When discussing the populous’ attitudes and preferences towards certain policy areas, such as welfare state expansion, there are two primary motivators, political values and prejudices, as well as economically self-interested preferences. For the most part, the rational self-interest model has been able to understand and account for citizens’ preferences surrounding the welfare state. This was confirmed in the dualization literature, which demonstrated that insiders are more likely to support policies that benefit themselves, while outsiders will prefer policies that alleviate the stresses and difficulties they face. While this model is straightforward and has fairly strong explanatory power, when applied to Globalization, the clarity of individuals’ preferences become muddled. The two conflicting motivators are once again competing over explanatory power on the subject of this analysis; however, unlike other topics of research, neither explanation adequately nor conclusively explains the attitudes that citizens hold towards globalization. To further complicate the discussion, Hiscox (2006) finds that much of the literature on this issue is not accurate because, as he finds, the framing of questions alters the results of studies substantially. Nonetheless, the majority of citizens in the United States and many Western European states oppose the rapid trend of globalization that has manifested itself since the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944. This then demonstrates that globalization has continued and therefore suggests that politicians have failed to follow the preferences of citizens. Thus, because of the lack of conclusive evidence, citizens do not have clear attitudes towards globalization, and because of this, politicians have continued the trend of globalization.

This essay will come to this conclusion by discussing many key elements of the globalization literature. First, Globalization will be defined, and in order to adequately define the term in the context that it will be used, Rodrik’s trilemma will be explained. By analyzing the trilemma, we will be able to understand which model we currently operate under, therefore demonstrating politicians’ response to globalization. Following this, the public discontent towards globalization will be explained by discussing both the political values and prejudice argument, as well as the economic self-interest model. Third, this essay will turn to the aforementioned framing issue to demonstrate that there is in fact no clear decision towards globalization as of yet. Finally, this essay will conclude with how politicians have responded to this phenomenon.

Globalism is a term often connotated with a visceral knee-jerk reaction from the electorate, as it often has a negative connotation. The reason for this, is because the term is used in many different ways by scholars and politicians, therefore muddling the actual meaning of the term. There are two primary definitions for globalization, a sociological and an economic definition. The latter will be used for this analysis. Because of this confusion, Rodrik (2000) uses the term “international economic integration” so the reader can better understand his analysis (177). As Rodrik’s renaming suggests, globalism, in the economic sense, is a procedural term that entails four core components: the movement of goods, the movement of services, the movement of financial instruments, and the movement of labor. As Mansfield and Mutz (2009) discuss, there is a common understanding amongst economists that trade is beneficial, and as a matter of fact, “Open trade and cross-national market integration help to allocate factors of production efficiently and to promote the welfare of countries and the world as a whole” (425-426). Despite this consensus, international economic integration is quite limited due to certain constraints inflicted by national sovereignty. These constraints include national borders acting as both boundaries of legal and political jurisdictions, and the inability of local and international courts to enforce a contract in which the two parties are from different states (Rodrik, 2000: 179-180). These constraints are some of the many that Rodrik introduces as he demonstrates why international economies have not yet integrated at an optimal level.

In order to more fully understand why states have not integrated on an international scale, Rodrik creates a political trilemma of the world economy to demonstrate that international economic integration, the nation state, and mass politics cannot all exist in harmony. Rather, the trilemma suggests that we can only have two of these three ‘nodes.’ (Rodrik, 2000: 180). In a perfectly integrated world economy, nation states would not interfere with trade or international markets as there would be minimal taxes imposed and transaction costs would be negligible. In essence, ‘global federalism’ would remove the boundaries, borders, and constraints that nation states currently impose as mass politics would continue on a global scale through a world government. The power of the nation state in this scenario is severely curtailed and restrained (181). The trilemma also suggests that we can achieve international economic integration with nation states, but we would need to give up mass politics. In this scenario, known as the Golden Straitjacket, states facilitate the mobility required through the structuring of domestic policies to international standards so a harmonious relationship between national economies can exist. In doing so, governments and parties are restricted to that structural framework and the “ability of mobilized popular groups to access and influence national economic policy-making” is restricted (182). In the third scenario, the Bretton Woods-GATT option, international economic integration is sacrificed as nation states retain their decision-making ability and mass politics is able to continue at the same extent (183). As Rodrik points out, many commentators believe that our world currently is operating under the Golden Straitjacket model (182). Additionally, while Rodrik concludes with the statement that in the next century he believes global federalism will be the prevailing framework, he includes a caveat. He writes, “one alternative possibility is that an ongoing series of financial crises will leave national electorates sufficiently shell-shocked that they … don the Golden Straitjacket for the long run” (185). In this context it is important to note that this work came before both the recession of 2000-2002 and the Great Recession. When you add in the fact that many commentators already believe we are operating under a Golden Straitjacket framework, it can be assumed that they are correct.

The notion that mass politics has fallen by the waist side as western states have donned the Golden Straitjacket is further strengthened when you consider the fact that there is a globalizing trend while around 60% of voters not only express anti-trade views, but a majority of citizens in most countries are in favor of restricting trade (Mayda & Rodrik, 2002: 1394). Even if the Golden Straitjacket is the framework our global economy has been operating under and is moving towards, it is still important to understand this broad discontent. As mentioned before, political values, identity and certain attachments have been used to account for opposition to globalization. Mayda and Rodrik (2002) produced much research to test this and their results were of significant value. They found that if an individual had a strong attachment to their neighborhood, county or region, or their nation, that individual tended to be less pro-trade (1414). Delving further into the subject of regional attachment, they find a strong negative relationship between national pride and pro-trade views (1414-1416). This negative relationship is due to the nationalist sentiments often being associated with national pride. These sentiments include feelings of superiority towards an individual’s country, pro-isolationism, and a distaste towards political alliances and international economic relations (1416). This survey helps understand why Poland, on a 5-point scale, has an average Trade Value Opinion 0.9 points lower than Germany (1418). What makes globalization unique and different in comparison to other economic trends, such as welfare state expansion, is that global integration has apparent social and cultural consequences, such as the presence of foreign multinationals, which then allows the political values to have a more pronounced effect on individuals’ attitudes (Margalit, 2012: 486). Sure enough, consistent with Mayda and Rodrik’s (2002) findings, Margalit (2012) finds that individuals who “are more anxious about social-cultural changes are much more likely to believe that economic integration is making them worse off,” as they find a strong association between cultural threat and self-perceived loss (491). It is apparent that due to the multi-faceted impact globalization has on a nation state and cultures, political values and identities play a larger than usual role in understanding citizens’ attitudes.

While the political values argument is strong and is backed up by empirical data, the economic self-interest model can also explain individuals’ attitudes towards globalization. The simple argument is that if an individual perceives globalization to be contributing to their social risk or insecurity, they are likely to develop anti-globalist attitudes (Scheve & Slaughter, 2004: 662). Naturally, the inverse is true for an individual if they benefit from globalism. Indeed, when empirically tested, this argument holds true. Consistent with the Heckscher-Ohlin model, Scheve and Slaughter (2001) find in their analysis that in the United States, an individual that has lower skill is likely to support new trade barriers. The model argues that states will specialize their workforce because barriers of the labor market have been broken down (272). Therefore, in a state where a majority of the workforce is high-skilled, low-skilled workers will be opposed to further globalization and integration. This trend is consistent throughout the literature surrounding globalization, as Mansfield and Mutz (2009) also find a key trend consistent with self-interest models on various different subjects. They find that highly educated individuals, those who have completed college, are much more likely to be in favor of increased integration (429-430).[[1]](#footnote-1) Much of the rational self-interest model for globalization is consistent with the many other studies conducted on individuals’ attitudes towards other economic subjects, such as welfare state expansion. The similarities being that these interests are primarily driven by economic factors, and such that an individual’s exposure to social risk is minimized. There is no reason to assume that the model for globalization is any different, as the rational self-interest model once again, can account for individuals’ preferences on any given issue.

Despite the apparent conclusive fact that a majority of citizens oppose globalization and an increase in international economic integration, their position is not clear. The reason for this, as discussed extensively by Hiscox (2006), is because of framing. As he points out, opinion surveys may be unreliable in understanding attitudes and policy preferences of individuals because respondents “tend to be strongly influenced by the specific wording of the questions posed and how these words ‘frame’ particular issues” (756). Hiscox conducts an experiment of his own to demonstrate how the issue of framing has permeated into the globalization literature. He finds that when respondents were asked the main survey question with an antitrade introduction that linked trade to job loss, respondents that heard the introduction were 17% less likely to support increasing trade than those who heard no introduction (756). Of those respondents who did not hear the introduction, 71% favored an increase in trade (756). In addition, when survey questions were asked without introductions, the respondents surprisingly favored trade. When asked, in 1999, if the US should promote more trade, continue it at the same rate, slow it down, or reject it, 58% of respondents reported they were happy with the current level or they wanted it to accelerate (761). Also, when asked “whether they though ‘growing trade and business ties’ between their country and other nations was good or bad for the” US, 82% thought trade was a good thing (761). Framing is important to any survey and seeing as the globalization literature predominantly used survey data, framing becomes all the more important to this analysis. As evidenced by Hiscox, when framing is adequately accounted for, opposition toward increased trade and integration is diminished while support increases. It is imperative to note that this is not saying that people do not oppose globalization, merely that we can no longer be certain that the majority of citizens resist globalization like many scholars assume.

If my assumption mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, that we are operating under a Golden Straitjacket framework, is correct, we can expect globalization to have continued regardless of the opinions of citizens. Indeed, as Frieden (2018) discusses, over the last half century, globalism and integration has grown, the most pronounced growth coming after 1990 (24). In his article he suggests that the vast majority of politicians continued the trend as they continued to integrate with other states around the world. However, there has been a backlash to globalization and to the politicians and elites that have supported and continued the integration. This backlash has come in the form of populism, and as he points out, “today virtually every advanced industrial country has a populist movement or party that is openly hostile to international trade and investment” (25). In his extensive research, he finds that the reason why an individual supports a populist agenda is directly related to one’s experience with globalization’s effects (Frieden, 2018). In essence, the motivators for opposition towards globalization are innately similar to the motivators for support of populist movements. The Golden Straitjacket is not adequate long term, as it underestimates the will of citizens to be heard in advanced industrial countries. Therefore, because of a lack of trust in their representatives, harder economic times, and the ability of political and public figures to tap into these sentiments and point to globalism as the key cause, populism has taken form.

This analysis has demonstrated that recent events, such as the Great Recession, have placed the world under the Golden Straitjacket scenario depicted in Rodrik’s trilemma. It has also demonstrated that many scholars assume that the majority of citizens oppose globalization, which as the trilemma discusses, does not have major implications due to the reduced role of mass politics under the Golden Straitjacket framework. However, this opposition has potentially been overstated, as observational surveys are biased because of issues with framing questions. Therefore, citizens do not have a clear attitude towards globalization. Nonetheless, opposition and resentment towards globalization still exists, and the failure of representatives and elites to adequately address these feelings has led to the increase in populist parties and attitudes around the globe.

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1. Mansfield and Mutz do introduce a caveat, however. They argue that education is more than just a skill, but that students at college are introduced to academic work, which includes much economic work in regard to trade. A consensus exists that trade is beneficial in general. Because of this exposure to numerous economists and their work, those who went to college are more in favor of trade. Nonetheless, other scholars view education as a way to observe skill level, therefore this finding is relevant to this section of the analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)