

# Globalization and Elite Responsiveness: Trade Shocks, Competitive Contexts, and Political Ideology

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## Abstract

Across the advanced industrialized democracies, the political center is collapsing as politicians on both the far-right and far-left enjoy increasing electoral success. Recent research links these shifts away from the political center to economic globalization, citing trade shocks as one particularly potent source of voter support for radical far-right parties; however, we know comparatively less about how trade impacts individual legislator ideology, or whether legislators from non-extremist parties have responded to the concurrent rise of far-right and far-left challengers. Do legislators shift their economic and cultural ideology in response to trade-induced shifts? What role do local competitive and electoral contexts play in shaping these ideological shifts? Using an original dataset of roll call votes in the French Senate, we find localized increases in trade exposure drive elite ideological shifts to the left economically, and that these effects are magnified in departments with competitive majoritarian systems. We also show legislators shift their cultural ideological positions in response to trade, but only when faced with extremist political competitors that define themselves primarily along these types of issues. Our results suggest the value of attending to not just international sources of domestic politics, but also the centrality of different types of electoral competition, including from radical candidates.

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In both the United States and Europe, as electorates increasingly opt for candidates espousing populist positions, the political center is collapsing. The National Rally in France, the Alternative for Germany, the Danish People’s Party, and the Brothers of Italy are just a few examples of the ever growing list of right-wing nationalist parties gaining support throughout Europe. At the same time, the support base of the traditional social democratic left is in many countries being bled by radical left competitors such as the France Insoumise and Left Bloc in Portugal.

A distinguished body of political economy scholarship identifies dimensions of globalization, and trade shocks in particular, as a key determinant of rising polarization (Autor et al., 2020) and support for anti-system politics among mass publics (Milner, 2021). Scholars find voters in regions with large import influxes are more likely to support extremist candidates (Margalit, 2011; Autor, Dorn and Hanson, 2016; Colantone and Stanig, 2018) whose policy positions overwhelmingly emphasize cultural issues. While there is extensive research on demand-side responses to trade and the rise of the populist far-right (Dippel, Gold and Heblich, 2015; Gingrich, 2017; Colantone and Stanig, 2018), as well as work on the effects of public opinion on legislator preferences (Guisinger, 2009; Milner and Tingley, 2011), we know comparatively less about how individual politicians shift their policy positions in response to globalization-induced economic volatility (Rodrik, 2021) and, more broadly, to the rise of these extremist challengers (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020; Spoon and Williams, 2021).

Indeed, existing work on legislative responses to globalization is characterized by convergent findings, but also by disagreement and even silence on key questions. On the one hand, there is now substantial agreement that localized trade shocks increase both negative views about trade and specific trading partners (Kleinberg and Fordham, 2013; Kuk, Seligsohn and Zhang, 2018), as well as support for trade protectionism (Campello and Urdinez, 2021), and that these effects are stronger among politicians operating in competitive districts (Feigenbaum and Hall, 2015). However, scholars disagree as to whether trade influences legislator ideology beyond the narrow scope of trade policy (Feigenbaum and Hall, 2015; Autor

[et al., 2020](#)). Moreover, perhaps because the vast majority of studies on legislator responses emerge from the US setting, there have been few efforts to explore how different types of local competitive and institutional contexts refract globalization-induced pressures.

Under what conditions do legislators shift their policy positions in response to trade? Using a hand-coded dataset of roll call votes from the French Senate, this paper advances our understanding of the dynamics of elite policy responses to trade in several ways. In addition to examining the degree to which trade alters legislators' ideological positions on economic versus cultural issues, we also explore how the local electoral context —namely, electoral system type, the presence of extremist challengers, and the competitiveness of the electoral environment— mediate this relationship.

We present three findings of note. First, in line with existing work on legislative responses to trade, overall, we find that localized increases in trade exposure drive elite shifts to the left on the economic ideological dimension. These effects are magnified in competitive majoritarian constituencies. We also explore how legislators shift their cultural ideological position when facing competition from niche and extremist candidates, and find that local variation in radical party strength mediates the effects of trade on ideology. While a strong radical left presence pulls only left-leaning politicians further to the left on both economic and cultural issues, a strong far-right pulls all politicians further to the right on the cultural dimension. Our findings suggest the value of attending to how international forces intersect with localized patterns of political competition to shape legislative behavior on both economic and cultural issues. This paper also contributes to the small but growing literature on the effects of radical competitors' success on the behavior and policy positions of other political actors.

## **The Domestic Consequences of Globalization**

Over the past twenty years, the advanced industrialized countries have experienced a tremendous increase in the internationalization of trade, labor flows, and finance. Trade from

low-wage countries, in particular, has led to job losses in traditional industry and put substantial downward pressure on wages (Donoso et al., 2014; Dauth, Findeisen and Suedekum, 2014; Balsvik, Sissel and Salvanes, 2015; Malgouyres, 2017b). Recent research suggests that on both sides of the Atlantic, where import competition from low-wage countries is higher, *voters* are more likely to support radical candidates and/or parties (Milner, 2021; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Dippel, Gold and Heblich, 2015; Gingrich, 2017; Malgouyres, 2014). But how have legislators changed their policy positions to reflect these shifts?

To date, there is little consensus on how or even whether the economic dislocations brought on by trade affect legislators' ideologies (Butler and Nickerson, 2011; Karol, 2007; Kleinberg and Fordham, 2013; Kuk, Seligsohn and Zhang, 2018; Autor et al., 2020). On the one hand, there is evidence that voters' interests around trade only marginally impact how members of the US Congress vote on legislative bills (Fordham and McKeown, 2003; Guisinger, 2009; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2006). More recent work, however, finds that local dynamics do impact legislative votes on trade policy in the US. For example, Feigenbaum and Hall (2015) find trade shocks cause legislators to vote in a more protectionist direction on trade bills, but identify no change in voting on other types of bill. In contrast, Autor et al. (2020) find evidence of a generalized polarized ideological response.

Interestingly, most research on individual elite responses to globalization draws on data from the US case.<sup>1</sup> What is more, all studies of legislative responses to globalization of which we are aware analyze a single (economic) dimension of politics. This economic focus, however, sits in some tension with work on how European *voters* react to globalization, which suggests that trade shocks and globalization more broadly should impact both the

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<sup>1</sup>The one explicitly comparative paper we are aware of examining local labor market shocks and legislative behavior is Campello and Urdinez (2021), on Brazil. In the European context the majority of elite-centered research on globalization has focused on political parties, particularly at the national level (Adams, Haupt and Stoli, 2009; Haupt, 2010; O'Grady and Abou-Chadi, 2019), rather than individual politicians. There is of course substantial work in Europe on individual legislator responsiveness to voters, but this work has been largely limited to stable domestic contexts (Broockman, 2013; Vries, Dinas and Solaz, 2016; Habel and Birch, 2019; Bol et al., 2021; André, Depauw and Martin, 2015), rather than ones facing exogenous economic shocks.

economic and cultural dimensions of politics.<sup>2</sup> The centrality of the American case in current theorizing has also arguably limited our understanding of its scope conditions given that key institutional features of the American polity—a two-party system generated by single member district (SMD) electoral rules—are not representative of many other advanced democracies.

This paper advances work on trade and individual elite ideology by examining the political dynamics of local labor market disruptions in a case outside of the United States: France. Like many other advanced democracies, France has experienced a dramatic increase in trade from low-wage countries since the early 2000s. Moreover, in contrast to the US, France has a multi-party system with a strong presence of both radical right *and* radical left parties. These features enable us to answer important questions about how political elites respond ideologically to global economic changes and the concurrent rise of extremist political challengers. In the next section, we generate predictions about how legislators representing trade-exposed regions should shift their ideological positions, and how we argue these shifts will be mediated by the local institutional and electoral contexts in which politicians operate.

## Trade Shocks, Local Electoral Context, and Legislator Ideology

Politics in western democracies takes place along two distinct dimensions: the traditional economic divide, and an increasingly salient cultural dimension that focuses on societal issues such as gender equality, immigration, and EU integration (Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2012; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Caughey, O’Grady and Warshaw, 2019; Kriesi

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<sup>2</sup>Economic integration has been linked to increased demand for far-right populism (Dippel, Gold and Hebllich, 2015; Gingrich, 2017; Colantone and Stanig, 2018), anti-immigrant sentiment (Autor et al., 2020; Ballard-Rosa, Jensen and Scheve, 2021; Coffé, Heyndels and Vermeir, 2007; Dippel et al., 2017; Malgouyres, 2017a), and increasingly authoritarian attitudes among voters (Gidron and Hall, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Werts, Scheepers and Lubbers, 2013). Until quite recently, the general consensus was that identity and values, rather than economic self-interest, drive voter preferences toward economic globalization (Rho and Tomz, 2017). Nevertheless, the pendulum has begun to swing back, as a growing group of scholars acknowledge that “globalization does not affect all voters in a uniform manner, but its consequences vary widely within the electorate,” (Rommel and Walter, 2018, 647) creating significant economic consequences resulting from offshoring, job losses, and other long-term economic dislocations for exposed workers.

et al., 2008; Van Der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). Following the existing literature, we distinguish between the traditional economic left and right, and use similar terminology for the cultural dimension for simplicity, defining the cultural right as being comprised of policies typically associated with populist, far-right politics, such as anti-immigrant sentiment, authoritarian attitudes, and nationalism, while the cultural left is more multicultural, libertarian, and (internationally) cosmopolitan (Volgens et al., 2020).

In multiparty systems, such as that in France and most of western Europe, parties differ both with respect to their policy platforms and also the relative emphasis they place on economic versus cultural issues. Indeed, parties have shown significant variation in how they respond to globalization (Garrett, 1998; Haupt, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2008). Established parties on both the left and right still focus predominantly on economic policy (Rommel and Walter, 2018), with the left emphasizing policies to strengthen the welfare state and increase redistribution, and protectionist ones that shield vulnerable workers exposed to the international economy. The mainstream right, in contrast, advocates market-oriented policies, decreased government spending, and lower taxes (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Benoit and Laver, 2007; Schmidt, 2010).

The more recent niche parties tend to reject this class-based orientation of politics, focusing on a different set of post-materialist issues such as nationalism, the environment, or regional autonomy (Meguid, 2005). Radical far-right parties, for example, focus predominantly on issues along the cultural ideological dimension, with a particular emphasis on (anti-)immigration. To the extent they adopt economic policies, they tend toward a “welfare chauvanist” platform—which advocates increased social protections for natives while excluding immigrants and other non-nationals—that falls on the market-regulating, or traditionally left-leaning side of the economic dimension (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).

France’s Rassemblement National (RN) party, whose economic policies have shifted left over time, illustrates these trends. In the 1990s, the RN’s economic position aligned more closely with the traditional right, pro-market stance. However, since the 2008 financial crisis,

the RN’s economic platform has been socialist-leaning, advocating issues such as fiscal justice, increased social spending, expanded social security, a lower retirement age, reduced health care costs, and a maternal salary (Abts et al., 2021; Ivaldi, Lanzone and Woods, 2017). Furthermore, while the RN previously advocated lower taxes traditionally associated with the right, more recently it has called for higher income taxes for the rich and even proposed a new value-added tax for luxury products (Abts et al., 2021). In other words, the RN, like many other radical right parties in Europe, has increasingly shifted its economic position toward the welfare chauvinist model while maintaining its far-right stance on cultural issues, such as immigration.

Given that politicians from established parties on both the left and right focus primarily on economic issues, and building on work that shows legislators respond to trade influxes exclusively along the economic dimension (Feigenbaum and Hall, 2015; Autor et al., 2020; Campello and Urdinez, 2021), we expect that, all else equal, individual elites’ responses to trade shocks will be reflected in economic ideological shifts. The economic insecurities created by globalization have driven affected voters to increasingly demand compensatory policies associated both with traditional parties on the left, resulting in greater government spending (Rodrik, 1998; Garrett, 1998; Dreher, Sturm and Ursprung, 2008) and an expansion of redistributive policies (Bergh and Nilsson, 2010; Leibrecht, Klien and Onaran, 2011; Meinhard and Potrafke, 2012). Indeed, individuals who directly incur the costs of trade have grown increasingly skeptical of neoliberalism (Przeworski, 2001), and as the negative consequences of globalization have grown other, more left-wing candidates that universally reject neoliberalism, consumerism, and globalized capitalism have become increasingly electorally successful (Bale and Dunphy, 2011). We see a leftward shift in response to trade even among the French Senate’s selectorate: localized increases in trade penetration are associated with increases in the vote share of left candidates in Senate elections.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, *we predict the ideological position of legislators representing trade-exposed regions will shift to the left*

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<sup>3</sup>Results are reported in the appendix

*economically.*

The extent to which legislators shift their ideological position with respect to that second, cultural dimension of politics, however, will be contingent on local context. We argue that legislators will only adjust their cultural positions in response to trade influxes when they face electoral competition from niche and other extremist competitors who, as noted above, define themselves primarily with respect to second dimension, post-materialist and cultural issues, rather than economic ones. Absent competitors that make this second dimension salient, legislators will prefer to focus on the economic policy-issues that are more central to their political identity. We return to this issue in more detail in the following sections, where we explore how competitive contexts mediate the relationship between economic globalization and legislative ideology.

## Variation across Electoral Systems

Electoral systems create distinct incentives for how politicians might respond to economic dislocations resulting from trade (Taagepera, 1973; Shugart and Taagepera, 1989; Katz, 1997; Chang et al., 2010; Breunig, Grossman and Hänni, 2022). Since Duverger (1954), political scientists have highlighted one important channel by which electoral systems might induce changes in elites' ideologies: through its 'mechanical' effects on vote-seat elasticities. The fact that identical vote distributions are translated into different seat allocations depending on the electoral system suggests that, in majoritarian systems where small vote swings can dramatically distort the relationship between vote and seat shares,<sup>4</sup> alienating voters by failing to offer compensation for the dislocations brought on by trade should entail a higher risk for politicians (Wlezien and Soroka, 2012).<sup>5</sup> In such departments, where the incumbency advantage plays a more pivotal role in determining a candidate's prospects for re-election

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<sup>4</sup>Indeed, empirical work suggests that seat-vote elasticities —or the percentage increase in seats produced by a one-percentage increase in votes— are 1.5 to 8 times greater in majoritarian when compared to proportional systems (Rogowski and Kayser, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>Existing work suggests another channel through which majoritarianism promotes pluralization: the fact that candidates in majoritarian departments can campaign at least to some extent on personal characteristics, and are thus less dependent on their party for re-election (Katz, 1997; Mitchell, 2000; Carey, 2007).



([Hainmueller and Kern, 2008](#)), we might also expect individual legislators to respond to trade-generated economic displacement, irrespective of the position taken by their political party ([Sieberer, 2010](#)).

While majoritarian systems should create incentives for ideological shifts among legislators in regions hard hit by trade, the literature also suggests the extent to which these incentives actually influence politicians' strategies is also dependent on the competitiveness of the election. According to the 'marginality hypothesis,' legislators elected by narrower margins (e.g. those in more competitive districts) will be more attentive due to the possibility of voter backlash. Therefore *we expect legislators elected via majoritarian rules will shift further to the left on economic issues than legislators in PR systems. These effects in majoritarian districts should be stronger in the case of competitive elections.*

## **Responding to Extremist Challengers**

In any representative democracy, elections provide key incentives for politicians to adjust their ideological positions. However, the nature and context of these elections can create varying incentives for elites to adapt ideologically. One source of variation across local elections is the electoral rules in place and the competitiveness of any given election; another is the type and strength of competition politicians face ([Watson, 2015](#)). As extremist and niche parties on the left and right grow in popular support, and increase the salience of cultural issues, they pose a direct electoral challenge to their mainstream competitors. Research finds that, when they are threatened electorally, traditional parties may opt for an accommodative approach wherein they shift their cultural ideological positions to more closely match those of their extremist competitors, in the hopes of drawing in or winning back voters ([Meguid, 2005](#)). In a direct test of these dynamics, [Abou-Chadi and Krause \(2020\)](#) indeed find that mainstream parties are more likely to emphasize anti-immigration positions when the populist radical-right received higher vote shares in the previous election. While work on party responses to extremists has focused primarily on the far-right, the rise of far-left political

formations in Europe in recent years raises questions about how a strong radical left presence might similarly influence elite policy positions. Building on previous findings, and extending them to consider individual legislators (rather than parties), we expect non-extremist legislators will adopt accommodative strategies when confronted with electoral threats from competitors on both the far-right and the far-left.

The types of threats posed by the far-right and the far-left, however, are somewhat distinct. The rise of populist radical right politicians, who distinguish themselves primarily with respect to anti-immigrant and other cultural issues, has been attributed in large part to the socio-demographic changes brought about by immigration (Jackman and Volpert, 1996). The far-right's stances have resonated with working-class voters experiencing significant economic hardship as a result of globalization, with research showing the far-right has been particularly successful in areas hit hardest by trade (Dippel, Gold and Hebllich, 2015; Malgouyres, 2014). Given the electoral salience of immigration, politicians across the political spectrum have increasingly advocated anti-immigrant policies to win votes and compete with far-right extremist competitors (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020; Alonso and Claro da Fonseca, 2012; Downs, 2001; Meguid, 2005; Schain, 2002; van Spanje, 2010; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016). Therefore, our expectation is that *in districts hard hit by trade with a strong far-right, we should observe relatively uniform shifts to the right on the cultural dimension among both left-wing and right-wing non-extremist legislators.*

While the far-right defines itself primarily with respect to post-materialist cultural issues, the far-left is more ideologically complex. In Europe, the far-left is comprised of both post-materialist niche parties, such as the Greens, and materialist radical-left parties, such as the Communists, who define themselves primarily with respect to economic issues. Despite having fairly distinct ideological foundations, both types of far-left parties compete for left-wing voters who have become disenchanted with the mainstream left. In times of relative economic prosperity, Greens prefer to emphasize their core environmental issues. However,

during times of relative economic hardship —such as those that result from trade shocks— Communists are particularly successful in attracting voters who support their economic platforms. Recent evidence shows that in these contexts of relative economic decline, Green parties shift their issue focus to emphasize economic issues in an effort to compete with the materialist-oriented far-left in an attempt to attract additional left-leaning voters (Spoon and Williams, 2021). Therefore, while we expect far-right competitors to primarily affect the cultural ideological position of legislators, *we predict individual politicians will shift to the left on both the economic and cultural dimensions when confronted with a strong far-left challenger.*

We note that our expectations about mainstream responses to a strong far-left differ from those outlined in Watson (2015). In Watson’s discussion of the political and policy consequences of a strong far-left, she highlights how center-left parties operating in the context of a strong far-left face incentives to move their policies to the right. In theory, this logic of a strong far left driving a shift to the right on the part of mainstream left politicians could be applied to local electoral constituencies (rather than national-level party systems), even for the indirectly elected Senate. However, we posit in this paper that left politicians operating in areas with a strong far-left presence should shift to the *left* on economic policy in response to increased import penetration.

Why the difference? Much has to do with the changing organizational underpinnings of the radical left in France. Watson’s argument about the strategic logic of the mainstream shifting right in response to a strong radical left movement was derived from a particular type of radical left, which she calls intra-left stalemate. Here, strong radical left parties are closely linked to trade unions who ‘encapsulate’ far-left voters, rendering them electorally unavailable to mainstream center-left and center-right parties. This logic clearly applied for much of the early postwar period in France. As is now well-documented, however, this powerful transmission-belt model of party-union relations in France has weakened dramatically. Equally relevant for our analysis, the functional equivalent of the General Confederation of

Labor (CGT) at the local level —municipal socialism (Kriegel, 1970; Kriegel, Braun and Muresianu, 1979)— has also declined. With this slow but steady organizational disembedding of communist voters, and the resultant fragmentation of the radical left, today France better represents the type of left that Watson characterizes as *electoral left radicalism*, in which there exists a moderately strong radical left party which lacks a strong presence within the trade union movement and/or civil society. In this context, there are few disincentives for mainstream left parties to respond to electoral threats on their left flank.

Finally, we also evaluate the possibility of differential responses to competitive contexts across partisan identities, exploring how non-extremist left- and right-wing politicians may respond differently depending on the competitive context they face. For any politician, changing ideologies is politically risky, as it can signal a weak commitment to core principles. Mainstream politicians should only accommodate these extremist positions if they face a real and immediate electoral threat, and they should be particularly likely to accommodate policy positions that are closer to their core ideological foundations (Han, 2015). As such, *we expect leftist politicians will be more responsive to a far-left challenger than their right-wing counterparts, while right-leaning politicians will be more vulnerable to challenges from the far-right and respond accordingly.*

In Table 1 we summarize our predictions for how trade shocks, electoral rules, and the local competitive context will impact individual legislators’ economic and cultural ideological positions.

## **The French Senate as a Lens for Studying Legislative Behavior**

We study the dynamics of globalization and elite politics in the context of France and the French Senate. France offers an excellent setting for studying the links between trade shocks, legislative shifts, and the mediating role of local electoral contexts. Like many other advanced industrialized countries, it experienced a dramatic increase in imports from low-

Table 1: Summary of Predictions

	<b>Economic dimension</b>	<b>Cultural dimension</b>
Trade shock	Shift left	Contingent on local context
Trade shock under competitive majoritarianism	Additional shift to left	Contingent on local party context
Trade shock + radical right competition	No change	Shift right (stronger effect for right-wing legislators)
Trade shock + strong radical left competition	Shift left (stronger effect for left-wing legislators)	Shift left (stronger effect for left-wing legislators)

wage economies beginning in the mid-1990s and, especially, from China after its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, leading to substantial local-level disruptions to both employment and wages (Malgouyres, 2014). Moreover, France has one of the most polarized electorates in Europe, making it an ideal context for exploring how the electoral success of extremist parties impacts legislators’ individual ideological positions. Indeed, France is somewhat unique among western democracies in that both the far-right and far-left are prominent, though again with significant sub-national variation.<sup>6</sup> This allows us to explore how the polarizing effects of globalization and the resultant extremist actors on both ends of the ideological spectrum influence the ideology of non-extremist legislators.

The French Senate has existed in its current form since 1958, when Charles de Gaulle dissolved its predecessor, the Council of the Republic (Smith, 2009). The under-studied French Senate offers a particularly useful setting for exploring how democratic linkages influence elite behavior for two reasons. First, unlike most legislatures, the French Senate employs multiple electoral systems simultaneously, thereby allowing us to test the varying effects of electoral system type on legislator ideology within a single case.<sup>7</sup> Some French senators are elected via 2-round majoritarian rules, including single-member district plurality (SMDP)

<sup>6</sup>The strength of the far-left in France is highlighted by Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s recent electoral breakthrough in the 2022 presidential election.

<sup>7</sup>It is generally agreed that electoral systems are chosen strategically (Boix, 1999; Colomer, 2005; Rokkan, 1970) in ways that may be correlated with determinants of elite responsiveness, such as party system type or the nature of societal cleavages (Eggers, 2015). By exploring variation in electoral rules within a single case, we can better identify how these institutions mediate the impact of globalization.

and multiple non-transferable vote (MNTV) rules. In other departments senators are elected by the D'Hondt proportional representation (PR) system. In the period under examination here, approximately two-thirds of senators were elected via majoritarian methods.<sup>8</sup>

Another advantage of using data from the French Senate is that we are less concerned with issues relating to reading legislative preferences off of roll call votes than we might be in many parliamentary systems. Indeed, one common critique of analyzing roll call votes is that parties' ability to enforce party discipline make roll call votes relatively uninformative (Carey, 2007). This is less a worry in our setting for two reasons. First, France permits intra-party competition in candidate selection,<sup>9</sup> making party discipline more difficult to enforce. It is also quite easy to form and receive state subsidies for new political parties. And of course the fact that the Senate cannot be dissolved by the President or by votes-of-no-confidence should provide senators with more independence vis-a-vis their parties.

One potential concern with examining the political consequences of globalization using data from the French Senate is that Senators are indirectly elected by a 150,000 member electoral college composed of local elected officials. This potentially shields senators from the direct wrath of voters and makes it more difficult to identify any effects of trade on senators' ideological positions. Although indirectly elected, French senators, like all democratically elected officials, are nevertheless subject to accountability through elections, and the downstream effects of trade shocks (employment and income losses) are likely to be highly salient among their selectorate: locally elected officials. Indeed, in the appendix we use data from senate elections to show that electoral support for left-leaning candidates is higher in trade-affected regions, suggesting a willingness to hold their elected representatives to account. Nevertheless, the indirect nature of Senate elections arguably constitutes a hard test for the claim that import competition drives legislative ideological shifts. If we find effects here, they should be more evident elsewhere.

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<sup>8</sup>Due to the availability of trade data, our analysis focuses exclusively on metropolitan departments.

<sup>9</sup>That is, France allows for both official and dissident party lists.

# Measures and Empirical Approach

## Dependent Variable: Ideology of French Legislators

Our outcome of interest is the ideology of French legislators, and in particular measures of changes in ideology, which we estimate using a spatial model. Applications of spatial models are extensive in the US Congress (Poole and Rosenthal, 1985), but have also been applied in legislatures with more than two political parties (Haspel, Remington and Smith, 1998; Hix and Noury, 2009; Meyerrose, 2018).<sup>10</sup> However, only a subset of these models allow for the inter-temporal comparisons of ideology needed to test our argument regarding shifts in legislative positions over time in response to trade shocks. We use a Bayesian dynamic item response (IRT) model to measure ideological changes within the French Senate. The dynamic IRT model, developed by Martin and Quinn (2002), is a more flexible alternative to DW-NOMINATE, another intertemporal spatial model (Poole and Rosenthal, 2001). The dynamic IRT model allows individuals' ideologies to change non-monotonically across legislative sessions (Clinton, Jackman and Rivers, 2004),<sup>11</sup> and it produces more precise point estimates than DW-NOMINATE (Caughey and Schickler, 2016).

Like American senators, not all French senators are elected simultaneously. American politics scholars count each 2-year congressional session as a legislative session for the US Senate; we follow a similar strategy. Because French parliamentary sessions only last 9 months, we divide the French Senate into sessions coinciding with periods in between elections (3 years).<sup>12</sup> We assign a session ID to each three-year period between Senate elections during the Fifth Republic. Our sample includes voting data from seven sessions: 13 (1996–1998) through 19 (2014–2017).

To estimate the dynamic IRT model, we scraped and cleaned information on public roll

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<sup>10</sup>See appendix for an overview of spatial models of voting.

<sup>11</sup>DW-NOMINATE constrains legislators' ideal points to move linearly.

<sup>12</sup>For most of the Fifth Republic, one-third of the Senate faced re-election every 3 years. There are exceptions: for example, a Constitutional Council ruling required the Senate to have a 4-year period between elections (2004 to 2008) to avoid too many elections (National Assembly, local, regional) in a single year.

call votes for all but two of the Senate sessions between 1996 and 2017.<sup>13</sup> The result is a dataset of 3589 roll call votes with information on how each individual senator voted on a given bill, as well as a text-based description of each bill’s content.

We predict legislators representing departments hard-hit by trade will be more likely to shift their economic ideological position to the left and, depending on their local context and partisan attachment, their cultural position to the right. To ensure we are capturing shifts on the economic and cultural issues specifically, we estimate legislators’ ideological positions on a subset of relevant roll call votes. Drawing on the economic and cultural categories identified in the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2020), we use the text descriptions to hand-code each of the 3589 bills in our dataset as either economic, cultural, or neither.<sup>14</sup> The result is two mutually-exclusive sets of roll call votes: 2227 economic and 613 cultural.

We validate our hand-coding using data from the Comparative Agendas Project, which codes a subset of the bills in our dataset by topic.<sup>15</sup> Since we identify relatively few cultural bills in our data, we also adopt a modelling-based approach to further validate our codings. DW-NOMINATE models allow the researcher to define the number of ideological dimensions *ex ante*, and then use patterns in the data to place legislators along the specified number of dimensions. We estimate a DW-NOMINATE model along two dimensions for the French Senate, finding the first dimension alone correctly classifies about 95% of all rollcall votes in our dataset. Although somewhat surprising, this gives us further confidence that our codings, which are heavily skewed toward economic bills, are accurate.

To estimate ideological positions in the French Senate, we apply an approximation of the dynamic IRT model using the `emIRT` package in R (Imai, Lo and Olmsted, 2016).<sup>16</sup> In preparing the data, we follow conventional practices and exclude individual roll call votes for

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<sup>13</sup><http://www.senat.fr/>. The endpoint of 2017 was driven by the availability of trade data. We were unable to collect information for 2004/5 and 2005/6 for which individual roll call votes were not published.

<sup>14</sup>Some bills mention both economic and cultural issues; for example, there are bills that discuss equal pay for women and minority groups. In these cases, we code the bill as economic since the primary issue is economic in nature.

<sup>15</sup>See Appendix for a detailed discussion.

<sup>16</sup>See appendix for details.



which the vote was either 97.5% for or against. We also remove legislators who did not vote at least 25 times within a given parliamentary session.<sup>17</sup> Finally, given the French Senate’s strict legislative voting rules, our view is that abstentions essentially equate to nay votes in this context and therefore code them as such.<sup>18</sup>

The dynamic IRT model requires the modeler to specify a set of prior distributions. We set priors based on a legislator’s party affiliation to orient the ideological space. These priors are only used for the first session in which a senator serves; therefore, they are not overly restrictive. We estimate two IRT models: one for the economic bills, and another for the cultural ones.<sup>19</sup> We operationalize our dependent variables, economic and cultural ideological shifts, simply as changes in the relevant IRT scores, both at the department and individual senator level.

## Independent Variables

To identify the degree of trade-induced labor market shocks, we use the shift-share Imports per Worker (IPW) measure pioneered by [Autor, Dorn and Hanson \(2013\)](#); [Autor et al. \(2020\)](#) to estimate local-level exposure to imports from China.<sup>20</sup> The intuitive idea behind this approach is that local labor markets are differentially affected by the growth in imports from low-wage countries depending on their prior industry specialization. Any changes in imports at the industry-level will disproportionately impact areas with higher degrees of employment in that industry. Following previous studies, we address the possible endogeneity of legislative voting patterns to the trade shock by instrumenting *IPW* using the growth in imports from less developed countries (LDCs) to five other wealthy European countries: Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, and the UK ([Dauth, Findeisen and Suedekum, 2014](#)). The identifying assumption is that LDC imports to these other countries should predict

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<sup>17</sup>We do not apply these exclusions in the case of the cultural models since there are relatively few cultural bills in our dataset.

<sup>18</sup>See appendix for a review of the literature on the treatment of abstentions in roll call voting and a discussion of the French Senate’s voting rules.

<sup>19</sup>We report the mean IRT score by party in the appendix.

<sup>20</sup>See appendix for a description of the IPW measure.

imports to France, but should be uncorrelated with product-demand shocks within France; this therefore isolates the supply-driven components of changes in French import exposure. In the appendix we show import competition in France operates on roughly a southwestern to northeastern axis, as departments in the northeast have been particularly hard hit by trade.

Our other main independent variables of interest relate to local context: electoral institutions, electoral competitiveness, and patterns of party competition. We used French Senate election data to construct measures of indicating whether a department held elections under majoritarian (as opposed to PR) electoral rules, as well as constituency-level vote margins and radical party vote share measures from the prior election. Further details on how these variables were constructed are provided in the appendix.

Table 2: Models and Variables

<b>Models</b>	<b>Variables</b>
Economic and Demographic Controls	Change in IPW + start-of-period political tendency, log population, pct female, pct immigrant, pct industry, age structure
Political Controls A	Change in IPW + Economic and Demographic controls, plus: district magnitude, district competitiveness, majoritarian electoral system, degree of local office-holding
Political Controls B	Change in IPW + Economic and Demographic controls + Political Controls A + Re-election session, divided legislature, seat expansion session
Unit & Time FE's	All models

In addition to our main independent variables, and as shown in Table 2, all models include a measure of the start-of-period political tendency of the department, as well as controls for demographic and economic factors, including a department's start-of-period logged total population, percent female, age structure, percent immigrant population and percent employed in industry; these figures were obtained from INSEE's *Estimations de Population*. We also estimate models with two sets of political controls. The first includes a

measure of department-level competitiveness, department magnitude, degree of local office-holding and a dummy for a majoritarian electoral system. Finally, we also include models that control for other changing features of the political context which might affect legislative behavior, including: indicators for whether in a particular session a department experienced a change in its electoral system; an expansion of seats; whether senators in a department are up for re-election in the subsequent session; and a measure of whether the legislature was divided. Finally, for all models we include two-way unit and time fixed effects, and report heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors clustered at the department level.

## Estimation Strategy

To estimate the relationship between trade exposure and legislative behavior, we follow standard practice by adopting a first-differences model, which allows us to control for time-invariant heterogeneity

$$\Delta IRT_{it} = \beta \Delta IPW_{it} + X'_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where  $it$  refers to department  $i$  from time  $t$  to  $t + 1$ . We defined  $\Delta IPW_{it}$  previously.  $\Delta IRT_{it}$  refers to the change in the department ideology score from time (session)  $t$  to  $t + 1$ .  $X'_{it}$  indicates a series of departmental start-of-period political and demographic controls, while  $\epsilon_{it}$  is an idiosyncratic shock we assume is uncorrelated with the regressors. We examine changes in import exposure and its effect on legislative ideology across all elections in our sample. We generate session-by-session IPW measures, IRT scores, and start-of-period controls for each department. This gives us five time periods: the change in trade exposure and legislative ideology from senate sessions 13 to 14, sessions 14 to 15, and so on, up through session 19. We then pool the data and use stacked first-difference estimation to examine the effects of short-term shifts in localized trade exposure on changes in legislative behavior.

## Overall Results

We first examine the effects of changes in trade exposure on legislator ideology by estimating, in Figure 1, two-stage least squares (2SLS) models in which the dependent variable is a change in economic ideology.<sup>21</sup> We report instrumental variables estimates using both individual- and department-level datasets.<sup>22</sup> Analyzing within-senator changes provides insight on how changes in IPW affect the ideology of incumbent senators, while within-department changes tell us about shifts in the average ideological disposition of the department via the election of new senators.<sup>23</sup>

First, in Panel A of Figure 1, we examine the effects of trade on individual-level economic IRT scores.<sup>24</sup> As predicted, the results show a statistically significant leftward shift among incumbent senators in response to localized increases in import exposure. A shift in imports per worker from the 25th to the 75th percentile results in a leftward shift on ideology of approximately one-third of a standard deviation.

One interesting question is whether replacement or realignment drive department-level ideological shifts. To investigate this question, we turn to the department-level models (see Panel B of 1). In our data, in any given renewal, approximately one-third to one-half of senators are replaced, making a replacement dynamic plausible.<sup>25</sup> At the department level, we find greater trade exposure produces a somewhat larger ideological shift to the left.<sup>26</sup> Although the confidence intervals are wider, the coefficients on  $\Delta$  IPW are approximately four

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<sup>21</sup>In the figures we report only the coefficients for the central variables of interest: change in imports for worker, and, for the interaction models, majoritarianism. See appendix for full regression tables.

<sup>22</sup>Because the department is the electoral constituency for French senators, even for our within-senator models the vast majority of our key covariates are at the department level (including the IPW measure, demographic and political control variables, such as percent immigrant, electoral system, and electoral calendar).

<sup>23</sup>These two sets of models provide an assessment of whether change is driven by ideological realignment among sitting senators and/or replacement by newly-elected senators.

<sup>24</sup>Controls are identical in the individual senator-level and department-level models. We also estimated models that include senator and department fixed effects; results were substantively similar.

<sup>25</sup>Electoral defeats, retirement, and leaving for positions in the National Assembly or in the government are among the most common reasons for replacement.

<sup>26</sup>In the appendix, we report results that suggest an increase in trade reduces the percent of right-wing senators being elected, and a roughly equivalent increase in the percent of left-wing senators—a shift consistent with the substantial leftward shift being driven by replacement.

times larger (-12 versus -3) for the department-level, as opposed to the senator-level, models. This suggests that newly elected senators from trade-affected departments tilt substantially more to the left than do their incumbent counterparts.

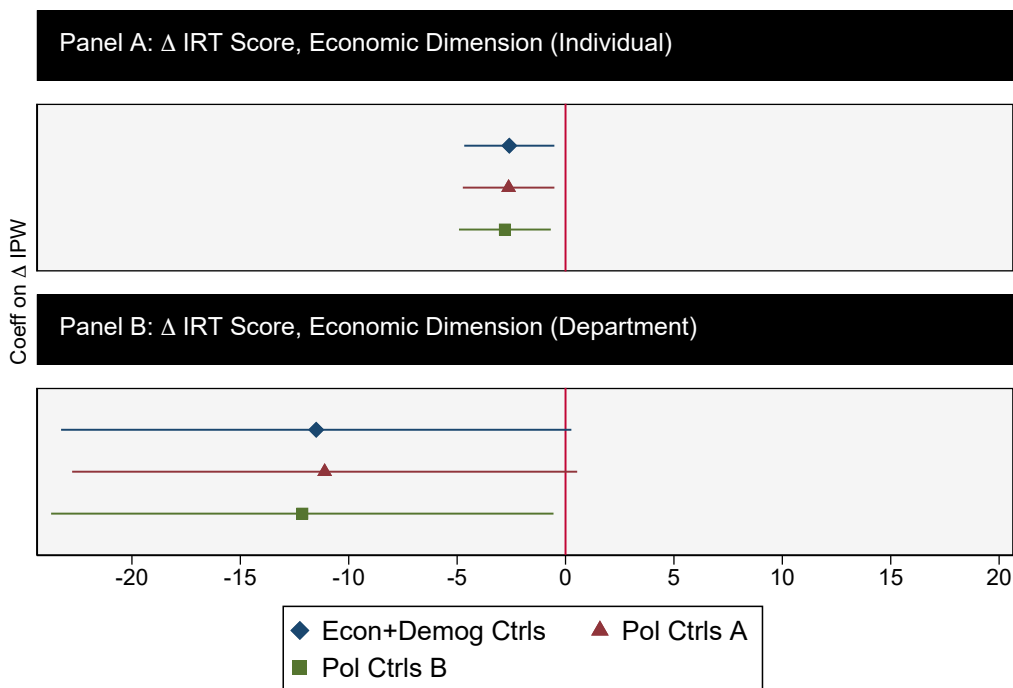


Figure 1: Changes in Imports Per Worker and Ideology (Economic Dimension)  
 Note: Independent variable is imports per worker, measured in hundreds of euros. All models estimated using 2SLS.

## Heterogeneous Effects: Trade and Local Context

The previous section presented results suggesting legislative elites are responsive to localized trade increases on economic issues. The overall finding on the economic dimension provides comparative evidence consistent with Ferrara and Herron (2005)'s analysis of the leftward-shifting consequences of trade for legislative behavior. One advantage of our study, however, is that we are able to explore the conditions under which trade is more or less likely to influence legislative outcomes. This brings us to the second major question of our paper: the intervening effects of varying electoral institutions and of local radical party strength.

## The Mediating Effect of Electoral Institutions

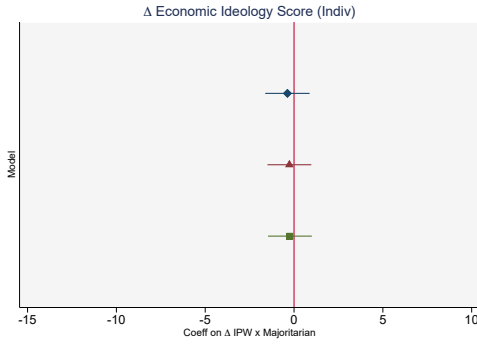
The analysis above established local labor market shocks affect the economic dimension of legislative voting in France. We now turn to the intervening effects of electoral systems. As discussed earlier, the literature suggests that, assuming reasonable levels of electoral competition, any ideological effects of trade should be magnified in departments where senators are elected using majoritarian rules.

To assess whether and how electoral institutions matter, we report estimates from two sets of models. The first focuses on within-senator responses to import shifts, while the second reports department-level effects. Coefficients for the senator-level models are shown in Panels 2a and 2b of Figure 2. Panel 2a suggests that, overall, majoritarian electoral institutions have little effect on changes in economic ideology. Panel 2b explores whether the effects of majoritarianism are contingent on the degree of electoral competition by reporting coefficients for the interaction of  $\Delta$  IPW, majoritarianism and department vote margin at different levels of electoral competitiveness. For the within-senator models, as political competition tightens in majoritarian districts, senator ideology shifts to the left in response to higher levels of import competition.<sup>27</sup>

The models reported in Panels 2a and 2b of Figure 2 tell us about the response of sitting senators, but do not take into account how the election of new senators shapes ideological shifts within departments. We investigate these dynamics via department-level models, shown in Panels 2c and 2d. Panel 2c shows that as import penetration increases in majoritarian, as compared to proportional representation, departments the average ideology score of the *department* shifts further to the left. Figure 3 shows marginal effects for the fully saturated model. Interestingly, however, Panel 2d shows that this leftward shift takes place irrespective of the electoral competitiveness of the department. This finding —that

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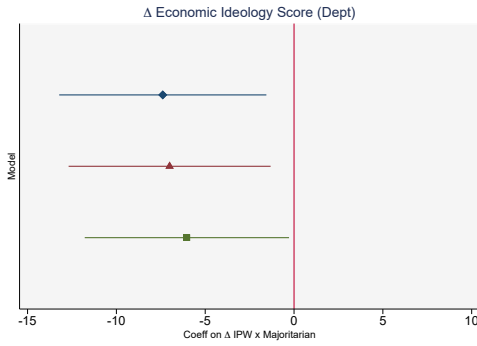
<sup>27</sup>In Table 1, we hypothesized that for the second (socio-cultural) dimension of politics, increasing import penetration in the context of majoritarian electoral institutions would be contingent on local party context. Due to space constraints we were unable to explore these dynamics in the main text, but we evaluate these dynamics in the Appendix.



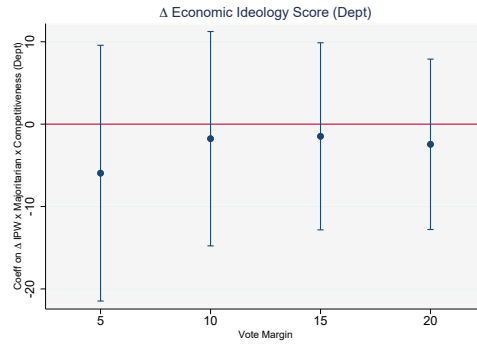
(a) Majoritarianism (Senator)



(b) Competitive Majoritarianism (Senator)



(c) Majoritarianism (Dept)



(d) Competitive Majoritarianism (Dept)

Figure 2: Trade, Electoral Systems and Competitiveness: Senator vs Department-Level Models.

Note: For Panels 2a and 2b, the plots report the coefficient on  $\Delta IPW$  interacted with majoritarianism. Model 1 (top) includes economic and demographic controls (as defined in Table 2); Model 2 (middle) adds political controls A; and Model 3 adds Political controls B.  $N=1430$  for Panel 2a;  $N=570$  for Panel 2b. Panels (b) and (d) report coefficients on the interaction of  $\Delta IPW$ , majoritarianism and the vote margin of a department, at different levels of vote margin, using the full set of controls (ie Model 3).  $N=1430$  for Panel 2a and 570 for Panel 2b. All models include unit and session fixed effects.

majoritarianism induces a leftward response, even under low levels of electoral competition— suggests that the effects of electoral systems in this context may work not simply through what [Duverger \(1954\)](#) termed the ‘mechanical’ channel of vote-seat shares, but also through a ‘psychological’ channel involving strategic coordination by parties and/or voters over candidate selection. We return to this point in the conclusion.

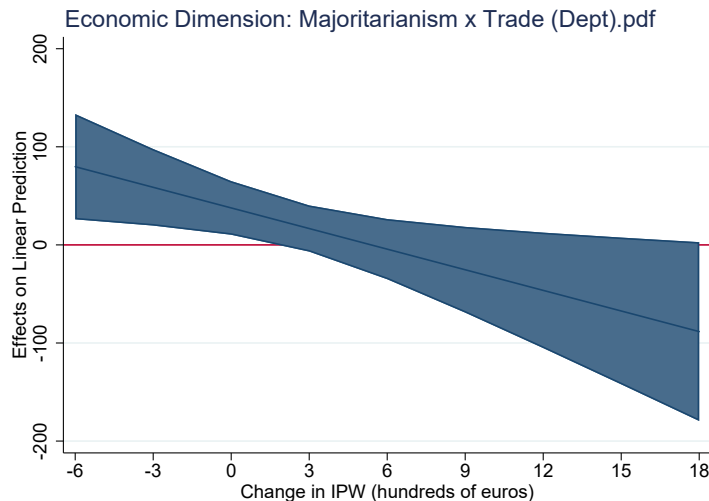


Figure 3: Trade and Electoral Systems: Marginal Effects for Department-Level Models  
 Note: Marginal effects for change in IPW x Majoritarianism using full set of controls (economic + demographic controls, plus political controls A and B).

## How Radical Party Competition Matters

Given the collapsing political center in France and across western democracies more broadly —a trend that has been attributed in part to economic globalization— another interesting question is how the political consequences of trade are mediated by the degree of local radical support. Above we hypothesized that non-extremist legislators will adopt accommodative strategies when confronted with electoral threats from extremist competitors on both the far-right and the far-left.

Figures [4a](#) and [4b](#) begin to explore this possibility, reporting coefficients on models interacting  $\Delta$  IPW with the electoral strength of radical left and radical right parties in the



previous Senate elections in each department.<sup>28</sup> Results shown in Figure 4a suggest that in departments with a pre-existing strong radical left, increases in IPW produce an overall modest leftward shift on economic ideology, and a very small leftward shift on cultural ideology. Neither estimate reaches statistical significance, however. In contrast, Figure 4b suggests that as local political support for the radical right increases, higher levels of import exposure shift the ideology of sitting senators to the right, irrespective of political party. This effect is particularly strong on the economic dimension, but also notable on the cultural dimension.<sup>29</sup>

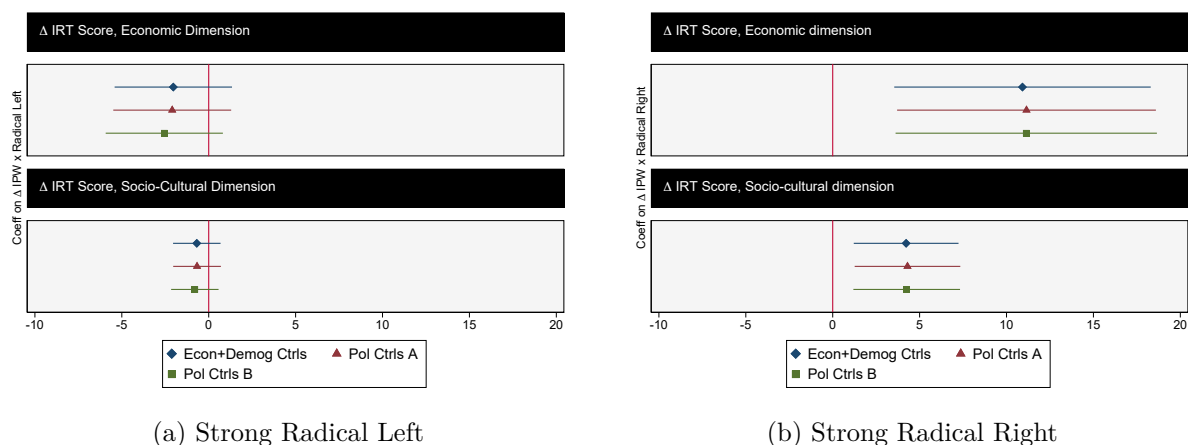


Figure 4: Trade and Radical Party Strength: Overall Results

<sup>28</sup>In this sub-section we report only individual senator-level results.

<sup>29</sup>We posited in Table 1 that we should also see stronger rightward ideological effects on the cultural dimension among senators operating in the context of both a strong radical right and majoritarian electoral rules. We provide suggestive evidence in favor of this hypothesis in the appendix.

The findings in Figure 4a suggest a strong radical left has little additional effect above and beyond increases in trade. But these overall results could mask heterogeneous treatment effects by party. To explore whether the effects of trade in districts with strong radical lefts vary by the partisan identity of senators, Figures 5a and 5b repeat the exercise above, reporting coefficients on Far Left Vote Share  $\times \Delta$  IPW, but break out the responses of left versus non-left senators. They suggest that left senators representing departments with a higher radical left vote share adopt accommodative strategies, shifting further to the left on both the economic and cultural dimensions.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, the effect of a strong radical left has no effect on senators from center and right parties.

Our results on the radical right are consistent with the extensive literature finding that electoral success for the far-right leads candidates across the ideological spectrum to shift their own cultural issues. Our results on economic issues suggest a more complex picture. This is likely a result of the fact that traditional parties, unlike their extremist competitors, define themselves primarily with respect to economic issues and thus are constrained by prior economic programmatic commitments (Han, 2015; Rommel and Walter, 2018).

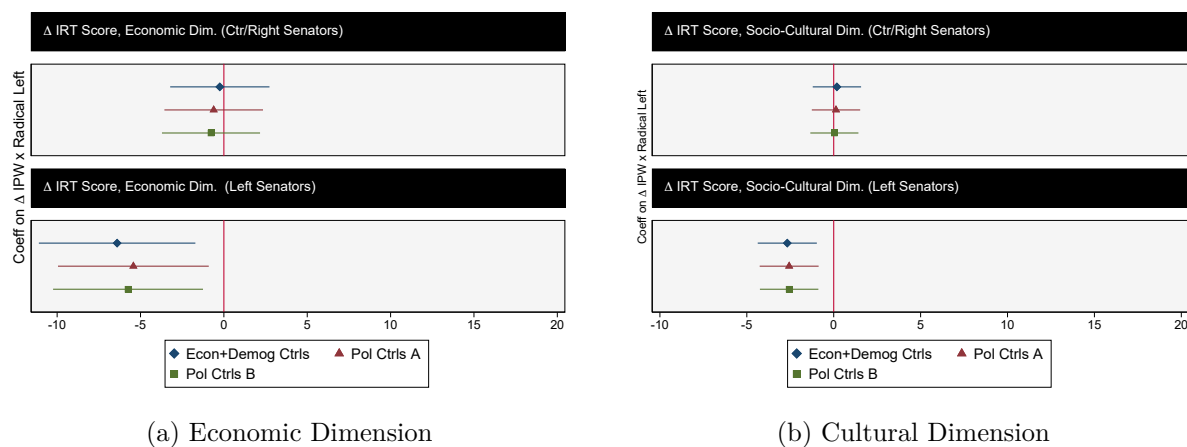


Figure 5: Trade and Radical Left Strength: By Party

<sup>30</sup>See the appendix for additional analyses on partisan differences in response to strong radical lefts.

## Discussion and Conclusion

There now exists substantial evidence of globalization’s far-reaching domestic consequences at the mass level, but we know far less about the extent to which these effects are reflected at the elite level. Does globalization lead to behavioral and attitudinal shifts among individual elected representatives, as well as voters? We explored this question through an analysis of voting trends in the French Senate over the past twenty years. We reported results from instrumental variables models linking changes in trade exposure between 1996 and 2017 to changes in the ideological positioning of senators, with several findings of note. First, increases in trade exposure result in a leftward economic shift at both the individual senator- and the constituency- (department) level. Second, we found that ideological shifts on the economic dimension are stronger in competitive majoritarian districts. Finally, we presented evidence that the local competitive context in which elections occur mediates the effects of trade: left and right politicians respond differently to trade in the face of strong extremist competitors.

Our findings of a fairly uniform leftward economic shift among French senators is consistent with existing literature on legislative responses to trade that find a link between constituency-level import shocks and legislator support for left-leaning (protectionist) trade legislation ([Feigenbaum and Hall, 2015](#); [Kleinberg and Fordham, 2013](#)) as well as for roll-call voting and bill sponsorship activity on legislation hostile to China ([Kuk, Seligsohn and Zhang, 2018](#)). [Autor et al. \(2020\)](#) find import shocks lead to increased economic polarization in the US House of Representatives. This paper’s findings showing how economic responses to extremist challenges vary across the partisan identity of mainstream legislators similarly suggests trade contributes to political polarization. Finally, our findings that the consequences of globalization are substantially stronger in departments with competitive majoritarian elections have implications for ongoing debates about the political consequences of trade cross-nationally, suggesting that we might see more muted responses to trade in countries that use PR, rather than majoritarian systems.

One important question that arises in any single-country study is that of external validity. We emphasize that our paper is fundamentally concerned with generalization, insofar as it joins other recent efforts to extend the political economy of legislative ideology to a setting outside the US. Moreover, the varied institutional setting of the French Senate arguably offers greater insight into the likely consequences of trade than do most single-country studies. Indeed, we see little reason why our findings about trade, electoral institutions and electoral marginality should not be relevant to other advanced democracies. Similarly, it seems plausible that our findings about the mediating effect of local far-right competitors should also generalize.

Whether the dynamics of far-left electoral strength extend to other settings is less clear, however. On the one hand, the French far-left has long been more diverse (and fragmented) than far-left movements in many northern European countries, where Green parties have been the dominant force on the radical left. It could be that the strong left-leaning response that we see in departments with a strong radical left presence are driven by France's relatively unique constellation of hard-left political formations, which include (among others) communists and trotskyites. That said, support for economically-focused radical left parties are on the rise even in countries with a traditionally strong social democratic left, including Germany, Denmark, and Norway. Thus, as the materialist-focused far-left become more prominent in Europe, the dynamics identified in France may prove increasingly relevant elsewhere.

This paper analyzed the ideological responsiveness of individual legislators to trade, as well as how electoral and institutional factors mediated these responses. Although we explored in a preliminary fashion one potential channel through which ideological changes take place—via the dynamics of realignment and/or by electoral replacement—important questions remain. For example, in several of our department-level models, we found evidence of stronger ideological shifts among newly-elected as opposed to sitting senators, and that this effect was magnified in majoritarian departments. This raises additional questions

about how globalization affects underlying supply-side dynamics, especially those related to candidate entry and selection. Do rising rates of import penetration affect the ideological leanings of new candidates? If so, how? To what degree does intensifying import competition heighten incentives for parties and voters to respond strategically to the anticipated effects of electoral rules by (for example) presenting fewer candidates in majoritarian elections (Duverger, 1954; Cox, 1997; Blais and Carty, 1991; Blais and Indridason, 2007; Fiva and Hix, 2019; Crisp and Demirkaya, 2020)? Investigation into these and related questions should offer important insights into the mechanisms through which global economic forces affect elite behavior, through the very functioning of the supply side of the political market.

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