Trade competitiveness, constituency interests, and legislators' attitudes towards trade agreements

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Trade Competitiveness, Constituency Interests, and Legislators' Attitudes Towards Trade Agreements

We argue that legislators' trade attitudes reflect constituents' economic interests. Concretely, we expect that legislators from districts that are highly competitive in international trade should be more supportive of trade agreements than legislators from noncompetitive districts. The strength of this relationship should be lower in multimember districts and for right-wing legislators. Data based on surveys with 3,576 legislators from 16 Latin American countries and 48 legislative periods between 2005 and 2019 allow us to test these expectations. The surveys captured legislators' attitudes towards trade agreements between their countries and the United States and the European Union, respectively, and the Pacific Alliance. We measure districts' trade competitiveness with an innovative combination of household survey and trade data. The evidence supports all three expectations. The findings contribute to research on trade policymaking, public opinion towards trade, and legislator behavior.

Introduction

Do legislators' trade policy stances reflect constituents' economic interests? In other words, are legislators that represent electoral districts with many beneficiaries and few losers from international trade more supportive of trade liberalization and

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trade agreements? We argue that legislators indeed consider their electoral districts' economic interests when making up their minds on international trade. Concretely, we expect that legislators representing districts that are competitive in international trade—that is, whose economic structure is in line with the country's comparative advantage—are more supportive of trade agreements than other legislators. We also argue that the relative importance of constituents' economic interests is higher for legislators from districts with a smaller number of seats available. This is so because multimember districts allow candidates to cater to, for example, losers from trade even when the median voter is expected to benefit from trade. Moreover, we argue that constituents' economic interests mainly matter for the trade policy stances of left-wing legislators, as right-wing legislators are anyhow ideologically committed to free trade.

Data on legislators from 16 Latin American countries over the period from 2005 to 2019 allow us to test these arguments. Specifically, we rely on surveys covering the positions of 3,576 legislators towards (potential) trade agreements between their countries and the United States of America and the European Union, respectively, and the Pacific Alliance consisting of Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. To gauge constituents' economic interests, we rely on an innovative approach that combines trade and household survey data into measures of what we call "subnational trade competitiveness." The results strongly support our arguments. Constituency economic interest, operationalized through subnational trade competitiveness, indeed positively correlates with legislators' support for trade agreements, but this effect is smaller in districts with larger magnitude and for right-wing legislators. Several tests suggest that these findings are not the result of endogeneity, namely legislators' attitudes affecting the trade competitiveness of districts. The results are also robust to changes in the operationalization of the predictor of interest and the addition of further control variables.

The key finding that legislators' trade policy stances reflect constituents' economic interests is in line with a considerable number of existing studies (Bailey, Goldstein, and Weingast 1997; Campello and Urdinez 2021; Feigenbaum and Hall 2015; Gartzke and Wrighton 1998; Hanretty, Lauderdale, and Vivyan 2017; Hiscox 2002; Miler and Allee 2018; Milner and Tingley 2011; Murillo and Pinto 2021; Owen 2017; Rickard 2015; Schonhardt-Bailey 2003; Stiller 2023). The article still makes a series of important

contributions to this literature. First, the two scope conditions for the main effect that we formulate add important theoretical nuance. Whereas a considerable number of studies have shown that institutions matter for economic policy outcomes (Ehrlich 2007; McGillivray 2004; Rickard 2018), how institutions moderate the effect of constituency interests on legislators' attitudes or behavior has not yet received much attention. The same applies to political ideology, where we know that it has a direct impact on legislators' attitudes and behavior (Poole and Rosenthal 2011) but not how it interacts with constituency interests. Investigating these interaction effects is crucial to identify the scope conditions of existing arguments.

Second, so far most studies in this field have relied on evidence from just one country, namely the United States (with the notable exceptions of Campello and Urdinez 2021; Murillo and Pinto 2021). This is problematic because the electoral system of the United States features single-member districts, which is the most likely setting to find a link between constituency interests and legislator attitudes or behavior. To what extent existing findings can be generalized to other countries and contexts hence remains open. Finally, we add to the state of the art with our operationalization of the trade competitiveness of electoral districts. In fact, the existing literature has found it difficult to operationalize this concept. Illustratively, Baldwin and Magee (2000) rely on a binary measure of industry competitiveness, and Murillo and Pinto (2021) distinguish between exporting and importing districts based on qualitative assessments. Our operationalization produces interval-level measures of trade competitiveness at the level of electoral districts. Specifically, we first use data on trade flows to estimate how competitive certain industries are in a country. We then merge this trade data with fine-grained, subnational employment data to estimate an employment-share weighted mean level of trade competitiveness at the level of electoral districts. The resulting measure captures the extent to which an electoral district aligns with the comparative advantage of the country. As we implement this approach for 16 countries and over time, we create unprecedented cross-country data on trade competitiveness at the subnational level.

Going beyond these contributions to research on legislators and trade policy, the article speaks to several broader debates. For one, addressing legislators' trade attitudes is key for a better understanding of the link between societal interests and trade policy

outcomes, which forms the basis of much trade policy research (see, e.g., Chase 2005; Dür 2010; Grossman and Helpman 2002; Milner 1988; Osgood 2017). Our findings run counter to the view that legislators only consider the interests of a few, well-organized economic actors. Rather, the positive relationship between subnational trade competitiveness and legislators' support for trade agreements indicates that legislators are concerned with the average economic interest of the electoral district. In speaking to this issue, the article also addresses normative concerns regarding representation in democracies.

Second, the article contributes to research on public opinion towards trade (Baker 2003; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006; Mansfield and Mutz 2009; O'Rourke and Sinnott 2001; Rho and Tomz 2017; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Concretely, we find some similarities but also some differences with respect to the determinants of mass and legislator attitudes towards trade. For both legislators and ordinary citizens, right-wing ideology positively correlates with trade support.

Finally, the article also relates to a large debate in the study of legislative behavior: how do legislators trade off ideology, partisanship, and their constituents' interest? While various scholars have already demonstrated the importance of political ideology as a predictor of attitudes towards trade agreements (Bohigues and Rivas 2019; Milner and Judkins 2004), legislators' ideological leaning may clash with the needs of their constituency as captured by our core predictor. The fact that ideology and constituency interests may point in different direction creates the need to disentangle the effects of these factors (Jackson and Kingdon 1992). Although we have seen an increase in research on this matter (see, e.g., Gilens and Page 2014), there has been little focus on how political institutions and political ideology may moderate the effect of constituency interests. In addition, whereas most studies in this field of research focus on congruence between policy outcomes and public opinion, we concentrate on congruence between legislator attitudes and a policy's expected effects on constituents' economic interests.

Argument

Do legislators' trade policy stances reflect the economic interests of their constituents? In answering this question, we operationalize legislators' trade policy stances via legislator attitudes

towards trade agreements. This sets our study apart from most existing research, which tends to focus on parliamentary votes (the exceptions are Campello and Urdinez 2021; Murillo and Pinto 2021). Analyzing attitudes has the advantage that our results are not distorted by party discipline that can have a large impact on votes cast in parliament. At the same time, it is possible that constituency interests matter for legislators' parliamentary votes but not for their attitudes. This is the case if legislators vote contrary to their convictions—for example, because of strategic considerations. While legislators clearly sometimes act against their convictions, we generally expect attitudes to be consistent with behavior, because humans are driven to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957; Harmon-Jones 2019).

In terms of constituents' economic interests with respect to trade agreements, we assume that they reflect what we call subnational trade competitiveness, namely the ability of firms from a district to sell goods and services on the world market (or to resist efforts by foreign companies to enter the domestic market).[1] Subnational trade competitiveness, in turn, is a function of a country's comparative advantage and the economic structure of the subnational region. All countries have a comparative advantage in the production of some goods or the provision of some services. Labor-abundant countries, for example, tend to have a comparative advantage in the production of labor-intensive goods and capital-abundant countries in the production of capital-intensive goods (Leamer 1984). Within countries, the economic structure of regions can be more or less aligned with the country's comparative advantage, leading to differences in trade competitiveness across subnational entities. A region's trade competitiveness is high (low) if it mainly produces goods and services for which a country has a (lacks) comparative advantage.

An electoral district's trade competitiveness, in turn, matters for the economic interests of its firms and citizens. In regions that lack trade competitiveness, at least in the politically relevant short to midterm, trade liberalization tends to produce an increase in imports that can lead to the displacement of jobs and hence to lower wages.[2] Liberalization then creates losses for a significant subset of firms and workers (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2013). For example, a region with a large agricultural sector that lacks competitiveness in that sector will be upset by a reduction of trade barriers that leads to an increase in agricultural imports. In the longer run, other economic effects start to dominate (e.g., lower

import prices can foster consumption, leading to higher economic growth rates, and job creation), but these effects are often heavily discounted because the causal link between these outcomes and trade policy choices becomes more tenuous the further the outcomes are in the future.

In highly competitive regions, by contrast, trade liberalization should produce more winners and fewer losers. In fact, these regions can expect a cut in trade barriers to produce an increase in their exports to partner countries. Greater demand for their goods and services, in turn, creates employment and increases wages (assuming that at least in the short-run geographic mobility within a country is limited). Districts with high trade competitiveness should also see more lobbying by firms in support of trade agreements, as competitive firms expect trade agreements to facilitate their sales abroad, which increases their profits (Kim and Osgood 2019; Plouffe 2017). Research has also shown that competitive firms benefit from trade agreements because they allow them to import intermediate goods and services that they use in their production processes at lower prices (Bernard, Jensen, and Schott 2009). Constituency interests hence should tilt more towards protectionism in districts with lower trade competitiveness than in districts with higher trade competitiveness.

These constituency interests can influence legislator attitudes via two distinct channels. For one, constituents can form interest groups that lobby legislators for specific policies (Drope and Hansen 2004; Hall and Deardorff 2006; Wright 1996). Such lobbying can either actually persuade legislators or affect legislators' public stance towards trade agreements. If the former, interest group demands are directly reflected in legislators' trade attitudes. If the latter, legislators' public stance should affect their attitudes because, as argued above, whenever attitudes are inconsistent with behavior, humans tend to either adjust their attitudes or their behavior (Festinger 1957; Harmon-Jones 2019). Since in the face of lobbying it is difficult for legislators to change their behavior, we expect them to adjust their attitudes.

Because interest groups can also influence elections (e.g., via campaign contributions or political information), they can furthermore select legislators that hold trade attitudes that predispose them to pursue policies in line with constituents' economic interests (Schlozman and Tierney 1986, 200–20). As put by Fordham and McKeown, interest groups can be expected "to seek out candidates committed to a general perspective likely to be congenial

to their interests" (2003, 525). In short, lobbying can bring legislators' trade attitudes in line with constituent economic interests.

Alternatively, an electoral mechanism may make legislators react to constituent interests. In democracies, voters can punish politicians if they feel that their economic interests have not been safeguarded (this is the basis for the large literature on economic voting; see, e.g., Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2019). They can also prospectively select legislators that hold attitudes in line with their economic interests. They can use party positions as a shortcut in the absence of information about individual candidates' attitudes. Voters may also voice their interests outside of elections, for example, by contacting their legislators or by participating in manifestations. Because most legislators either strive for reelection or at least need public support to pursue policies that are important to them, they have an incentive to listen to these constituent demands (which is evidenced, for example, in the findings by Gilens and Page 2014; Hanretty, Lauderdale, and Vivyan 2017). Again, this can either persuade them or affect their attitudes via the cognitive-dissonance mechanism outlined before. Importantly, this mechanism can be at play even if there is no evidence of voters ever mobilizing with respect to trade policy, as legislators can preempt mobilization by pursuing trade policies that reflect voter interests (Bailey 2001).

Independent of which of these two channels is at work, the expectation is that constituents' economic interests as captured by an electoral district's trade competitiveness should be reflected in legislator attitudes towards trade. We hence derive the following hypothesis:

H1: The higher the trade competitiveness of a legislator's electoral district, the greater is his or her support for a trade agreement.

In addition to this main effect, we argue that the relationship between subnational trade competitiveness and legislators' trade policy stances is conditional on political institutions and legislators' political orientations. For one, the relationship between subnational trade competitiveness and legislators' attitudes towards trade agreements should depend on district magnitude. District magnitude refers to the number of seats available in a given electoral district. In a single-member district, in which only one legislator is elected, candidates' strategies should be fairly homogeneous.

All of them have an incentive to focus on the median economic interest of the electoral district, independent of whether the link between constituency interests and legislators' stances works via interest groups or elections. If the interest group channel is at work, it makes sense for legislators to cater to those groups that reflect the median economic interest, as—on average—they are likely to be either the most numerous or the most prominent. For example, since Antofagasta (Chile) has a large mining industry, Compromiso Minero, the association representing Chile's mining industry, also plays a large role in that region. With respect to the electoral channel, in a single-member district, legislators have an incentive to reflect the interest of the median voter.

The more candidates are elected in an electoral district, the more diluted the relationship between median economic interest and legislators' trade policy stances should become (Portmann, Stadelmann, and Eichenberger 2012). In such multimember districts, some candidates have an incentive to cater to the interests of a minority of economic interests or voters. In essence, individual legislators may decide to be the candidate of either the winners or the losers of trade liberalization. As a result, the effect of trade competitiveness on legislators' trade attitudes should be stronger in electoral districts of small magnitude. Our second hypothesis hence reads:

H2: The effect stipulated in Hypothesis 1 decreases as district magnitude increases.

We also expect that legislators' ideology moderates the relationship between constituency economic interests and legislators' trade attitudes. Right-wing legislators can be expected to show more support for trade agreements, as trade liberalization is often seen to disproportionately benefit wealthier parts of society (as shown for developing countries by Meschi and Vivarelli 2009). In fact, using the same data that we use, Bohigues and Rivas (2019) show that in Latin America right-wing legislators are more supportive of trade agreements with the United States and the European Union than left-wing legislators. What is more, right-wing political parties have generally been found to be less protectionist than left-wing parties (Milner and Judkins 2004). Data from party manifestos, moreover, show that (at least in Latin America) right-wing parties are more strongly committed to free trade than left-wing

parties to protectionism (Burst et al. 2020).[3] This ideological commitment to free trade should make it difficult for right-wing legislators to oppose trade agreements even if their district isn't highly competitive; whereas in highly competitive districts, ceiling effects mean that those already ideologically presupposed towards welcoming a trade agreement cannot become even more supportive of it. By contrast, subnational trade competitiveness should be a major determinant of the trade policy stances of left-wing legislators, as ideologically they are less committed to supporting or opposing a trade agreement. In form of a hypothesis, we expect:

H3: The effect postulated in Hypothesis 1 is larger for left-wing legislators.

Research Design

Outcome: Attitudes Towards Trade Agreements

We rely on the Latin American Elites Database to test our hypotheses (Alcántara 2019). For each legislative period since 1994, this database includes data from a survey based on personal interviews with a representative sample of legislators in the lower chambers of a series of Latin American countries. Questions cover a wide range of topics, such as democratic representation, demographics of legislators, and policy positions on various issues, including attitudes towards trade agreements (Barragán 2015; Bohigues and Rivas 2019).[4] We use all available waves of the survey that include at least one question on trade agreements. This covers a total of 3,576 interviews with legislators in 16 countries and 48 legislative periods between 2005 and 2019, for whom data for both trade attitudes and subnational trade competitiveness (see below) is available (for more information, see Table A1 in the online supporting information).[5]

Our outcome variable sets us apart from most existing literature, which generally analyzes parliamentary votes. The key advantage of our data is that it is available for many countries and a long time period. In contrast, parliamentary votes on trade agreements are relatively rare and difficult to compare because of how different PTAs and potential partners are from each other. A potential

criticism of our approach is that explaining parliamentary votes is more important than explaining legislators' attitudes. We have two responses to this critique. On the one hand, most likely attitudes matter for votes. Individual legislator's attitudes should influence party positions, which in turn are the key factor explaining legislative votes in most countries. On the other hand, even if this were not the case, the finding that a correlation between constituency interests and attitudes exists, but then disappears when analyzing votes, would have important normative implications.[6]

Latin American countries are interesting cases for a variety of reasons. For one, they are very active in negotiating trade agreements and have signed a considerable number of both inter- and intraregional trade agreements (Dür, Baccini, and Elsig 2014). This means that legislators in these countries have experience with trade agreements and thus can meaningfully respond to questions about their views towards them. Additionally, all countries that we include in our analysis are established democracies (see, e.g., Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2019). To some extent, our argument should also apply to nondemocratic countries, but the mechanism is clearer in democracies.

Furthermore, all of these countries have an electoral system based on proportional representation with party lists at the regional level (Reynolds, Reilly, and Ellis 2005).[7] These systems have two characteristics that are advantageous for our empirical design. First, because legislators generally are elected in a clearly defined electoral district, we can estimate their constituents' economic situation (and thus approximate the distributional consequences of trade liberalization). Second, district magnitude varies within and across countries, allowing us to test the moderating effect of district magnitude. Below, we account for the minor differences in electoral systems across countries in our sample through country-year fixed effects.

To capture our outcome variable, we rely on the following question: "On a scale from 1 to 10 where '1' means very negative and '10' means very positive, how do you evaluate [trade agreement][for Latin America]?"[8] Trade agreements mentioned include a free trade agreement with the United States (for all 48 legislative periods and 3,473 legislators), a free trade agreement with the EU (for 27 legislative periods and 1,753 legislators) and the Pacific Alliance (for 20 legislative periods and 1,328 legislators).[9] That this question is formulated in a generic manner has the advantage that even legislators that lack specialist knowledge in the field of

trade policy can respond to it. The questions concerning agreements with the United States and the European Union ask for an evaluation of the consequences for Latin America. Given that most legislators are not trade policy specialists, we expect them to answer even this broader question based on their experiences in their districts rather than based on an evaluation for the whole of Latin America. We pool the data across agreements and thus have a total of 6,554 complete observations of legislators responding to one of the agreements.[10] Agreement fixed effects allow us to control for any differences across agreements.

A trade agreement with the United States has been on the agenda of most Latin American countries at least since the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s. In the meantime, several of these countries (among them Mexico, Chile, and Colombia) have concluded preferential trade agreements with the United States (Dür, Baccini, and Elsig 2014). An agreement with the EU has also been on the agenda of many countries. Mexico and Chile were the first to sign an actual preferential trade agreement with the EU, and the Central American and Andean countries followed suit. The Pacific Alliance of Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, finally, was created in 2012 (Nolte 2016). Below, we utilize potential differences in attitudes towards existing and not (yet) existing agreements to address endogeneity concerns.

In short, our data show variation across countries and (potential) trading partners and over time. This sets our study apart from the existing literature that mainly consists of single case studies, which are limited in terms of both geographic and temporal scope. Thus, moving beyond specific cases and years minimizes the chance of idiosyncratic results and allows us to test the moderating effect of political institutions.

Predictors: Subnational Trade Competitiveness, District Magnitude and Legislator Ideology

By definition, each country has a comparative advantage in the production of some goods or the provision of some services. A country's economic structure, however, is unlikely to be fully homogenous across subnational regions. Some regions produce the goods and services for which a country has a comparative advantage, whereas other regions produce other goods and services. As a

result, the former exhibit greater international trade competitiveness than the latter.

To measure subnational trade competitiveness, following the approach outlined in detail in Huber, Stiller and Dür (2023), we first calculate a country's comparative advantage at the industry group level. For this, we rely on two measures: (1) revealed comparative advantage (RCA) and (2) exports-over-imports (EX/IM) (for more detail, see section C in the online supporting information). The RCA was introduced by Balassa (1965). The underlying idea is that a country has a comparative advantage with respect to a product if it exports relatively more of this product than the rest of the world. The measure is calculated by dividing the share of a product's exports in total exports of a country by the global share of a product's exports in total global exports. For our purpose, we use an adjusted RCA measure that assesses a country's comparative advantage in the markets of the partner countries in a PTA.[11] We do so because for the decision on whether to enter a trade agreement, constituents should be concerned about their competitiveness in the future trade agreement and not in the world market. If a country exports the same share of a given product to the partner country as the world exports to the partner country, the RCA equals 1. If the RCA value is below 1, the country has no comparative advantage in this product. Producers of that product in that country hence can be assumed to face import competition. By contrast, when the value is above 1, domestic producers are mainly export oriented.

The second measure of comparative advantage assesses to which extent industries are net importing or net exporting (see, e.g., Conconi, Facchini, and Zanardi 2012). We compute this second measure (EX/IM) by dividing a country's exports of a certain product to the partner country by the respective imports from the partner country. A value below 1 implies that the country is net importing and thus has no comparative advantage in a specific product, whereas a value above 1 means that the country is net exporting in that product.

We log transform both RCA and EX/IM for three reasons: First, the value 0 becomes the tipping point between having and not having a comparative advantage. Second, doing so converts measures that represent ratios, where the values 0.5 and 2 have the same substantial meaning but a different distance to the value of 1, into linear measures, where the values −1 and + 1 have the same

distance to the value of 0. Finally, log transforming allows us to get rid of occasional outliers in the data.

The underlying trade data for goods stems from the United Nation's Comtrade database.[12] The data are at SITC rev.3 group (three digits) level. In total, we get data for 259 categories of goods. For services, we rely on the OECD and WTO's Balanced Trade in Services database (BaTIS).[13] This database contains data for 11 service categories, such as "Communication Services." Unfortunately, the BaTIS data ends in 2012, and thus we need to carry forward the 2012 data for the years 2013–17. We convert this trade data to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) scheme, as this is the level of aggregation at which we can join the trade data with the data from household surveys. For example, ISIC rev.3 contains 292 classes, 159 groups, and 60 divisions. We use the most fine-grained data available throughout.

As both operationalizations of comparative advantage are at the country-industry group level, and we need to capture the trade competitiveness of districts, we combine them with data on economic activities at the district level (for similar approaches, see Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2013; Colantone and Stanig 2018).[14] The best available data on economic activity at the district level comes from household surveys (such as census, living condition, or labor surveys). The sources for all these surveys are indicated in the online supporting information. These surveys use the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) scheme. We rely on these data to calculate employment shares by industry group at the district level.[15] When calculating these shares, we exclude workers in nontradeables sectors. The final step then is to sum up the products of all comparative advantage values with the respective employment shares. This way we arrive at two measures of district-level trade competitiveness, which is a measure of the extent to which a district's economy produces goods and services for which the country possesses a comparative advantage, one based on the RCA and one on EX/IM. We further standardize these measures at the country-year-agreement level so that the district with the minimum value for an agreement within a country and year receives the value 0, whereas the district with the maximum value receives the value 1. Doing so ensures that different ranges for our measures across trading partners do not drive the results.

To reduce endogeneity concerns, we use household surveys and trade data from two years prior to the election. At times, we need to violate this rule since some countries do not field yearly

household surveys (or do not include all necessary variables). For example, we use the household survey data from the year 2004, rather than 2003, for the Argentine 2005 election, because no such survey was available for 2003. As mentioned above, we exclude legislator surveys for which no household survey within the period between four years prior to the election and the election itself was available. Table A1 in the Appendix summarizes these design decisions and deviations in detail.

Moving on to district magnitude (Hypothesis 2), we hand-coded the number of seats elected within each district. Finally, Hypothesis 3 posits a conditional effect of subnational trade competitiveness on legislators' trade attitudes depending on legislators' political ideology. Our measure of ideology is self-reported by the legislators. It ranges from 0 (left) to 9 (right). The variable shows considerable variation across countries and political parties. Even within the same political parties, however, we often find legislators towards both the left and the right end of the political spectrum. The center-left Democratic Revolutionary Party of Panama, for example, has legislators that identify as completely left (value of 0) and others that see themselves as completely right (value of 9).

Model Specifications

Our dataset includes at least one and up to three continuous support ratings of trade agreements per legislator and survey. Given the continuous nature of our dependent variable, we use ordinary least square regression to regress trade-agreement support on our set of predictors. In terms of control variables, we control for legislators' gender, given the strong evidence of a gender effect in the literature on public opinion towards trade (Mansfield, Mutz, and Silver 2015). We do not control for party affiliation in our main models as—in line with our argument—this variable may mediate the effect of subnational trade competitiveness. In robustness checks, however, we show that our main findings hold even in the presence of party fixed effects.

Moreover, we include country-year and agreement fixed effects. The country-year fixed effects capture factors such as the economic circumstances (e.g., whether a country experiences a growth period or a recession), institutional settings, and other political dynamics specific to a country at a specific time. Additionally, they allay concerns about potential violations of measurement

invariance across countries and capture differences introduced by distinct ISIC coding schemes or conversion tables. The agreement fixed effects control for differences across the partners in trade agreements. Since legislators are nested in district-years, we cluster standard errors at that level. This approach is preferable to clustering at the district level, as we have much variation over time in terms of both legislators and values on our competitiveness measures.

We report the results from a model with just main effects to test Hypothesis 1. We rely on interaction models to investigate the conditional effects outlined in Hypotheses 2 and 3. To test Hypothesis 2, we interact the district-competitiveness measure with log-transformed district magnitude and squared log-transformed district magnitude. The transformations allow to account for the likely nonlinear interaction between district competitiveness and district magnitudes (i.e., the marginal effect of subnational trade competitiveness should decline to but never below zero). We interact district competitiveness and the linear measure of political ideology.[16]

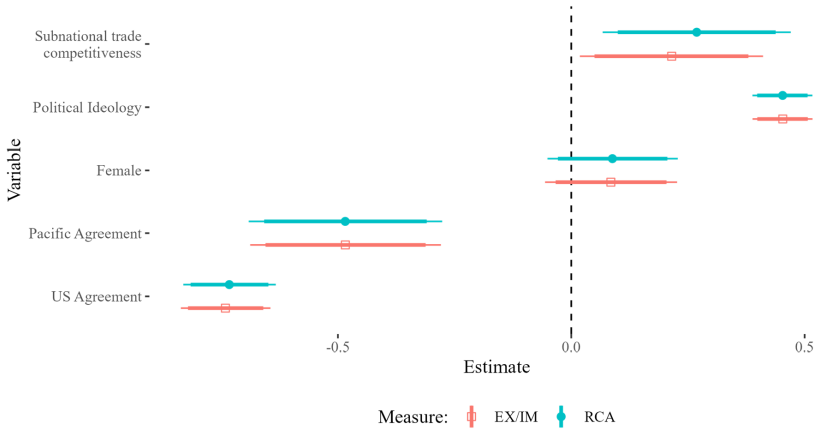
Results

Main Effects

Do legislators consider their districts' trade competitiveness when forming policy preferences with regards to trade? Our baseline models (see Figure 1 and Table E1 in the online supporting information for the regression output) suggest that this is the case. The first pair of ranges for districts' trade competitiveness indicate a consistent and statistically significant positive correlation between district competitiveness and trade agreement support for both the RCA and EX/IM measure. In other words, legislators from more competitive districts are more supportive of trade agreements. This finding is in line with Hypothesis 1.

The estimated coefficients suggest that legislators in the districts with the highest trade competitiveness rated the trade agreements by about 0.3 points higher on a scale from 1 to 10 compared to legislators in the least competitive districts. This may not seem like a large effect. Our results, however, are a lower bound estimate. For one, ideology likely captures part of the effect of trade

FIGURE 1
Coefficient Plot of the Main Analyses
Note: Points are unstandardized estimates from a linear regression. Ranges represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals using standard errors clustered at the district-year level. Table E1 in the online supporting information provides the full regression output for Figure 1. Country fixed effects are omitted from the figure.



competitiveness. In more competitive districts, it can be expected that candidates are elected whose ideology ensures that they will support trade agreements. Moreover, in multimember districts, not all legislators need to align their position with the districts' average trade competitiveness. Even in a highly trade-competitive district, representing the few losers from trade may be a vote-winning strategy (see more on this below). Finally, our measure of districts' trade competitiveness is likely to contain some noise, for example for districts with a large share of subsistence agriculture or public service employees that do not face international competition in the same way as other employees. Considering these factors, our results indicate that competitiveness is an important factor shaping legislators' trade-agreement attitudes.

Moving to the control variables, the second set of ranges shows the results for political ideology (for both measures of competitiveness). Consistently, right-wing ideology is associated with more support for trade agreements. Substantively, the results mean that within a country and for a specific year, legislators,

for each step on the 10-point left-right scale, increase support for trade agreements by approximately 0.45 points (on a scale from 1 to 10). Female legislators do not differ from male legislators. The agreement-fixed effects suggest that the average support is highest for the agreement vis-à-vis the European Union (reference category) and lowest for the agreement with the United States. Compared to the European Union, legislators support an agreement with the United States substantially less (by approximately 0.75 points). This likely reflects geopolitical dynamics associated with the United States in Latin America.

Scope Conditions: District Magnitude and Political Ideology

Going beyond these direct effects, we have argued that the effect of subnational trade competitiveness should be smaller in districts with larger district magnitude, that is, with more seats per district (H2). To test this, we interact district competitiveness with both the log-transformed district magnitude and the squared term of the log-transformed district magnitude (to account for the nonlinear nature of the interaction). This model finds support for Hypothesis 2. In Figure 2, we plot the marginal effects of trade competitiveness by district size. The results for trade competitiveness follow the expectation just set out. While competitiveness plays a subordinate role in districts with larger magnitude, it is a strong predictor of trade attitudes in districts with only few representatives. The effect is stronger for the RCA measure than for the

FIGURE 2
The Moderating Effect of District Magnitude
Note: Ranges represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals using standard errors clustered at the district-year level. Table E2 in the online supporting information provides the full regression output.

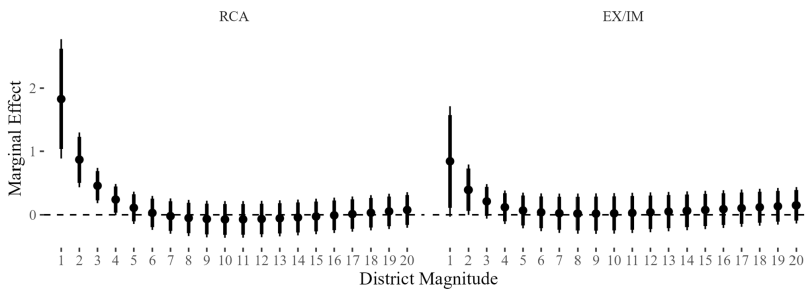
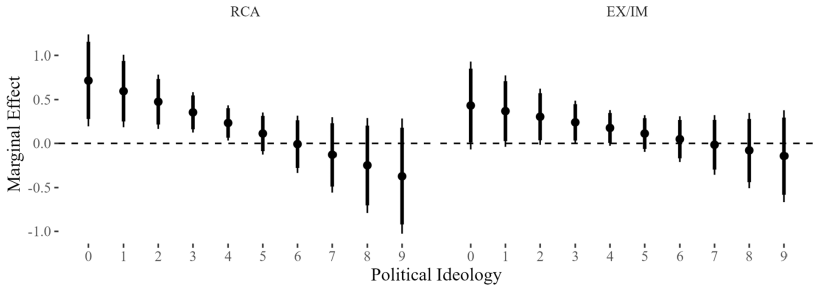


FIGURE 3
The Moderating Effect of Political Ideology
Note: Ranges represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals using standard errors clustered at the district-year level. Table E2 in the online supporting information provides the full regression output.



EX/IM measure. Still, as expected in Hypothesis 2, the findings suggest that legislators follow different electoral strategies depending on district magnitude, with legislators in smaller districts focusing more on their districts' average economic interest.

Hypothesis 3 suggests that the effect of subnational trade competitiveness is also conditional on legislators' ideological leaning. Figure 3 provides the empirical evidence for this argument. Specifically, we show the marginal effect of subnational competitiveness (on the y-axis) by different ideological leanings (on the x-axis). Higher values on the political ideology variable denote more right-wing legislators. The evidence is consistent with our expectation. While the effect is substantially stronger for our RCA measure, the EX/IM measure of subnational trade competitiveness also shows a negative slope. While a districts' subnational trade competitiveness does not help explain trade attitudes among right-wing legislators, left-wing legislators are more supportive of trade agreements in competitive districts. In other words, subnational trade competitiveness positively correlates with trade support especially among left-wing legislators, as expected in Hypothesis 3.

Addressing Potential Endogeneity

As is the case with all observational studies, the results of this one may be affected by endogeneity. Concretely, via their support for trade agreements, legislators may make their districts more

economically competitive. This could be because their support for trade agreements makes them also support policies that make a district more competitive or because they manage to have trade agreements implemented that have a positive effect on the district's competitiveness. In either case, trade competitiveness would be a consequence rather than a cause of legislators' trade attitudes. We use several distinct strategies to address this concern in this section.

First, if legislators are part of the parliament for the first time, it is unlikely for their trade attitudes to have affected district trade competitiveness, particularly as we capture competitiveness two years before the start of the legislative period. Our data offer the possibility to test this implication empirically. For this, we reran the main analyses only including first timers (who constitute 67.7% of legislators in our data) in the models. The results hold for the RCA-based measure of trade competitiveness, but the EX/IM measure of trade competitiveness is no longer statistically significant. Even this coefficient, however, is only slightly smaller than in the main model, meaning that this evidence alleviates concerns about endogeneity (see Table E4 in the online supporting information).

Second, we regress districts' levels of competitiveness two years after a survey wave[17] on the districts' competitiveness before the survey wave as well as trade attitudes. We lose some observations for survey waves that were conducted recently (that is 2016 or later), as trade data and household surveys are not yet available. A positive coefficient for trade attitudes could mean that legislators' support for trade agreements causes an increase in their districts' competitiveness, posing an endogeneity problem. Our findings, however, indicate that trade competitiveness is rather sticky. In our models, trade attitudes have no significant effect on the future trade competitiveness of the legislators' districts (see Table E5 in the online supporting information).

Finally, some agreements that legislators were asked about are hypothetical (that is, they have not materialized in any form) while others have been signed and implemented (for example, a trade agreement between Mexico and the United States—NAFTA—was signed before our observational period). If legislators would give different answers for hypothetical agreements compared to existing ones, this could be an indication of endogeneity, namely that support for a trade agreement could affect competitiveness via the provisions included in a trade agreement. To assess this possibility, we use information from the DESTA dataset on whether

agreements were signed prior to the surveys being carried out (Dür, Baccini, and Elsig 2014). However, the interaction term in Table E3 in the online supporting information suggests that there is no systematic difference between the two groups of agreements. In sum, these tests suggest that endogeneity is not a major problem for this study.

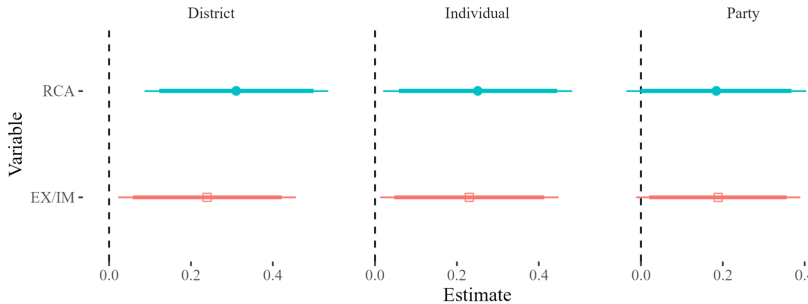
Further Robustness Checks

In the following, we present a series of tests that examine the robustness of our findings. First, we discuss whether our results are sensitive to the operationalization of subnational trade competitiveness. Figure 1 already presented results for two different measures. Both suggest a relationship of similar magnitude, and both reach conventional levels of statistical significance. As these measures are based on quite distinct approaches (although they try to capture the same concept), chances are low that our results are driven by some idiosyncratic aspect of our measurement. Nevertheless, we implemented a further check with variables that do not capture competitiveness vis-à-vis the respective agreement's partner(s) but vis-à-vis the world. The measures are calculated as above, but instead of using trade flows with the partner country or countries, we rely on trade flows with the world. The findings, which we present in Table E6 in the online supporting information, provide further evidence of the robustness of our findings. The coefficients are similar to those reported in Figure 1 in both size and levels of statistical significance.[18]

Second, we add three sets of additional control variables. The first of these models includes additional controls at the district level, namely Gross National Income per capita, logged population density, and mean level of education in years. The first variable captures variation in levels of development across legislative districts, which plausibly could affect legislators' trade attitudes. Urban and rural districts systematically differ in their economic activity, which logged population density captures. The mean level of education in years of a district approximates the skill level of a district. The second model adds two variables at the level of individual legislators, specifically legislators' education and income. Given the strong prevalence of arguments regarding education and public opinion towards trade (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2006), we might expect that also legislators with higher education view trade

FIGURE 4
Additional Controls

Note: Points are unstandardized estimates from a linear regression. Ranges represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals using standard errors clustered at the district-year level. Tables E7, E8, and E9 in the online supporting information provide the full regression outputs for Figure 4. Control variables as well as country and agreement fixed effects are omitted from the figure.



agreements more favorably. The last model includes party fixed effects. These fixed effects capture party specific dynamics, in terms of party discipline and the party's role in the party system, among others, which plausibly affect which position legislators take.

In all but one of these models (see Figure 4), the coefficients for subnational trade competitiveness remain positive and statistically significant. Only in the model in which we control for party membership, the RCA-based measure of competitiveness narrowly misses statistical significance ($p = 0.101$). The additional controls also largely work as expected. Legislators representing more developed districts support trade more. Similarly, legislators with higher education and income support trade substantially more. The party fixed effects indicate large variation in terms of support for trade agreements across political parties.

Third, we split the analyses by trade agreement since it would undermine our argument if only one agreement drove the overall effect. By and large, we find similar results across the three agreements (see Tables E10 to E12 in the online supporting information). In two of the six models, however, the EX/IM measure of trade competitiveness fails to reach statistical significance. The

RCA measure, by contrast, is highly robust. Fourth, we investigate the extent to which the electoral system moderates the effect of subnational trade competitiveness. While we generally focus on electoral regimes with proportional representation rather than majority vote, there is reasonable variation in how seats are allocated. To account for this variation, we manually coded whether a country uses closed or open list systems. While voters elect parties in the former, they can select candidates in the latter. In line with Wagner and Plouffe (2019), Table E13 in the online supporting information suggests that district competitiveness is a particularly strong predictor of trade attitudes in the presence of open lists. Finally, to account for possible nonlinearity in the interaction between competitiveness and ideology, we split the interval-scaled moderator of political ideology in five groups from left to right. In line with Hypothesis 3, we find that left-wing and center-left legislators react to district competitiveness, whereas centrist and right-leaning legislators do not (see Figure E1 in the online supporting information). Taken together, these alternative specifications suggest that our findings are robust.

Conclusion

Several studies have argued that at least under some circumstances legislators' stances on trade policy should reflect constituents' economic interests. This article not only contributes a novel empirical test of this expectation to this literature but also investigates the scope conditions of this argument. Concretely, we have argued that the relationship between constituency interests and legislators' trade attitudes should be stronger in electoral districts with smaller district magnitude and among left-wing legislators. Relying on a survey with 3,576 legislators from 16 countries and covering 48 legislative periods since 2005, we have found support for our expectations. Several tests show that our findings are robust and not driven by endogeneity. They hold for different operationalizations of subnational trade competitiveness, and three distinct trade agreements, namely agreements with the United States and the European Union and the Pacific Alliance. Our empirical test of the link between constituency interests and legislators in the field of trade policy is innovative in several ways. For one, we add cross-national, cross-agreement, and over-time evidence to the respective literature. This is an important contribution given that existing research has mostly studied the United States. The broader

empirical basis from which we can derive our findings has allowed us to test scope conditions of the argument. Moreover, we add a novel operationalization of constituent interests via the concept of subnational trade competitiveness to this literature. For this, using an original approach, we had to link national-level trade data with district-level employment data from labor and household surveys.

Our research contributes to a broad literature on legislators' behavior and attitudes beyond the field of trade. Scholars have long debated whether legislators follow their ideology or constituent preferences when taking a stance on a specific issue (Jackson and Kingdon 1992). We find that legislators consider both ideology and the economic interests of their electoral districts. This finding has normative implications: legislators represent constituency interests, as should be the case in democracies, but this still leaves scope for legislators to have their own views. Our results also indicate that the effect of constituents' economic interests is conditional on legislators' ideology. Because it is probable that ideology partly reflects economic interests, however, we likely underestimate the role of constituent interests. This issue, and also the question to which extent our findings apply to policy areas other than trade, can be the starting point for future research.

Future research could also add data on public opinion to this analysis to better investigate the causal chain from subnational trade competitiveness to legislators' attitudes. Are voters in highly competitive districts also more profree trade than in other districts? Finally, data on lobbying, as has been collected in studies assessing trade policy in the European Union and the United States (see, e.g., Ehrlich 2008), would help better identify the causal mechanism between economic conditions and legislators' trade-policy stances. In short, this article is only a first step toward a broader research agenda on legislators as intermediaries between constituencies and policy outcomes.

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Data Availability Statement. The data that support the findings of this study are available from LSQ's Harvard Dataverse at 10.7910/DVN/K2PHQM.

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NOTES

1. Some firms have branches in several districts. If such a firm is only active in one industry group, it will defend the same trade preference in all districts, as its trade competitiveness is determined by the comparative advantage of the country as a whole. If it is active in several industry groups that vary in their competitiveness, it will have ambiguous trade preferences and hence will likely abstain from adopting a position on trade.

2. As our argument explicitly focuses on the politically relevant short to midterm, we assume that factors of production are immobile. This implies that workers and firms share the same trade preference (see, e.g., Alt et al. 1996). Contemporary research in the framework of new trade theory also suggests that within firms, capital owners and workers share the same trade preference (see Helpman et al. 2017).

3. Additionally, left-wing legislators show substantially higher variation in their trade attitudes according to the PELA data than their right-wing counterparts.

4. More information on the database is available at https://oir.org.es/pela/ (last accessed December 23, 2022). We report several quality checks in Section F in the online supporting information. These checks confirm the high quality and representativeness of the data.

5. These countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. We lose 709 legislators because there is no information of acceptable quality available to calculate trade competitiveness (see the subsequent section: we lose one wave each in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Paraguay, three waves from Honduras, and all legislators from the only wave in Venezuela). The survey in Brazil only includes a yes/no question on support for trade agreements, which does not fit the rest of our analysis. Therefore, we exclude Brazil from our analysis. While the samples are based on random sampling, we additionally checked the plausibility of the sample. The results in section F.1 in the online supporting information suggest that the sampling conducted by the Latin American Elites Database works as intended.

6. The Latin American Elites Database ensures all legislators anonymity. Thus, data protection does not allow us to identify legislators and, for example, compare their attitudes to their votes.

7. Note that Bolivia and Mexico are considered mixed systems (Reynolds, Reilly, and Ellis 2005). However, they have strong and substantial proportional representation systems as part of the mixed system.

8. The original Spanish version reads: "En una escala de 1 a 10 donde 1' significa muy negativo y '10' muy positivo ¿cómo valora Ud. [el Tratado de Libre comercio con Estados Unidos para América Latina/el Tratado de Libre comercio con la Unión Europea para América Latina/la Alianza del Pacífico]?"

9. In some waves of the survey, the questionnaire included a question regarding the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), which was initiated by Venezuela and Cuba to provide a socialist alternative to other trading blocs in Latin America. However, given that ALBA has not led to (and did not envision) any trade liberalization, it should be regarded more as a geopolitical project than a free trade agreement, and thus we exclude it from our research.

10. Descriptive statistics for all variables are shown in Table D1 in the online supporting information.

11. For the EU and Pacific Alliance, we combine the total trade of all countries. Thus, we weight countries by their trade volume.

12. https://comtrade.un.org/ (last accessed October 4, 2019.

13. https://www.oecd.org/sdd/its/balanced-trade-in-services.htm (last accessed May 2, 2020).

14. This approach works because in most Latin American electoral systems, legislators are elected in specific electoral districts, which usually correspond directly to first-level administrative districts (comparable to NUTS-1 level). Chile uses smaller electoral districts that we aggregate to federal districts, in which they are perfectly nested. To test Hypothesis 2, however, we code district magnitude at the electoral district level (which is 2 for the available elections in Chile). Ecuador (15 of 137 legislators), Guatemala (31 of 158), and Nicaragua (20 of 92) elect some legislators in national constituencies, whereas Colombia (5 of 166) and Ecuador (6 of 137) have minority-reserved seats or seats representing emigrants. We drop these observations from our analyses since we cannot calculate our measures of trade competitiveness for them.

15. Sections F.2 and F.3 in the online supporting information provide several tests to demonstrate the labor surveys' distribution of employment is representative and comparable with existing country estimates.

16. Given recent debates on the nonlinearity of interaction effects (see Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu 2019), we investigate whether our theoretical assumptions on the functional forms of the interaction are correct. Figures E2 to E5 in the online supporting information confirm the design decisions outlined in this paragraph.

17. Due to data availability, at times we need to use data between 1 and 5 years after a survey wave. The mean lag is 2.1 years.

18. The measures are highly correlated ($r(6, 552) = 0.754$, $p = 0.000$), but they differ sufficiently for them to capture slightly different aspects of subnational trade competitiveness. Section C in the online supporting information provides more detail.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Appendix S1.