

PERCEPTION OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE: GENDER AND GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES?

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ABSTRACT

Through a cross-sectional and longitudinal study, we examined the attitudes of men and women at two time periods, 20 years apart, towards a set of social and ethical issues in international trade using a 10-item survey questionnaire. While women are more concerned than men in both time periods, this concern has declined over time for both groups. In 1999, women were significantly more disturbed than men over child labor, working conditions and human rights violations in exporting countries. In 2019, women were significantly more concerned about lower wage rates, use of prison labor, and deficient environmental standards, in addition to poor working conditions. Use of prison labor and undemocratic nature of foreign governments were the least important issues for both groups in either time periods. The findings suggest that quality of life issues in developing countries concern women more than men and the relevance of issues change from one generation to another. While no support was found for trade critics' assertion that low wages are a source of unfair competition, policy makers, advocacy groups, and corporate leaders need to be mindful of how trade is viewed by women.

INTRODUCTION

Differences between men and women have been a long-standing subject of academic research. Studies from business settings have pointed to noticeable variations between the two sexes in their attitude and behavior on a wide range of subjects, including ethics, bribery, and corruption. In this paper, we look at how they view 10 specific issues of concern surrounding international trade and how these same issues are viewed twenty years later.

Since the end of the Second World War, national and multilateral policies have vastly expanded global trade and investment flows. The impact of globalization is felt acutely across society through jobs and income levels, availability and choice of products, in public policy formulations and geo-political tensions, and in corporate decisions and conduct. Some markers of globalization include the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), China forming Special Economic

Zones offering attractive incentives to domestic and international investors to manufacture and export, the U.S. granting “most favored nation” treaty status to China (which gave a turbo boost to China’s exports) and the expansion of an existing free trade agreement between the U.S. and Canada to include Mexico (North American Free Trade Agreement – NAFTA).

Concerns Over Trade

This liberalization of trade and investment also gave rise to concerns over their “downsides”: increased incomes and economic growth came on the back of low wages, adverse working conditions, poor governance, and degradation of the environment, among other deleterious practices, in many less developed exporting countries. Opposition emanated from various interest and advocacy groups – labor unions, human rights activists, religious denominations, environmentalists, and businesses wary of competing with cheaper imports (Compa & Diamond, 1996). The success of trade sanctions against South Africa, imposed to pressure that country’s minority government to dismantle apartheid (a race-based policy that discriminated against non-Whites), was seen by activists as evidence that abhorrent practices abroad could be changed through public pressure and legal changes in that country’s trading partners.

Critics averred that unfettered trade and investment flows would neither be “free” nor “fair” (Shoch, 2000). In many less developed exporting countries, low wages, employing of children or prisoners, poor working conditions, absence of laws (or of their enforcement) to protect the natural environment or intellectual property (IP), and undemocratic political regimes that ignored workers’ well-being and denied its citizens basic human rights would enable companies to produce and export goods at low prices that would also harm domestic manufacturers in the importing country. Benefitting from lowered trade barriers and taking advantage of low labor costs and minimal or no regulations, products made in these countries and subsequently exported to developed nations such as the U.S., competed on an unfair basis (Rodrigues, 2018). The removal of trade barriers encouraged multinational firms to locate to or source from low-cost, less regulated countries.

Opponents of trade liberalization pushed for the inclusion of a social clause in bilateral and multilateral trade treaties. Such a clause would link improvements in labor standards in developing countries to greater access to markets in developed nations (Sanyal, 2001). The goal was to ensure that trade was not only free but also “fair.” Companies engaged in international commerce were told that their stance on human rights and working conditions would be considered part of their performance and that they would be expected to confront the governments that host them on issues ranging from political repression to child labor – in effect, exercise corporate social responsibility (Cowell, 2000). In negotiations that led to the creation of the WTO, ministers from the 123 member countries approved a declaration that worker rights must be on the agenda of the new organization (Preeg, 2012). NAFTA with Mexico included supplemental clauses covering labor rights and environmental protection. In 1999, the United Nations launched Global Compact, a call to companies to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, environment, and corruption to advance societal goals (Global Impact). The U.S. Department of Labor (2018) is obliged by law to issue an annual report that lists goods

produced by child labor around the world. Companies adopted voluntary codes of conduct and international organizations enacted rules calling for adherence to social and ethical issues. The mantra of “people, planet, and profit” came into vogue (Elkington, 2018).

Since the late 1990s, the U.S. economy has become even more integrated with those of other countries. For instance, the proportion of imports of goods and services into the U.S. has risen from 4.2 percent of the country’s GDP in 1960 to 11.81 percent in 1995 to 14.6 percent in 2019 (World Bank, 2021).

Public Attitude Towards Trade

Public attitudes in the U.S. toward international trade have fluctuated over the past few years. Gallup began tracking this attitude in 1993 when the favorable-unfavorable ratio was 44:48. However, since 2013, most Americans have viewed it as a net positive for the U.S. With an economic recession and high unemployment resulting from the pandemic's impact on everyday life, more Americans in 2021 viewed trade as a threat (compared to the previous year) – though a majority still saw it as an opportunity for the U.S. economy – 63 percent versus 32 percent compared to 79 percent versus 18 percent in 2020 (Younis, 2021).

Despite this positive outlook on trade, social and ethical issues have continued to dominate headlines. Accidents such as the collapse of a factory building housing garment manufacturing in Bangladesh killing 1,132 people in 2013, allegations over use of convict labor in China to produce goods for exports, reports of children being employed to stitch soccer balls in Pakistan, among many other stories, have put pressure on the U.S. government (and those of other developed countries) to renegotiate existing trade agreements (International Labour Organization, 2016-20). U.S. companies and the U.S. government have accused foreign governments and foreign state-owned enterprises of acquiring IP through questionable means. In 2016, Mr. Donald Trump secured the U.S. presidency on a campaign platform that criticized foreign countries for unfair trading practices. In office, his administration renegotiated NAFTA, championed a “Make in U.S.A.” policy, withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Trade Agreement (Amadeo, 2020), and entered into new trading arrangements with China (Swanson & Rappaport, 2020). That trade is strictly a commercial function with no immediate connection to societal concerns has evaporated under the pressure of political and social forces generated by the globalization of the economy. More recently, concern about environmental issues (e.g., global warming and activities contributing to it, rain forest destruction, zero waste, recycling, and sustainable development) and human rights (e.g., harassment of women in the workplace, discrimination against minorities, and prejudice against Black people) have come to the fore. Additionally, public opinion in the U.S. towards certain countries (e.g., Russia and Saudi Arabia) have become less positive, for various reasons, including worries over economic espionage, authoritarian practices, and undemocratic conduct.

Impact on Women

International trade has a mixed impact on women. It has played a transformational role in improving women's lives, creating new jobs, enhancing consumer choice, and increasing their bargaining power in society. However, though they represent half the world's population, they contribute only 37 percent of the global GDP. While this gap is lessening, it is happening at a very slow pace. Trade also led to job losses for women and their concentration of employment in lower-skilled jobs. Korinek et al. (2021) argue that closing the gender gap makes good economic sense and targeted policies and socially responsible conduct by businesses can help women maximize the benefits from global trading. These include removing barriers that impede women's access to education, financial services, and digital technologies.

Trade policies, while not *de jure* discriminatory, tend to be biased against women, resulting in lower levels of employment and higher prices for consumer goods. Although countries do not overtly impose import tariffs according to gender, implicit biases can amount to "pink tariffs" that put women at an economic disadvantage. Compared to men, women tend to spend a larger share of their income on goods with high tariffs (such as food). Eliminating import tariffs could help women gain 2.5 percent more real income than men. So that trade can increase opportunities for both men and women, policy makers need to assess the potential impact of trade rules on various segments of the society and develop policy responses based on evidence (World Bank & World Trade Organization, 2020).

Against this backdrop, we conducted surveys to ascertain opinion with respect to how various social and ethical issues in foreign countries were viewed in the U.S. by men and women. We first started sampling attitudes in the late 1990s. In the late 2010s, we carried out the same survey with a similar population. The topics in the survey instrument have remained relevant despite the twenty years that elapsed since we created and administered it. This large set of data drawn in two time periods form the basis of this study reported here.

REVIEW OF EXTANT LITERATURE

That businesses needed to be socially responsible in their international operations emerged as a major topic of academic research in the 1980s as growing number of child labor and sweatshop scandals involving apparel and footwear companies and mounting awareness of global environmental issues (such as depletion of ozone layer and deforestation) dominated news headlines. Outlets such as the *Journal of World Business* and the *Journal of International Business Studies* saw many research articles in this field (Kolk, 2016). A paper by Guvenli and Sanyal (2002) found that public concern was highest with respect to the use of child labor, human rights violations, and poor working conditions in the exporting countries. More recently, Guvenli et al. (2022) reported that over a twenty-year time period between 1997-99 and 2019-20, there had been a marked lessening of concerns in the U.S. over ethical and social issues in foreign countries, though subjects such as use of child labor, violation of human rights, and poor working conditions remained as the leading subjects of disquiet.

Since the primary focus of this paper is to discover if men and women differ in their views with respect to the social issues that accompany trade, we examined some of the literature on how these two groups differ on social, political, and ethical dimensions. The concept of masculinity-femininity was introduced by Hofstede (1980) where he posited cultural differences between the two genders and demonstrated with scores that led him to conclude that some countries tend to have more “masculine” characteristics and others more “feminine” characteristics as a part of a continuum. Countries with “high” femininity scores were likely to exhibit a greater commitment to quality of life and empathetic human relationships. Similar ideas were advanced by Trompenaars (1993). One could conclude from their scholarship that women, as a group, differed markedly from men on what is important to and how society is configured, what values need to be emphasized, and that social well-being need to be given more weight than material goals. Hofstede categorized the U.S. as more of a high masculinity country.

Gilligan (1982) explained that men and women differ in their moral reasoning and judgments, contending that men look at moral issues in terms of justice, rules, and individual rights while women tend to consider such issues in terms of relationships, caring and compassion. Her research, traced back to the work of Freud, holds that gender identity becomes established at a very early age through the mother-child relationship and is thereafter, irreversible. Gender socialization theory predicts that as adults the sexes will bring different ethical values to their work roles, shaping in different ways their work-related decisions.

A substantial body of work has explored the differences in the behavior and attitudes of men and women in various economic transactions. Empirical and experimental research show that overall, men and women differ with respect to ethical issues. Croson and Gneezy (2009) in a review of studies on the subject concluded that both nature and nurture are responsible for the gender differences. Dawson (1995) tested six workplace scenarios and found that the response of men and women differed significantly in four cases. Studies show that women commit fewer crimes than men. Steffensmeir et al. (2013), for example, examining 83 cases of corporate fraud, found that women were not typically part of conspiracy groups and if they did, their role was minor. There were two main ways in which women were involved – they had close personal relationship with a male co-conspirator, or they occupied a corporate position with gateway access to financial matters.

Studies also show that men and women differ in the preference for taking risks – women are more risk averse than men when taking investment decisions (Harris et al., 2006). Similarly, women’s preference for competitive situations are lower than for men. Several studies have found that women are more altruistic and socially conscious than men (Andreoni and Vesterlund, 2001). Hence, actions that undermine the public good (such as accepting and giving bribes) are less likely to be undertaken by women.

Guvenli and Sanyal (2012), examining attitudes in the U.S. toward bribery in international business, found significant differences by sex with respect to specific hypothetical business situations with men more likely to give bribes in exchange for providing services. Alatas et al. (2009), in an experimental study, found Australian women to be less tolerant of corruption than Australian men; however, no gender difference in corruption tolerance was found in India, Indonesia and Singapore, leading them to conclude that gender difference in the attitudes towards

corruption, and hence the corruptibility of women, may be culture specific and not a universal phenomenon. Similarly, other studies (e.g., Goetz, 2007) have noted it is not that women are fundamentally different from men when it comes to corrupt behavior but that factors such as family obligations, cultural issues, democratic practices, institutional integrity, and gender status play a role. The explanation offered is that differences between men and women towards illegal and unethical conduct is the result of an “unfair” system rather than the “innate” higher moral nature of the fair sex.

A review of 14 studies by Ford and Richardson (1994) comparing the two sexes in terms of their ethical behavior found that the results of seven studies supported females being more ethical than males. The remaining seven studies found no significant difference between the two in terms of their ethical behavior. Borkowski and Ugras (1998) conducted meta-analysis on 47 studies. Their finding reveals that 49% of them yielded significant differences between females and males in terms of ethical behavior, 34% not significant and 17% mixed results.

Difference between men and women was popularized in the culture with the publication of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, a non-fiction book that became a runaway best seller (Gray, 1993). Thirty years later, the debate on how and why the two sexes are different and what it means for their roles in society remains unsettled. Pew Research Center surveys have found that majority of Americans say that men and women are basically different, but there is no consensus on the origins of these differences (Parker et al., 2017).

Gender inequality in the U.S., has been declining throughout its history but disparity persists in political representation, corporate leadership, occupational segregation, income and wealth, and household responsibilities. However, in education and school enrollment today, the numbers for women match or even exceed that for men. The 2021 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report shows that the Gender Development Index for the U.S. is 0.994 (HDI – Human Development Index – for men is 0.928, for women 0.922), placing it among the highest in the world.

Research on gender and international trade has been limited due to insufficient data and an insufficient understanding of the relationship between the economic roles played by women as workers, consumers, and decision-makers. Extant research suggest that women tend to be more protectionist than men. Burgoon and Hiscox (2008) found that women in the U.S. (and in developed countries generally) are more likely to support restrictions on trade than men. This divergence in attitude can be traced in part to differences in exposure to economic ideas and information. Mansfield et al. (2015) too found that women were less favorably inclined towards international trade. They attributed this to less favorable attitudes toward competition among women, less willingness on their part to relocate for jobs, and a preference for a more isolationist non-economic foreign policy.

Drawing on our data set, we focused on determining whether (a) women and men perceived the challenges of free trade differently and (b) whether women and men in 1997-99 perceived these challenges differently from their counterparts in 2017-19. There does not appear to be any study focused on this subject – attitude toward social and ethical issues in international trade. This study is an attempt to shed light on this important aspect of global business.

In general, lack of gender-specific data reinforces biases against women in both corporate conduct and trade policy formulation. Decomposing data by sex is needed to determine how these impact men and women differently. The changing nature of the world economy – growth in services, global value chains, and digital technology – is bringing to the fore new trading issues and opportunities for women. Thus, this study offers an additional set of sex-disaggregated data over two distinct time periods to inform our understanding of how trade issues are perceived.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A survey instrument was developed that sought responses on a five-point scale to ten most common issues of social and ethical concerns in international trade and business. These issues were identified from news headlines in the U.S. in the late 1990s, political and public reactions, and extant studies. The issues are: employment of child labor, employment of prison labor, poor working conditions, low wages, violation of human rights, authoritarian/non-democratic nature of foreign governments, insufficient protection of IP rights, low or no environmental standards, non-enforcement of environmental standards, and unfair competition based on low wages. The rationale for including the last issue in the survey was to ascertain whether respondents would associate low wages with unfair competition. The questionnaire was administered in 1997-1999 (referred to as Time 1) and twenty years later, in 2017-2019 (called Time 2).

In the context of the notion of including a social clause in trade treaties, survey participants were asked whether they would support restrictions on the import of goods into the U.S.A. if those products had been made in countries where employment conditions and business practices identified in the previous section prevailed. Responses could range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Thus, a score of 1 indicated little concern over this issue while 5 meant the highest level of disquiet. Low scores would indicate less inclination to impose restrictions on trade and investment with the countries where these issues prevailed while a high score would reflect strong opposition to importing from those countries. The focus was on countries, not individual firms.

The survey respondents were students in a state-supported U.S. university in the upper Midwest of the country. The sample size in the 1997-99 surveys is 336 (46 percent female; 54 percent male). In the 2017-19 surveys, 240 completed responses (46 percent female; 54 percent male) were used. Participants in the study, upper classmen studying for an undergraduate degree in business, were in the 21-24 age bracket. This experimental design enabled a controlled comparison of two groups of respondents with very similar profiles at two different time periods. The participants, we stress, were fully exposed to and familiar with economic theories and ideas and knowledgeable about international trade.

The survey results were tabulated and statistically analyzed. T-tests were used to compare the two groups and each of the 10 items.

RESULTS

In Table 1, we present the mean scores for both demographic groups for both Time 1 (1997-99) and Time 2 (2017-2019) periods for each of the ten ethical and social issues of concern.

TABLE 1. MEAN SCORES FOR WOMEN AND MEN IN TIME PERIODS 1 AND 2

Issue	<u>Mean Scores</u>			
	Time 1		Time 2	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
<u>Employment Conditions -</u>				
Use of child labor	4.39	4.09	3.94	3.69
Poor working conditions	4.18	3.77	3.83	3.52
Low wage rates	3.05	3.01	3.07	2.78
Use of prison labor	2.64	2.47	3.00	2.74
Unfair competition due to low wages	3.41	3.27	3.23	3.08
<u>Politics and Law –</u>				
Undemocratic governments	2.49	2.45	2.71	2.50
Human rights violations	4.37	4.01	3.95	3.92
IP rights violations	3.54	3.44	3.66	3.57
<u>Physical Environment –</u>				
Low or no environmental standards	3.65	3.48	3.43	3.17
Non-enforcement of standards	3.75	3.65	3.48	3.25

Note: Respondents answers ranged on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 indicating the highest level of concern with the prevalence of that issue.

Four statistics in Table 1 stand out. One, on all the ten topics, for both time periods, the mean scores for women are higher than those for men, indicating that women are more concerned with these issues than men. Two, compared to Time 1 the mean scores for women for five of the ten issues were lower in Time 2. In contrast, for men, the scores were down for seven of the issues. In

Time 2, no item averaged a score above 4 on the five-point scale. Twenty years earlier there were 5 items with mean scores of over 4 – one for men and four for women. These indicate a general decline in disquiet over these subject matters. Three, on 3 topics – use of prison labor, undemocratic foreign governments, and inadequate protection of IP rights – the concern of both men and women rose in Time 2 compared to the previous period. This suggests, that over time, these three issues have become salient in a noticeable way in the media, in the political arena, and in public discourse. Four, the top three concerns for women in Time 1 were the same in Time 2. For men, these were the top concerns in Time 1; in Time 2, concerns over IP violations had replaced poor working conditions as a top three concern.

In Tables 2 and 3 we look at whether the mean scores for the two groups for each item are significantly different. Table 2 looks at the results from Time 1. T-tests are used to measure the difference between the two groups.

TABLE 2. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TIME PERIOD 1 (T-TESTS)

Issue	<u>Mean Scores</u>		t value	p value
	Females	Males		
<u>Employment Conditions -</u>				
Use of child labor	4.39	4.09	2.61	0.01***
Poor working conditions	4.18	3.77	3.73	0.00***
Low wage rates	3.05	3.01	3.07	0.75
Use of prison labor	2.64	2.47	1.31	0.19
Unfair competition due to low wages	3.41	3.27	1.24	0.22
<u>Politics and Law –</u>				
Undemocratic governments	2.49	2.45	0.31	0.76
Human rights violations	4.37	4.01	3.26	0.00***
IP rights violations	3.54	3.44	0.92	0.36
<u>Physical Environment –</u>				
Low or no environmental standards	3.65	3.48	1.53	0.13
Non-enforcement of standards	3.75	3.65	0.85	0.40
Significance level: ***0.01				

The results indicate that on three topics – use of child labor, poor working conditions, and human rights violations – women were significantly more concerned than men. As noted above, these issues with mean scores of 4.39, 4.18, and 4.37 were of the highest concerns for women among all the 10 topics. There are no significant differences with men on the other seven items.

Table 3 presents the same analysis as table 2, but for Time 2.

TABLE 3. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TIME PERIOD 2 (T-TESTS)

Issue	Mean Scores		t value	p value
	Females	Males		
<u>Employment Conditions -</u>				
Use of child labor	3.94	3.69	1.45	0.15
Poor working conditions	3.83	3.52	1.92	0.06*
Low wage rates	3.07	2.78	2.12	0.04**
Use of prison labor	3.00	2.74	1.66	0.1***
Unfair competition due to low wages	3.23	3.08	1.02	0.31
<u>Politics and Law –</u>				
Undemocratic governments	2.71	2.50	1.62	0.11
Human rights violations	3.95	3.92	0.21	0.83
IP rights violations	3.66	3.57	0.62	0.52
<u>Physical Environment –</u>				
Low or no environmental standards	3.43	3.17	1.87	0.06*
Non-enforcement of standards	3.48	3.25	1.56	0.12
Significance levels: ***0.01; ** 0.05; * 0.10				

Between the two generations, the difference among men and women have narrowed to only one issue – low wage rates -- at the $p < 0.05$ level of significance. At the $p < 0.1$ level, we find more issues over which women were more concerned than men – poor working conditions, use of prison labor, and low or no environmental standards in the exporting countries. There was no statistical difference between the two sexes on their views on human rights violations and IP rights violations.

We looked at the responses of women for the two time periods to gain an inter-generational perspective. They are reported in Table 4.

**TABLE 4. COMPARING SCORES OF WOMEN IN TIME 1 AND TIME 2
(LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS)**

Issue	Mean Scores		t value	p value
	Time 1	Time 2		
<u>Employment Conditions -</u>				
Use of child labor	4.39	3.94	3.10	0.00***
Poor working conditions	4.18	3.83	2.61	0.01***
Low wage rates	3.05	3.07	-0.22	0.83
Use of prison labor	2.64	3.00	-2.52	0.01***
Unfair competition due to low wages	3.41	3.23	1.38	0.17
<u>Politics and Law –</u>				
Undemocratic governments	2.49	2.71	-1.94	0.05**
Human rights violations	4.37	3.95	3.01	0.00***
IP rights violations	3.54	3.66	-0.93	0.35
<u>Physical Environment –</u>				
Low or no environmental standards	3.65	3.43	1.76	0.08*
Non-enforcement of standards	3.75	3.48	2.02	0.04**
Significance levels: ***0.01; ** 0.05; * 0.10				

The results reveal that women’s attitudes have evolved over time. On five of the items – use of child labor, poor working conditions, human rights violations, low or no environmental standards, and non-enforcement of these standards -- their concerns have declined significantly. However, on two issues -- use of prison labor and the undemocratic nature of foreign governments -- their alarm has increased significantly. These two subjects, though, rank at the bottom of the league of concerns, with mean scores of less than 3.0. On the remaining three topics, there have been no significant changes.

We performed a similar comparison of men from the two generations. The results are shown in Table 5.

**TABLE 5. COMPARING SCORES OF MEN IN TIME 1 AND TIME 2
(LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS)**

Issue	<u>Mean Scores</u>			
	Time 1	Time 2	t value	p value
<u>Employment Conditions -</u>				
Use of child labor	4.09	3.69	2.90	0.00***
Poor working conditions	3.77	3.52	1.87	0.06*
Low wage rates	3.01	2.78	1.84	0.07*
Use of prison labor	2.47	2.74	-1.84	0.07*
Unfair competition due to low wages	3.27	3.08	1.38	0.17
<u>Politics and Law –</u>				
Undemocratic governments	2.45	2.50	-0.39	0.70
Human rights violations	4.01	3.92	0.67	0.50
IP rights violations	3.44	3.57	-1.06	0.29
<u>Physical Environment –</u>				
Low or no environmental standards	3.48	3.17	2.51	0.01***
Non-enforcement of standards	3.65	3.25	3.11	0.00***
Significance levels: ***0.01; ** 0.05; * 0.10				

Paralleling the responses of women, for men too, there was significantly less concern over use of child labor, poor working conditions, low wages, absence or insufficient environmental standards, and their non-enforcement. Only on one item – use of prison labor – was there significantly higher concern in Time 2 compared to Time 1. However, the mean score for men on this subject was a middling 2.74 on a five-point scale. Though the mean scores show an increase in concern over undemocratic governments and IP rights violations in Time 2, they are not statistically significant.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The results offer clear insights regarding the views of men and women on trade issues what it implies for policy makers, advocacy groups, and businesses engaged in and impacted by international business.

The crucial finding is that women are more sensitive to ethical and social issues in international trade than men – they were 20 years ago, they were 20 years later too. In a sense, this confirms the broader scholarship finding that women, generally speaking, are more sympathetic to quality of life, ethical, and socially related issues than men. The top three concerns for women -- use of child labor, poor working conditions, and human rights violations – were significantly higher than men although these were the top three rated issues for men too. These topics are humanistic issues, less connected with competition, materialism, and profit-inducing factors. In Time 2, while the top 3 concerns have remained unchanged for women, for men, IP violations have replaced poor working conditions. Women were significantly more concerned than men in Time 2 on a wider set of issues: low wages, use of prison labor, and lower environmental standards. These are also all quality-of-life issues. These findings also echo earlier studies that women are less enthusiastic about international trade than men.

A second finding of this distinctive longitudinal study is that perspectives shift from one generation to another towards the same issues over time. For both men and women, the concern is lower for all the issues in Time 2 except for use of prison labor; the higher score for it may well reflect persistent media reporting on the subject in recent years. In general, while women are more concerned than men over six of the ten issues, there is no difference between them on the other four, and overall, the level of concern on all issues save prison labor, is markedly lower. The lower scores in Time Period and a reordering of the ranks of the listed issues suggest other topics may be emerging that are of concern – such as women’s rights, climate change, and political rivalries.

A third finding was that men and women did not differ significantly in either time period with respect to believing that the source of unfair competition were the low wage rates in the developing countries. Their middling mean scores of about 3.0 suggest they were neutral on this issue. Additionally, unfair competition stemming from low wages was not ranked among the top three concerns by either men or women in Time 1 or Time 2. It appears that respondents understand that differences in labor costs across locations is a source of competitive advantage for certain goods and countries and that in of itself does not equate to unethical or exploitative conduct.

What explains the general decline in concern for most of the issues for both men and women? We offer three explanations.

First, during this period (1999 through 2019), the world continued to experience growth in international trade and investment. To a large extent, this expansion and accompanying rise in income in the U.S. was the result of lower wages, poor working conditions, lax environmental standards, and other social deficiencies and ethical laxities in many of the countries from which products were imported. In effect, these factors were the source of competitive advantage for many

of the less developed exporting countries. Thus, with the widespread benefits of international trade so palpable, disquiet over these issues has softened.

Second, expansion in trade and investment has been accompanied by many regulatory and monitoring mechanisms at national and inter-governmental levels, by both international agencies and advocacy groups. These efforts have to a considerable extent alleviated some of the harshest and most egregious negative social and ethical conditions. At the same time, it has become starkly apparent that (a) the pace with which change can be brought about in the political, economic, social and cultural conditions in a foreign country is slower than had been hoped or wished and (b) there is a limit to how much pressure from outside – government or non-government – that can be brought on a foreign sovereign country to change and reform. As a result, the feeling is that this is as much that can be accomplished, and any improvements can at best be incremental. Thus, concern over many of the issues has declined.

Third, while the survey instrument used reflected international trade worries in the late 1990s, twenty years later, other global concerns have come to the fore, such as climate change, rights of indigenous peoples, treatment of Black people, and sustainability. While these issues were not in the survey given in 2017-19, it can be that attention and concern have moved to these issues, relegating the subjects that agitated the population a generation ago. The nature of global trade has been changing – growth in trade in services, the reliance on long and complex supply chains, and the digitization of economic activities.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

For trade policy makers, it means that subjects of concern have shifted over time. In negotiations and other dealings with foreign governments, emphasis has to be given to protecting the intellectual property rights of the companies of the U.S. and push to stop import of products made by prisoners. The government can find support among its populace to seek restrictions on trade with countries that are seen to benefit from these acts. In short, trade agreements need to be regularly revisited and recalibrated to address changing concerns among the consumers in the importing country. Since conditions in exporting countries change (e.g., nature of government, environmental protection, economic development, etc.), public attitudes change too.

For companies trading and investing in foreign countries, it behooves them to be mindful of what issues are of importance to their customers and suppliers. Importers of products made by child or prison labor may experience reputational damage, public backlash, and sanctions. At the same time, they have to be vigilant that fake products do not fool their customers. The public affairs strategy of these firms needs to be revised to reflect the sentiments of the various constituencies it serves – protecting and advocating its interests and leveraging public support when it is there.

For advocacy groups that blacklist companies and pressure foreign governments, they too need to pick the issues to focus on that will have the most impact and garner public support. Some issues recede in importance or public awareness while other subjects emerge. This inter-generational study indicates that advocacy groups need to be prepared to shift this mission, resources, and

strategies to adapt to changing realities. For example, in recent years, issues of sustainability, reducing the carbon footprint, loss of wildlife habitats, and reducing waste have emerged as key issues overtaking topics such as low wages or unfair competition.

For all constituencies in the U.S., it is worth remembering that the concerns that animate women cannot be ignored. The impact on women of trade policies and corporate conduct has been reiterated. Given the high level of empowerment of women in the U.S. and their growing presence in senior corporate leadership, legislative bodies, state agencies and not-for-profit organizations, social media, in addition to rising financial clout, they are a potent force to influence and sway public policy and legislative agendas. It also feeds into the programs of NGOs, which may be able to garner female support and exercise greater influence by focusing on those topics that are important to them. This may also lead to pressure on U.S. firms to distance themselves from doing business with countries where ethical lapses are egregious. Similarly, firms based in, and governments of, exporting countries can benefit from this knowledge and accordingly address the changing concerns of the constituencies in the U.S.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study, first conducted in the late 1990s, reflects the social and ethical issues informing trade at that time. Staying focused on them enabled this current longitudinal study to be conducted. Going forward, researchers can recognize new and emerging societal issues impacting global business (e.g., sustainability and global warming, etc.) and include those in similar studies.

The data underlying this study comes from surveys of business students – men and women. To ensure a broader and representative societal perspective is obtained, responses could be sampled from a more diverse pool of respondents in terms of education (non-business students and individuals without college degrees), age, income levels, ethnicity, gender diversity, and those in other parts of a large country.

This study could also be expanded into a wider, multi-country comparative examination of these concerns. Multi-country perspectives would allow for a fuller understanding of the importance of these issues in individual countries. Studies on how these issues are perceived in exporting countries would offer a complementary and fuller picture of trading relationships, expectations, challenges, and anxieties.

The respondents to the surveys belonged to two different generations. The “second” generation was answering questions at a time when the world economy was more globalized compared to 20 years ago, with more information and insights available, including the efficacy of various policies and approaches in the U.S. to drive reforms in developing nations. Thus, the Time 2 respondents are affected by the “time lapse” effect. Since the authors plan to continue the survey, the results from future periods would provide additional perspectives on how perceptions towards international trading issues change or do not change and if such changes are seen differently by various segments of the public.

CONCLUSIONS

This cross-sectional (men and women) and longitudinal (two time periods separated by 20 years) study contributes to the literature on how sensitivity to international business issues may vary between men and women. Our findings show that women are more concerned than men over social and ethical issues surrounding international trade. While the concern has declined on the part of both men and women over the two decades, overall, women continue to remain more troubled on all the ten issues examined. Given the very high and nearly equivalent level of human development for both sexes in the U.S, continuing divergence between men and women on how they view trade issues suggests additional indication of gender difference. It also appears that topics of worry change over time, with new issues emerging to gain the attention of the population. For instance, though not statistically significant, there is greater uneasiness in the second generation over IP violations. The overall findings signal the value for international trade negotiators, policy makers, foreign governments, corporate leaders and advocacy groups to be mindful of what concerns women (and different demographic groups) and to recognize that public concerns shift over time.

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