

Theorizing Social Movement Influence on the State

THE QUESTIONS THE NAFTA battle raises—how did activists politicize and influence trade policy—lie at the heart of cutting edge research among sociologists and political scientists who study how civil society organizations, specifically social movements, influence the state and state policies. Two decades of research suggests that three variables are the best predictors of social movement influence on political outcomes: a movement's organizational form, strategies, and the political context that it confronts. Because there is too much variation in how these factors combine and interact to be able to devise a recipe for success across all movements, research has turned to examining the interaction of these factors in specific contexts, which some scholars suggest is the most fruitful direction for future research. As Amenta and colleagues comment on the current direction of scholarship: "There are no specific organizational forms, strategies, or political contexts that will always help challengers. Instead, scholars should be looking for specific forms of organization and strategies that are more productive in some political contexts than in others" (2010:296).

The Relationship between Strategies and Political Contexts

Questions of how strategies and political contexts interact therefore are critically important for social movements research. For the last thirty years, political opportunity theory and its variants have provided the dominant

framework for understanding this relationship. They posit that changing political contexts explain variation in the level and success of insurgency. Doug McAdam, in his classic explanation of the rise and success of the civil rights movement, argues that macro-level shifts in opportunities, including the northward migration of African Americans, general salience of civil rights among the public, and international political pressure, explains why activists' mobilization and influence increased from 1961 to 1965 (McAdam 1982).

Despite its ubiquity, political opportunity theory has faced serious criticism. As even its original proponents point out, the concept of political opportunity is vague and broad (see Gamson and Meyer 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Meyer 2004). Others suggest that it fails to explain how activists gauge the openness of a political opportunity structure, or how their strategic choices affect a structure's permeability (see Kingdon 1995; Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Recognizing the value of political opportunity theory, however, scholars have engaged in compelling work that attempts to extend and expand it. They have studied how activists adapt strategies to particular political contexts (Ganz 2000; Martin 2010; McCammon 2012), and how political contexts determine strategies (Bernstein 1997; Walker et al. 2008).

Other scholars have attempted to reconceptualize political opportunity theory, calling attention to its inability to adequately account for "the fundamental interaction of social practice and structure" (Bloom 2015:392).¹ Joshua Bloom (2014, 2015; Bloom and Martin 2013), calls for a re-theorizing of political opportunity as the leveraging of insurgent practices across institutional cleavages, as he explains: "Meso-level institutional cleavages serve as opportunities for insurgent practices, mediating any macro-structural effects. In this sense, political opportunity is an institutional cleavage, that is, an institutionalized conflict or sustained antagonism between routinized interests of influential social groupings or authorities" (2015:395).

Bloom's theory is quite useful for understanding how insurgent movements that seek to disrupt business as usual exploit fissures in institutional structures to mobilize effectively and influence policy changes. Because opportunities exist across broad institutional cleavages that are constantly changing and getting reconfigured, the trick for activists engaged in disruptive movements is to develop practices—or cultural routines that combine historically particular forms of action and rhetoric—to challenge authorities across these cleavages. As Bloom explains, his

“insurgent practice theory” directly addresses three of the key weaknesses in political opportunity theory:

First, conditions do not independently favor insurgency by a group. Analyzing context effects requires taking insurgent practices into account. Second, macro-structural effects on insurgency are mediated by meso-level institutional cleavages. Considering opportunities at the meso level allows much more precise explanation of the timing and influence of specific insurgencies. Third, context effects are interactive rather than independent. Opportunities determine the effects of insurgent practice rather than causing insurgency directly. (2015:396)

Bloom’s framework is unique because it brings together context and strategy in a way that is predictive of the kinds of insurgent practices that are more likely to be successful across a given institutional cleavage. Moreover it helps explain how and why, when a cleavage is reconfigured, a particular practice becomes ineffective. In the case of the civil rights movement, for example, activists effectively challenged authorities using sit-ins. When the state demanded integration, the practice no longer leveraged institutional cleavages, and was therefore no longer effective. The goal of insurgent movements, and the key to their success according to Bloom, is to develop and deploy insurgent practices across institutional cleavages.

Insurgent versus Institutionalized Practices

In his reconceptualization of political opportunity theory, Bloom focuses on insurgent practices. He neither discusses nor theorizes institutionalized practices, or those that seek redress by engaging official—usually state—channels such as lobbying, filing lawsuits, electoral politics, etc. Scholars have long differentiated between activists’ use of routine political advocacy and disruptive or contentious direct action; interest group scholarship in political science focuses on what is generally termed “insider” and “outsider” politics (see Kollman 1998; and Browne 1998),² and social movement scholars delineate between institutional and contentious politics.

Although there is a plethora of research tracing interest groups’ and social movements’ use of different tactics, scholars have not adequately dissected the relationship between strategies that engage the state and its

authority, and those that attempt to challenge it disruptively. As Bloom (2017) explains, a key problem is the focus on individual group membership rather than on mobilization practices:

The classical distinction revolves around the position of contending groups. *Members* are said to command sufficient resources and so advance their interests using institutionalized or “contained” means. Conversely *challengers* are largely excluded from access to institutionalized power, and seek to advance their interests by disrupting business as usual. But it turns out that the generalizable differences in kinds of mobilization actually concern the form of practice, not determined by group membership. Members of the same social group—and even the same individuals—can participate in either or both types of mobilization simultaneously. The more salient distinction in mobilization dynamics is not driven by *who* is mobilizing, but by *how* they are mobilizing.³

The extant literature also provides little theoretical guidance about when each of these types of strategies or practices is more advantageous and in what political context. Social movement theorists tend to reify disruptive and insurgent activity and therefore miss its complex relationship with routine institutionalized practices. This is problematic given that almost no movements have historically utilized insurgent practices to the exclusion of all others. In reality, activists often employ a variety of strategies simultaneously, both institutionalized and insurgent, marked as insider and outsider. During the civil rights struggle, for example, sit-ins and freedom rides were carried out in combination with lawsuits and lobbying. Moreover scholars’ emphasis on disruptive behavior paradoxically undermines the notion of political opportunity structure because political openings actually minimize the need to employ insurgent action by providing less costly avenues for pursuing policy goals.

Field Theory, Social Change, and Agency

Theoretical approaches that foreground institutional fields are quite useful in pushing forward a more integrated framework for understanding the dynamic between social movement strategies and political context in general, and how social movements influence policy using both

institutionalized politics and insurgent action in particular. Throughout the book we use the term “institutional field” (hereafter “field”). Although we could easily substitute “arena” for “field,” we decided to use the latter because it is widely utilized and theorized across sociological literatures (see Martin 2003; Davis et al. 2005; Fligstein and McAdam 2012).

The field concept emerges from two theoretical traditions: Bourdieu’s work on social fields, and in organizational theory. For Bourdieu, the social spaces that constitute fields—art, economics, etc.—represent the structures of different components of social life through which power is constituted, contested, and reproduced as individuals pursue common interests (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Swedberg 2006). For organizational theorists, a field is constituted by like organizations that directly interact or are indirectly oriented to each other, and that “in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life . . .” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:674–665). Although there are different ways to constitute fields,⁴ most organizational scholars focus on the dynamics of a single field and define it to map onto existing categorizations of industries or sectors (see Meyer and Scott 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1991). When policy questions are addressed, then, industry-specific regulatory agents and other state actors who influence that substantive industry are all aggregated within a single field (see Laumann and Knoke 1987).

Here we adopt Fligstein and McAdam’s more broad definition of fields as “constructed social orders that define an arena within which a set of consensually defined and mutually attuned actors vie for advantage” (2012:64). Incorporating the concept of a constructed social order is important, because it delineates fields not only by networks of actors, but also by specific institutional logics and discrete norms. The idea of a set of consensually defined and mutually attuned actors is particularly important—a field adheres as a coherent entity only to the extent that the actions of actors operating within it are motivated, shaped, and constrained by the features of that field.⁵ Defining fields in terms of actors who constantly vie for advantage also recognizes the inherent dynamism of fields—change is constant and actors can use their skills to stimulate it in various ways.

Organizational scholars generally focus on what happens *within* individual fields. For example, research has focused on the creation of new fields, competing logics inside fields, and the effect of outsiders on fields (see Clemens 1993; Scott et al. 2000; Armstrong 2002; Schneiberg and Soule 2005; Lounsbury 2007; Duffy, Binder, and Skrentny 2010). Their

research provides a theoretical foundation for understanding social movement influence by: (1) emphasizing the networked nature of the political terrain, in which relationships between “hubs” within a field predominate and in which hierarchies of actors exist; (2) highlighting the social constructedness of the terrain, in which widely shared beliefs may limit the parameters of political debate and shape the perception of what is possible; and (3) underlining the importance of informal norms and formal regulations that restrict and channel action. Although fields have different internal logics, all are organized such that actors, beliefs, and rules matter.

Organizational scholars recognize that changes occur within fields, and frequently examine how actors (and social movements) devise strategies to influence a given field. What is not well theorized in the organizations and social movements literatures, however, is how activists can forge novel sources of power by leveraging *across* fields. Despite extensive scholarship on internal field dynamics, there has been little work on the dynamics *between* and *across* individual fields.⁶ Fligstein and McAdam highlight this problem: “Virtually all of the previous work on fields, however, focuses only on the internal workings of these orders, depicting them as largely self-contained, autonomous worlds” (2012:18). It is surprising that organizations scholars have, for the most part, limited their analyses to *intra-field dynamics* given that social actors and organizations—including elements of the state itself—*almost always* straddle multiple fields in which the organizing principles, networks of actors, and institutional characteristics differ.

Laumann and Knoke’s (1987) “organizational state” provides a useful starting point for thinking about the points of leverage that straddle fields. Rejecting the unitary state that, at the time, was at the center of most international relations theories, Laumann and Knoke conceived of the state as a complex grouping of multiple overlapping policy fields (which they call domains)⁷ that include both state and nonstate actors and organizations.⁸ This conceptualization foregrounds the relevance of actors outside a field and the influence hierarchies within it rather than perpetuating a simple division of insiders and outsiders. The policy domain/field concept extends social movement ideas about elites and challengers; not all nonstate actors are challengers because they may hold “hub” positions within a given field. Conversely, politicians can be “challengers” to a dominant ideology within a policy field.

Although Laumann and Knoke’s model illuminates the routine functioning of policy decision-making, it does not offer theoretical

purchase on how social movement activists engage fields, or examine the mechanisms that allow them to achieve policy outcomes across fields. They argue that most policy fields are characterized by stability, in which a core group of actors dominates the determination of policy problems and governmental solutions. Only a very small number of decisions become the subject of public controversy, which, Laumann and Knoke argue, is “the result of poorly understood processes whereby key actors come to contest the symbolic framing in which ‘routine’ decisions had heretofore been made.”⁹ It is this issue of politicization that lies at the heart of the NAFTA battle, and that remains insufficiently understood.

In contrast to Laumann and Knoke, Fligstein and McAdam foreground the instability of fields. Indeed, at its core, their analysis of fields offers a more general theory of social change and agency. They locate possibilities for both in the relationship *between* fields: “The main theoretical implication of the interdependence of fields is that the broader field environment is a source of routine, rolling turbulence in modern society. A significant change in any given strategic action field is like a stone thrown in a still pond sending ripples outward to all proximate fields” (2012:19). They explain the important connections between fields, particularly those between nonstate and state fields:

the long-term prospects for stability and change in a field are affected at least as much by threats and opportunities that arise outside of the field—usually in proximate fields or the state—as those within the strategic action field itself. To accurately capture the dynamics of any given field the analyst must, in our view, understand the internal structure and workings of the field and the broader set of relationships that tie any given field to a host of other strategic action fields (including various state fields). (p. 169)

Fligstein and McAdam extend Laumann and Knoke’s conception of the state as overlapping policy fields by suggesting a way to understand how actors come to contest or politicize issues in fields: it is how skilled social actors use their position in fields, the resources available to them, and their connections to others in and outside the field that determines their ability to reproduce a field or alter it. This framework is very useful for thinking about how social actors (including social movement actors) can influence state policy. Fligstein and McAdam’s formalization of a theory of state and nonstate fields expands upon Laumann and Knoke’s initial

model, and builds upon our 2008 conceptualization of the state as: “an aggregation of multiple fields that overlap with non-state fields” (Evans and Kay 2008:973).

Reconceptualizing Political Opportunities in Relationship to Intersecting Fields

Although Fligstein and McAdam consider how fields can be interconnected (distant and proximate, dependent and interdependent, nested and hierarchical) and therefore where sites of stability and stasis across them might lie, they do not specifically locate sources of leverage in the places where fields intersect. Indeed, they focus on crises within fields as sites of transformation and opportunity: “Challengers may find an opening (what social movement theorists call a “political opportunity”) to force changes on the existing order. They may ally themselves with other dominant groups, invaders from other fields, or state actors to help reconstitute a given field” (2012:112). We extend their theory by showing how points of intersection *across* state and nonstate fields can be leveraged strategically by activists to achieve specific policy outcomes. And, we go one step further, suggesting that political opportunities emerge from how both state and nonstate fields intersect, which creates unique points of leverage that render particular targets more vulnerable and strategies more effective. In conceptualizing political opportunity structures as leverage points across institutional fields, we weave together useful strands of the social movement and organizations literatures to build a framework that extends our understanding of the dynamic between social movement strategies and political context.¹⁰

Bloom’s understanding of political opportunities as institutional cleavages, then, is very similar to our conceptualization of them as leverage points across institutional fields, as we discussed in earlier work: “Our framework allows social movement scholars to reconceptualize political opportunity structures not simply as ‘windows’ that are randomly opened or closed to movement activists (requiring clairvoyance to detect and exploit), but rather as dynamic configurations of overlapping fields that can be leveraged strategically to achieve specific policy outcomes. Political opportunity structures are constituted where fields interlock. Key allies, powerful new frames, and resources for disadvantaged actors are found at the intersections where structural contradictions are highest” (Evans and Kay 2008:988).

When fields intersect, transformation in one field can occur because of the leverage derived from the way that it interlocks with other fields and as a result of networked actors operating in multiple fields.¹¹ The concept of inter-field leverage places *strategy* at the center of analysis because activists' influence on policy results from their ability to skillfully use leverage across fields. This is implicit in social movement analyses of organizational capacity-building, resource mobilization, and alliance building. But it is also a result of intersecting status hierarchies and spheres of influence that derive from interpersonal relationships, control of key resources, and ideological affinity. Fligstein and McAdam are explicit in their characterization of fields in these terms: "The links between fields are shaped by a number of factors: resource dependence, mutual beneficial interactions, sharing of power, information flows, and legitimacy" (2012:59).

Our focus on inter-field dynamics therefore allows us to show how activists utilize framing, resource mobilization, and coalition-building—all of which are core concepts in social movement scholarship—to leverage across fields. Our goal is to show how a field overlap framework helps to illuminate and specify the dynamics of these widely discussed movement strategies and mechanisms of political contention (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). We do not attempt to supplant these strategies with wholly new ones. Rather we attempt to expand our understanding of their relationship to political contexts. We suggest that their success and failure depends on how they are deployed across fields to exploit leverage points or, in Bloom's schema, institutional cleavages. What we are suggesting with our theory of field overlap, and what Bloom is offering with his theory of insurgent practice, is that leverage points always exist; success results from matching strategies/practices to the unique configuration of those points of leverage, unlocking the potential to transform power dynamics. Therefore, in addition to looking for specific strategies that succeed in some political contexts and not others as Amenta and colleagues urge (2010), we should also examine why only specific combinations of strategies (both insider and outsider) succeed in any given political context.

In showing how activists try to politicize issues and influence policy across fields, we thus foreground four strategies for: (1) shifting the framing of an issue across fields, (2) changing the rules across fields, (3) brokering resources across fields, and (4) building alliances and coalitions across fields. Framing strategies enable skilled actors to strategically adapt frames in one field in order to facilitate their resonance, adoption, or

reconceptualization in another field. They can build upon existing frame concordance between fields or translate conceptual understandings from one field to another, thereby reconceptualizing key political ideas or discursive parameters across fields and transforming the collective understanding of available political options.

The most fundamental changes occur when rule-making strategies are used to transform the rules bounding a preexisting field, which can advantage previously disadvantaged groups and transform influence hierarchies. Actors that lack influence within a field can draw upon relationships with others more influential in it to gain direct access to the field, increase their legitimacy within it, or indirectly influence decision-making. This captures the importance of alliance-building strategies and highlights the potentially transferable nature of influence; relationships outside of specific policy contexts can become an effective political resource, and legitimacy within one field can facilitate access to another. Skilled actors can also employ resource brokerage strategies by utilizing financial and/or political resources to gain influence or power in another field by inducing trade-offs, explicitly buying access, providing discourse-shaping information, etc. Social movement scholars have long recognized the importance of resources for political mobilization. Here, however, we emphasize the importance of resources that can be rallied externally and leveraged across fields.

Our framework helps explain how activists, who by definition begin from a position of relative political weakness, can have influence within a hostile field by leveraging resources across overlapping fields. State officials can have considerable statutory power in one state field and negligible influence in another. Activists may gain access to a state field in which they are marginal because of their influence in a nonstate field. The tendency of influence to permeate across fields results from institutional configurations that create intersecting status hierarchies, spheres of influence, and ideological affinities.

Using the NAFTA case, we show how activists can exploit sites of intersection with one field to change the parameters in another, use their position in one field to gain access to an intersecting field, use resources as leverage in another field, and expropriate legitimating discourse from one in pursuit of goals of another. By exploiting these points of leverage, activists can construct new policy issues—such as trade—as subjects of public controversy and try to influence how the decisions surrounding them are made. Understanding strategic action in relationship to overlapping fields, then, helps us illuminate and better understand the processes underlying

politicization. When we look at the contexts in which trade policy actors operate, for example, it quickly becomes apparent that they often stand at the intersection of multiple fields oriented to overlapping but not identical goals. Rather than draw a boundary around all the actors and institutions engaged in trade policy to define it as a single trade field, we believe it is more analytically useful to think of those actors as embedded in distinct yet intersecting fields that address trade issues in the context of broader problem-solving directives and that operate according to distinct institutional logics in the pursuit of those goals.¹² We now turn to a description of the fields, or arenas, relevant during the NAFTA negotiations.

Fields Relevant to NAFTA

The NAFTA battle included discrete time periods punctuated by decision points that brought different fields, actors, and points of leverage into play. Figure 2.1 provides a timeline of key events in NAFTA's history for readers to reference as they move through the text. We show how four key fields affected trade policy outcomes during the NAFTA struggle in the United States: the U.S. legislative field (herein the legislative field), the U.S. trade policy field (herein the trade policy field), the transnational trade negotiating field (herein the transnational negotiating field), and the grassroots politics field. Although the president, in coordination with his/her cabinet and members of his/her Economic Policy Council, possesses authority over the development of trade policy, Congress continues to legislate the parameters in which the president is allowed to operate.



FIGURE 2.1 NAFTA Timeline

The *legislative field* includes Congress, staff, and nonstate congressional advisors. Under the Constitution, Congress determines the conditions under which trade negotiations occur and ratifies trade agreements. Fast-track privileges (first introduced in the Trade Act of 1974), granted by Congress enable the Office of the USTR to negotiate changes in domestic law while restricting congressional ability to amend elements of an agreement; members can only vote up or down on the agreement as a whole. The distinction between power and influence is crucial in this context; although under present rules rank-and-file members of Congress lack the power to affect the details of international trade negotiations, they collectively maintain influence over the negotiation process through their nullifying power. Trade policy field members need to ensure that their actions do not tip the required numbers of legislators against the agreement; the win-set therefore includes the constellation of possible positions that will retain the support of the requisite majority. With most trade agreements, it is the point of ratification that provides the legislature as a whole with leverage. The degree of constraint experienced by negotiators will in part vary according to the ratification point; a priori ratifications provide greater latitude to negotiators than do ex post facto ratifications.¹³

The *trade policy field* includes the Office of the USTR and its staff, approximately a thousand nonstate members of official advisory committees, negotiators from various government offices, and members of Congress and staff involved in trade-related committees. Negotiating authority centers on the USTR, which operates as part of the executive branch and conducts negotiations on behalf of the president. USTR has ambassadorial and cabinet rank. The USTR includes negotiators with a variety of technical specialties, and it has historically operated with the broad mandate to promote trade liberalization. The USTR coordinates U.S. trade, and commodity and investment policy among the different departments responsible for trade issues, and helps develop U.S. trade strategy.¹⁴

During NAFTA negotiations, ten members of Congress were appointed as congressional advisers to international trade negotiations. The House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee were regularly briefed on USTR activity and consulted for advice, and they provided crucial input on negotiating drafts. In addition, Congressional committees that are regularly involved in specific trade-related matters include: the House Banking and Financial Services, Commerce, and International Relations Committees, the Senate

Foreign Relations, Banking, and Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committees. The trade policy field therefore spans both the executive and legislative branches, even though the USTR officially negotiates on behalf of the president.

The NAFTA case illustrates the importance of conceptualizing the state as an aggregation of multiple fields that intersect with nonstate fields because the trade policy field has a unique corporatist structure that has institutionalized the participation of private companies and labor unions in trade policy development. Business and union leaders regularly meet with officials from the USTR to provide input and advice through a three-tier advisory system mandated by Congress. The first tier—the Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACTPN)—comprises executives appointed by the president who collectively represent key sectors of the U.S. economy affected by trade issues. The second tier consists of policy committees, such as those for investment and services, that provide policy advice concerning general policy areas. Finally, the third tier includes technical, sectoral, and commodity group committees that provide information about the effects trade policies will have on specific sectors. During NAFTA negotiations the Labor Advisory Committee consisted of approximately eighty union members and represented a broad range of organized labor groups.¹⁵ Not only do such seats provide routinized access to USTR negotiations, but they also legitimize the position of those nonstate actors as participants within the field itself.

Participation in the USTR advisory system, however, is heavily weighted in favor of representatives from the largest U.S. companies. Participants in ACTPN during NAFTA negotiations included the heads of major U.S. corporations. At least ten of the forty-five companies represented on ACTPN at that time had facilities or subsidiaries in Mexico,¹⁶ and only two representatives were labor leaders. The configuration of the trade policy field thereby institutionalizes the influence of large corporations on trade policy through the hierarchy of USTR advisory committees.¹⁷

The *grassroots politics field* encompasses the public arena distinct from the state in which mobilization to affect state policy outcomes occurs. Action within this field includes a broad range of activity, both routine and contentious: press conferences, mass marches, petition signings, sit-ins, and political theater. But although mobilization in the grassroots politics field may ultimately be oriented to influencing state decision-makers, the

field's defining characteristic is the public nature of that mobilization. It therefore expands the reference group by which government decision-makers measure their actions. It is within this field that collective identity and mobilization potential is collectively constituted, either through coordinated activity or political response (i.e., voting blocs). We refer to mobilization in the grassroots politics field as "popular politics" to distinguish it from the direct "advocacy politics" that occurs in the U.S. trade policy and legislative fields.

The *transnational negotiating field* includes the negotiators and staff empowered to represent their nations in trade negotiations. During NAFTA negotiations it included U.S., Mexican, and Canadian trade policy representatives. The field underlines the relationship between action in domestic and international fields; negotiators are influenced by the actors, rules, resource considerations, and policy frames of their own domestic trade policy fields, those of their counterparts, and those within the field itself.

Leveraging across Fields during NAFTA's Negotiation

Unlike most scholarship on trade that focuses broadly on overall negotiating outcomes, we narrow our analysis to how activists politicized trade during the NAFTA battle, and how they shaped key but limited outcomes: linking labor and environmental rights and protections to trade, changing the rules to win formal recognition and participation of environmental organizations on trade advisory committees, and demanding that labor and environmental protections, however weak, be included in the agreement. Because our analysis seeks to understand how social movements influence state policies, we do not engage the very diverse and broad trade policy literature that largely focuses on international relations and inter-state negotiations. We view our contribution here to the social movements and organizations literatures (and even more specifically, in bridging key elements of them), rather than to trade policy theory.

It is also important to note that although what happens in individual fields is important to the NAFTA story, our focus here is on the processes that occur across multiple fields. This does not mean that we ignore activities within fields that are critical to understanding trade politicization. We explore, for example, how anti-NAFTA organizations built their coalition

within the grassroots politics field, and we address how obstacles within the legislative field made it difficult for activists to achieve more. We argue, however, that the data shows that the best explanation of how activists politicized and influenced trade outcomes lies not in what transpired in any one field, but rather, in the dynamics across them.

Trade Politics prior to NAFTA

THE CONFIGURATION OF the trade policy field and the characteristics of its intersection with the legislative and transnational negotiating fields were formed during decades of political contention and negotiation in the years preceding NAFTA's introduction. The trade policy field was dominated by a political elite who blamed the Great Depression on high tariffs and believed that the key to postwar stability was a more integrated global economy led by the United States. In the years following the onset of the Great Depression, these trade policy officials created an elaborate U.S. policymaking system designed to support continuous reductions in barriers to trade. They helped establish a global framework to reduce or eliminate trade barriers under GATT. And to further shield Congress from constituent pressures to enact protectionist measures, they utilized a fast-track mechanism (a provision of the Trade Act of 1974) that gave the president authority to negotiate trade barrier reductions without congressional amendments. The combination of a committed network of trade policy field actors and rules that facilitated a reduction in trade barriers was effective. By the 1970s, world trade had been significantly liberalized, and at home there was very little opposition to this policy approach.

As global trade expanded, however, support for it began to slip in the legislative field. The deteriorating plight of import-affected industries in the 1970s and 1980s, the unfair trade practices of some of the United States's global competitors, an overvalued dollar, and rising trade deficits took their toll. The majority of members of Congress were still unwilling to fundamentally tamper with the rules constituting the trade policy field, but they did begin to use influence (derived from their ultimate ability to pass trade agreements) to press for trade policies that were more fair. Members of Congress prodded U.S. trade policy officials to work more