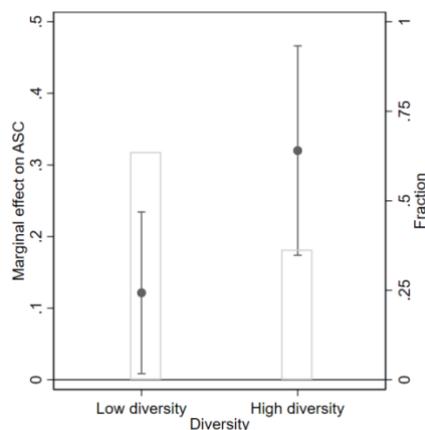
Ballard-Rosa Feature Essay...continued from page 8

Building off recent work indicating that contemporaneous security threats may activate authoritarian tendencies, we argue--following an established line of earlier work (Fromm 1941; Lipset 1959; Rokeach 1960)---that sustained economic decline may similarly trigger authoritarian predilections in citizens who potentially favor decisive leadership to fix an ailing economy or who respond to economic frustration with rising aggression against outgroups. In particular, we borrow from the ADH empirical design to identify local communities that have been damaged by competition with Chinese imports to investigate whether citizens in the United Kingdom living in regions more exposed to the China shock demonstrate higher levels of authoritarian values. In joint work with Mashail Malik, Stephanie Rickard, and Kenneth Scheve, we find strong support for this hypothesis: Citizens in regions of the UK hit harder by import competition display significantly higher measures of authoritarian aggression, submission, and conventionalism (ASC). This association remains after controlling for a number of individual and regional-level concerns and in an instrumental variable framework in which we instrument for imports in specific industries into the UK by using information on US imports instead. While limited in our ability to prove that these regional differences arise due to changes in citizens' values directly, we rule out several potential alternative explanations related to initial (pre-crisis) distributions of such values, as well as the possibility that our results arise due to respondents' differential mobility. Further analysis suggests our results are strongest when focusing on the subdimension of authoritarian "aggression," consistent with a mechanism whereby citizens in communities with failing economies may respond to retarded economic expectations with rising frustration. Our findings that individuals in the UK more exposed to trade shocks demonstrate more authoritarian values, and that these values subsequently help explain support for a Leave campaign centered on anti-immigrant sentiment and restoring the sovereignty of the British state, help substantiate results by Colantone & Stanig (2018b) who also find that regions of the UK more exposed to the China shock were more likely to vote Leave in the Brexit referendum.

Yet, while we expect sustained economic decline driven by global trade competition may have caused individuals in some communities to respond with heightened authoritarianism, we also argue that local racial demography may moderate the severity of this response. In additional work with Amalie Jensen and Kenneth Scheve, we incorporate into our theoretical model concerns over social identity, focusing in particular on the majority groups' interests in conformity by out-groups. Under the assumption that at least partly a groups' identity is dependent on the material wellbeing of that group (Akerlof & Kranton 2000), we argue that sustained economic decline may lead majority group members to upweight their preferences for conformity by outgroups--that is, see an increase in their authoritarian values---in order to shore up falling utility from economic losses. Importantly, we suggest that this concern with outgroup behavior is likely to be strongest for those individuals living in more diverse regions, who are more likely to observe the conformity (or lack thereof) of minority groups (Feldman 2003).

In the US context, our results mean that members of the dominant majority group (whites) should be most likely to display heightened authoritarian tendencies when living in more diverse regions that are also heavily exposed to sustained economic decline. We test this by incorporating into the standard ADH framework an additional attentiveness to local racial demography, and find that, while whites living in less diverse regions of the country are indeed somewhat more likely to demonstrate higher authoritarianism when exposed to the China shock, the magnitude of this effect is approximately tripled when considering instead the effect of Chinese import competition on whites living in more diverse parts of the country (Figure 3). We also demonstrate that whites living in diverse regions exposed to the China shock were significantly more likely to vote for Donald Trump in the 2016 elections, consistent with the findings linking a backlash against globalization to support for more populist candidates

Figure 3



continued on page 10

*Ballard-Rosa Feature Essay...continued from page 9*

discussed above. Crucially, however, we emphasize the importance of a particular set of individual values as mediating the relationship between economic threats and support for populists, arguing that these are best thought of as complementary approaches to understanding particular stages in the overall causal chain.

We hope that our findings on the relationship between personal values and contemporary economic conditions encourage additional research on the linkages between these two important areas (Gidron & Hall, 2017). Yet, we also recognize these findings raise a series of additional puzzles for future research. First, in contrast to much prior work that seeks to explain mass behavior primarily due either to “micro” or “macro” level factors, our work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that finds strong effects of “meso” or community-level conditions (Broz, Frieden & Weymouth 2019). As evidence continues to accumulate that regional economic factors are critical for citizens’ political beliefs and behavior, more work should untangle the precise causal pathways via which these effects are transmitted. In addition, while much of the work employing the China shock has emphasized the negative economic consequences of globalization, it is of course also true that trade integration has created many winners. Work in the US by Jensen, Quinn & Weymouth (2018), for example, finds not only that the losers from trade are less likely to support incumbents but also that likely winners from export markets significantly increase their support for sitting politicians. In Germany, extension of the standard ADH design incorporating regional winners from export expansion similarly finds mirrored effects of trade: In places most harmed by imports, individuals are more likely to support extreme right parties, but in parts of the country that benefit most from exports, support for the radical right is significantly reduced (Dippel, Gold & Heblich 2016).

And, while Norris & Inglehart (2019) demonstrate significant periods of rising popular support for authoritarianism during times of economic distress, they also document reversals away from such predilections when economies experience sustained recovery. While the current moment of twin economic and public health crises is one of uncertainty about the extent of global integration moving forward, understanding the consequences of crisis for the values held by particular groups in society may help us better come to grips with the waves of surprising electoral outcomes we have witnessed over the past several years.

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*continued on page 11*

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

*Ballard-Rosa Feature Essay...continued from page 10*

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## FEATURE ESSAY

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### Pandemics and the Politics of Trade

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The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our world, our lives, and, not least, the global economy. When the APSA Political Economy Section reached out in January for a newsletter contribution, COVID-19 was mostly a local, ‘pneumonia-like virus’ spreading through China. At the time, the *New York Times* reported over 4,500 cases and 106 deaths.<sup>1</sup> Almost four months later, the global number of infected persons has surpassed 4.8 million across 213 countries and territories, with a death toll approaching 315,000.<sup>2</sup> As we prepare this piece in our locale of Singapore, the government reports an accumulated number of cases exceeding 28,000 – an extraordinary number for a country of 6 million.<sup>3</sup>

COVID-19’s impact on the politics of trade is dominated by the broader politics of navigating between containment and keeping the economy open, both nationally and internationally. The tension between international trade and international public health is not new. International trade brought about the first recorded pandemics by way of shipping routes, going back as far as the 2nd century. The first instance of a quarantine is recorded in 14th century Sicily (Peckham 2016; Tognotti 2013).<sup>4</sup> Over the centuries, pandemics have led to international institutions – including the World Health Organization – that seek to standardize response measures across countries’ trading ports. These instances of international cooperation face a delicate balancing act between containing infectious diseases while keeping global trade moving. How can countries achieve containment without economic closure?

Governments around the world have adopted a wide range of policies addressing when and how much to ease the current lockdown. These variations will and should be studied for their efficacy in addressing a global health and humanitarian crisis. The following sections suggest questions about how the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to affect global trade in these challenging times. They highlight the centrality of the state to our fight against the spread of the virus and the effects on trade along the international supply chain, the development of e-commerce, and the US-China trade war.

#### The Shadow of Global Economic Contraction

Politics, policy, and scholarship on COVID-19 unfold in the shadow of global economic contraction. Global trade is plummeting during the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> World Trade Organization (WTO) Director, General Azevedo’s announcement in early April projected an expected decline in global merchandise trade in the range of 13% to 32% in 2020.<sup>6</sup> IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva noted the pandemic is leading the global economy into its worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. The IMF’s appropriately titled April 2020 World Economic Outlook: The Great Lockdown projects a 3% contraction of the global economy. Many expect a recovery in 2021, but such optimism is tempered by news on vaccine development and whether countries will adopt policies to support the recovery of trade.

#### Once More, with Feeling: Bringing the State Back In

What explains national responses to the pandemic? The variation in national responses around the world has reminded us that the state is the central actor driving choices between viral containment and economic sustenance. Variation in state response ranges from Sweden, which kept much of its economy open, to New Zealand, which quickly imposed a full lockdown. We will not know for some time which of the national responses is a more successful approach for managing both containment of the virus and keeping the economy moving.

*Measuring ‘Success.’* When we look back on this pandemic and how the world has fared, should we look to indicators of the pandemic’s toll, such as total accumulated number of cases and the number of deaths from COVID-19? Should we look to the extent of damage to national economies, such as the magnitude of their contraction and the loss of trade during this period? How about the pace of economic recovery or of international trade and investment? Finally, does “success” include consideration of civil liberties countries chose to forego or to preserve?

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1 *The New York Times*, 28 January 2020.

2 World Health Organization, 18 May 2020.

3 See Kirsten Han’s perspective in *Foreign Policy*, 6 May 2020.

4 Peckham, R., 2016. *Epidemics in Modern Asia* (Vol. 15). Cambridge University Press; Tognotti, E., 2013. Lessons from the History of Quarantine, from Plague to Influenza A. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 19, 2:254.

5 New research from Cerdeiro et al. (2020). of the IMF proposes a new methodology for tracking real-time trade during the pandemic.

6 WTO Press Release, 8 April 2020.

*continued on page 13*

*Kim & Cheong Feature Essay...continued from page 12*

*'Strong' States.* On our phones is TraceTogether, Singapore's digital contact tracing app. It asks users to keep it open when in meetings, public spaces, or public transport. South Korea has a similar digital contact tracing app, which can identify close contacts in as little as 30 minutes. And just this week, when Wuhan recorded six new cases in the second weekend of May, the Chinese government announced it would test all 11 million inhabitants of the city, in a matter of ten days. When it comes to containing the spread of COVID-19, given its infectiousness, governments that have taken swift, decisive, and often unilateral action appear to have been more successful.

*SARS Experience.* There is widespread agreement in Asia that experience with Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 shaped the readiness of regional health systems. In Singapore, in the aftermath of the 2003 outbreak, the government established the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (DORSCON) framework to signal the severity of threat – four levels including Green, Yellow, Orange (current level) and Red. They also reinforced and enhanced infrastructure for managing infectious diseases. Taiwan, as well as Hong Kong and South Korea, among others in Asia, were able to meet the COVID-19 outbreak with greater preparedness than countries in other regions.

*Women Leaders.* Finally, preliminary research, as well as observations in the media, suggests that women leaders have contained the pandemic more effectively than their male counterparts. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin, and Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen have been praised for their leadership in controlling infection in their respective countries, regardless of whether they instituted a lockdown. This contrasts with the 'Ostrich Alliance,' a term coined by Oliver Stuenkel, of strongmen leaders across the globe that have refused to acknowledge the pandemic's severity. The list of leaders with their proverbial heads in the sand includes the following and is growing: Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro; Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega; Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko; Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov; and then there is President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte and US President Donald Trump.<sup>7</sup> Time will tell how gender affects a leader's effectiveness in managing the COVID-19 crisis, but to this point there is plenty of praise of women leaders' effective management and skepticism about the viability of the alpha-male approach.

## **Rethinking Offshoring: The Supply Chains of Tomorrow**

Are we likely to see a reshoring of production and contraction of international supply chains? Complex supply chains are especially vulnerable to the stoppage in trade, but with COVID-19 even firms in the cosmetics industry have been affected.<sup>8</sup> According to the WTO, over eighty countries have imposed export restrictions, covering medical supplies such as face masks, pharmaceutical products, and ventilators.<sup>9</sup> Some have also extended restrictions to other necessities, such as food and toilet paper. While WTO rules under Article XI allow for temporary measures to curb critical shortages of essential products like food and medical supplies, there is currently a lack of transparency in how restrictions are applied. Only 13 WTO members (counting the European Union (EU) as a bloc) have informed the WTO of restrictions applied in their jurisdictions. This has led the WTO to issue warnings about the possible long-term risks to global supply chains.<sup>10</sup> While export restrictions may be a temporary response to short-run shortages in critical goods, their effects may be longer-lived than the pandemic.

*The Geopolitics of Supply Chains.* Domestic shortages in medical supplies and other necessities raise questions concerning reliance on global supply chains for the flow of essential goods. Such reshoring rhetoric has centered on excessive reliance on China as a source of production inputs. France's Finance Minister, Bruno Le Maire, ordered a review to classify segments of French industry that needed "economic and strategic independence".<sup>11</sup> He singled out the pharmaceutical industry in particular, noting that over 80% of the raw materials for some drugs are sourced exclusively from China. United States Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has similarly referred to the strategic vulnerability created by relying on countries such as China for critical medical supplies.<sup>12</sup> The Japanese government, in its COVID-19 stimulus package, earmarked \$2.2 billion to help Japanese manufacturers shift their operations out of China.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Financial Times*, 20 April 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Trade Talks podcast, 'Beautiful Trade in Ugly Times,' 26 April 2020.

<sup>9</sup> World Trade Organisation, 23 April 2020.

<sup>10</sup> World Trade Organisation, 7 April 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, 20 February 2020.

<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times*, 11 May 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Bloomberg, 8 April 2020.

*continued on page 14*

Kim & Cheong Feature Essay...continued from page 13

## The Digital Frontier

*Governance of Electronic Commerce.* How will countries coordinate to manage electronic commerce? ‘Electronic commerce,’ or e-commerce, according to the WTO, refers to the ‘production, distribution, marketing, sale or delivery of goods and services by electronic means’.<sup>14</sup> E-commerce is emerging as a lifeline for businesses and consumers amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital economy has allowed businesses to remain connected to consumers while lock-downs across the world have closed storefront retail outlets. E-commerce has played a crucial role ensuring citizens continue to have access to goods and services. In China, e-commerce giant Alibaba was quick to augment its digital logistics platform to fast-track the shipping of essential goods to warehouses in Wuhan, the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak.<sup>15</sup> These goods were then made available to customers in Wuhan through Taobao and Tmall, Alibaba’s online business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) retail outlets. To increase delivery capacity amidst a massive shift towards online retail outlets, JD.com and several other retailers turned towards wide-scale usage of automated delivery robots.<sup>16</sup>

The ubiquity of e-commerce giants in China means fewer obstacles in citizens’ access to the digital economy. In other countries, governments may need to step in to ensure that customers can connect to businesses digitally. As many stores turn towards digital solutions to maintain their business, customers need information about what is available. The Italian government has, for instance, published a list of services that citizens can gain access to online.<sup>17</sup> From a regulatory standpoint, governments would also need to make it more conducive for businesses to move online and operate safely amid the pandemic. For instance, legal frameworks concerning the online delivery of services such as medical consultations may need to be clarified.<sup>18</sup> Delivery services are crucial to e-commerce platforms. Strict enforcement of safe distancing measures when conducting delivery operations will be needed to reduce transmission risks. While e-commerce can be leveraged to ensure business continuity during the pandemic, public policy will need to be dynamic enough to improve citizen access to such platforms, alongside providing safeguards to protect public health.

*The Role of International Institutions.* In the international arena, the WTO and free trade agreements with e-commerce provisions will play an important role in governing digital trade. Mira Burri and Rodrigo Polanco, in the January issue of the *Journal of International Economic Law*, announced the launch of the Trade Agreements Provisions on Electronic-Commerce and Data (TAPED) dataset.<sup>19</sup> TAPED provides a mapping of PTA provisions – in annexes as well as the main texts – that directly or indirectly regulate digital trade. Manfred Elsig and Sebastian Klotz find that WTO member countries participating in the WTO’s Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and the plurilateral International Technology Agreement (ITA) are more likely to commit to cooperation in digital trade.<sup>20</sup> These mapping projects provide valuable data for scholars to identify areas of strength and weakness in the flow of e-commerce during the pandemic and beyond.

## The US-China Trade War

Finally, how will the pandemic affect the ongoing US-China trade war? Before COVID-19 became part of our everyday existence, trade conflict between two of the world’s largest economies led to the Phase 1 deal. Signed in January of this year, US and China pledged to reduce some US tariffs on Chinese imports in exchange for China increasing its purchase of US agricultural and energy products by \$200 billion.<sup>21</sup> In March alone, US exports to China fell by 18% over 2017 levels, but the trade deficit with China was also the lowest in 16 years.<sup>22</sup> The Trump administration has made no official pronouncement to date on what it intends to do about compliance, but it is already evident China will not be able to fulfill its obligation to import \$76.7 billion worth of agricultural goods in 2020.

The Phase 1 trade deal signaled a possible de-escalation and end to the trade war. but, tensions between the US and China, brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, could once again threaten to reignite the trade war. Since the pandemic, the US-China Trade War has transformed into a war of words about China’s handling of the COVID-19 outbreak in its early days. The relationship between the US and China is even more strained with the escalation of COVID-19 case counts in the US. This

14 WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce.

15 *Harvard Business Review*, 17 March 2020.

16 *South China Morning Post*, 21 February 2020.

17 *Solidarieta` Digitale*, Accessed 10 May 2020.

18 World Economic Forum, 13 May 2020

19 Burri, M and R. Polanco. 2020. *Journal of International Economic Law* 23, 1:187–220, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jgz044>.

20 Elsig, M. and S. Klotz. ‘Digital trade rules in preferential trade agreements: Is there a WTO impact?’ (forthcoming)

21 Reuters, 16 January 2020.

22 *Politico*, 6 May 2020.

continued on page 15

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

*Kim & Cheong Feature Essay...continued from page 14*

renewed tension could spell trouble for the trade deal. US officials have been trading barbs with their Chinese counterparts concerning the origins and the handling of the virus. President Trump had himself claimed there was evidence that the virus originated from a Chinese laboratory. When asked about the fate of the trade deal, Trump answered that ‘I have not decided yet, if you want to know the truth’.<sup>23</sup> In the week following this statement, Trump suggested in an interview with Fox Business that ‘we [US] could cut off the whole relationship [with China]’.<sup>24</sup> Even if the US and China could maintain some semblance of a working relationship as geopolitical tensions reach a fever pitch, the economic disruption brought about by the pandemic would see the US and China struggle to keep to the terms of the Phase 1 trade deal.

The war of words between the United States and China continues to cast uncertainty over the multilateral trading system as we know it. The US was absent from the European Commission’s coronavirus vaccine fundraising conference that raised almost €7.5 billion. In the US Congress, resolutions have been introduced to withdraw from the WTO. Although this opportunity arises every five years and the last vote in 2005 was soundly defeated, the timing of these latest resolutions amid the pandemic and close to the US presidential election highlight the instability in US trade policy. Along with the suspension of WHO funding announced by the Trump Administration in April, the US-led multilateralism at the heart of the international order since the end of World War II is very much in question.

As of this writing, Singapore is in the second month of its ‘circuit breaker’ period, which for us has involved staying home, working virtually, and going out once a week to stock up on groceries. Restrictions are set to ease after June 1st. Questions about the impact of the pandemic on our everyday politics and the international economy will continue to be raised and addressed in new calls for research in various issue areas and disciplines. The answers will not be immediate. So in the meantime, we are, like many others that have already taken advantage of the early openings of hairdressers, very much looking forward to booking a haircut.

<sup>23</sup> *The New York Times*, 8 May 2020.

<sup>24</sup> *The New York Times*, 15 May 2020.

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