
1 EU trade policy and non-trade objectives: The RESPECT survey

Matteo Fiorini, Bernard Hoekman, Naïs Ralaison and Aydin Yildirim¹

European University Institute

The EU perceives itself as a normative actor in international relations. A key feature of the 2015 EU ‘Trade for All’ strategy is the call for trade and investment policy to take responsibility for supporting and promoting EU values and standards. It notes that doing so requires coherence across policy areas as well as commonality of action (European Commission 2015). Key policy areas include the common commercial policy, which determines the conditions for trade in goods and services as well as investment flows into and out of the European single market, official development assistance, and economic diplomacy programmes implemented by both EU member states and EU institutions. All these instruments are used by the EU to pursue its external normative goals.

The Horizon 2020-supported research project RESPECT (Realising Europe’s Soft Power in External Cooperation and Trade)² seeks to analyse the factors that support or inhibit the realisation of EU non-trade policy objectives (NTPOs) established in the Treaty of Lisbon – such as sustainable development, human rights, labour standards, and environmental protection. One component of the project comprises a web-based survey instrument. The RESPECT survey was designed to collect opinions on EU trade and trade-related external policies from a population of practitioners and expert observers. The survey centres on perceptions by practitioners regarding the drivers and implementation of EU trade policy and the appropriateness and effectiveness of trade as an instrument to pursue and achieve NTPOs.³ The RESPECT questionnaire complements existing survey instruments which tend to target public opinion more

1 The survey results that are reported in what follows are part of a project supported by funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 770680.

2 See <http://respect.eui.eu/> for a description of the project.

3 NTPOs include the promotion of human rights, labor, environmental protection and anti-corruption as well as economic development in non-EU countries

generally. The specific perspective taken in the survey aimed to add value to the body of existing evidence regarding views on the connection between trade policy and NTPOs.

The existing survey evidence for EU countries reveals several empirical patterns as regards public opinion towards EU trade and trade-related policy instruments. One source of survey data on the EU are the Eurobarometer polls. These are of three types: the standard survey, special polls, and flash editions.⁴ Responses to the standard Eurobarometer survey (Eurobarometer 2018) reveal that the majority of EU citizens (more precisely, 65% percent of the EU population) agree that the EU has sufficient power and tools to defend the economic interests of Europe in a global economy. This number has been relatively stable in the surveys undertaken in period between 2009 and 2018. However, opinions on the welfare effects of globalisation on EU member states, which has a bearing on a much broader set of policies than trade policy, reveal much greater polarisation in views. The free movement of people, goods, and services is recognised by the majority of the respondents (almost 60%, with very little variation over the period 2012-2018) as the most positive result of the EU in the standard Eurobarometer survey.⁵ While this suggests that trade and trade-related policies are regarded as positive dimensions of the EU, it leaves open the question how exactly trade policy fits in the constellation of EU soft power tools for the achievement of EU NTPOs.

A number of special Eurobarometer editions have focused more directly on trade topics. Eurobarometer special edition 152 (Eurobarometer 2001) revealed that Europeans trust the EU to defend their interests in international negotiations and thought the EU was well placed to compete on international markets. At the same time, it revealed that many also thought that freedom of trade would force the EU to lower its norms regarding the environment, public health, or consumer protection. Furthermore, respondents tended to perceive that the organisations tasked with economic policy cooperation did not defend the interests of the population at large: more than one third of respondents thought that international organisations did not represent their interests. In interviews undertaken in the context of the Eurobarometer special edition 357 in 2010, the majority of participating EU citizens expected the EU to use trade policy to create employment

4 A description of the three dimensions of Eurobarometer editions as well as the reports for all three types of polls can be accessed from the web portal of DG Communication at <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>.

5 At the same time, from 2015 onwards, immigration, together with terrorism, appears at the top of the ranking of the most important issues facing the EU at the moment.

opportunities for European citizens (Eurobarometer 2010).⁶ The European Commission has also conducted several public consultations on trade topics. Between 2014 and the end of 2018, 19 trade-related consultations were undertaken. The majority of the trade consultations had a rather narrow focus, usually the effects or design of a specific EU trade agreement or trade-related regulation. Some had a broader scope – for example, soliciting views on a potential reform of investor–state dispute resolution mechanisms and the EU’s strategy on adaptation to climate change.

Complementary survey-based data collection efforts with a focus on trade and trade policy have been undertaken by other organisations. Particularly relevant are the surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014 and 2018 (Pew Research Center 2018) and Bertelsmann Stiftung on globalisation (Bluth 2018). The Pew surveys targeted public opinion in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the UK. They revealed that more than eight in ten Europeans perceive trade to be good for their country, with positive views increasing slightly since 2014. Four in ten Europeans said international trade creates jobs, while about a third believed trade leads to job losses. Roughly a third thought that trade undermines wages and nearly four in ten thought that trade leads to price increases. Bluth (2018) reports on a statistically representative online survey of 12 countries, including France, Germany, and the UK. Globalisation – defined as the increasing movement of products, ideas, money, jobs, culture, and people around the world – is seen as a force for good for the world by 40% of respondents in Germany, 41% in France, and 47% in the UK. This is much less than respondents in China (77%) or the average for surveyed emerging economies (64%).

None of these surveys and consultations included a systematic investigation of the linkages between trade policy instruments and NTPOs. The RESPECT survey aims at enhancing information on views on whether trade and trade-related policy can be an effective tool to attain NTPOs. By focusing on the EU’s external social and economic objectives, the RESPECT questionnaire goes beyond existing surveys that tend to centre on opinions regarding the effects of trade and trade policy within the EU. What follows presents some of the results that emerge from the survey.⁷ Data were collected on an anonymous basis using Qualtrics, an online survey application. A total of 511 respondents took the survey from 5 July 2018 to 24 June 2019. Respondents include individuals from academia, think tanks, EU institutions, EU member state officials, NGOs, business associations, firms, non-EU member state officials, and trade unions.

6 According to the Eurobarometer timeline (European Commission 2018), no other DG Trade Eurobarometer special edition has been produced after 2010. However, DG Trade has commissioned a number of Eurobarometer flash editions (the last one in 2014) to survey attitudes on cross-border trade and consumer protection. These provide information on consumers’ confidence and attitudes towards cross-border online shopping, featuring opinions on product safety, unfair commercial practices, and the reliability of claims regarding the environmental footprints of traded products and services.

7 A more comprehensive discussion and presentation of the survey results can be found in Fiorini et al. (2019).

Perceptions on the design of EU external policy

A central focus of the RESPECT survey is the role of EU trade and trade-related policy as a tool to promote and attain NTPOs in non-EU countries. A majority (55%) of respondents agree that the EU should make access to its markets by other countries conditional on non-trade outcomes (such as human rights, labour, environmental protection, and anti-corruption) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 The EU should make market access conditional on non-trade outcomes

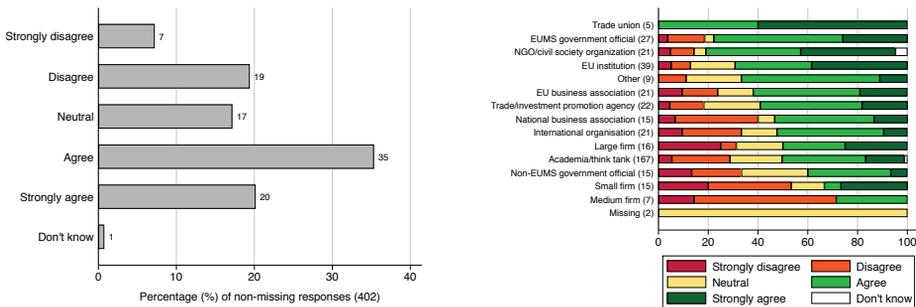
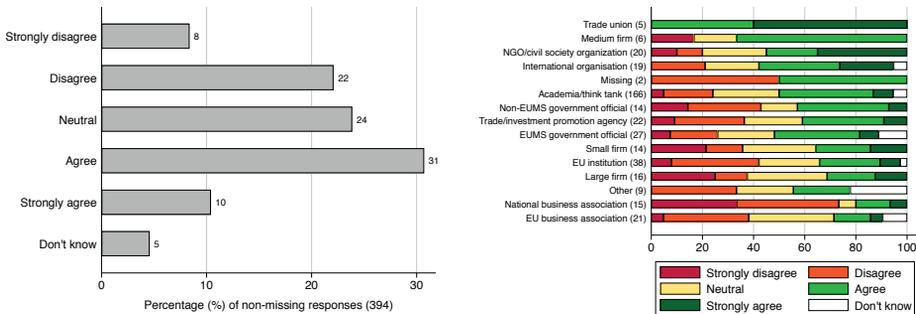


Figure 2 EU trade policy primarily serves the interest of the largest firms



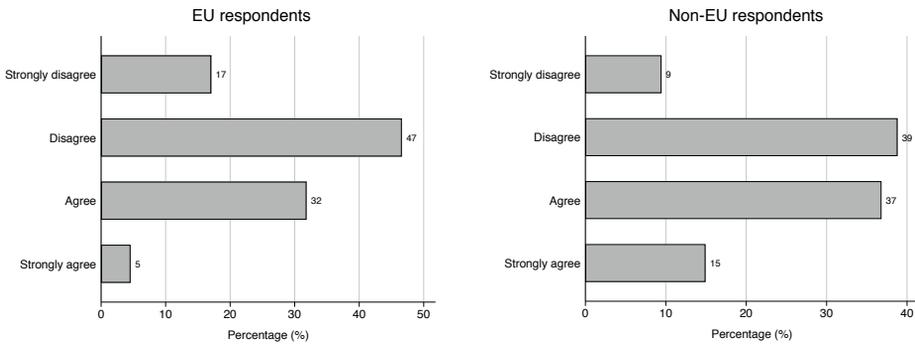
Other questions assess opinions on the political economy of EU trade and trade-related policy formation, in particular whether the design of trade agreements is efficiently informed by consultation of stakeholders, whether the formation of EU trade policy primarily reflects the interests of large EU member states or the largest firms. One half of respondents believe EU trade agreements are adequately informed by consultation of stakeholders. A plurality perceives large companies as particularly successful in shaping the formation of EU trade policy (Figure 2).

Policy instruments and effectiveness

A second part of the survey focuses on opinions on the effect of trade policy on trade flows, distinguishing between exports and imports. The results reveal a strong conviction as regards the positive role of trade agreements for EU exports and imports. This contrasts with the more varied range of views found in general public surveys cited above. The number of respondents that do not believe trade agreements are good for EU exports account for only 3-5% of the total, rising to 7-11% for EU imports. A similar strong and positive attitude emerges regarding EU development assistance, which tends to be considered a good instrument to support trade with non-EU countries.

Substantial polarization emerges when respondents are asked if inclusion of non-trade objectives reduces the effectiveness of EU trade policy (Figure 3). A majority of non-EU respondents either agree or strongly agree with this view.⁸ There is a relatively strong and stable positive belief regarding the capacity of EU trade policy to help realise NTPOs (Figure 4).

Figure 3 The inclusion of non-trade objectives reduces the effectiveness of EU trade policy



⁸ EU respondents comprise people working for EU institutions, EU member state governments, European businesses and analysts in research institutes. See “The Respect Survey Instrument: Descriptive Report” available at <http://respect.cui.eu/>.

Figure 4 EU trade policy supports the realization of EU non-trade objectives

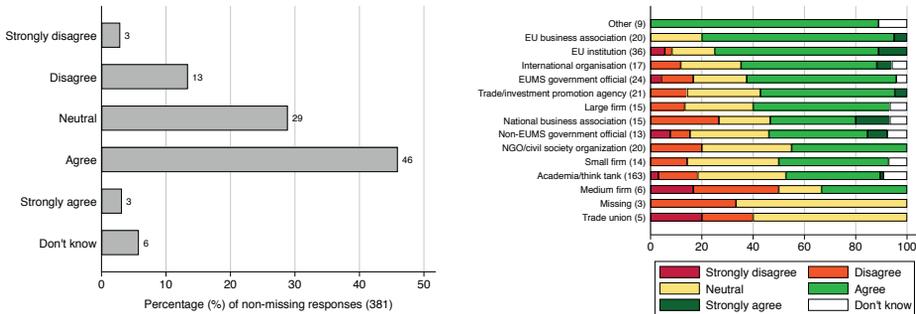
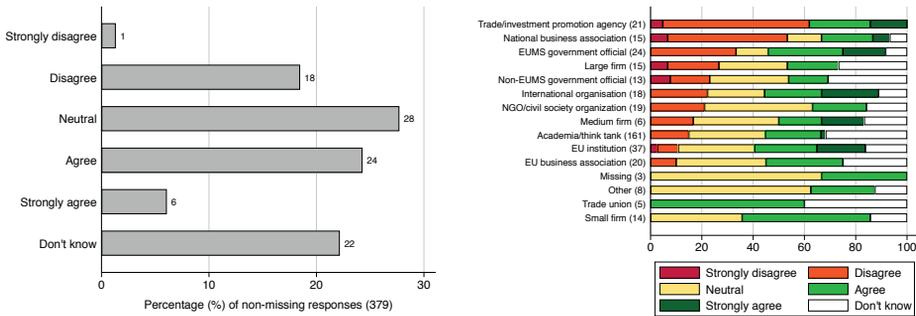


Figure 5 EU national trade promotion agencies work against each other



About one-third of respondents agree with the statement: “Activities of national trade promotion agencies of European countries work against each other” (Figure 5). The top three instruments to promote trade between EU and developing countries are held to be trade agreements, technical assistance, and direct investment by European multinationals in partner countries (Figure 6). As regards promoting NTPOs, the most frequently chosen instruments are targeted assistance for NGOs, unions and regulatory bodies, expert dialogues between the EU and partner country stakeholders, and technical assistance (Figure 7). The responses suggest limited support for the notion that trade is among the most effective instruments available to the EU to promote NTPOs.

Figure 6 What instrument most effectively promotes EU trade with developing countries?

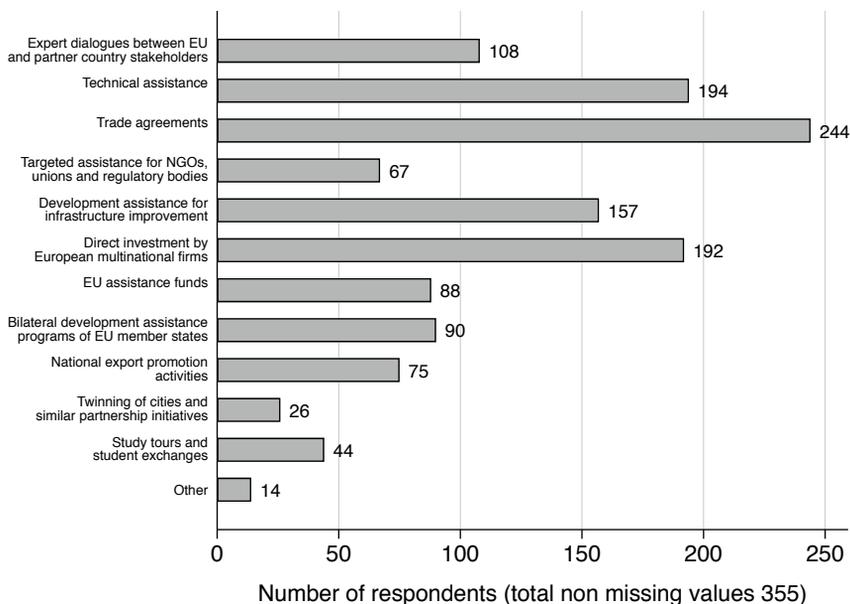
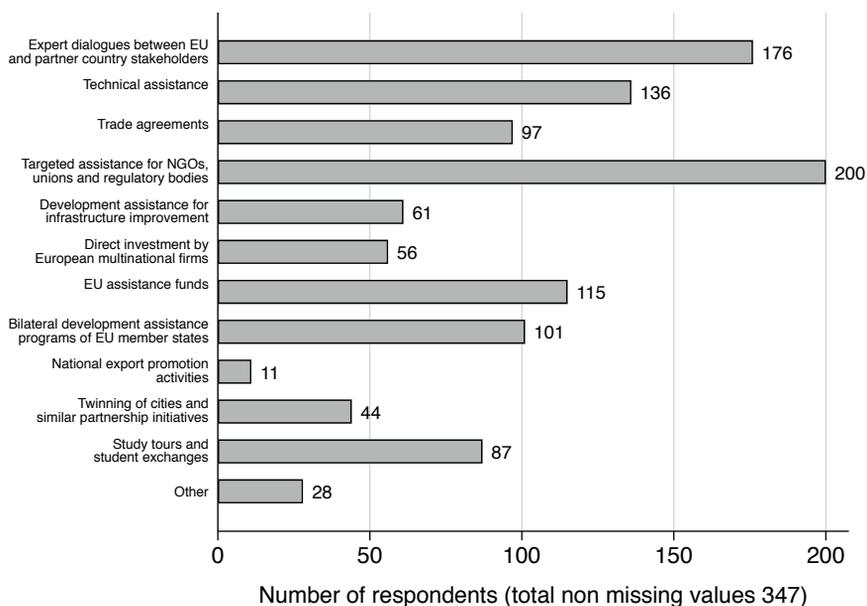


Figure 7 What instruments are most effective in promoting non-trade objectives?



Implementation and evaluation of EU trade policy effectiveness

The final part of the survey included questions on the implementation and evaluation of EU trade policy. A majority of respondents believes the EU is serious about realising non-trade objectives – such as human rights, labour, environmental protection and anti-corruption – in trade partners (Figure 8) as well as about promoting economic development in low income trade partners (Figure 9).

Figure 8 The EU is serious about realising non-trade objectives as part of its trade policy

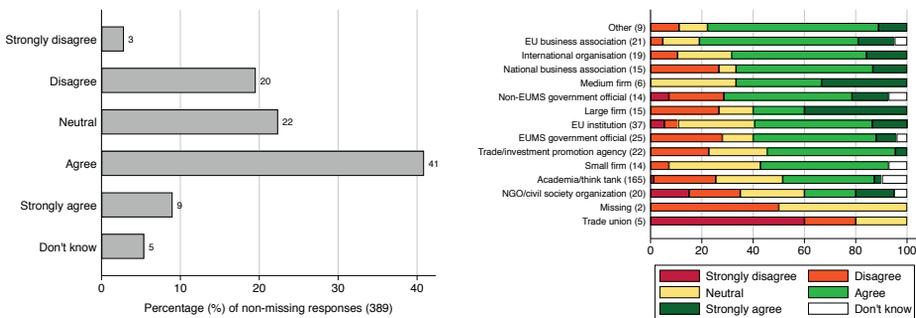
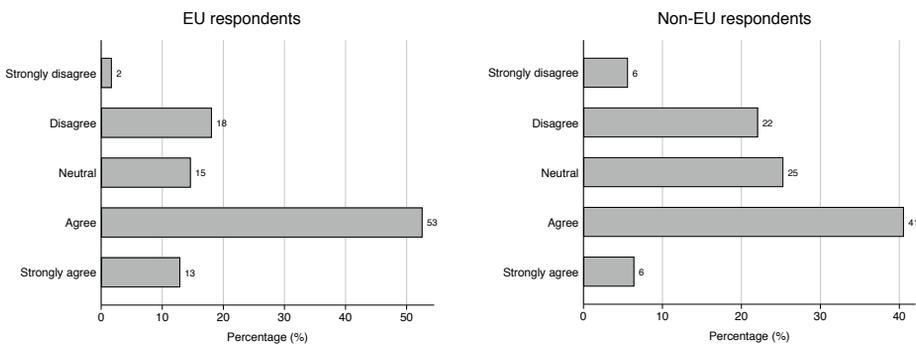


Figure 9 The EU is serious about promoting economic development of trade partners



Almost 40% of respondents believe the EU ignores violations of human/labour rights or environmental regulations if substantial export interests are at stake; a similar share of respondents agree or strongly agree that the EU only takes trade actions against partner countries regarding non-trade issues (such as labour standards) when there is pressure to do so by NGOs and public opinion. More than one-third of the respondents (36%) perceive there to be no meaningful monitoring of implementation of trade agreements

(Figure 10). However, respondents tend to be less supportive of the statement that there is effective monitoring of how the implementation of trade agreements impacts on non-trade outcomes (Figure 11).

Figure 10 There is meaningful monitoring of implementation of trade agreements

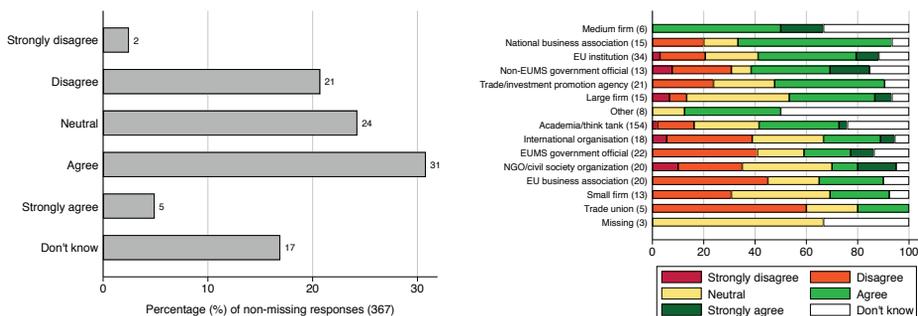
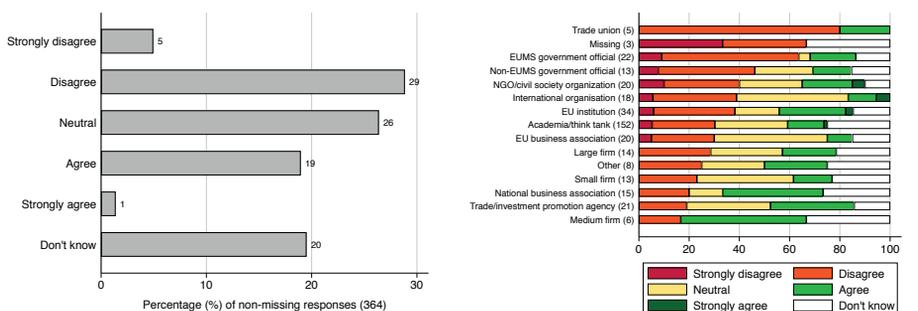


Figure 11 The EU monitors how the implementation of trade agreements impacts on non-trade outcomes



Concluding remarks

The survey results suggest most respondents tend to agree with the strategy of using trade policy instruments, and in particular market access, as a tool to attain EU external NTPOs. The majority of respondents also believes the EU is serious about realising NTPOs and promoting economic development in low-income trade partners. At the same time, some 40% of the surveyed population of experts and stakeholders believe the EU ignores violations of human/labour rights or environmental regulation when major trade interests are at stake. Similarly, more than one third of respondents agree that the EU only takes trade actions against partner countries regarding non-trade issues (such as labour standards) when pushed to do so by NGOs and public opinion. On the central theme of using trade (and trade-related) policy to attain NTPOs in external

relations, the respondents tend to agree that the EU should use trade policy to promote NTPOs and that in principle it is serious about it.

Many respondents believe that targeted assistance to NGOs and regulatory bodies and expert dialogues are the most relevant (effective) instruments to help realise NTPOs, while trade agreements and technical assistance are identified as the most effective policy instruments to promote trade between the EU and developing countries. Finally, the survey results reveal interesting patterns on a number of ancillary topics, including economic diplomacy, where opinions tend to be rather polarized with respect to the possibility that the activities of national trade promotion agencies of European countries work against each other.

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About the authors

Matteo Fiorini is Research Fellow, Global Economics at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute in Florence, Italy. His research focuses on international trade, trade policy, and development. He holds a PhD in Economics from the European University Institute.

Bernard Hoekman is Professor and Director, Global Economics at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute in Florence, Italy where he also serves as the Dean for External Relations, and a CEPR Research Fellow.

Naïs Ralaison is a Project Assistant in the Global Governance Programme, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute. She holds a Master's in International Affairs from Sciences Po Paris. Before coming to Florence, she worked at the French Institute for Strategic Research.

Aydin Yildirim is a political scientist at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute. His research and teaching interests are in international political economy, global value chains, trade policy, and firms in trade governance. He is a collaborator in the RESPECT project and is starting a new EU-funded project at the World Trade Institute, Bern, as of September 2019, investigating the impact of globalization of production on firms' lobbying strategies across supply chains. His work has been published in *Global Policy*, *World Trade Review*, *Comparative European Politics*, and the *Review of International Organizations*.