

PubPol/Econ 541

Class 14

Why Countries Restrict Trade

by

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Pause for News

Announcements

- Note that Paper 2 is due Nov 6. Confer with your team soon and look at the assignment, so that you can ask any questions.

Outline

- Multiple reasons
- Second best use of tariffs
- Political economy
- Why are trade barriers so low?
- Recent uses of protection

Pause for Discussion

Questions on KOM

- What benefits from free trade are not captured in the partial equilibrium model?
- The textbook mentions only two arguments against free trade: terms of trade and market failure. Can you think of others?

Outline

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Multiple Reasons

- See my Glossary:
 - Lists: Arguments for Protection
 - I list 26, and our examples later suggest more

Arguments for Protection

Balance of payments

Cultural

Decreasing cost

Domestic distortions

Employment

Environmental protection

Externalities

Fairness

Foreign investment

Graham's

Income redistribution

Infant industry

Labor standards

Monopoly

National defense

Noneconomic objectives

Optimal tariff

Patriotism

Pauper labor

Revenue

Second-best

Self-sufficiency

Strategic industry

Strategic trade policy

Sunset industry

Terms of trade

Multiple Reasons

- Details on just a few
 - Cultural: Sustain a distinctive culture that would be undermined by imports
 - Foreign investment: Use tariff to induce foreign companies to invest instead of export
 - Infant industry: Let new industry “learn by doing” behind tariff wall
 - Patriotism: Support our own producers

Pause for Discussion

Questions (not asked before)

- Which of these seem to have motivated Trump's tariffs?
 - From his presidency?
 - From his current plans
- Do any of these seem to have motivated Biden's tariffs?
- Which look like they may be legal under GATT/WTO?

Outline

- Multiple reasons
- **Second best use of tariffs**
- Political economy
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Second best use of tariffs

- First, why do economists expect undistorted markets to do well?
 - In general, the recipe for maximizing benefit net of cost is to increase any useful activity up to the point that
 - Marginal Benefit equals Marginal Cost
 - To the extent that
 - Supply curves measure marginal cost (MC), and
 - Demand curves measure marginal benefit (MB),
 - Then market price equates these
 - And maximize net benefit

Second best use of tariffs

- But what if the curves don't measure these?
 - Then we say there are “distortions” and market price is not optimal.
 - The harm done by a tariff is an example of this.

Second best use of tariffs

- Our model says tariffs hurt if all else is perfect. What if there are
 - Market failures?
 - Distortions?
 - Externalities?
 - Imperfect competition?
 - Etc.

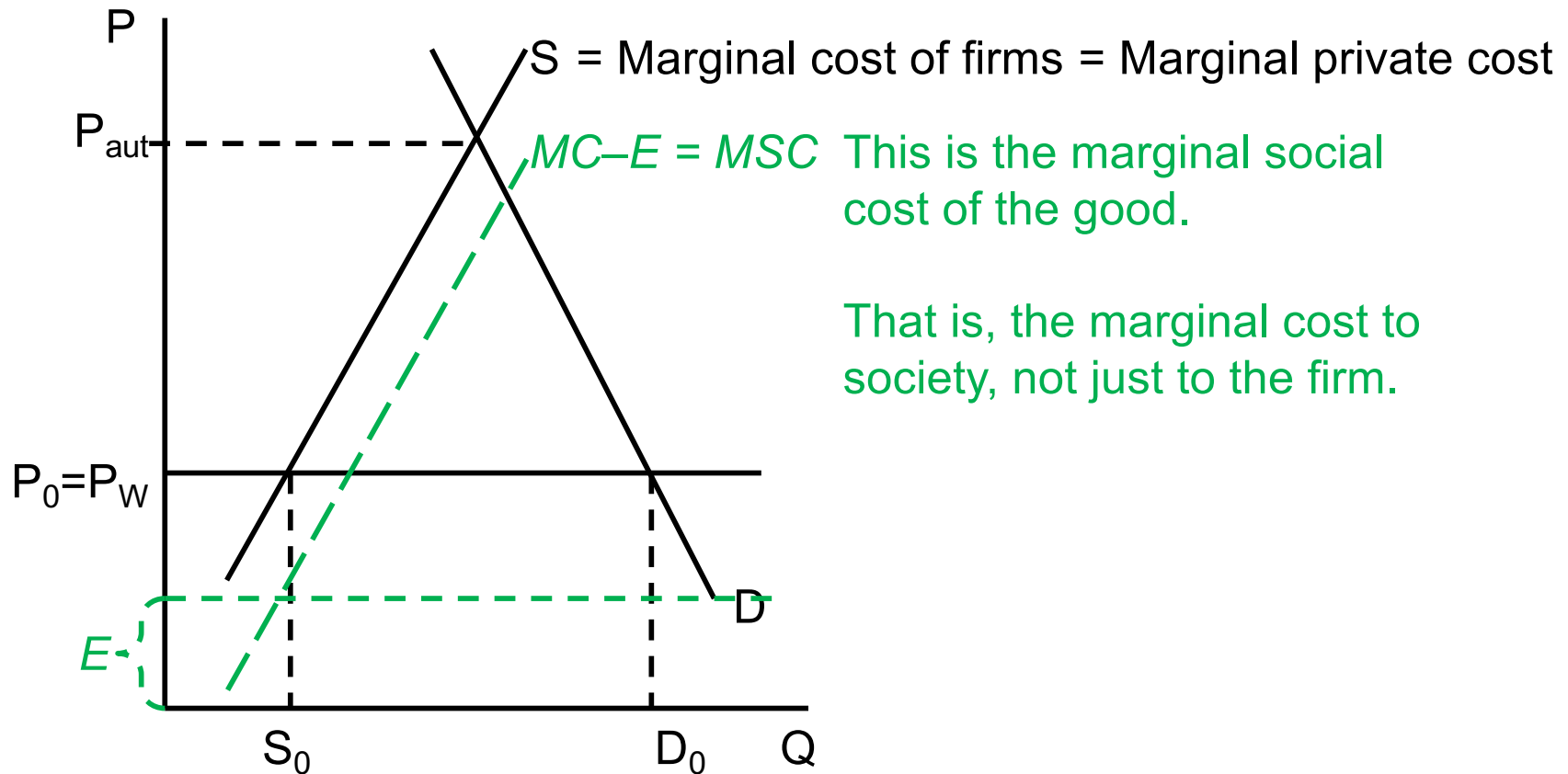
Second best use of tariffs

- Answer
 - A tariff can offset some distortions and therefore may raise welfare
 - But there is always another policy that will do better
 - Reason: A tariff creates two distortions (see our triangles of dead-weight loss)
 - One may offset a distortion, but the other makes things worse
 - Hence tariff is “second best”

Second best use of tariffs

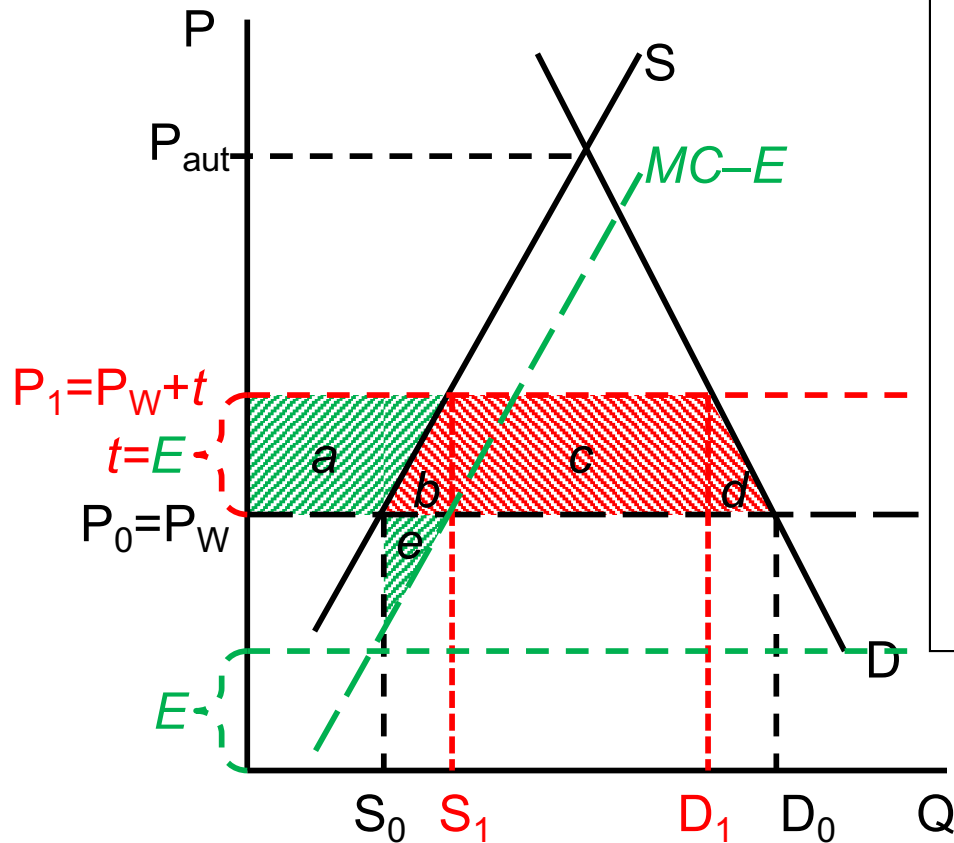
- Example
 - Suppose production yields a “positive externality”
 - Production provides a benefit not captured (or charged for) by producers
 - A tariff stimulates production and so generates more of the externality – That’s good!
 - For example, European farms make countryside attractive to tourists

Small country with positive externality



Positive Externality, E

Small country tariff with positive externality



- Welfare effects of a tariff, if set equal to E , starting from free trade:
 - Suppliers gain $+a$
 - Demanders lose $-(a+b+c+d)$
 - Government gains $+c$
 - Externality benefit $+(b+e)$
 - Country gain or loss $+e - d$

Specific Tariff $t=E$

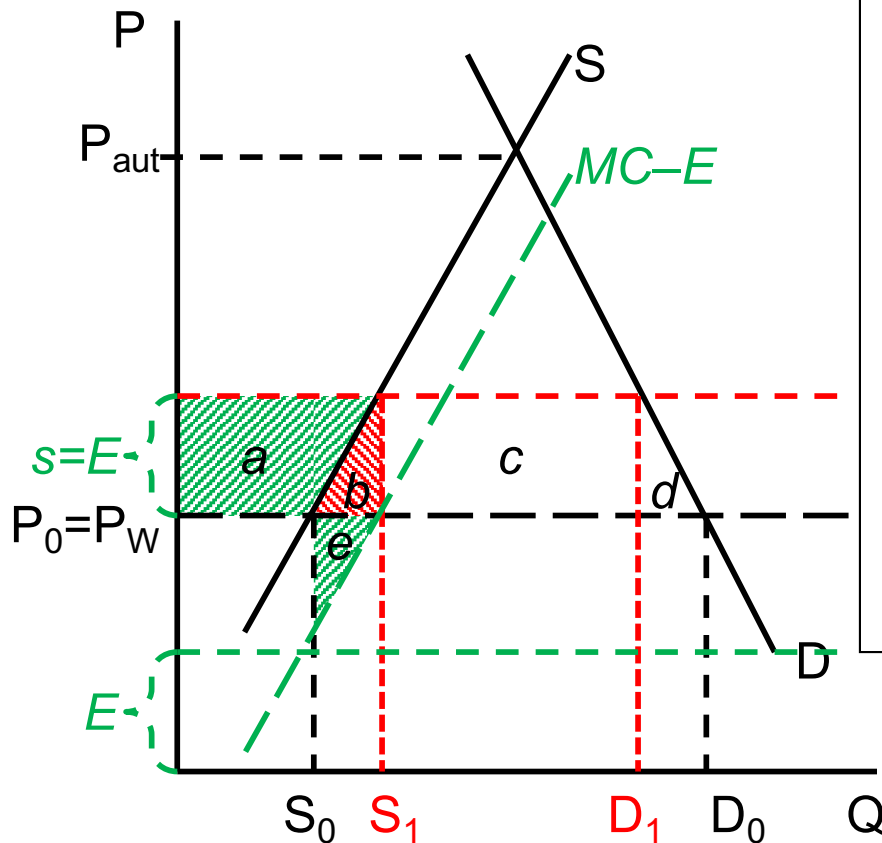
Second best use of tariffs

- Result
 - Tariff raises welfare if $e > d$
 - That is, if
 - the benefit of increased externality exceeds
 - the demand-distortion loss of the tariff

Second best use of tariffs

- But there's a better policy: subsidize supply:
 - That leaves demanders facing world price
 - Lets suppliers be paid $P_W + E$
- Causes only one distortion, of supply, and
 - That is beneficial because
 - It corrects the distortion of the externality
 - Without also distorting demand

Small country production subsidy with positive externality



- Welfare effects of a subsidy, if set equal to E , starting from free trade

– Suppliers gain	$+a$
– Demanders lose	0
– Government loses	$-(a+b)$
– Externality benefit	$+(b+e)$
– Country gains	$+e$

But note that:

- Tariff creates revenue
- Subsidy costs the gov't

Production subsidy $s=E$

Second best use of tariffs

- In general, most distortions (market failures) distort only supply or demand
- A tariff can only correct one by hurting the other
- A more direct policy – tax or subsidy on distorted behavior – will be “first best”
 - Except for budget implications

Pause for Discussion

Questions on KOM

- How does the theory of the second best provide reasons that tariffs may be beneficial?
- How does it also provide reasons why tariffs are not the best policy in such cases?

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Political Economy of Tariffs

- Explains policies based on features of the political process
 - Allow for
 - Voting
 - Lobbying
 - Other forms of political pressure by interest groups
 - But also allow policymakers to care about economic well-being as in our models

Votes for freer trade

Democrats

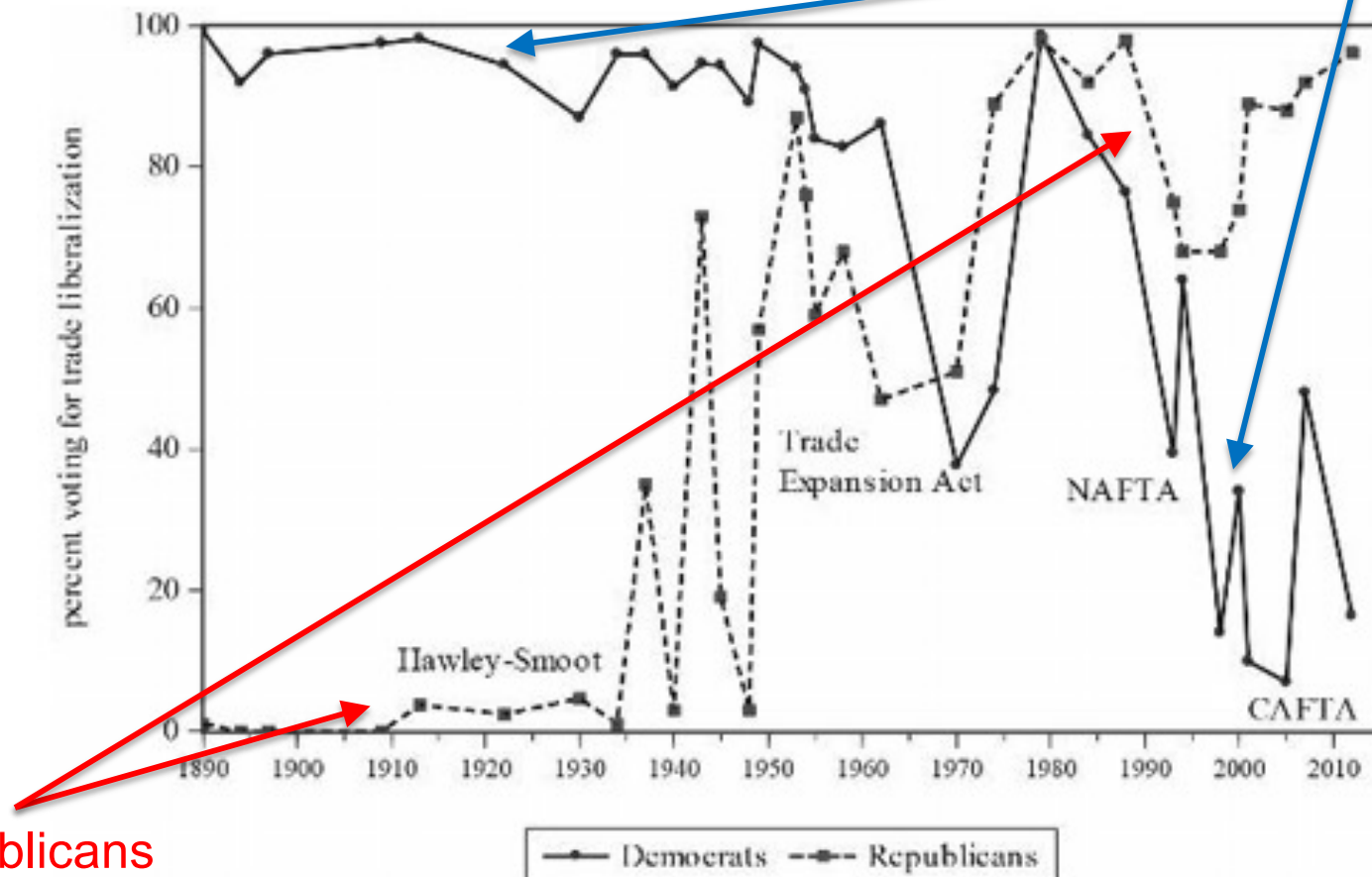


Figure 13.2. House voting on trade legislation, by party, 1890–2015. (Compiled by the author.)

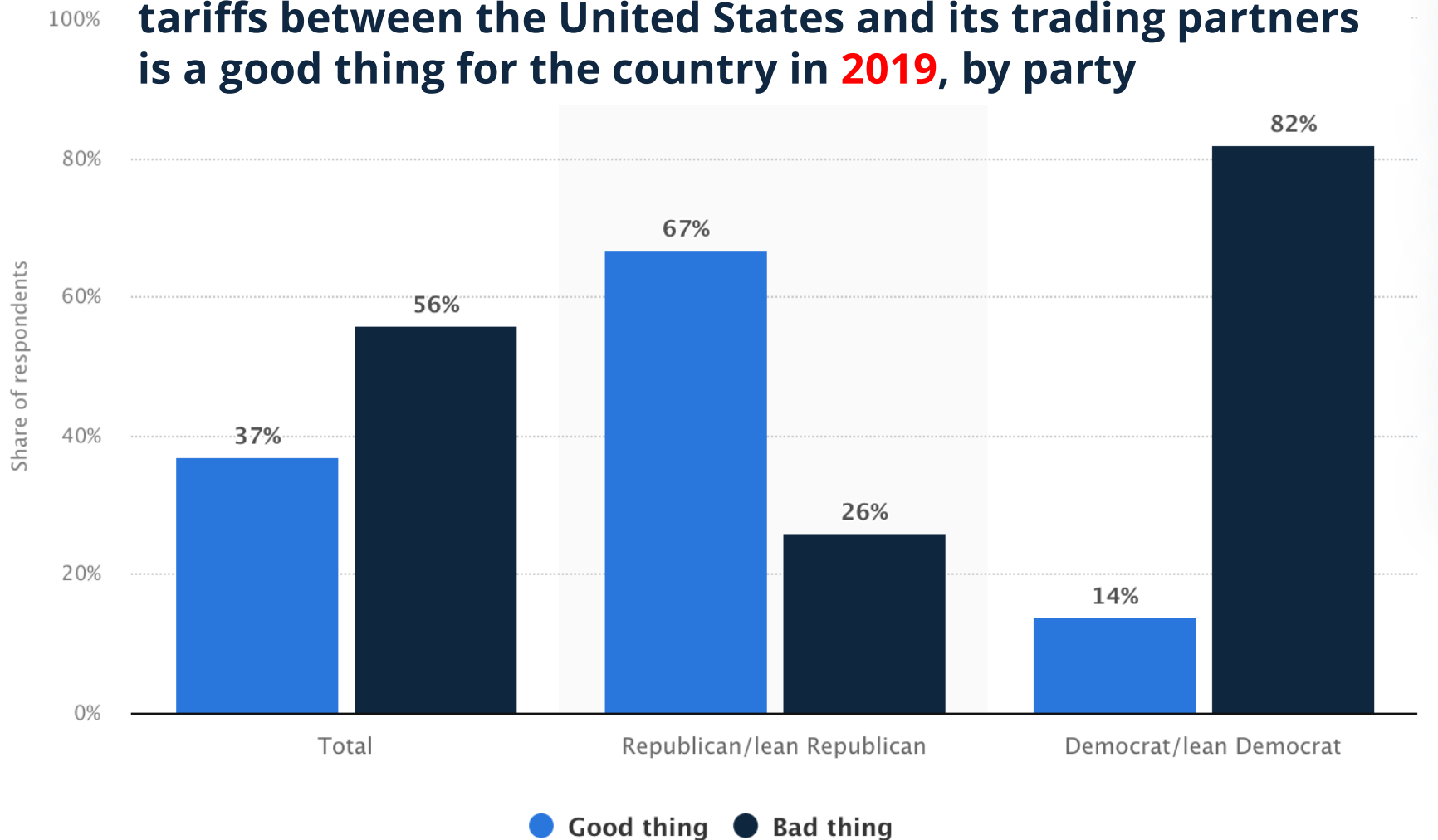
Political Economy

- Politics of tariffs in US 2024 election
 - See Ponnuru
 - Trump promises new tariffs
 - “End our gaping trade deficits”
 - “Bring back millions of American jobs”
 - “Bring trillions and trillions of dollars pouring into the United States Treasury from foreign countries”
 - Biden did not, but he was aggressive on other trade-related policies
 - China policies
 - IRA subsidy conditions
 - Favors unions, who are protectionist
 - Harris says little, but likely similar to Biden

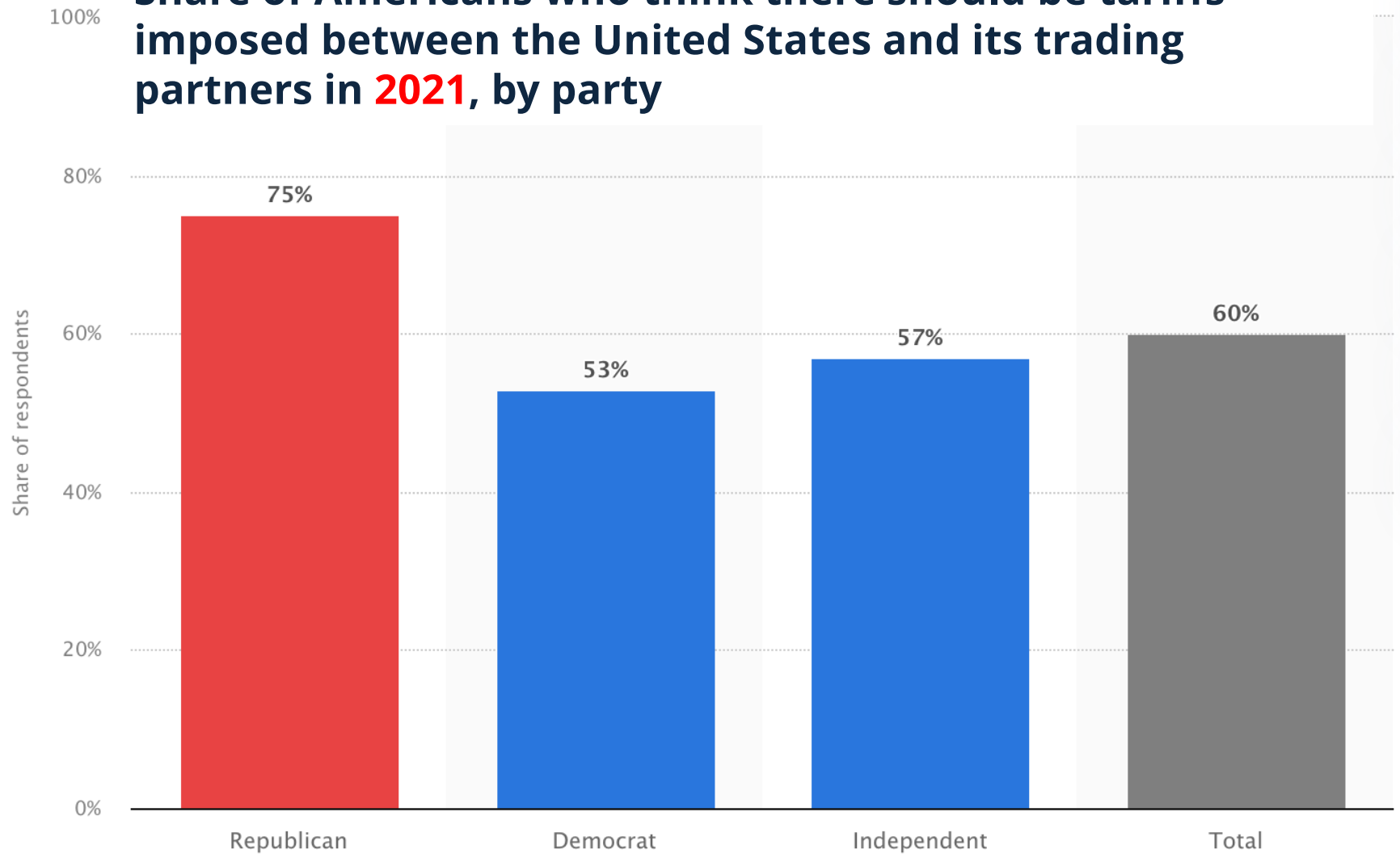
Political Economy

- Politics of tariffs in US 2024 election
 - Trumps “tariffs have become an item of bipartisan consensus.”
 - But public is more positive on trade than the politicians, and also more than they were 10 years ago
 - “Gallup finds that Americans are more likely to consider trade an opportunity, and less likely to consider it a threat, than they were 10 years ago.”
 - “That’s especially true among Democrats.”

Share of people in the United States who think increased tariffs between the United States and its trading partners is a good thing for the country in 2019, by party

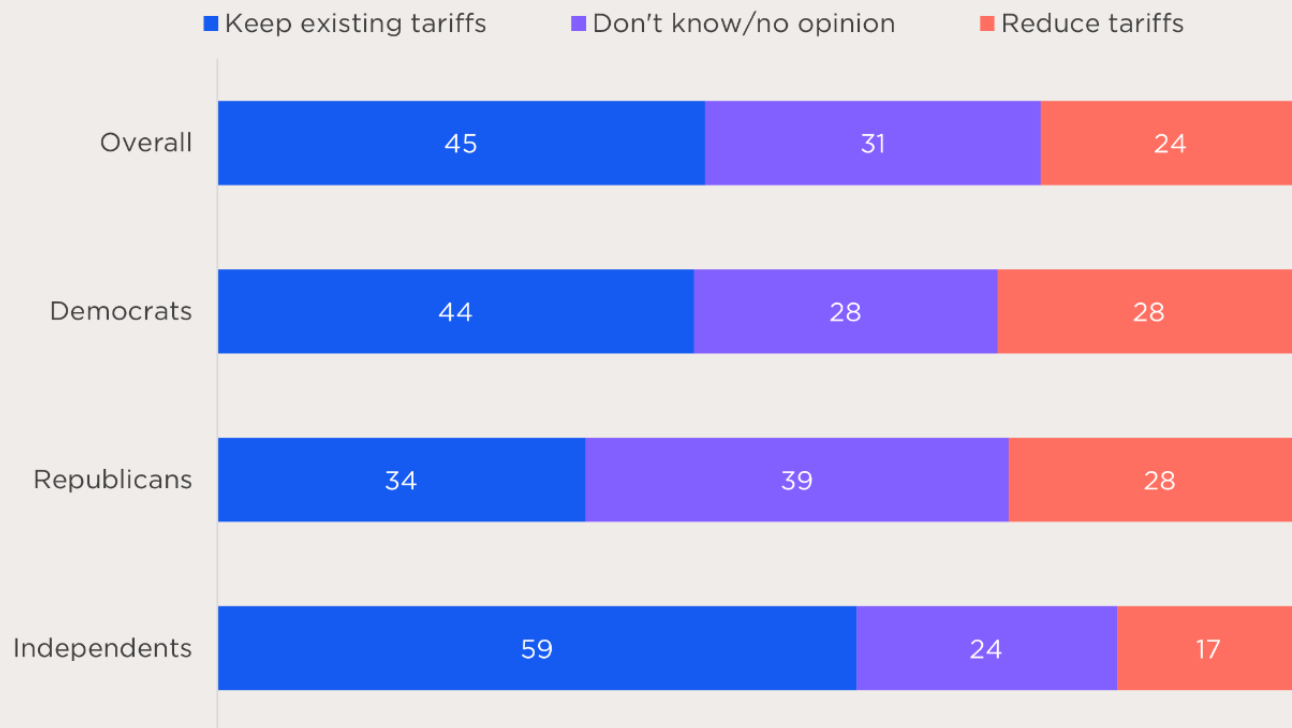


Share of Americans who think there should be tariffs imposed between the United States and its trading partners in 2021, by party



Support for US Tariffs on China (from poll Mid-May 2022)

Should the United States keep existing tariffs on China in place or reduce them to lower the prices of consumer goods? (%)



Mid-May 2022 | n=1,000
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Pause for Discussion

Questions on KOM

- What is the “median voter theory,” and why does it seem not to explain protection?

Questions on Baldwin & Magee

“Is Trade Policy for Sale?”

- By what mechanisms do theorists suggest that political contributions result in votes for and against trade liberalization?
- Do businesses and labor groups in the US tend to contribute in favor of protection or free trade?
- What were the three Congressional votes studied by Baldwin and Magee? Which side – labor or business – had the greater effect on the voting?

Questions on Baldwin & Magee

“Is Trade Policy for Sale?”

- What do they estimate as the “price” of one congressional vote against NAFTA or the WTO?
- Were campaign contributions the only thing that mattered for congressional votes on these trade issues?

Questions on Ponnuru, “The Politics of Trade Favor ...”

- Does Trump promise more tariffs?
- What does he claim tariffs will do?
 - Why are two of his claims contradictory?
 - And why are all proven wrong by experience?
- Why do politicians favor tariffs?
- Will there be lots of new tariffs?

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Why Aren't Tariffs Higher?

- Magee lists 6 possible reasons why tariffs are not higher:
 - ~~1~~ Politicians are not responsive to lobbying efforts
 - ✓2. Welfare costs of tariffs are higher than traditionally measured
 - ✓3. The GATT was successful in reducing trade barriers
 - ✓4. Free riding by firms hinders lobby organization
 - ~~5~~ Users of imported goods lobby against tariffs
 - ✓✓✓6. Protection is given, but by non-tariff barriers, which are high
- Magee's view of the evidence
 - #1, 5 not important
 - #2, 3, 4 play a small role
 - #6 is most important: actual protection is much higher than tariffs

Pause for Discussion

Questions on Magee

“Why Are Trade Barriers So Low?”

- Does the main “political economy” model for explaining tariffs say that politicians care only about campaign contributions?
- Why does Magee give only partial credit to GATT negotiations in explaining the fall of tariffs since the 1930s?

Questions on Magee

“Why Are Trade Barriers So Low?”

- How do the following terms or concepts figure in explanations for why trade barriers are low:
 - free riding;
 - peace;
 - imported inputs;
 - non-tariff barriers?

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Recent uses of protection

- Some examples from earlier (not in this year's readings):
 - India considers tariffs on China after border conflict
 - Pakistan to “halt trade with India” after actions on Kashmir
 - Japan uses export controls on S Korea after Korea seeks compensation for forced labor in WWII
 - US bars arms exports to Hong Kong after China reduces Hong Kong independence

Recent uses of protection

- More from earlier:
 - China puts tariffs on Australian barley after Australia seeks inquiry on origins of coronavirus.
 - US may stop cocoa imports from Ivory Coast for using child labor.
 - China blocked meat imports from Canada after Canada arrested daughter of Huawei founder.
 - China had a ban (and has now lifted it) on US chicken due to outbreak of avian flu.

Recent uses of protection

- From two years ago:
 - US banned avocados from Mexico due to verbal threat made to US inspector in Mexico.
 - US threatened tariffs on countries using a digital services tax.
 - China suspended imports of many food products from Taiwan in response to Nancy Pelosi visit.

Recent uses of protection

- From last year:
 - Mexico banned GM corn
 - India regulates imports of laptops
- From this year:
 - EU bans imports from areas with deforestation

Recent uses of protection

Message from much of this:

Countries often restrict trade to hurt other countries that they are angry at.

Pause for Discussion

Questions on Krugman

“Two Cheers for Carbon Tariffs”

- Why would Krugman favor a carbon tariff even if it were as economically harmful as a tariff usually is?
- Why does he discuss the economics of the value added tax?
- A carbon tariff set equal to a domestic carbon tax makes sense, but what if the domestic policy is regulation, not tax?
- Why does he give only two cheers, not the usual three?

