Pre-analysis plan: Whose interests do legislators consider in trade policy?

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1 Study Information

As part of the Power in Trade Negotiations (TRADEPOWER) project, we plan to carry out survey experiments with legislators from a series of Latin American and Caribbean countries.[1] Key aim of the study is to better understand to which extent (which) legislators consider the interests of the public or businesses when voting on trade agreements. As such, the study speaks to a large literature on representation (e.g. Gilens and Page 2014). Its more direct aim, however, is to advance on the trade policy literature, much of which assumes that trade policy is mainly a reflection of interest group pressures (Milner 1988; Grossman and Helpman 2002; Dür 2010). This is likely true in most cases, as the public often hardly notices trade agreements. Recently, however, trade agreements have received broad public attention in various countries (Kay and Evans 2018). In cases in which trade agreements are publicly salient, would decision-makers still cater to organized interests rather than the public?

2 Study Design

The questionnaire will be fielded in the language that is dominant in each country (Spanish in all countries except Brazil, Portuguese in Brazil).

2.1 Experiments

The survey instrument will contain four experiments that all try to capture the same idea. In each case, the experimental treatments will be randomly assigned so each respondent has the same chance to receive a specific treatment.

The four experiments will be introduced in random order, with the exception of experiment four, which will be kept at the end, as this is the only experiment in which we

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refer to a specific country. We want to avoid priming respondents to think just about this country in responding to the other experiments.

1. Imagine COUNTRY negotiates a new trade agreement with an important trading partner.

   [Business associations support this agreement, but there is opposition within the population to it.]

   [There is opposition within the population to this agreement, but business associations support it.]

   [Business associations oppose this agreement, but there is support within the population for it.]

   [There is support within the population for this agreement, but business associations oppose it.]

   How much would you support or oppose this trade agreement?

   11 point scale from "Would strongly oppose" to "Would strongly support"

2. Trade agreements often lead to losses for [businesses] [workers] via increased international competition. To help these [businesses] [workers], please tell us how much you would support or oppose the following measures:

   - Direct [] [wage] subsidies
   - Higher tariffs on imports
   - Tax cuts
   - Infrastructure projects

   5 point scale: "Would completely oppose", "Would partly oppose", "Would neither support nor oppose", "Would partly support", "Would completely support"

3. Imagine COUNTRY negotiates a trade agreement with an important trading partner.

   [70 percent of workers in COUNTRY would benefit from this agreement via higher wages.]

   [30 percent of workers in COUNTRY would lose from this agreement via lower wages.]

   [70 percent of firms in COUNTRY would benefit from this agreement via higher profits.]

   [30 percent of firms in COUNTRY would lose from this agreement via lower profits.]

   How much would you support or oppose this trade agreement?

   11 point scale from "Would strongly oppose" to "Would strongly support"

4. Trade agreements tend to create winners and losers. Concretely, a trade agreement with India could...

[lead to lower wages for workers in COUNTRY but increase profits of firms from COUNTRY exporting to India.]

[increase profits of firms from COUNTRY exporting to India but lead to lower wages for workers in COUNTRY.]

[lead to higher wages for workers in COUNTRY but reduce profits of firms from COUNTRY that compete with imports from India.]

[reduce profits of firms from COUNTRY that compete with imports from India but lead to higher wages for workers in COUNTRY.]

How much would you support or oppose this trade agreement?

11 point scale from "Would strongly oppose" to "Would strongly support"

2.2 Sample size

We plan to carry out our research in as many Latin American countries as possible. At the time of writing this pre-registration report, it is still unclear in which countries we will be able to field the survey because of two problems: for one, the websites of some parliaments are out of date and do not yet reflect recent election results. The inclusion of some countries thus depends on these pages being updated, so that we can get access to email addresses of current members of parliament. Moreover, it is not clear whether the email servers of specific parliaments will let our invitation to participate in a survey get through to the individual email addresses. Internet service providers use spam traps that may reject a large number of emails that all contain the same content. The sample size that we can achieve thus is the big unknown in this project.

2.3 Data collection and timeline

We expect to be able to start data collection in the last week of April. The process of data collection will take several months, as we expect difficulties in reaching the number of responses to achieve sufficient statistical power. The absolute minimum number of respondents that we strive for is 300.

3 Hypotheses

Ideology:

H1a: Left-wing legislators react more strongly to the citizen framing than right-wing legislators.

H1b: Right-wing legislators react more strongly to the company framing than left-wing legislators.

Gender:

H2a: Female legislators react more strongly to the citizen framing than male legislators.

H2b: Male legislators react more strongly to the company framing than female legislators.

District trade competitiveness:

H3a: Legislators from districts with high trade competitiveness react more strongly to the citizen framing than legislators from districts with low trade competitiveness.

H3b: Legislators from districts with low trade competitiveness react more strongly to the company framing than legislators from districts with high trade competitiveness.

Government vs. opposition:

H4a: Legislators from parties that are in opposition react more strongly to the citizen framing than legislators from parties that are in government.

H4b: Legislators from parties that are in government react more strongly to the company framing than legislators from parties that are in opposition.

Importance of trade policy:

H5a: Legislators for whom trade policy is a minor issue react more strongly to the citizen framing than legislators for whom trade policy is a major issue.

H5b: Legislators for whom trade policy is a major issue react more strongly to the company framing than legislators for whom trade policy is a minor issue.

First timers versus seasoned legislators:

H6a: First-time legislators react more strongly to the citizen framing than seasoned legislators.

H6b: Seasoned legislators react more strongly to the company framing than first-time legislators.

"Delegates" vs. "trustees":

H7a: Legislators that conceive of themselves as delegates react more strongly to the citizen framing than legislators that conceive of themselves as trustees.

H7b: Legislators that conceive of themselves as trustees react more strongly to the company framing than legislators that conceive of themselves as delegates.

4 Analysis

4.1 Operationalization of variables

We plan to operationalize the variables used in the hypotheses above as follows:

- *Ideology:* we will manually code legislators' ideology based on their party affiliation.
- *Gender:* we will rely on a manual coding of the biological sex of the respondents.
- *District trade competitiveness:* we rely on data described in (Huber, Stiller and Dür 2021) for this variable.

- *Government vs. opposition:* we will manually code which parties form part of the government in each country.
- *Importance of trade policy:* we will rely on the answer to a question in the survey for this ("In your function as Member of Parliament, how important is trade policy for you in comparison with other topics on the agenda of parliament?" Responses are recorded on a 11-point scale from: "Not important at all" to "Extremely important".
- *First timers versus seasoned legislators:* we will manually code whether a legislator is in his/her first term or later.
- *"Delegates" vs. "trustees":* we use a battery of six survey items to operationalize this variable. The question wording is as follows:

  To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

  a. In a representative democracy, parliamentarians should act in the interest of the country even if that means making unpopular decisions.
  b. In a representative democracy, parliamentarians should act according to public opinion even it is at odds with their own opinion.
  c. Demonstrations and letter writing campaigns are legitimate ways to influence the decisions of parliamentarians.
  d. Trade agreements are so technical in nature that ordinary citizens cannot comprehend them.
  e. The influence of economic elites on trade negotiations is too big.
  f. Populists exploit the lack of knowledge of ordinary citizens about trade agreements.

  Responses are recorded on a 5 point scale from "strongly disagree", via "disagree", "neither agree nor disagree", and "agree" to "strongly agree".

4.2 Control variables

We will control for the country and type of legislature a respondent (lower or upper chamber) forms part of.

5 Ethics

The study has received ethic clearance as part of the ethical review of the TRADEPOWER project. In the e-mail inviting legislators to respond to the survey, they will be told that participation entails consent to the use of the anonymous data. There are no risks to subjects from responding to the survey.

6 Bibliography

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