

[Prospectus]

The World Globalization Made: Institutional Origins and the End of “the End of History”

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Abstract

In contrast to the optimism that marked “the end of history” three decades ago, today’s world appears far less assured. This dissertation proposes the study of how globalization – a fundamental structural transformation of both the global and domestic societies – reshapes world political, economic and security dynamics. It argues that many of today’s persistent problems are deeply rooted in the institutional design and process of globalization, particularly during the post-Cold War period. The prospectus consists of three interconnected projects. First, I investigate the puzzle of autocratic economic resurgence after the Cold War and how they leverage global economic institutions in ways that challenge the expectations of globalization. A specific type of autocracies – engaged reformers – are better able to exploit free trade than their democratic counterparts through competing for external demand, despite remaining institutionally weak in generating domestic demand. Second, I propose a novel theory of expectation mismatch on contemporary bipartisan anti-globalization sentiments. I show that the theoretical foundations underpinning globalization policy systematically overlook contested and uncertain post-equilibrium dynamics. When state-directed and mercantilist economies disrupt the realization of mutually beneficial trade – as illustrated by the “second China shock” – the gap between theoretical expectations and realized outcomes fuels broad political skepticism and opposition. Lastly, I investigate how these globalization-created structural imbalances touched on in the first two projects within the liberal international order, such as global imbalances and others, escalate into order contestation and the returning great-power competition. Employing a mixed-methods approach – combining quantitative analysis, formal models, survey experiments, and qualitative case studies, this dissertation provides insights into how the challenges facing the current order stem from globalization shaped by the order, as well as possible solutions.

1 Introduction

The postwar era of economic globalization – especially following the end of the Cold War – has profoundly reshaped global politics, the world economy, and international security. Under the liberal international order (LIO), championed by major democracies such as the United States and the European Union, global trade and financial integration accelerated rapidly, accompanied by increased migration and the diffusion of global governance institutions and policy practices. Although globalization was initially celebrated for fostering economic cooperation, reducing poverty, and spreading liberal values (Ikenberry 2011; Rodrik 2019), its unintended consequences have increasingly undermined these expectations. Growing domestic and international discontent, political backlash, and social resistance (Autor et al. 2020; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Rodrik 2019) have coincided with the reemergence of power politics after decades of dormancy.

Against this backdrop, my dissertation examines how economic globalization and its challenges interact to reshape international political, economic, and security dynamics. As a background, contemporary globalization confronts crises at three analytically distinct levels. First, at the domestic level, globalization has generated widespread political backlash across advanced and developing economies. Second, at the regime level, the post-Cold War optimism about democratic convergence has given way to autocratic resurgence and democratic backsliding. Third, at the systemic level, unintended and persistent globalization outcomes have eroded the legitimacy of the LIO itself, generating new forms of order contestation particularly during a period of potential power transitions by a rapidly rising China.

A large literature seeks to explain these turbulences. Some studies emphasize globalization’s distributional effects, showing how concentrated losses among domestic actors fuel polarization, populism, and protectionism (Autor et al. 2020; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Rodrik 2019). Others focus on states’ ability to shield citizens from external shocks through compensation and adjustment policies, highlighting the role of domestic institutions and welfare regimes (Ruggie 1982; Walter 2021). A third line of work adopts security and geopolitical perspectives, arguing that power transitions, strategic rivalry, and the rise of alternatives generate anti-globalization sentiment and alignment shifts (Broz et al. 2020; Lake et al. 2021). Related work also highlights concerns about unfair competition and mercantilist practices, particularly in relation to state-led economies (Wu 2016).

Despite their insights, these accounts share two important limitations. First, they often treat economic shocks and competitive pressures as exogenous as given or neglect their origins. Second, they focus primarily on domestic or interstate politics, paying limited attention to how the governing rules of globalization shape outcomes over time. If globalization operates through specific institutional rules built on particular assumptions, then contemporary outcomes should reflect how those rules were written decades ago (North 1990; Pierson 2000). These limitations leave key questions unresolved. Why has globalization backlash proven persistent rather than transitory? Why do structural, imbalanced outcomes emerge among participants, with some states becoming persistent winners that possess stability and prosperity (e.g., China, Vietnam, Singapore, Gulf states, core Europe) while others experience prolonged stagnation or decline or domestic turmoils (e.g., many in the Global South and even in the developed world) (Baldwin 2016)? There are huge long-run performance disparities among states after decades of globalization. If globalization’s problems were primarily distributive, domestic solutions should be sufficient. Yet when some states themselves appear to be long-run losers compared to others, domestic redistribution cannot sustainably resolve the problem. Nor can domestic politics alone explain why globalization has coincided with autocratic resurgence, declining confidence in democratic governance, and bipartisan elite skepticism toward globalization in many advanced economies. I argue that addressing these puzzles requires shifting analysis back to the system and returning to the institutional foundations of globalization to understand how they shape long-run economic and political outcomes.

With this in mind, I turn to the institutional roots of globalization to examine how governing rules generate asymmetric outcomes that accumulate into persistent, state-level structurally imbalanced outcomes and political contestation. My focus is therefore on structural persistence rather than episodic backlash. In other words, I show the origins of why the current form of globalization may (inevitably) lead to current turmoils. Backlash is not just about distributional pain — it is produced by structural imbalances resulted from the rules.

Overarching argument. Much of this argument will require further refinement, but the core intuition is straightforward. If we treat the current globalization turmoils as an institutional failure of the LIO, that failure arises not simply from flawed design choices, but from the interaction between liberal institutional rules and heterogeneous states whose capacities and incentives diverge from the assumptions under which those rules were constructed.

Since the 1940s, classical trade theories – ranging from Ricardo-Viner and Heckscher-Ohlin to

new and new-new trade theories – have profoundly shaped trade liberalization policies embedded in the Bretton Woods institutions (e.g., the WTO, World Bank and IMF) and pro-free trade sentiment (Williamson 1990; Samuelson 1972). Although these institutions may favor some such as patron states or their allies (Carnegie and Clark 2023; Lipsky and Lee 2019) or limit certain behavior (e.g., tariffs), globalization institutions were built around the largely neutral design-level assumptions embedded in these theories: balanced trade, symmetric adjustment, market-conforming state behavior, limited state capacity to strategically shape outcomes, and liberal domestic constraints. That is, global economic institutions treat domestic institutions as background conditions rather than as strategic assets.

Assumptions are not guarantees. When states systematically diverge – actively or passively, for better or worse (e.g., pushing for reforms vs. disallowing labor protests) – from the behaviors globalization institutions presume, the same rules can generate asymmetric advantages rather than neutral outcomes. Asymmetric adjustment costs, differential state-market coordination, uneven enforcement leverage, and divergent political time horizons – each assumed away or hard to capture and enforce in institutional design – become operative under heterogeneous state structures. Crucially, this argument does not hinge on widespread rule-breaking: many competitive asymmetries arise from rule-consistent strategies. For example, well-conducted state-firm coordination that avoids tariffs or quotas can confer strategic advantages without violating formal rules. It may also not require proactive intervention: systemic suppression of labor rights due to passive institutional characteristics *de facto* lower down factor costs in production.

To be clear, although the institutional rules fall short of envisaging many deviant practices, they do envision limited types of non-market behavior. Some rules are designed to handle, for example, subsidies or ensure sequential member accession (Downs et al. 1998), malpractices are often hard to (often conceptually) identify, rely on bilateral disputes for compliance, and largely remain covert (Wu 2016). As Mark Wu (2016) observes in his analysis of the China case, “at the heart of this challenge (to the WTO) is the fact that China’s economic structure is *sui generis*, having evolved in a manner largely unforeseen by those negotiating WTO treat law.” Many policymakers who participated in the WTO negotiations assumed away potential deviations and believed in ultimate convergence (ibid).

Put differently, if globalization’s institutional rules were grounded in assumptions that better matched reality, outcomes would differ. Counterfactuals include strict monitoring of mercantilist

practices within the WTO or mandatory, dynamic rebalancing of trade through exchange rates enforced by the IMF. Table 1 lists examples of mismatches between globalization’s institutional designs and operating realities.

Theoretical Assumptions	Institutional Design	Operating Units (Reality)
Market conformity	Ban formal tariffs and quotas (GATT Art. II, XI); discipline explicit subsidies (WTO SCM); limited constraints on other state intervention	Some states are state-led or mercantilist, coordinating firms and finance
Institutional capacity neutrality	Regulate formal policy instruments rather than coordination capacity; limited scrutiny of implicit state support	Some states possess strong coordination capacity and long policy time horizons
Macroeconomic balance (e.g., balanced trade)	Low tariffs and floating exchange rates; no binding rebalancing mechanisms (GATT Art. XV defers to weak, non-binding IMF surveillance)	Some states suppress domestic consumption, manipulate exchange rates, and sustain persistent surpluses
Compliance neutrality	Enforcement relies on voluntary compliance and retaliation (DSU Art. 22–23); no centralized enforcement	Some states delay compliance and can absorb or outlast retaliation pressure
Domestic tolerance neutrality	Adjustment, compensation, and redistribution delegated to domestic politics	Some regimes are insulated from losers and electoral pressure, enabling prolonged adjustment
Value neutrality	Accept illiberal members under formally neutral rules	Some autocracies obtain systematic advantages under these operating conditions

Table 1: Mismatch Between Assumptions/Institutional Design of Globalization and Operating Realities

My three projects are unified by this theoretical foundation of “institutional mismatch” – which refers to a mismatch between institutional assumptions and the characteristics of actors operating under those institutions. The first project on autocratic rise shows that, despite formally uniform globalization rules to all, engaged and reforming autocracies possess distinctive institutional capacities that enable them to compete effectively in external markets, producing not only structural imbalances among states but also autocratic resurgence as an unintended, more serious outcome. The second project on expectation mismatch and bipartisan anti-globalization sentiment builds on the same logic, arguing that asymmetric state capacities and strategies can nullify the expected gains from mutually beneficial comparative-advantage-based trade, persistently eroding both advantaged and disadvantaged sectors in other economies and generating broad political backlash. The third project then demonstrates how these structural and persistent imbalances in outcomes escalate into direct contestation of the LIO that has shaped globalization.

2 [Paper 1] Autocratic Resurgence

2.1 Context and Research Question

This paper investigates a systemic-level phenomenon highly related to the institutional mismatch described above. Globalization markedly accelerated its pace after the Cold War (Baldwin 2016; Rodrik 2012).¹ Among many historical transformations are global trade and finance integration and economic policy convergence (Simmons and Elkins 2004), accompanied by the optimism that economic liberalism advances democracy (Fukuyama 1989; Ikenberry 2001). Yet, the once promising democratization has stalled, and scholars are puzzled about both democratic backsliding and stable, often competitive autocracies (Diamond 2015; Ekiert and Dasanaike 2024; Haggard and Kaufman 2016).² Democratic backsliding is partially linked to globalization (Autor et al. 2020; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Rodrik 2017), which also witnesses “autocratic rise” – many autocracies survived and reconsolidated, and in many cases, have outpaced economic performance of democracies. In contrast to the 1990s, democracy no longer commands the same normative and political appeal as a governance model. Is the autocratic rise merely coincidental with globalization?

2.2 Proposed Argument

Institutions designed for liberal, market-conforming states generate asymmetric outcomes when applied to non-liberal but strategically adaptive regimes. I argue that autocratic resurgence is driven primarily by a specific subtype of authoritarian regime – those that are both economically engaged and reformed, which I term engaged reformers. Features typically viewed as disadvantages in closed economies, such as centralized authority and weaker institutional constraints, can become sources of advantage under conditions of openness and reform. Globalization shifts the logic of development outward, away from import substitution and domestic demand, and creates space for states to win external demand as a substitute for inclusive political reform. Consequently, even with inherently weak domestic demand, authoritarian regimes with reformed economic institutions and credible international engagement face lower political costs in mobilizing export competitiveness. This advantage operates through both active channels – such as industrial policy, export promotion, firm-level incentives, and control over currency and capital – and passive channels, including weak labor protections, limited public accountability, and low redistribution.

¹This paper focuses on contemporary globalization since 1990, not those pre-1990 or pre-WWI.

²Some scholars call for “defining research programs” to understand this issue (Drezner 2022).

2.3 Research Design

To address the research question, I adopt a mixed-methods research design that triangulates the theory using formal modeling, quantitative analysis, and qualitative evidence.

Theory. I develop a theoretical framework explaining how the institutional features of economically engaged and reformed autocracies generate asymmetric trade advantages under formally uniform globalization rules. The framework integrates insights from international trade theory, comparative authoritarianism, and institutional political economy. I employ formal models to characterize state trade behavior in open-and-reform contexts as a function of interactions among the state, the selectorate, and their respective incentives and constraints. Where appropriate, the model incorporates firm-level decision-making to analyze how firms allocate investment when choosing between engaged autocracies and democratic counterparts. To generate testable hypotheses, I adapt canonical trade models from economics and embed them in strategic settings using game-theoretic tools – including normal-form games and bargaining models – to capture strategic interaction between policymakers and firms in a competitive global economy.

Main Empirics. The empirical analysis proceeds by causally identifying how regime type conditions the economic effects of globalization using observational data. The core explanatory variables are trade integration, measured by WTO membership, and institutional reform, proxied by rule-of-law and property-rights protections. Both variables are interacted with regime type to isolate the distinct effects of engaged reformer autocracies relative to other regimes. The primary outcomes are exports and external balances. To address causal identification, I employ a combination of model-based and non-parametric inference. Model-based approaches include gravity models and hierarchical models, while non-parametric strategies include differences-in-differences with weighting and matching to estimate average treatment effects on the treated (ATT). These methods are well suited to observational settings where treatment assignment is non-random and identification requires careful modeling. The analysis draws on established datasets, including BACI trade flows, World Bank economic indicators, and V-Dem institutional measures. Robustness checks, including sensitivity analyses and bootstrapping, are conducted to assess the stability of the results.

Mechanism Patterns. The second step investigates the mechanisms linking regime type to aggregate trade outcomes using observational data. To unpack the sectoral foundations of cross-national patterns, I first analyze sector-level trade data to identify which industries drive aggregate export performance and external balances, and how these patterns differ systematically across

regime types. I then conduct mediation analyses to examine the causal pathways connecting regime characteristics and trade outcomes. Candidate mediating variables include manufacturing-sector greenfield FDI, fixed capital formation, infrastructure investment, tariff exposure, resource rents, and national saving rates. Together, these analyses clarify how institutional features translate into export competitiveness and external imbalances.

Mechanism Verification. To further probe the theoretical mechanisms, I employ two complementary strategies. First, I conduct a structured comparative case study of China and India – respectively, a paradigmatic engaged reformer autocracy and a large democracy. Despite important differences, the two countries shared many structural similarities until the early 1980s, including large populations, trade-facilitating geography like coastal proximity, comparable resource endowments, and inward-looking, state-led development strategies. India, while not strictly limiting private ownership like China, kept an extensive system (License Raj) of licenses, permits, and regulations that controlled the private sector since the 1950s. For decades, both countries unsurprisingly had similar trajectories in export performance, but started to diverge once exposed to an environment of both engagement and reform. Tracing the subsequent divergence in export performance allows me to isolate the role of engagement-plus-reform in shaping trade outcomes. Second, I conduct a text-based analysis of Japanese business media (e.g., Sankei Shimbun) to examine firm-level investment perceptions. By analyzing coverage of Japanese multinational investment in an autocratic engaged reformer (Vietnam) and a comparably developing democracy (the Philippines) from 2000 to 2020, I assess whether firms’ stated motivations and risk assessments align with the institutional mechanisms emphasized in the theory. Topic modeling or large-language-model-based text analysis is used to extract systematic patterns in investment reasoning.

3 [Paper 2] The Roots of Anti-globalization Politics

3.1 Context and Research Question

This paper shifts the focus from the systemic consequences of institutional mismatch – such as autocratic resurgence – to its domestic political implications. It asks why anti-globalization sentiment has intensified and become increasingly bipartisan, and why free trade was politically feasible during its expansion but has proven harder to sustain in its mature phase. In the elite and policy domains, both major U.S. parties have converged on greater skepticism toward unfettered trade,

endorsing tariffs, industrial policy, and strategic trade tools, particularly vis-à-vis certain trading partners. Although this convergence is less pronounced in mass public opinion, existing research suggests that public attitudes toward trade are often weakly informed or lagged (Colantone and Stanig 2018; Margalit 2011), or shaped by elite cues (Guisinger 2009; Rho and Tomz 2017). Importantly, contemporary “anti-free trade” sentiment does not imply a wholesale rejection of trade; rather, it reflects growing skepticism toward the earlier conception of free trade as open, unfettered, and universally beneficial under existing institutional arrangements.

3.2 Proposed Argument

I argue that the contemporary trade backlash largely stems from expectation mismatch arising in the later stage of trade liberalization. States liberalize trade expecting comparative advantage-based gains: advanced economies would expand in capital- or technology-intensive sectors, for instance. As such, during the transition to stable equilibrium as in traditional trade (politics) models, we mostly see policies of managed transitions and trade distortions of others remain less politically sensitive (as developing economies move to specialize in lower-end production). Traditional models stop here, implying equilibrium stability. After transition stabilizes however, in what I term as “post-equilibrium” period, trading partners can continue advancing up the value chain and alter “revealed” comparative advantages, often enhanced and enabled by varied means such as devaluation, technology diffusion, and state-aided industrial policies that are connected to states’ institutional characteristics – defining characteristics in the post-1970s global economy. When (perceived) advantage sectors erode without sufficient new advantages created, national leaders naturally raise skepticism and advanced economies can experience real deindustrialization – trade now becomes a non-starter and the effect of distortions becomes more sensitive. This expectation mismatch, strengthened by a sense of “others cheat,” leads to the framing of trade as unfair, which is hardly the case for losing disadvantage ones as originally expected.

3.3 Research Design

This paper employs a mixed-methods approach to demonstrate the logic, by combining causal inference, textual analysis, case studies, and survey experiments. Currently, there are two potential framings: (1) developing the theory of expectation mismatch based on comparative advantages, then analyzing political responses of both elites and the public. (2) Taking losing advantage sectors

as a given fact, then examine the responses.

Theory. For the prospectus, I focus on the first framing. The theoretical framework proceeds in three steps. The first step builds on top of the existing debate among economic literature that the long-run effect of trade liberalization is not clear and many assumptions of free trade theories do not hold. Using macroeconomic models, I show that when states simultaneously lose both comparative-advantage and disadvantage sectors, trade liberalization can generate negative aggregate welfare effects. Second, I introduce models of strategic politics to demonstrate how, under specific political incentives and constraints, leaders on both the left and the right may converge on anti-trade positions. Third, I derive conditions under which political responses to trade diverge across contexts. The main moderating factors include the nature of the perceived threat (systemic versus sectoral), geopolitical considerations (ally status and regime type), the structure of trade (intra-industry trade and product differentiation), and firm-level exposure (multinational ownership and localized production).

Main Empirics. I begin by examining long-run trends in elite trade preferences using U.S. Congressional speech data from 1980-2024. Leveraging policy debates in the Congressional Record, I analyze how policymakers' concerns evolve over time, with particular attention to whether discourse increasingly emphasizes the erosion of comparative-advantage sectors. This stage relies on text-as-data methods, including topic modeling and large language models, to identify systematic shifts in issue salience and framing. I then test whether sectors that initially exhibited comparative advantage at the onset of trade liberalization subsequently face greater protection. Comparative advantage is measured using revealed comparative advantage (RCA) data from the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS). Based on the literature, I treat a sector as possessing inherent comparative advantage when its RCA exceeds one and remains stable during the early phase of liberalization. The empirical test evaluates whether later sector-level protection – measured through tariff increases or related trade barriers – is associated with declining RCA in these initially advantaged sectors. Because protection may be driven by multiple factors, including security concerns, lobbying, or domestic politics, this analysis carefully controls for confounders in regressions and matching-based approaches.

Mechanisms. To move beyond aggregate patterns and clarify causal mechanisms, I employ three complementary strategies. First, I conduct two structured case studies drawn from the literature: U.S.-Japan trade frictions in the 1990s and U.S.-China trade conflict in the 2010s. These episodes

capture distinct phases of trade liberalization – one within the Western bloc during the Cold War and the other under globalized competition – and allow me to trace how perceived threats to advantage sectors (e.g., semiconductors and automobiles) translated into political responses. Second, I field survey experiments to test the micro-foundations of the theory. Although mass public opinion on trade is often lagged and shaped by elite cues, it nonetheless constrains and reinforces policy choices. Using conjoint designs, I examine how respondents react to scenarios involving expectation mismatch, sectoral threat, and geopolitical context, both to validate the proposed mechanisms and to adjudicate between competing explanations. Finally, I draw on existing public opinion datasets to assess whether workers in sectors experiencing declining comparative advantage (e.g., automobiles versus furniture or textiles) exhibit sharper drops in trade support, providing additional evidence on sectoral heterogeneity in political responses.

4 [Paper 3] Issue-induced Order Contestation

4.1 Context and Research Questions

This paper examines how uneven, imbalanced outcomes generated by globalization, arising from institutional mismatch within the LIO, affect the order itself. Because the institutional design of globalization and the LIO allows heterogeneous state characteristics to translate into asymmetric advantages – producing persistent winners and losers – contestation over the LIO is difficult to avoid. Decades of globalization have presented the LIO with mounting such issues or challenges, rooted in the very neoliberal globalization it has shaped (Broz et al. 2020; Rodrik 2019; Walter 2021) – on which Lake et al. (2021) remark “this time might be different.” This paper asks, how do issues of the LIO shape order contestation? Existing studies suggest problematic issues within institutions result in diminished legitimacy and weakened performance (March and Olsen 1984; North 1990; Pierson 2000). However, an international order differs vastly from typical domestic or international organizations (IOs). Existing accounts in power transition, order, and IO theories imply a simplified prediction: dissatisfaction pushes states to seek outside options. They often treat alternatives as exogenous to issues, do not differentiate issue types, or imply a monotonic or linear effect, while neglecting the complex interdependence of globalization and falling short of reconciling disengagement with institutional stickiness that deters “exit” (Organski and Kugler 1980; Gilpin 1981; Ikenberry 2011; Broz et al. 2020; Lipsky 2015).

4.2 Proposed Argument

I develop an issue-based theory of order contestation that highlights two connected mechanisms. First, unlike conventional wisdom, rising powers as outside options do not automatically gain from dissatisfaction. Complicated by globalized interdependence, their credibility declines when they are implicated in the issues, reducing states' disengagement likelihood while increasing order resilience. Second, even with exogenous outside options, LIO's high disengagement costs, weak alternatives, and institutional stickiness prevent mild issues from escalating. However, there exist LIO's most intractable problems – severe, persistent, and systemic “helpless issues” – that can rationalize disengagement by collapsing states' LIO loyalty by nullifying expectations of long-term gains or social benefits.

4.3 Research Design

The project employs a multi-methods design that integrates formal theory, original issue measurement, global statistical tests, text analysis, and qualitative process tracing.

Theory. I build an issue-based theory that connect issues, the LIO, rising powers, and state leaders. The theory builds on top of the literature of international organization, power transition, rational-choice and sociological institutionalism. I employ formal models to formalize the intuition behind the mechanisms using a micro-founded model of leaders' decision-making. By treating leaders as actors weighing loyalty benefits against issue-specific costs, the model identifies the conditions under which support for the LIO remains stable and when it collapses. The model yields two key implications: (1) when outside options are implicated in the issues at stake, states' disengagement likelihood is moderated, and (2) only issues that surpass a threshold of helplessness produce support shift. These implications guide the empirical design by clearly defining the types of evidence required to support the theory.

Main empirics. The empirical analysis tests the two core mechanisms outlined above across a set of ten issue areas within the LIO, focusing on uneven state-level outcomes generated by globalization rather than macroeconomic global imbalances per se. I operationalize leaders' support for alternative order arrangements using state leaders' attendance at the 2017 Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) summit, following established practice in the literature. The first mechanism concerns endogenous outside options. I examine whether states facing larger external deficits are more likely to attend the BRI summit, and whether this propensity is moderated when China is directly implicated in

the issue, proxied by bilateral imbalances with China. This analysis employs probit models, supplemented by robustness strategies including sensitivity analysis, inverse propensity-score weighting, and instrumental-variable approaches. The data are drawn primarily from World Bank sources. The second empirical test operationalizes the concept of helpless issues. I identify ten major LIO issue areas based on the International Organization 75th anniversary special issue and the broader IPE literature. Each issue is evaluated along four theoretically derived dimensions – stubbornness, severity, attributability, and unaddressability – using economic reasoning and qualitative assessment. This coding strategy enables transparent, replicable, and falsifiable issue classification. The resulting dataset allows me to test whether only helpless issues predict alignment with China. I adopt a three-pronged strategy: (1) testing whether only helpless issues generate support shifts; (2) constructing a binary helplessness indicator that takes the value of one when any helpless issue exceeds a theoretically defined threshold; and (3) constructing a continuous globalization grievance index that aggregates all ten issue areas using theory-driven weights, and testing for nonlinear effects on support behavior.

Mechanism Validation. Mechanism validation relies in part on a detailed case study of Italy – the only G7 country to attend the BRI summit and therefore a hard case for the theory. The case study draws on contemporaneous news reporting, government archival materials, and the existing scholarly literature. I also test mechanisms with additional tests using alternative data and outcome measures. The endogenous outside-option mechanism should not be confined to high-level leadership signaling, since states routinely confront dissatisfaction arising from external imbalances. Accordingly, I test whether bilateral imbalances with China predict variation in states’ voting behavior in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which captures more routine and less symbolic diplomatic behavior. To validate the helpless-issue mechanism, which builds on the erosion of institutional loyalty, I examine UNGA voting on Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine (UN ES-11/1). This vote represents a high-stakes decision in which siding with Russia carries substantial reputational and geopolitical costs, providing a demanding test of the theory. Finally, I supplement the issue-level coding by analyzing global media perceptions of LIO-related issues using textual data from media databases such as LexisNexis. This analysis provides an additional validation of the helplessness classification.

5 Chapter Outline

The dissertation proceeds in seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the central puzzle of globalization’s post–Cold War trajectory and advances the core argument that many contemporary political and economic disruptions stem from the institutional design of globalization. Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework, tracing the intellectual foundations of global economic institutions and identifying the neutral assumptions embedded in their design that generate systematic mismatches when applied to heterogeneous states. Chapter 3 examines autocratic economic resurgence, theorizing and empirically demonstrating how “engaged reformers” leverage global economic institutions to compete for external demand despite weak domestic demand generation. Chapter 4 develops a theory of expectation mismatch to explain contemporary bipartisan anti-globalization sentiment, showing how post-equilibrium dynamics and state-directed competition undermine the realization of mutually beneficial trade. Chapter 5 analyzes how the structural imbalances identified in the earlier chapters escalate into order contestation and renewed great-power competition, focusing on alignment behavior and leadership-level signaling. Chapter 6 explores the implications of these findings for institutional reform and policy responses to globalization’s challenges. Chapter 7 concludes by summarizing the dissertation’s contributions and outlining directions for future research.

6 Timeline

The timeline for completing the dissertation is realistic and structured around clear deliverables. The projects are well underway. The first project on autocratic resurgence is largely drafted; the remaining work focuses on strengthening the micro-level mechanism by collecting and analyzing new data on Japanese firms’ investment perceptions and decisions in Vietnam and the Philippines, which will provide direct evidence on how institutional capacity shapes external demand competition. The second project is in an earlier stage: the analysis of U.S. congressional speeches has been completed, establishing the political salience of expectation mismatch, and the next steps involve extending the empirical analysis to observational data and survey experiments. The third project on order contestation is complete and currently pending revision before initial submission following rounds of feedback. I anticipate completing the remaining data collection and empirical analyses over the next academic year, revising all three papers for submission, and integrating them into a unified dissertation manuscript shortly thereafter.

7 Conclusion

This dissertation advances a unified account of globalization’s contemporary crisis by shifting attention from short-term backlash and distributive conflict to the institutional foundations of globalization itself. By theorizing how global economic rules – designed under neutral assumptions – interact with heterogeneous state capacities and incentives, the project explains why globalization has produced persistent asymmetries, political backlash, and growing order contestation rather than convergence and stability. Across three interconnected projects, the dissertation shows how these institutional mismatches enable autocratic resurgence, generate expectation mismatch and bipartisan opposition to free trade, and ultimately erode loyalty to the liberal international order. Methodologically, the project demonstrates the value of combining formal theory, quantitative analysis, survey experiments, and qualitative case studies to trace the micro-political mechanisms linking structural economic conditions to political behavior. Substantively, the findings speak to core debates in international political economy and international relations concerning globalization, regime competition, and the future of international order. More broadly, the dissertation highlights that addressing today’s global challenges requires not retreating from globalization, but rethinking the institutional assumptions that govern it and adapting them to a world of enduring heterogeneity to achieve sustainability.

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