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# Context-driven attitude formation: the difference between supporting free trade in the abstract and supporting specific trade agreements

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## ABSTRACT

Many studies use the same factors to explain attitudes toward specific trade agreements and attitudes toward the principle of free trade and thus treat both objects as interchangeable. Contemporary trade agreements, however, often reach beyond trade in the narrow sense. Consequently, factors unrelated to free trade may affect citizens' evaluations of these agreements. We propose a model of attitude formation toward specific trade agreements that includes the societal context as a constitutive feature. We expect salient aspects of an agreement to activate corresponding predispositions. Empirically, we compare how this contextual model and a standard model perform in explaining German citizens' attitudes toward free trade and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The results show that the standard model performs well in explaining public opinion on the principle of free trade but is less useful in explaining attitudes toward TTIP. The latter were driven by postures toward transatlantic cooperation, predispositions toward the role of interest groups in politics, and market regulation – aspects salient in German public discourse about TTIP. In sum, we find ample evidence for the need to differentiate between the two attitude objects and for our contextual model of attitude formation.

**KEYWORDS** Free trade; international political economy; politics of integration; micro-level preferences; globalization; deep integration; TTIP

## 1. Introduction

Public opinion on free trade has become a widely studied topic. Previous research has developed an impressive number of individual-level explanations of attitudes toward free trade (for a review, see Kuo & Naoi, 2015). These studies focus on generalizable explanations and their relative merit. One hotly debated question, for example, is whether economic self-interest or symbolic predispositions toward open societies and foreigners drive the evaluation of free trade. Most of these contributions treat attitudes toward the general principle of free trade and toward specific agreements as

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interchangeable. While focusing on the explanation of attitudes toward the principle of free trade, the authors of these studies implicitly assume that the same factors explain attitudes toward specific trade agreements (e.g. Mansfield & Mutz, 2009; Mayda & Rodrik, 2005; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001).

Treating attitudes toward the principle of free trade and attitudes toward specific trade agreements as interchangeable, however, does not do justice to the nature of many contemporary trade agreements. These agreements cover services, investments, intellectual property rights, investor rights, competition regulation, and consumer protection – they go well beyond free trade in the narrow sense (Coughlin, 2002; Milewicz, Hollway, Peacock, & Snidal, 2016; Rodrik, 2011). Because of their large scope, they were dubbed ‘deep integration’ agreements (Lawrence, 1996). Furthermore, the additional content has received considerable public attention during the negotiation of several contemporary trade agreements. We argue that in these cases, citizens do not see the agreement as an instance of free trade but focus on the additional content. If so, explanations of public attitudes must take into account how citizens are predisposed toward this content that is not directly related to free trade.

Advocates tend to frame deep integration agreements as facilitating free trade and as the only way to increase prosperity in the globalized world. They tend to ignore arguments about detrimental effects in areas beyond economics, although these arguments have increasingly been raised in the public discourse. To some extent, then, advocates of deep integration seem to miss the point of public opposition (Rodrik, 2017). Scholars risk the same when explaining attitudes toward specific free trade agreements with factors that have been identified as relevant for attitudes toward free trade in the abstract. Instead of providing insights, they might misrepresent the drivers of public attitudes toward specific trade agreements by ignoring their non-economic nature and corresponding concerns voiced in public discourse. If the additional aspects are not taken into account, academics and decision-makers alike might inadvertently fan the flames of the public backlash against globalization.

We explore this argument by studying German public attitudes toward the principle of free trade and toward a specific deep integration agreement – the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Since the agreement and its deep integration content had high public salience in Germany, it is a most-likely case to apply our contextual model of attitude formation to. Our research question asks whether the commonly used explanatory factors of attitudes toward the principle of free trade can explain citizens’ attitudes toward TTIP or whether the inclusion of predispositions not directly related to trade but to concerns prominent in public discourse provides additional explanatory power. Our expectation is that variables identified in the literature on free trade are not sufficient to explain attitudes toward TTIP; we expect that TTIP attitudes were substantively influenced by predispositions toward concerns that were prominent in public discourse.

Our analysis draws on public opinion data from a survey ( $n = 8388$ ) conducted in spring 2016, a period in which TTIP was salient in German public discourse. We find many Germans to support the principle of free trade but to oppose TTIP. Furthermore, different factors apply when explaining attitudes toward free trade and TTIP. While predispositions toward openness – such as isolationism and ethnoculturalism – are closely associated with evaluations of free trade, they are less closely associated with evaluations of TTIP. Evaluations of TTIP are closely related to predispositions not directly related to free trade – such as predispositions toward the role of interest groups

in politics and domestic market regulation. The largest influence on TTIP support, however, stems from postures on transatlantic cooperation: Germans willing to cooperate with the USA in general are also substantially more supportive of TTIP. These findings corroborate our contextual model. What mattered to citizens when evaluating TTIP was the potential partner and the agreement's content unrelated to trade – aspects that were highly salient in Germany's political context.

In the following section, we provide a detailed explication of our contextual model of attitude formation toward specific trade agreements and contrast it with the standard model in the literature. We then discuss the explanatory factors included in the standard model against the backdrop of contemporary trade agreements. Following this, we describe our specific case, TTIP, and derive context-specific explanatory factors. Before presenting the results of our empirical analysis, we describe the data and the measures. The article closes with situating our findings in the current debate on the public backlash against different forms of international integration and globalization.

## **2. Explaining attitudes toward specific trade agreements: accounting for contextual activation**

### **2.1. The standard model of free trade attitudes**

Over the last 15 years, the explanation of public attitudes toward free trade has developed into a vibrant research field. Scholars have made great strides toward understanding what drives attitudes to the principle of free trade. This work tends to share a general outlook on the explanation of free trade attitudes: It (1) tries to find a *fixed* set of variables that (2) explains *both* attitudes toward the principle of free trade *and* toward specific trade agreements. Both of these features imply generality.

While authors have fiercely debated which variables determine free trade attitudes, they often share the conviction that there is a fixed set that explains these attitudes, irrespective of time and place. For example, an important strand of the literature discusses whether economic cost–benefit calculations or predispositions to openness drive public attitudes toward free trade (for a review, see Kuo & Naoi, 2015). In a typical research design, competing explanations are tested against each other to identify the variables with the highest explanatory power. Put differently, the authors of these studies agree on the general functionality of their models – i.e. that a fixed set of variables should explain free trade attitudes irrespective of context – but disagree over their specification, namely which variables to include.

The second feature of current research implying generality is that attitudes toward specific trade agreements are often treated as crystallized instances of the abstract principle of free trade, and not as a different class of attitude objects. This has resulted in empirical analyses that use the same variables to explain attitudes toward various specific trade agreements (mainly Central America Free Trade Agreement and North American Free Trade Agreement) and attitudes toward the principle of free trade (e.g. Ahlquist, Clayton, & Levi, 2014; Baker, 2003; Beaulieu, 2002; Mansfield & Mutz, 2009; Merolla, Stephenson, Wilson, & Zechmeister, 2005; Rankin, 2004, Rathbun, 2016; Urbatsch, 2013). Furthermore, many researchers who analyzed attitudes toward free trade (or its logical counterpart protectionism) in the abstract went on to discuss the implications of these findings for specific trade agreements. This practice disregards the influence of context, which – as we will argue below – may induce citizens to think differently about different trade agreements.

While such broad reviews usually do some injustice to the individual studies considered, identifying implicitly shared assumptions helps advancing the debate. Given the common underlying assumptions just discussed, it seems justified to speak of a ‘standard model’ of attitude formation toward free trade. It seeks to specify a fixed set of factors that explain attitudes both toward the principle of free trade and toward specific trade agreements, irrespective of context. By grouping these approaches into one model, we do not want to suggest that there are no debates about which variables to include in this standard model. Yet, when examined closely, these turn out to be debates about the best specification of a model whose underlying theoretical assumptions are consensual. In the following sections, we will sketch out this debate.

### **2.1.1. Economic costs and benefits**

A large strand of research argues that economic self-interest determines public attitudes toward the principle of free trade and specific trade agreements. Researchers employ a series of bridge hypotheses to identify whether citizens are potential winners or losers of free trade. Some focus on the vocational or educational skill level, following the reasoning that those with high skill levels can easily switch between industries and choose one benefiting from free trade (Stolper–Samuelson) (e.g. Mayda & Rodrik, 2005; O’Rourke & Sinnott 2001; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). Others argue that the costs of switching industries are decisive – even for highly skilled employees. They analyze whether industries benefit or suffer from free trade and hypothesize that employees in winner industries will support free trade, whereas employees in loser industries will oppose it (Ricardo–Viner) (e.g. Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). Yet another argument states that it is unlikely that whole industries benefit or suffer from free trade. Rather, the productivity of individual firms should determine if their employees are winners or losers of free trade (New New Trade theory) (e.g. Bearce & Tuxhorn, 2017; Melitz & Redding, 2014). Finally, citizens in the middle of a country’s income distribution might look especially favorable at free trade because the positive effect of free trade on their buying power is particularly large (e.g. Baker, 2003, 2005).

These explanations assume that citizens are mainly interested in the consequences of free trade for themselves. It seems likely, however, that sociotropic perceptions play a role as well, for example of the impact of free trade on the distribution of incomes, consumer protection regulation, state support for specific industries, and democratic representation. Mansfield and Mutz (2009) made a first step in accounting for the influence of such sociotropic perceptions. They find that free trade support is more closely associated with the belief that free trade has benefited a country than with the belief that it has brought personal benefits. Despite problems with their research design (Fordham & Kleinberg, 2012), these findings suggest that not only narrowly defined economic interests matter for citizens’ evaluation of free trade.

### **2.1.2. Predisposition-based attitude formation**

Another strand of research has pointed to symbolic associations and cognitive deductions as ways how citizens evaluate the principle of free trade and specific agreements. Given citizens’ rather low political involvement as well as the high technicality and low public salience of trade issues, it has been argued that citizens are not able or motivated to determine their material self-interest (Rho & Tomz, 2017). If so, they would be unable to form an attitude on that basis. That is why many researchers believe instead that public attitudes are rooted in more general predispositions (e.g. Mayda & Rodrik,

2005; O'Rourke & Sinnott 2001; Rankin, 2001; Rathbun, 2016). In this literature, predispositions are understood as cognitive constructs that are central to a person's belief system, durable, accessible, and associated with affective loadings.

Following this reasoning, researchers have to specify which predispositions might be activated when citizens evaluate the principle of free trade and specific trade agreements. Previous research suggests that people conceptualize free trade as a transaction with a 'foreign other' (Sabet, 2016) and that predispositions toward foreigners and foreignness guide their reactions. The degree to which national identity is conceived in hierarchical and exclusive terms (chauvinism, ethnoculturalism), prejudice toward outgroups (ethnocentrism), and preferences about whether one's government should get involved in international affairs (isolationism) have proven to be powerful explanatory factors of free trade attitudes (e.g. Mansfield & Mutz, 2009; Mayda & Rodrik, 2005; O'Rourke & Sinnott, 2001; Rankin, 2001; Rathbun, 2016).

It is far from certain, however, that this is an exhaustive list. As we will argue below, when explaining citizens' attitudes toward specific trade agreements, we should analyze what information about the agreement in question is available to citizens and then think about what predispositions might influence their attitudes. Doing so will point us to additional predispositions that are likely relevant in the specific case under consideration but not necessarily in other cases with different information environments. As of now, such a context-driven view on the explanatory factors of specific free trade agreements has largely been missing in the literature.

### 2.1.3. *Elite cues*

Various authors have highlighted the relevance of partisan actors and interest groups for attitudes toward international agreements (e.g. Guisinger & Saunders, 2017). With regard to trade, it is disputed how large the influence of elite cues on attitudes is. Some authors have found evidence that respondents follow elite cues (Darmofal, 2005; Hiscox, 2006; Mansfield & Mutz, 2009), whereas others have not (Kaltenthaler, Gelleny, & Ceccoli, 2004). These divergent findings seem largely driven by variation in the information environment, specifically by variation in the salience of trade issues (Herrmann, Tetlock, & Diascro, 2001) and in the degree of partisan polarization with regard to these issues (Guisinger & Saunders, 2017).

Political parties and unions constitute the two most likely candidates for elite cueing on the topic of free trade. With regard to parties, cueing effects can be expected if a party comes out for or against a given trade agreement. Traditionally, parties allied with the labor movement oppose free trade, while those aligned with the interests of employers tend to support it (Mansfield & Mutz, 2009). Still, we should not generalize to a consistent left-right divide. Culturally liberal parties representing post-materialist or cosmopolitan values might be more open to free trade than traditional left-wing parties focused on protecting workers' rights and interests. Thus, we should focus on actual positions parties take on a given free trade agreement when forming hypotheses about cueing effects. The same holds for unions (Ahlquist et al., 2014; Shoch, 2000).

In this context, two mechanisms are proposed – one focusing on short-term communication directly aimed at a given free trade issue, the other on socialization effects of repeated in-group communication. As for the former, some researchers have argued that elite cues might work as heuristics for individuals to lower the costs of forming opinions about specific topics (e.g. Gilens & Murakawa, 2002; Lupia, 1994; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). Group members can rely on direct cues by trusted elites and adopt

their issue positions. Other authors maintain that links between group membership and specific policy positions exist because group members develop similar predispositions through socialization processes and then use them to evaluate new issues (e.g. Jennings & Markus, 1984; Sears & Brown, 2013; Sears & Funk, 1999). Methodologically, it is thus necessary to control for predispositions and utility considerations in order to isolate the effects of short-term communication. Only then can we interpret attitude differences between, for example, supporters of different parties as the reaction to elite signals.

## **2.2. Toward a contextual model of attitudes to specific trade agreements**

We believe all explanatory factors in the standard model to be potentially relevant for explaining attitudes toward specific trade agreements. At the same time, we believe it is crucial to consider the information environment in which citizens evaluate a given agreement. Doing so means moving from the question ‘what drives attitudes toward free trade agreements?’ to ‘what drives attitudes toward a given free trade agreement in the case-specific context?’. If context is an important factor in attitude formation on specific free trade agreements, we should not expect a fixed set of micro-level variables to explain the attitudes toward different agreements. Instead, we should analyze the context to identify likely explanatory factors in each case and test for their influence (see, e.g. Owen & Walter, 2017; Schoen, Roßteutscher, Schmitt-Beck, Weßels, & Wolf, 2017).

There are two reasons to contextualize models of attitudes toward specific trade agreements. One relates to frames in communication, the other to the nature of contemporary trade agreements. Citizens evaluate objects on the basis of information that is available and subjectively relevant. It is well established that attitude formation systematically varies with the framing of issues (Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 2007b; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Frames are ‘principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters’ (Gitlin, 2003, p. 6). Political actors try to increase the prominence of the frames in public discourse that support their preferred outcome regarding a given issue (Entman, 2004). They do so by influencing media coverage and reaching out to the public directly through canvassing, information mailings, and email blasts. The relative prominence of frames in public discourse depends on external events as well as the relative power and interest of elites to sponsor each frame (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

As long as there is little variation in the information environments, the context dependence of attitude formation remains largely without consequence and thus invisible. With regard to contemporary trade agreements, however, variation in the nature and discussion of free trade agreements has increased. With the transition from the General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs (GATT) to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1994, trade policy increasingly focused on non-tariff trade restrictions. The goal was to harmonize national regulation only indirectly related to trade (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009; Rodrik, 2011). This has been described as a move from shallow to deep integration (Dür, Baccini, & Elsig, 2014; Lawrence, 1996; World Trade Organization, 2011), with deep integration meaning ‘intergovernmental cooperation in designing and applying domestic policies such as taxes, health and safety regulations, and environmental standards’, which may ‘involve either harmonization of policies or mutual recognition’ (Hoekman, Mattoo, & English, 2002, p. 594). This increase in scope has

transformed the nature of trade agreements. They have become vehicles to reform domestic, market-supporting institutions, such as ‘property rights, regulatory institutions, institutions for macroeconomic stabilization, institutions for social insurance, and institutions of conflict management’ (Rodrik, 2002). Contemporary trade agreements thus go well beyond traditional trade policies, which were concerned with tariffs and other protectionist measures. The deepened degree of international integration and an accompanying loss of national sovereignty are increasingly reflected in public discourse surrounding contemporary trade agreements (Rodrik, 2011). In addition to their increased depth, contemporary agreements have also moved specific partners to the forefront of political debate. After the WTO reached a stalemate during the Doha round in 2008, trade agreements mostly come in the form of preferential trade agreements (PTA) or bilateral agreements (Dür & Elsig, 2015). Thus, while trade agreements under the WTO included many partners, contemporary agreements tend to be concluded by fewer countries. This makes it more likely that predispositions toward these countries influence attitudes toward the agreement.

To account for the influence of the information environment, we propose a *contextual* model of attitudes toward free trade agreements, which is illustrated in Figure 1. Central to the model is the moderating role of the information environment in which citizens evaluate a given agreement. Accordingly, the frames about a given agreement as well as direct elite cues that feature prominently in this environment will influence how citizens think about an agreement by activating and increasing the relevance of corresponding cognitive constructs. If we conceptualize the attitude formation process as dependent on context, it is impossible to specify a fixed set of cognitive constructs that is equally relevant in all cases. To illustrate this argument, we have listed three explanatory factors in Figure 1 that have featured prominently in previous research (perceived economic costs and benefits, openness-related predispositions, and identifications with political actors). We added two factors that – given our reasoning above – are likely to be important in attitude formation toward specific contemporary trade agreements (predispositions related to deep integration content and predispositions toward the prospective partner). This list is *not* meant to be exhaustive, nor is the order of phenomena listed supposed to signify their general relevance. Rather, the entries on

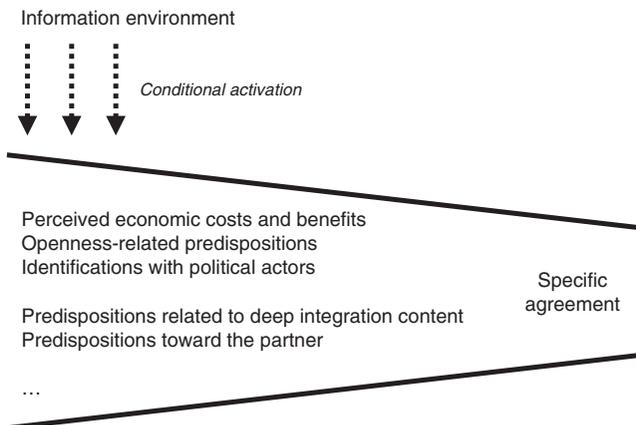


Figure 1. A contextual model of attitude formation toward specific trade agreements.

the left side of the ‘funnel of causality’ (see, e.g. Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960) represent some of the potential explanatory factors that may become relevant if activated by the information environment.

We use the term information environment (see e.g. Jerit & Barabas, 2012; Jerit, Barabas, & Bolsen, 2006) to denote all information available to citizens. The information environment is composed of many divergent sources (e.g. media coverage, politicians or parties, activist groups or NGOs, and social networks) and takes various channels to reach the citizens (e.g. print media, television, Internet, direct information mailings, flyers, and personal exchanges). The contextual model in [Figure 1](#) specifies neither the amount nor the content of the information available. It is thus applicable to a wide range of cases.

To illustrate, in some cases, the information environment might be dominated by various political actors framing an agreement as a free trade issue and disagreeing over its economic implications. The specification of the contextual model would then resemble the ‘standard model of free trade attitudes’, because the information context would induce citizens to think about the agreement as an instance of shallow economic integration. Accordingly, the contextual model is more general than the standard model – the latter being a special case of the former. Another type of case should emerge when the information environment is dominated by frames focusing on deep integration content of an agreement. Here, the contextual model predicts that predispositions toward the deep integration content will be important explanatory factors of citizens’ attitudes. What these predispositions are, specifically, depends on the information provided by the context of each case. In the case of the German discourse on TTIP, consumer protection and democratic accountability featured prominently in public discourse – consequently, predispositions toward these issues should feature prominently in German citizens’ evaluation of TTIP (see below).

The differentiation between free trade in general and specific agreements points to attitudes toward the agreement partner as another potential explanation of agreement attitudes. When evaluating free trade, such attitudes can obviously play no role because free trade in general is detached from any specific trading partner. In contrast, when it comes to evaluating a specific agreement, knowing who the agreement partner is might induce citizens to transfer their feelings toward that partner to the agreement (cf. Chiang, Liu, & Wen, 2013; Davis & Bartilow, 2007; Spilker, Bernauer, & Umaña, 2016; Steiner, *in press*; Wals, Theiss-Morse, Gonzalez, & Gosda, 2015).

Similarly, the differentiation between free trade in general and specific agreements raises the question whether the attitude toward free trade might represent another explanatory factor of attitudes toward specific agreements. Without a doubt, there exists a reciprocal relationship between the two. Still, we would argue that citizens who actually have a crystallized attitude toward the principle of free trade will use it to derive a corresponding attitude toward trade agreements. This seems especially likely if the salience of the agreement in question is low and citizens know little more than that it is a trade agreement.

As noted, the explanatory factors listed in [Figure 1](#) are not meant to be exhaustive. For example, if citizens are confronted with information about public opinion or prominent frames in other countries, attitudes toward this other country might become relevant in determining how to incorporate that information in one’s attitude formation. Another example is experience with previous agreements – for example, it seems likely that German citizens will, at least for some time, remember the discourse about TTIP

and evaluate future agreements the same way they evaluate TTIP (irrespective of whether the agreement in question resembles TTIP or not).

In sum, to explain public attitudes toward trade agreements, we have to analyze the case-specific information environment in order to identify prominent frames. This will allow us to identify predispositions that are likely to serve as evaluation criteria during attitude formation. This step of specifying the contextual model for a specific agreement is the crucial difference to the standard model.<sup>1</sup> We expect that this will increase our ability to explain the variation in attitudes toward specific agreements. At the same time, we expect the additional explanatory factors identified via the contextual analysis to be largely irrelevant for the explanation of attitudes toward the principle of free trade. In the following empirical analysis, we test these expectations: we will apply the contextual model to the case of German public attitudes toward TTIP and juxtapose the results of the contextual model with the results from the standard model. Furthermore, we test whether the additional explanatory factors identified against the backdrop of the German context also explain attitudes toward free trade in general.

### 3. An application of the contextual model of attitude formation toward TTIP

The TTIP is a proposed trade agreement between the European Union and the USA. The negotiations on the agreement started in July 2013 and were originally slated to conclude in 2016. However, they seem stalled if not moribund in face of widespread public opposition in Europe, especially in Germany, and the election of President Trump in the USA. For our purposes, the ultimate success or failure of the agreement is irrelevant. Relevant for us is its high public salience in Germany during the period of our study and its deep integration content.

Three distinct pieces of evidence attest to TTIP's high salience in Germany's information environment. First, TTIP received considerable media attention. A simple search with the keyword 'TTIP' with the preset 'German language news' in the news database Nexis reveals that, on average, 40 articles per day mentioned TTIP in the month of our study (April 2016).<sup>2</sup> Second, public opinion data show an increasing familiarity of German citizens with the topic. In the Eurobarometer waves in 2014 and 2015, roughly 20 percent of German respondents chose the 'don't know' category when asked about their opinion about 'a free trade and investment agreement between the EU and the USA' (European Commission, 2015, 2017). In our survey, fielded in April 2016, only 6–8 percent chose the 'don't know' response to our TTIP items. Finally, the stark decline in public support for TTIP during the negotiation period also indicates that the issue was salient enough for citizens to either form or change opinions on the agreement (Bluth, 2017; PEW Research Center, 2015).<sup>3</sup>

The overarching objective of TTIP was 'to increase trade and investment between the EU and the US', which would lead to 'the creation of jobs and growth through increased market access and greater regulatory compatibility and setting the path for global standards' (General Secretariat of the Council, 2014). Four measures were proposed to achieve this objective: (1) the removal of tariffs on transatlantic trade, (2) the removal of discriminating policy measures in favor of domestic goods and service providers, (3) the increase of regulatory coherence to reduce the segmentation of the market driven by different regulatory standards and thereby to lower costs for suppliers in the EU and the USA, and (4) the potential inclusion of investment protection and

investor-to-state dispute settlement (ISDS) (cf. General Secretariat of the Council, 2014). The first of these is a measure of shallow integration, while the other three are directly from the deep integration playbook.

German elites backing TTIP framed the issue as a case of liberalizing trade with macro-economic benefits for all countries involved. In contrast, opponents focused on three aspects of deep integration: (1) the alleged erosion of consumer protection, (2) the perceived loss of democratic sovereignty due to the institution of supra-national courts for investment protection and investor-to-state dispute settlement (ISDS), and (3) the lack of transparency in the negotiations, which perhaps allowed special interest groups to develop undue influence on the negotiations and inhibited democratic control.

The difference in the framing that TTIP supporters and opponents used becomes apparent in the media coverage, which we gauged with a content analysis of two major newspapers. We searched the news database Nexis for articles mentioning ‘TTIP’ between January 2016 and June 2016 in the German daily *Tagesspiegel* and the weekly *Der Spiegel*. Both papers are politically unaffiliated, and their coverage resembles the mainstream of Germany’s media landscape.<sup>4</sup> Of 88 articles mentioning TTIP in the *Tagesspiegel*, 63 contained arguments in support or opposition to the agreement. Of 32 articles mentioning TTIP in *Der Spiegel*, 13 contained arguments. Of these articles, the arguments presented most were, in descending order, about the perceived loss of influence in national legislation leading to an endangerment of consumers (54%), TTIP’s economic impact (53%), democratic self-determination (43%), about the negotiation process and its perceived lack of transparency (38%), and the prospective partner, the United States (18%).

This illustration shows the types of arguments that were salient in public discourse. To analyze their influence on public TTIP attitudes, we introduce four additional predispositions, which we expect to be activated by these arguments. Three of these relate to the content of the TTIP agreement and one accounts for the specific trading partner. We expect these predispositions to matter for TTIP attitudes because they are connected to dominant frames in public debate. There is no reason to expect that they are particularly important for the explanation of attitudes toward the principle of free trade.

Once a specific trade agreement enters public discourse, predispositions toward the potential party of contract come into play. Accordingly, if citizens know which the potential party of contract is, they can evaluate the agreement on that basis. Previous research has shown that the more citizens are positively predisposed toward a given country, the higher their general willingness to collaborate with them is (e.g. Herrmann, Voss, Schooler, & Ciarrochi, 1997; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1990; Schafer, 1997). This has also been shown with regard to free trade agreements (e.g. Chiang et al., 2013; Davis & Bartilow, 2007; Spilker et al., 2016; Wals et al., 2015). It thus seems likely that predispositions toward the transatlantic partner – the United States – also feature prominently in German citizens’ attitude formation toward TTIP. Specifically, we draw on the concept of atlanticism here, which focuses on the degree to which citizens favor close cooperation across the Atlantic or prefer a more independent role of their country (Asmus, Everts, & Isernia, 2005; Mader, 2017). Atlanticism has been introduced as a variant of the more general concept of multilateralism, i.e. a general willingness to cooperate in the pursuit of shared goals and maybe even subordinate one’s own immediate national interest to that of allies (e.g. Chittick, Billingsley, & Travis, 1995; Rattinger et al., 2016). Since trade agreements are a form of cooperation, citizens with an

atlanticist orientation should be more supportive of the agreement than citizens who generally oppose cooperation with the USA. At the same time, atlanticism should be unrelated to citizens' general attitudes toward free trade. In theory, a case could be made that free trade has been a cornerstone of the American liberalism at the world stage for decades. It seems unlikely, however, that German citizens are sufficiently versed with American grand strategy to make this connection.

The first content-dependent predisposition regards the influence of interest groups in politics. In the context of TTIP, one concern of opponents was that interest group influence was large and unchecked due to the opacity of the negotiations, and that this would lead to results disadvantageous for citizens. Rampant interest group influence might even hinder well-meaning and responsive politicians to act on public demands. Accordingly, the more citizens believe that interest groups have an unduly large political influence, the more successful this argument should be. Consequently, citizens who are convinced that interest groups have too much influence should be less likely to support TTIP. It is less clear whether a connection exists between perceived interest group influence and free trade attitudes in general. On the one hand, it is conceivable that citizens interpret the principle of free trade as a special interest that companies pursue to increase their profits. In this case, we would expect citizens who perceive the influence of interest groups as too large to oppose free trade. On the other hand, at least in Western societies, free trade is mostly portrayed as being in the interest of the public at large and as a normatively desirable principle. This is reflected, for example, in higher education curricula and public statements of economists (Driskill, 2012; Mansfield & Mutz, 2009; Rodrik, 2011). Therefore, instead of associating the principle of free trade with interest group influence, the public might interpret it as a valence issue. In this case, there should be no association between perceived interest group influence and free trade attitudes.

The second content-dependent predisposition is level of external political efficacy. We take account of this predisposition since critics of TTIP argued that the negotiation process lacked transparency and was removed from public control. For example, in a highly publicized event, Greenpeace protested against this lack of transparency by opening a 'TTIP reading room' at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. There, the public could read the classified current draft of the TTIP agreement. Before this intervention, only parliamentarians had been able to read the document in a reading room at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs. And even they were allowed to enter only after handing in their cell phones and affirming to maintain strict confidentiality. Episodes like this contributed to the dominant frame of government elites trying to shut out public influence and likely activated citizens' sense of external efficacy. Generally speaking, efficacy is 'a norm which supports a democratic political regime. One who has internalized this norm is presumably less likely to distrust the regime or to engage in regime-challenging acts' (Balch, 1974). External efficacy represents one facet of this norm, namely 'beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands' (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). Citizens who feel efficacious have been shown to be more system-supportive – they support democratic norms and trust the political system and its authorities (see Almond & Verba, 1963; Finifter, 1970).

In the case of TTIP, this leads us to expect citizens with high external efficacy to trust the government officials negotiating the agreement. They should believe that these officials act in their best interest and thus be indifferent to the fact that the negotiations are confidential.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, citizens with high external efficacy should be more

supportive of TTIP. Distrust in the political system should, in contrast, lead to distrust in the specific actions of the government authorities and to the conviction that government actions must be constantly controlled. Thus, although TTIP would imply a reduction of government influence, the way the agreement came about makes it likely that citizens with low external efficacy opposed it. At the same time, following this line of reasoning leads to a somewhat different possible effect of external efficacy on the principle of free trade. Accordingly, a low level of external efficacy might translate into a general preference for a small government. Considering free trade in general, this preference for small government might in turn lead to a preference for free trade – trade that is free of government agencies' influence. Like in the case of atlanticism, however, we wonder whether these arguments – although plausible – might not be too complicated to be of relevance in the attitude formation of many citizens. It seems more likely that external efficacy will not be associated with free trade attitudes.

The last content-dependent predisposition focuses on market regulation. Such preferences should be relevant for citizens' acceptance of those elements in specific trade agreements that make them 'deep' agreements. As described above, in the case of TTIP, a central concern of German critics was that the agreement would weaken the state's ability to regulate domestic markets, especially with regard to consumer protection (Young, 2016). Citizens who worry about market failure and prefer regulated markets should evaluate TTIP less favorably than citizens who consider free markets unproblematic and regulation unnecessary to protect consumers. In contrast, it is much less certain that citizens show a connection between their predisposition toward market regulation and what they think about the principle of free trade. Opening national borders to foreign goods does not necessarily lower market regulation. It merely means that multiple markets are integrated into one market, in which the same (potentially strict) rules apply. At the same time, economic globalization did in fact go hand in hand with a perceived loss of national control, which means that preferences for regularized markets could be associated with opposition to free trade.

As with the other context-driven predispositions, the connection between preferences for strong regulation of markets and attitudes toward TTIP is clear, while the connection between this predisposition and free trade in general is not. This underlines that we should not simply assume that people interpret specific agreements as mere instances of free trade. Instead, if the goal is to explain attitudes toward specific agreements, we should look at the specific configuration of the information environment and identify predispositions that relate to prominent frames. Table 1 summarizes the expected effects of the explanatory factors we have discussed on TTIP attitudes and on attitudes toward free trade in general. Entries are missing if we have no theoretical reasons to expect an effect, such as in the case of the TTIP-specific predispositions influencing attitudes toward the principle of free trade.

As for the explanatory variables of the standard model, the expected effects documented in Table 1 are directly derived from the literature. First, we consider the impact of economic self-interest on the assessment of free trade in general and TTIP in particular. Following the Stolper–Samuelson model, higher employment skill levels in developed countries should go hand in hand with a more positive assessment of free trade. Conversely, following the Ricardo–Viner model, respondents whose employers face international competition should oppose free trade. Following the New New Trade model, respondents employed by internationally competitive firms should support free trade. Finally, following the argument based on consumer power, citizens in the middle

**Table 1.** Directions of expected effects.

Explanatory factor	Effect on		Model family
	Free trade	TTIP	
Atlantism		+	Predispositions not directly related to trade (partner)
Political influence of interest groups perceived as too high		–	Predispositions not directly related to trade (deep integration content)
Political efficacy		+	Predispositions not directly related to trade (deep integration content)
Need for regulation		–	Predispositions not directly related to trade (deep integration content)
Skill level	+		Economic self-interest
Perceived international competition	–	–	Economic self-interest
Perceived importance of exports	+	+	Economic self-interest
Middle income <sup>a</sup>	+	+	Economic self-interest
Isolationism	–	–	Openness-related predispositions
Ethnoculturalism	–	–	Openness-related predispositions
Chauvinism	–	–	Openness-related predispositions
Party ID, CDU/CSU <sup>a</sup>		+	Elite cues
Party ID, SPD <sup>a</sup>			Elite cues
Party ID, FDP <sup>a</sup>		+	Elite cues
Party ID, Greens <sup>a</sup>		–	Elite cues
Party ID, Left <sup>a</sup>		–	Elite cues
Party ID, AFD <sup>a</sup>		–	Elite cues
Union membership <sup>a</sup>	–	–	Elite cues

Notes: + (–) indicates that higher levels of the explanatory factor should lead to higher (lower) support.

<sup>a</sup> Nominal trait; + (–) indicates support is higher (lower) if trait is present, in comparison to when trait is not present.

of the income distribution should benefit most from falling prices and thus support free trade.

Since the EU and the USA have comparable labor costs, we can assume that the agreement will have little direct effect on the outsourcing of labor. Instead, the expected economic consequences of TTIP in both countries are higher exports for competitive firms and lower prices for imported products. This makes TTIP a case in which we expect to find no effects of employment skill levels on attitudes, negative effects based on the exposure to international competition, positive effects of the importance of exports, and positive effects of medium income.

As for openness-related predispositions, we take account of three predispositions toward foreigners and foreignness, namely isolationism, ethnoculturalism, and chauvinism. All three should have negative effects on attitudes toward free trade and TTIP. However, the effect size of ethnoculturalism on TTIP might depend on the cultural distance citizens perceive between Germany and the USA. If this distance is perceived to be small, there might be no or even a positive effect of ethnoculturalism on TTIP support.

In assessing the potential influence of elite cues on attitudes toward TTIP, we have to consider elites' actual position on TTIP. The parties in favor of TTIP were the Christian-democratic government party CDU/CSU and the market-oriented Free Democrats (FDP). Citizens who identified with these parties might have picked up cues to support TTIP. The SPD was internally divided over the issue, which led to an absence of clear

cues. We thus do not expect SPD affiliates to be especially pro or contra TTIP. The remaining politically relevant parties (Greens, The Left, AfD) and the labor unions came out clearly against TTIP, which is why we expect affiliates of these political players to be more critical of TTIP.

All established German parties – with the notable exception of The Left and perhaps the AfD – support the principle of free trade. There is latent disagreement over how free trade should be organized at the world stage, with the SPD, the Greens, and The Left tending to focus more on fairness vis-à-vis developing countries than the CDU/CSU and FDP. By and large, however, there is no publicly salient divide over this issue (with one party group clearly arguing for free trade and another party group arguing for protectionism). That is why we do not expect attitudes toward the principle of free trade to be influenced by direct party cues.

#### 4. Data and indicators

The data for this study were collected using an online panel based on a probability sample of individuals holding Germany's most widely distributed consumer bonus card (owned by one out of two German households). The panel does not allow self-registration and actively recruits its participants by random invitation. On a variety of sociodemographic variables, holders of the card do not differ from the general population.<sup>6</sup> Participants received incentives for survey participation (worth 1.5€). Forty percent of the invited panelists participated in the survey, which matches the AAPOR Response Rate 2 standard (The American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2016). Overall, 8388 respondents completed the survey between 21 April and 3 May 2016.<sup>7</sup>

In Table 2, we document our operationalization of the concepts discussed above. For most variables, item nonresponse is only a minor problem.<sup>8</sup> Yet, there are exceptions, some due to intentional nonresponse, and others due to survey filtering. As far as intentional nonresponse is concerned, the only problematic question is the one about income, which Germans are always hesitant to answer (25 percent missing values). Missingness in INCOME is not correlated with the outcome variables, which can be interpreted as evidence that coefficients estimated by means of the reduced sample are unbiased. Survey filtering is an issue in the case of INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION and EXPORT ORIENTATION. These two questions were posed only to currently employed respondents; respondents who were in training, unemployed, or retired were filtered out. When entering all variables described in this section in a regression model, 2982 observations of the initial sample of 8388 remain. To demonstrate the robustness of our findings, we vary the set of variables included in the regressions. The main findings are robust to the inclusion and exclusion of the variables with many missing values.

#### 5. Attitude formation toward free trade and TTIP: the standard model vs. the contextual model

We begin with a discussion of the uni- and bivariate distributions of the FREE TRADE and TTIP variables. If citizens viewed TTIP as a free trade issue, the distributions would be similar and highly correlated. Substantial differences between the levels of support and a low statistical association can be interpreted as evidence that different models are needed to explain attitudes toward TTIP and the principle of free trade.

**Table 2.** Operationalization of dependent and independent variables.

Variable	Question wording
FREE TRADE <sup>a</sup> TTIP <sup>a,b</sup>	Germany should limit the import of goods from other countries. (1) The German government should advocate the ratification of the free trade agreement TTIP between the EU and the USA; (2) in general, there are more advantages than disadvantages associated with the free trade agreement TTIP for Germany; and (3) the negotiations on the free trade agreement should be terminated.
ATLANTICISM <sup>a,b</sup>	(1) In foreign affairs, Germany should act in accordance with the USA; (2) it is desirable that the USA takes a position of leadership in international affairs.
INTEREST GROUP INFLUENCE <sup>a,b</sup>	(1) Interest groups have a strong influence on the decisions of politicians; (2) people disagree on the role of employers' associations and corporate network in politics. Some say they have too much influence, others say the influence of employers' association on politics is too weak. What is your opinion?
EXTERNAL EFFICACY <sup>a,b</sup>	(1) Politicians care about what people like me think; (2) politicians seek for a close connection with citizens.
NEED FOR REGULATION <sup>a,b</sup>	(1) Free markets without legal restrictions do more harm than good; (2) a rigorous legal regulation of markets is necessary to ensure the safety of consumers.
SKILL LEVEL <sup>c</sup>	Please report your occupation using the following list. (Skill levels were coded using the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) scheme, with 1 being the highest and 4 the lowest skill level (ILO 2012). For all response options and the corresponding ISCO skill level, see Online Supplementary File – Section 1)
PERCEIVED INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION <sup>a</sup>	How much is your work influenced by international competition?
PERCEIVED EXPORT ORIENTATION <sup>a</sup>	In your opinion, how important is the export business for your employer or your company?
MEDIUM INCOME <sup>c</sup>	What is your monthly net income after tax and social insurance? – 2500 to 4000€
ISOLATIONISM <sup>a,b</sup>	(1) Germany best preserves its interests by not intervening in other country's affairs; (2) Germany should not jeopardize the well-being of its citizens by maintaining contact and exchanges with other states; (3) in international affairs, Germany should mind its own business.
ETHNOCULTURALISM <sup>a,b</sup>	In order to be a German, (1) it is important to speak accent-free; (2) ...it is important to have German ancestors; (3) ...it is important to share German morals and norms.
CHAUVINISM <sup>a,b</sup>	(1) Germany is a better country than most other countries; (2) the world would be a better place if more countries were like Germany.
PARTY IDENTITY <sup>c</sup>	In Germany, many people lean toward a specific political party for a longer time, even though they vote for a different party from time to time. What about you: Do you – in general – lean toward a specific party? If so, toward which?
UNION MEMBERSHIP <sup>c</sup>	Are you or is someone in your household a union member?

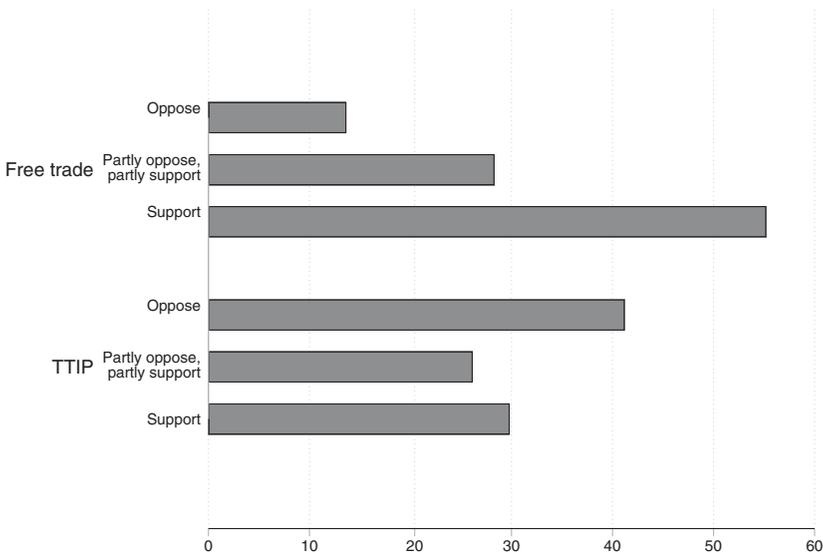
Notes: The Supplementary File (Online) reports question wording and response options for all items used in the analyses (Section 1), missing values (Section 2), and the internal reliability of all indexes (Section 5).

<sup>a</sup> Answers were given on a 7-point Likert scale.

<sup>b</sup> Additive index. For details, see Supplementary File (Online).

<sup>c</sup> Answers were coded into dummy variables. For details, see Supplementary File (Online).

Figure 2 reports the distribution of TTIP and free trade attitudes. To make these distributions easier to compare, we use trichotomized measures in Figure 2.<sup>9</sup> Free trade was supported by more than 50 percent of the respondents, whereas not even 15 percent opposed it. Support for TTIP shows a reverse pattern: more than 40 percent of the respondents opposed the agreement, while only about 30 percent supported it. German citizens thus viewed free trade considerably more positively than TTIP, which implies that they differentiated between both objects. The bivariate distribution suggests the same conclusion: almost one in four respondents supported free trade and at the same



**Figure 2.** Distribution of attitudes toward free trade and TTIP (in percent).

time opposed TTIP (Table 3). Similarly, the Pearson's correlation coefficient for the 7-point FREE TRADE variable and the TTIP index is only  $r = 0.15$ . Finally, regressing the TTIP index on FREE TRADE (and the other variables) again yields evidence of the relative independence of free trade and TTIP attitudes. If citizens did not differentiate between free trade in the abstract and the specific TTIP agreement, there should be an extremely large effect. Empirically, however, this is not the case: the coefficient of FREE TRADE is a moderate  $b = 0.11$ .<sup>10</sup>

What is driving the differences in German attitudes toward free trade in general and TTIP in particular? To answer this question, we regressed free trade and TTIP attitudes on the variables described in the previous section. To increase comparability, all regressions use an OLS estimator. All variables were recoded to a range from zero to one in order to facilitate the interpretation of the coefficients.<sup>11</sup>

Since many respondents drop out of the estimation when PERCEIVED EXPORT ORIENTATION, PERCEIVED INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION, and MEDIUM INCOME are included, we calculated models with and without these predictors (Table 4). The first two columns report results from a model with all predictors. When PERCEIVED EXPORT ORIENTATION and PERCEIVED INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION are included, we study only employed citizens ( $N = 3524$ ) – the unemployed, trainees, those not in the labor force, and pensioners were not asked these questions and drop out of the estimation. Columns three and four report results from models without these two variables; here, we study the

**Table 3.** Cross tabulation of attitudes toward free trade and TTIP.

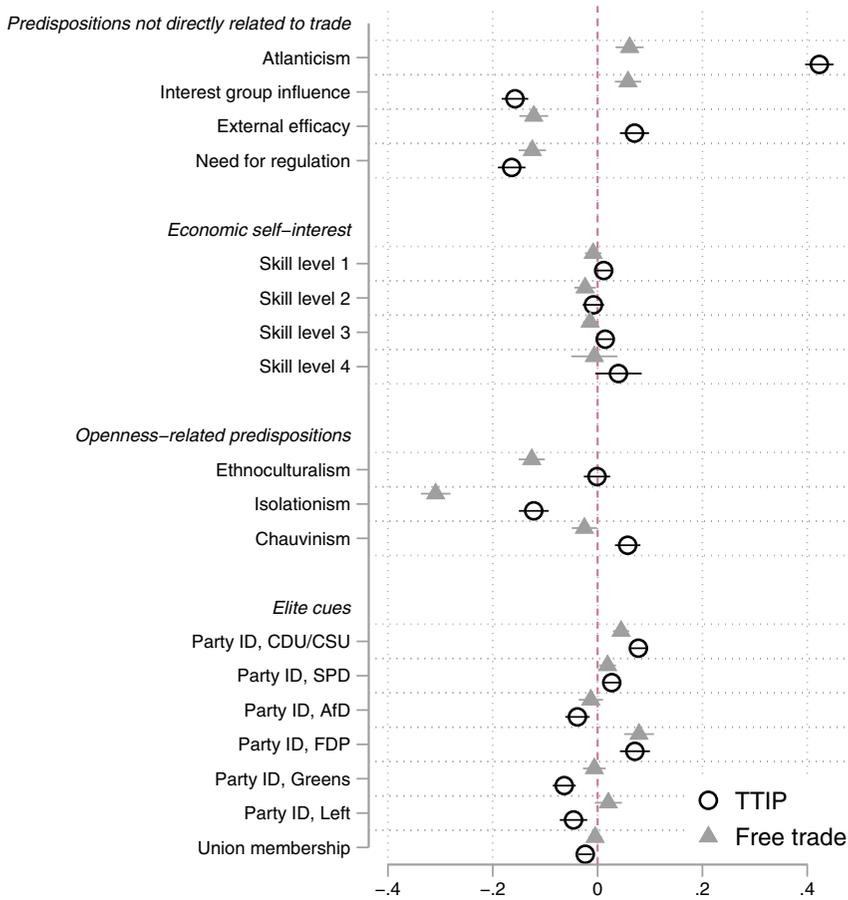
	Oppose TTIP	Partly oppose, partly support	Support TTIP
Oppose free trade	7%	3%	3%
Partly oppose, partly support	12%	9%	6%
Support free trade	23%	12%	21%

Note: Reported are cell percentages.

**Table 4.** Determinants of attitudes toward free trade and TTIP.

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	TTIP	Free trade	TTIP	Free trade	TTIP	Free trade
<i>Predispositions not directly related to trade</i>						
Atlanticism	0.42*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.42*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.42*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
Interest group influence	-0.14*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)	-0.16*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
External efficacy	0.06** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)
Need for regulation	-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.01)	-0.16*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)
<i>Economic self-interest</i>						
Skill level 1	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Skill level 2	-0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)
Skill level 3	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	0.01* (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)
Skill level 4	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Perceived international competition	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)				
Perceived export orientation	0.05** (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)				
Medium income	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)		
<i>Openness-related predispositions</i>						
Ethnoculturalism	0.02 (0.02)	-0.14*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)
Isolationism	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.33*** (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.33*** (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.01)	-0.31*** (0.01)
Chauvinism	0.04* (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	-0.03* (0.01)
<i>Elite cues</i>						
Party ID, CDU/CSU	0.07*** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Party ID, SPD	0.03** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Party ID, AfD	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.03* (0.02)	-0.04* (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.04** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Party ID, FDP	0.07*** (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Party ID, Greens	-0.06*** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Party ID, Left	-0.04* (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.04** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Union membership	-0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.02* (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Constant	0.49*** (0.03)	0.91*** (0.03)	0.47*** (0.02)	0.93*** (0.02)	0.47*** (0.01)	0.92*** (0.01)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.262	0.179	0.262	0.173	0.259	0.167
Observations	3524	3524	6197	6197	7808	7808

Notes: Reported are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; reference category of PI dummies is 'other'/'no party'; reference category of skill level dummies is 'all others'; \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 3.** Determinants of attitudes toward free trade and TTIP. Reported are OLS coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from the regression models reported in Table 4, columns 5 and 6.

whole sample ( $N = 6197$ ). A column-wise comparison demonstrates that the estimated effects remain substantively the same. This suggests that there are no differences in attitude formation between the employed, on the one hand, and the unemployed, trainees, those not in the labor force, and pensioners, on the other. The last two columns display results from a model without the *MEDIUM INCOME* variable ( $N = 7808$ ), and again the estimated coefficients do not differ from those in the other two model specifications. To make the most of the survey's large sample, in the following, we focus on the results from the models with the reduced set of predictors. Figure 3 displays these coefficients graphically.

Our main hypothesis is that the predispositions related to features of TTIP that were salient in German public debate should have large effects on attitudes toward TTIP and small effects on attitudes toward free trade. Consistently, the most important determinant of the former is *ATLANTICISM* ( $b = 0.42$ ): TTIP support among citizens with maximum *ATLANTICISM* scores is estimated to be 0.42 scale points higher than among citizens with minimum *ATLANTICISM* scores. This is a substantial effect, given that our

TTIP attitude scale ranges from zero to one. In contrast, ATLANTICISM has, if any, a small effect on support for free trade. It might seem banal that respondents opposed to transatlantic cooperation would oppose a trade agreement with the United States. However, it seems trivial only against the backdrop of the contextual model. If no context-related predispositions would enter the attitude formation process, respondents' attitudes toward specific trade partners should not matter. The fact that ATLANTICISM has such a large effect thus supports the contextual model. A similar pattern is found for INFLUENCE OF INTEREST GROUPS: as predicted, it has a negative effect on TTIP support ( $b = -0.16$ ) and virtually no influence on free trade attitudes.

The results for the other two predispositions related to the deep integration content fit less well with our hypotheses. While NEED FOR REGULATION and EXTERNAL EFFICACY show the expected association with TTIP attitudes, they are also associated with free trade attitudes. The effect of NEED FOR REGULATION is negative in both instances ( $b = -0.16$  and  $b = -0.12$ ). An explanation for the effect on free trade attitudes might be that at least some citizens equate the enlargement of markets, as implied in free trade, with the deregulation of markets. While POLITICAL EFFICACY has a small positive effect on support for TTIP ( $b = 0.07$ ), the estimation returns a negative effect on support for free trade. Citizens with low political efficacy might prefer a loose regulation because they lack trust in the regulating institutions. In their eyes, an unregulated system might be preferable to a system regulated by unresponsive institutions. However, this conjecture is not conclusively testable with our data and should be addressed in future research.

Overall, the predispositions we introduced to take account of TTIP's deep integration character perform rather well. Although they are not strongly related to free trade as such, they are necessary to understand citizens' attitude toward TTIP. But how do the variables that are traditionally used to explain support for free trade fare in explaining support for TTIP? The contextual model would lose relevance if the more traditional explanatory factors of free trade attitudes were similarly or more important than the context-related ones.

To start with the results for free trade attitudes, predispositions related to the openness of societies are quite closely associated with these attitudes. This confirms our expectation and is well in line with previous findings. The more citizens define the nation in ethnocultural terms, the less supportive they are of the principle of free trade. ISOLATIONISM also affects these attitudes negatively and represents one of the two most important explanatory factors of free trade attitudes ( $b = -0.31$ ). The effect of CHAUVINISM, in contrast, is negligible. In comparison to these results, the pattern of coefficients for TTIP attitudes is markedly different. Although isolationism is also negatively associated with the evaluation of TTIP, the effect ( $b = -0.12$ ) is significantly smaller than the effect on free trade. ETHNOCULTURALISM is unrelated to TTIP attitudes, while CHAUVINISM surprisingly exhibits a small positive effect ( $b = 0.06$ ). Perhaps, chauvinists see the USA at a similar superiority level as Germany. If so, this could render the ingroup-outgroup distinction that is assumed to drive the negative impact of chauvinism on free trade attitudes meaningless in the TTIP case. Taken together, these results suggest that the potential partner of the agreement might be more important than the abstract principle of international involvement when it comes to the evaluation of a specific trade agreement.

Turning to explanations based on economic self-interest, the estimated coefficients are invariably small. There is no evidence of attitudinal differences based on skill levels,

as shown by the minuscule coefficients reported in Figure 3. The same can be said about buying power: regression models in which the MEDIUM INCOME variable was included (see the first four rows in Table 4) do not support the notion that those who would profit most in terms of buying power view TTIP and free trade more favorably. There is some evidence, however, in support of the Ricardo-Viner model (but not of the related New New Trade model). The perception that one's employer is dependent on the export business (PERCEIVED EXPORT ORIENTATION) is associated with increased support for TTIP ( $b = 0.05$ ). But this effect, albeit statistically significant, is quite small. All told, economic self-interest variables are not very helpful in explaining German public support for free trade and TTIP. One might argue that our modeling strategy is inappropriate to quantify the total effect of the calculation of economic costs and benefits because we included mediating variables in the regression models. We therefore estimated univariate models including only one of the explanatory factors and also varied the operationalization of the income variable.<sup>12</sup> The results, however, remain virtually the same: all measures designed to capture economic winners and loser of free trade are basically unrelated to free trade attitudes as well as to attitudes toward TTIP.<sup>13</sup>

An important area of current research is effect heterogeneity. Several authors have argued that economic self-interest should matter more among those on whom free trade has an actual economic impact as well as among those with sufficient economic knowledge to foresee the consequences of proposed trade policies (cf. Owen & Walter, 2017). To address these subgroup hypotheses, we ran our model in subgroups differing in the importance they attributed TTIP personally and for Germany, their political interest, and their education level. We find no substantial differences between subgroups. Unlike previous studies (e.g. Rho & Tomz, 2017), our results do not show systematic differences in the relevance of economic self-interest.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, let us examine the relevance of elite cues. As discussed above, one precondition for cue-driven attitude formation is that elites send signals about their position on a given issue to their supporters. In our case, this precondition is not met as far as the principle of free trade is concerned. It was not a salient issue in public discourse during the relevant period prior to our survey; there were basically no cues from unions or parties on how to evaluate free trade in general. Still, affiliates of the CDU/CSU ( $b = 0.04$ ) and the FDP ( $b = 0.08$ ) look somewhat more favorably on the principle of free trade than the reference group (consisting of citizens without affiliation, identifying with a politically irrelevant party, and those unwilling to respond), while the affiliates of the other established German parties do not evaluate the issue differently.

With regard to TTIP, we find that party support and TTIP attitudes are more closely aligned. Supporters of the CDU/CSU ( $b = 0.08$ ) and the FDP ( $b = 0.07$ ) – parties which publicly supported TTIP – tend to favor TTIP more than the reference group. In contrast, affiliates of the Greens ( $b = -0.06$ ), the Left Party ( $b = -0.05$ ), and the AfD ( $b = -0.04$ ) tend to be more critical of TTIP than the reference group, reflecting the TTIP-critical positions these parties communicated. Thus, the largest cueing-based difference, between affiliates of the CDU/CSU and the Greens, amounts to 0.14 scale points. In sum, these results suggest a moderate partisan divide induced by direct elite cueing.

We find no substantial negative effect of union membership on attitudes toward TTIP. This is somewhat surprising, since previous studies showed opposition to free trade deals to be strong among labor unionists. Our findings might be the result of TTIP being discussed largely on noneconomic terms. Alternatively, opposition to free trade among union members might be driven by predispositions included in our model

**Table 5.** Explanatory power of different models of TTIP attitudes.

	$R^2$ of models with individual variable blocks	$R^2$ of models with increasing number of variable blocks
Economic self-interest	0.01	0.01
Openness-related predispositions	0.05	0.05
Elite cues	0.08	0.11
Free trade	0.02	0.12
Predispositions not directly related to free trade	0.22	0.27

Notes: Reported are corrected  $R^2$ ; the left column reports the percentage of explained variance if only the variables from the respective variable block are included as independent variables; the right column reports the percentage of explained variance of models with an increasing number of variable blocks, where blocks are added subsequently, from top to bottom; additional controls: age, gender, region, and education; in each case, the largest possible sample was analyzed; all coefficients and  $N$  are reported in Section 13 in the Supplementary File (Online).

and not be based on direct elite communication. Yet another possibility is an overall decreasing communicative influence of labor union leaders on their members. This interpretation is supported by low effects of union membership on attitudes toward both free trade and TTIP when only the variables capturing union and party membership are considered as independent variables.<sup>15</sup>

As a last step of analysis, we compare the percentages of variance each model family is able to explain. Table 5 shows that the context-related predispositions explain the largest share of the variance in TTIP attitudes. When entered as the only variable block into the regression, the four predispositions not directly related to trade account for 22 percent of the variance. This is more than twice as much as the cueing variables can claim, which come in at second place. A similar picture emerges when the variable blocks are successively entered into the regression model. Here, we entered the predispositions not directly related to trade last in order to obtain the most conservative estimate of the contribution of these variables. Still, as the second column of Table 5 shows, the explanatory power of the model increases from 12 percent to 27 percent after the inclusion of the context-related predispositions.

In sum, the results support our argument that predispositions unrelated to trade matter for attitudes toward contemporary trade agreements. This is because public discourse about such agreements includes information about the partners of the agreement and its deep integration content, which in turn induces citizens to think about the agreements along these lines. Thus, it seems unwise to rely on the standard model of free trade attitudes in these cases, as the real drivers of support and opposition toward specific trade deals might remain hidden.

## 6. Discussion and implications

There is a lot to be said in favor of parsimonious models. Yet, parsimony should not stand above accuracy. Research on public attitudes toward the principle of free trade has developed a de facto standard model that consists of a set of explanatory variables that are expected to be equally relevant across cases. The elegance of this model is not in doubt. As argued above, however, it has blind spots when applied to attitudes toward specific contemporary trade agreements. To explain the latter, we need to add explanatory factors derived from the case-specific context. This implies a less elegant but more flexible model that does not specify *ex ante* what explanatory factors are decisive in a

given case. In conjunction with a careful analysis of the boundary conditions of the case in question, however, this contextual model should perform better in explaining attitudes toward specific agreements.

The revision of the standard model of attitudes toward trade is necessary because contemporary trade agreements exhibit an increased variation in depth, specificity of partner countries, and degree of politicization in national politics. Following the literature on framing effects, this variation in context should be associated with variation in the explanatory factors of attitudes toward trade agreements and their relative relevance across cases. In light of our contextual model, the earlier success of the standard model was not driven by the context independence of the attitudes but by the stability of contexts across cases. In this reading, the standard model performed well because citizens and elites everywhere saw trade agreements as instances of economic globalization. The more this consensual perspective on trade agreements dissolves and other aspects become salient, the more important taking account of the case-specific context becomes. It will be interesting to see if similar developments can be identified in other domains of international integration and foreign policy more generally. Taking account of variation across contexts might require a broadening of the explanatory models for these cases as well.

We illustrated the implication of the contextual model with an analysis of German public opinion toward TTIP. The characteristics of this case – high public salience, with the agreement’s deep integration content at the center of public debate – should favor the activation of predispositions unrelated to trade. It would have been strong evidence that a contextual model is unnecessary if the standard model had proven to be sufficient for explaining German attitudes toward TTIP; but as we have shown, accounting for predispositions associated with the dominant themes in public discourse substantially increased the explained variation in TTIP attitudes. Furthermore, the general attitude toward free trade was not a good predictor of TTIP attitudes. Thus, the analysis yielded ample evidence that the contextual model is superior to the standard model in explaining German public opinion on TTIP. This shows that theories of free trade attitudes may hold only limited power in explaining public opposition toward specific free trade agreements.

There are, of course, various caveats and limitations. First, we have analyzed cross-sectional data, which yield correlational evidence only (Fordham & Kleinberg, 2012). We have tried to limit the inherent endogeneity problem by using explanatory factors that are clearly more general than the dependent variable – at least in the case of the TTIP attitudes. We would argue that the problem of endogeneity varies in significance, depending on how conceptually close the independent variable is from the dependent variable. This distance is smaller in analyses like the one by Mansfield and Mutz (2009), which employs beliefs about free trade utility to explain the overall evaluation of free trade (Fordham & Kleinberg, 2012). It is larger in our analysis, which links concepts such as interest group influence to TTIP attitudes; in our case, the conceptual distance is larger and correspondingly the endogeneity problem smaller. Still, concerns about endogeneity remain. Experiments that are run in parallel to salient, ongoing real-world debates about specific trade agreements and tailored to pick up the context-specific arguments exchanged in these debates would be well suited to address these concerns.

Furthermore, we only analyzed a single, most-likely case. This does not represent a formal test of the contextual model. Such a test would require an analysis of multiple

cases with different levels of public salience of the agreements and their elements. To do so, it would be necessary to conduct either a large comparative study across countries or a study of several carefully selected cases. Still, our results indicate that the standard model lacks in explaining German public attitudes toward TTIP. If a model based on the dominant literature fails in explaining public opinion toward one of the most prominent contemporary trade agreements on record, this points to a problem in the field. Opening up explanatory models used in international political economy to account for predispositions that are activated by public discourse seems like a promising step forward. Our findings suggest that it would be fruitful to develop and test the contextual model further.

One of the strongest drivers of attitudes toward TTIP was attitudes toward the partner of the proposed agreement, the USA. This finding is especially relevant because after the stalemate of the WTO Doha round in 2008, trade agreements most often come in the form of preferential or bilateral agreements. While multilateral agreements contain many partners, bilateral agreements focus on very specific partners, whose identity can come to matter greatly in public discourse. If so, the move toward favoring bilateral agreements by both the Trump administration in the USA and post-Brexit administrations in Britain might make attitudes toward the specific partners key factors in public attitudes toward these agreements. Depending on the partner, this might prove to bring much harder domestic compromise building than currently envisioned by proponents of this development. Ironically, dealing with fewer partners might thus increase public opposition.

We currently experience a public backlash against international integration, of which free trade is one important element. As others have argued, theories of international political economy struggle to explain this backlash (Best et al., 2017). This article has shown that, if we want to understand it, it is insufficient to apply explanations of attitudes toward abstract international integration. Instead, we have to take seriously the contextual factors salient in public discourse about the concrete proposed initiatives and agreements. As specific free trade agreements have come to be about much more than trade, our explanatory models have to expand as well. The benefits of free trade and the detriments of protectionist measures have become deeply ingrained into Western curricula. Support for free trade might thus indicate the internalization of a particular Western ethos but say little about support for specific trade agreements. Likewise, explanations of attitudes toward the principle of free trade might tell us little about attitudes toward specific agreements. Scientists who ignore this subtle difference run the risk of misunderstanding public reactions toward specific agreements. Policy decisions that are based on these misunderstandings might then lead to unintended outcomes. In the time of Trump, Brexit, and widespread opposition toward trade agreements like TTIP and CETA – a time in which international integration has come under attack from the right and the left side of the political spectrum – a precise understanding of the drivers of these phenomena is crucial.

## Notes

1. This model also implies that the impact of ‘standard’ economic predictors may depend on context, e.g. specific economic implications of agreements.
2. For a detailed description of this analysis, see Section 3 in the Supplementary File (Online).

3. According to a Pew poll from March 2014, 55 percent of the German public supported TTIP; one year later, using the same question wording, a second Pew poll found that this figure had decreased by 14 percentage points, to 41 percent (PEW Research Center, 2015). A similar trend was reported by the Bertelsmann Stiftung (Bluth 2017, p. 24), according to which support fell by 21 percentage points between February 2014 and October 2015, from 55 to 34 percent. Again, these figures stem from identical question wording.
4. For a detailed discussion, see Section 3 in the Supplementary File (Online).
5. Similarly, previous research has shown that social trust can influence free trade attitudes (Kaltenthaler & Miller, 2013; Spilker, Schaffer, & Bernauer, 2012). The argument here, however, is that TTIP attitudes are influenced by (mis-)trust in the elites who negotiate the agreement, and not by trust in international transactions or the trading partner.
6. In the implemented sample, however, citizens (especially older women) with low education are underrepresented. Using a survey weight that corrects for age, sex, and education does not change the results. See Section 4 in the Supplementary File (Online).
7. The data set is available online at Jungherr, Mader, Schoen, and Wuttke (2018).
8. See Section 1 of the Supplementary File (Online) for detailed information about the items, Section 2 for a discussion of univariate distributions and missing values, and Section 5 for a psychometric analysis of the multi-item measures.
9. In the case of FREE TRADE, which was measured on a 7-point scale, we coded respondents who chose categories 1–3 as ‘oppose’, category 4 as ‘partly oppose, partly support’ and categories 5–7 as ‘support’. The TTIP summary index was trichotomized analogously, but with a tolerance range for the ‘partly oppose, partly support’ category: respondents with index scores between 0.44 and 0.56 (range of the index: 0–1) were assigned to the ‘partly oppose, partly support’ category. These thresholds imply that someone who chose the middle category on two TTIP items and the middle category +/-1 scale point on the third TTIP item is coded into the ‘partly oppose, partly support’ category of the trichotomized variables. The reported patterns are not an artifact of trichotomization. The distributions of the original scales are reported in Section 2 in the Supplementary File (Online).
10. The results of this OLS regression are reported in Section 6 in the Supplementary File. Since all variables were rescaled to range from 0 to 1, the coefficient of 0.11 indicates that the difference in the TTIP variable between persons with a minimum and a maximum FREE TRADE score is only 0.11 points. All coefficients reported in this article can be interpreted analogously.
11. To check the robustness of the findings reported below, we made several robustness checks (see Sections 7–9 in the Supplementary File (Online)). First, we analyzed free trade attitudes using an ordered logit regression, taking account of the fact that the 7-point scale of this variable does not have a metric scale. Second, we reran the regressions with a post-stratification weight that adjusts for age, sex, and education. Third, we checked whether the results change when ‘don’t know’ responses are explicitly accounted for in the regression analysis (Kleinberg & Fordham, in press). The results remain substantively the same in all these checks.
12. For these results, see Section 10 in the Supplementary File (Online).
13. Mansfield and Mutz (2009) propose to test interest-based attitude formation by asking respondents what economic effects free trade has for themselves and the nation. While this strategy is a more direct measure of citizens’ utility perceptions, it raises concerns regarding endogeneity and even tautology (Fordham & Kleinberg, 2012). In the Online Supplementary File, Section 11, we show that the effects of the predispositions not directly related to trade do not change when Mansfield and Mutz’s ‘perceived effects’ variables are included.
14. See Section 12 in the Supplementary File (Online).
15. See Section 13 in the Supplementary File (Online).

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