

“RIPPED OFF”: CHINA, THE AMERICAN POPULIST RIGHT, AND
GEOECONOMIC STATECRAFT

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ABSTRACT

Geoeconomics has become a defining element of international relations and international law in the post-Cold War era. A topic of growing importance among international legal scholars, geoeconomics is broadly defined as the use of coercive economic legal tools to gain a relative strategic advantage over rival states. Under the leadership of former President Donald Trump, the United States drastically expanded its use of geoeconomic tools and strategies, particularly towards the People’s Republic of China. Through various geoeconomic mechanisms (such as tariffs, circumventing WTO procedures, pressuring third state economies, and primary and secondary sanctions against firms), Trump undertook an aggressive campaign to gain strategic advantages over China. While the Biden Administration has continued many of Trump’s policies, it was Trump who first adopted such wide-ranging geoeconomic posturing. Yet the embrace of geoeconomics by the Trump Administration did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, certain segments of American society across the political spectrum supported and encouraged this move by the Trump Administration. Among the most powerful sectors supporting geoeconomic resistance against China was a group central to the rise of Trump’s political fortunes: his “base,” the American populist right. This article seeks to explain the reasons behind the populist right’s calls for resistance against China, and how such calls helped to pave the way for Trump’s geoeconomics. I argue that populist right-wing anger towards China is largely born out of an incremental yet profound social change regarding neoliberalism. Due to a variety of socioeconomic and philosophical developments, the populist right has developed the perception that neoliberal policies and institutions are beneficial to China—at the expense of American interests and global primacy. It is this decades-long social change among the populist right that helped to give Trump the political opportunity to use geoeconomics resist neoliberal policies and institutions, attempt to gain relative advantages over China, and end a long period of getting “ripped off.”

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I. INTRODUCTION

On May 29, 2020, then-U.S. President Donald Trump gave a Rose Garden address at the White House in which he attacked one of his favorite targets: the People’s Republic of China. “For decades,” the president declared, “[China has] ripped off the United States like no one has ever done before.” Trump went on to bemoan the perception that international institutions, domestic actors, and even past presidents had willingly allowed China to “rip off” the American people. The president claimed that these individuals and institutions gave China the leeway to violate its World Trade Organization (WTO) commitments, steal intellectual property, raid American factories, and force domestic jobs to move offshore. To respond to this injustice, President Trump declared that the U.S. would take a powerful step to counter growing Chinese aggression: “eliminating policy exemptions that give Hong Kong different and special treatment.” For decades, the U.S. had established special economic agreements with Hong Kong that gave the island special treatment with regards to American trade. Those days, President Trump declared, were over. China’s aggressive posturing needed consequences, and the United States would utilize powerful economic weapons to both exact retaliatory pain on the Chinese government for its

misdeeds and ensure that the U.S. had the tools to compete economically with the East Asian giant.¹

The substance of Trump’s attack was not particularly unique to his administration. Prior administrations had similarly (albeit with less aggressive rhetoric) bemoaned perceived Chinese malevolence on the world stage. The George W. Bush Administration, for example, spent much time pressing the case against perceived Chinese religious intolerance.² The Barack Obama Administration expressed frustration at Chinese maneuvering in the South China Sea, alleged currency manipulation, and intellectual property theft.³ What is unique with respect to the Trump years, however, is the degree of focus on China and the resulting policy initiatives. Trump’s rhetoric during the Rose Garden address was nothing new; in fact, it was perfectly in-line with the kind of rhetoric that the former real estate mogul had used throughout his dual presidential campaigns and single term in office. The president’s frequent use of anti-China rhetoric—from declaring that “We can’t continue to allow China to rape our country” during a 2016 campaign rally,⁴ to claiming that “China has consistently taken advantage of the American economy with practices that undermine fair and reciprocal trade” in a 2018 White House statement⁵—was a centerpiece of his presidential runs and foreign policy initiatives. Though prior presidents had expressed frustrations with China, none had focused on China with the degree of intensity displayed by Trump. Furthermore, the policy actions undertaken by the Trump Administration were quite different from his predecessors in their scope. The Trump White House adopted a series of legal tools to complement the president’s rhetoric, including imposing widespread tariffs on Chinese goods and restricting domestic firms from making sales to certain Chinese companies.⁶ Though

¹ Donald Trump, Remarks by President Trump on Actions Against China (May 29, 2020) (transcript available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-actions-china/>).

² See Matt Spetalnick & Jeremy Pelofsky, *Bush Presses China on Religious Freedom in Visit*, REUTERS (Aug. 9, 2008, 9:56 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-bush/bush-presses-china-on-religious-freedom-in-visit-idUSN0947249120080810>.

³ See Jin Canrong, *How America’s Relationship With China Changed Under Obama*, WORLD ECON. FORUM (Dec. 14, 2016), <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/12/america-china-relationship/>; *Obama says to keep pressing China on currency, intellectual property*, REUTERS (Dec. 11, 2014), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-obama/obama-says-to-keep-pressing-china-on-currency-intellectual-property-idUSKBN0JP20120141211>.

⁴ *Trump Accuses China of ‘Raping’ US With Unfair Trade Policy*, BBC NEWS (May 2, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-36185012>.

⁵ *President Donald J. Trump is Confronting China’s Unfair Trade Policies*, THE WHITE HOUSE (May 29, 2018), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-confronting-chinas-unfair-trade-policies/>.

⁶ See Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, *Special report: Trump’s U.S.-China transformation* for a concise summary of the actions taken by the Trump Administration against China, AXIOS,

prior administrations had adopted some elements of these policies (the Obama Administration, for example, slapped a 35 percent tariff on Chinese tires)⁷ none had taken the dramatic steps of the Trump Administration, in which all-out trade war developed and trillions of dollars of goods were caught in the line of fire.

This is not to say, however, that Trump's actions emerged solely out of a vacuum and that Trump alone was responsible for the shift in tone and policy towards China. Instead, Trump's rhetoric and policymaking towards the Far East was in many ways a consequence of a decades-long simmering of frustration and resentment among America's populist right. The populist right—often described as Trump's "base"⁸—played an important role in Trump's foreign policy thinking. Decades-long economic and social developments within the populist right lead the political faction to develop strong anti-China feelings. These feelings were recognized by Trump, and helped to play a large part in laying the groundwork for the U.S. to adopt an anti-China platform and implement sweeping reforms to the Sino-American relationship.

Trump's actions towards China were also striking with regards to the methods employed to both exact punishment and achieve greater economic equity. During the Cold War, American presidents utilized a series of geopolitical strategies to both punish Soviet aggression and place the United States in a relative strategic advantage to its chief rival. These geopolitical tools were wide-ranging, employing such methods as military build-up, alliance formation, and diplomatic triangulation.⁹ This approach to the Soviet Union was nothing new, as nations have long used geopolitical tools to achieve relative security advantages over rivals.¹⁰ Trump, however, took a decidedly different approach in dealing with America's top 21st Century rival. In dealing with China, Trump did not rely as heavily on the same kind of

(Jan. 19, 2021) <https://www.axios.com/trump-china-policy-special-report-154fa5c2-469d-4238-8d72-f0641abc0dfa.html>.

⁷ See Patrick Gillespie, *Obama Got Tough on China. It Cost U.S. Jobs and Raised Prices*, CNN MONEY (Jan. 3, 2017, 3:41 PM ET), <https://money.cnn.com/2017/01/03/news/economy/obama-china-tire-tariff/index.html>.

⁸ See, e.g., Bart Bonikowski, *Trump's Populism: The Mobilization of Nationalist Cleavages and the Future of US Democracy*, in *WHEN DEMOCRACY TRUMPS POPULISM: EUROPE & LATIN AMERICA LESSONS FOR THE UNITED STATES* 110, 110–131 (Kurt Weyland and Raúl Madrid eds., 2019).

⁹ For a general explanation of American geopolitical strategies during the Cold War, see generally Geoffrey Warner, *Geopolitics and the Cold War*, in *THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE COLD WAR* (Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde eds., 2013).

¹⁰ One can cite a myriad of examples of how America's geopolitical posturing during the Cold War was reflective of earlier international rivalries; pre-World War I and II rivalries, 19th Century imperialist rivalries, and early 19th Century British-French rivalries were all defined by similar geopolitical posturing. See, e.g., Donald S. Spencer, *A Short History of Geopolitics*, 87 *J. OF GEOGRAPHY* 42 (1988).

geopolitical strategies that were employed by his Cold War predecessor to combat the rising power of the Soviet Union. Trump instead relied primarily on series of economic and legal tools to achieve strategic advantages and attempt to roll back growing Chinese power. This reliance on economic and legal tools to influence international relations is a phenomenon known as *geo-economics*, and it adds a unique dimension to Trump’s rivalry with the Far East.¹¹ The Biden Administration has continued, and in many ways expanded, Trump’s *geo-economic* platform. Yet Trump was the origin of America’s new, and increasingly aggressive, *geo-economic* strategy.

This article seeks to explain how Trump’s base—the populist right—played a key role in paving the way for Trump’s *geo-economic* agenda. Although other groups in American society surely embraced the similar anti-China sentiments, the focus on the populist right is important for the effect it had on Trump. Trump wisely identified this anti-China undercurrent within the populist right and realized this could be used as vehicle for electoral success—which, in turn, had a profound effect on Trump’s policymaking once in office. Although there were reasons beyond pleasing his base that Trump embraced *geo-economics*, the importance of the populist right in encouraging and shaping Trump’s policies in the Far East cannot be understated. To explain this development, an analysis must be conducted on: why the populist right came develop anti-China feelings, the effect this had on political discourse, and how this relates to the rise of Trump and his policy agenda. I argue that since the end of the Cold War, the populist right incrementally developed deep resentment and anger towards China. The source of these feelings is the perception that the neoliberal order—which has come to dominate both domestic and international politics since the Cold War’s conclusion—has unequally benefitted China at the expense of the United States. This has produced a world in which American primacy is threatened, domestic workers are harmed, and an “ungodly” state in the Far East has been given the opportunity to assert itself internationally. It is for this reason that the populist right not only approved of, but also encouraged the abandonment of neoliberal principles and the adoption of *geo-economic* strategies against China.

To explain the intersection of populist *geo-economics* and China, this article will be divided into several parts. Part I will discuss the relationship between *geo-economics* and neoliberalism. I will begin by briefly sketching how *geo-economics* emerged and came to dominate the international landscape. I then explain how the neoliberal international order helped to

¹¹ For a greater description of this phenomenon, see Henry Farrell & Abraham Newman, *Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion*, 44 INT’L SEC. 42 (2019); see also Mark Leonard, *Introduction*, in *CONNECTIVITY WARS* (Mark Leonard ed., 2016).

facilitate the rise of geoeconomics as a mechanism for interstate interaction and coercion.

Part II will discuss how the populist right responded to the rise of neoliberalism. I first note that the populist right is not a monolith, and to understand the thinking of the populist right it is important to look at the beliefs of individual factions that comprise the populist right. I focus specifically on the two largest and most influential factions: working-class whites (who account for upwards of two-fifths of the American electorate, and 70 percent of whom backed Trump) and white Evangelicals. I detail how each group developed a hostility towards neoliberalism. While the white working-class resentment to the neoliberal order is largely grounded in the lived economic experiences of this group, the white Evangelical anger is part of a much deeper philosophical anger and resentment.

Part III will turn towards China. I first explain how China has in fact benefitted from the neoliberal order, as the nation has used neoliberalism to its advantage and has allowed the state to emerge from Third World status to near (if not total) superpower capabilities. I tie China's benefit from the neoliberal order to the populist right, who saw China as the primary beneficiary of neoliberalism. As China advanced within the neoliberal system, the populist right saw itself and the United States as a whole as the victims of this rise. China's rise was thus seen to have come at the expense of American national security and economic primacy.

Part IV will discuss how the populist right—and its champion, Donald Trump—ultimately embraced geoeconomics as the tool to roll back China's advances through the neoliberal order. I explain how Trump took advantage of populist right anger during his 2016 run, and transformed that anger into concrete policy and legal action once in office.

II. NEOLIBERALISM AND GEOECONOMICS

On their face, neoliberalism and geoeconomics do not necessarily seem to intersect. Neoliberalism defines a set of largely laissez-faire economic and legal policies, while geoeconomics refers to coercive economic measures taken within the sphere of international law. These two conceptions can, practically speaking, exist independent of each other. Yet in the modern age, the two are deeply intertwined. Neoliberal policies and institutions have established a world that is increasingly interconnected both technologically and economically—and it is this interconnectedness that often makes geoeconomics strategies so effective. The global interdependence championed by neoliberalism ensures that tariffs, sanctions, or other geoeconomic strategies have a powerful effect on the target state. At the same time, neoliberal policies have provoked negative domestic reactions, and many governments have turned to geoeconomics to roll back the tide of neoliberalism.

This section seeks to unveil the heart of this relationship between geoeconomics and neoliberalism. I will first provide very broad definitions of geoeconomics and neoliberalism. I then briefly sketch the rise of neoliberalism and how neoliberal policies and institutions began to face deep challenges during the 21st Century. I will then discuss how the rise of and challenges facing neoliberalism ultimately led to the development of modern geoeconomics. This section will not focus on either the U.S. populist right or China; instead, this section will provide a broad theoretical understanding of the relationship between the two central policy forces at play in this article.

A. *Some Definitions*

In defining geoeconomics, I rely on Jennifer Harris and Ambassador Robert Blackwill’s apt description: “The use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations’ economic actions on a country’s geopolitical goals.”¹² With this definition in mind, it should be noted that the study of geoeconomics is relatively new among scholars of international law. Edward Luttwak’s 1990 article, “From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics,” opened the first serious inquiry into geoeconomic thinking. Luttwak argued that in the wake of the post-Cold War era, military might would no longer be the focus of relations between states; rather, commerce would emerge as the centerpiece of international affairs.¹³ Luttwak further posited that the causes and instruments of international conflict would be commerce and economics. These conflicts would develop not just as a replacement to traditional military confrontation, but also to ensure that states could maximize domestic economic vitality.¹⁴ In the nearly thirty years since Luttwak posited this thesis, his predictions have largely come to fruition. Global military conflict has been relatively limited, while states have more routinely used economic tools to either respond to perceived malevolent behavior or to gain a strategic upper hand.¹⁵ Part of the growing reliance on geoeconomic strategies can be attributed to the increasing globalized nature of national economies. As states become more and more dependent on each other, international economic conflict contains the potential to inflict greater and greater damage on domestic marketplaces. This geoeconomic phenomenon has been labeled by professors Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman as “weaponized interdependence.”¹⁶

¹² ROBERT D. BLACKWILL & JENNIFER M. HARRIS, *WAR BY OTHER MEANS: GEOECONOMICS AND STATECRAFT* 21 (Harvard University Press, 2016).

¹³ Edward Luttwak, *From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics*, 20 NAT’L INTEREST 17 (1990).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 20-21.

¹⁵ See BLACKWILL & HARRIS, *supra* note 12, at 1–18.

¹⁶ See generally Farrell & Newman, *supra* note 11.

According to political scientist Mark Leonard, nations presently employ three main geoeconomic strategies. The first is “economic warfare,” in which states project “power through their influence over the global economy, finance (including the dollar and euro), and trade, and through their control over multinational corporations domiciled in their countries.”¹⁷ Common tools in economic warfare include sanctions, currency manipulation, and trade wars.¹⁸ The second strategy is the “weaponization of international institutions,” in which “countries undermine the international system by gridlocking institutions or pushing for a selective application of the rules.”¹⁹ The final strategy is “infrastructure competition,” in which leading regional powers try to “make other countries dependent on them” (there is perhaps no better example of this than China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative, which is aimed at spurring Chinese infrastructure investment across Eurasia).²⁰ For our purposes, I will primarily focus on the first two categories of geoeconomic strategies, as these have been the preferred tools in the Trump Administration’s geoeconomic conflict with China.

Turning to neoliberalism, although an exact definition is somewhat squishy, there is a general consensus that neoliberalism refers to the resurgence of 19th Century liberal economic policies in both the domestic and international spheres starting in the 1970’s and continuing through the present-day. Domestic neoliberal policies typically include a support for free markets, deregulation, and controlled government spending. International neoliberal policies tend to support globalization and free trade, and place a high degree of value on international legal institutions (such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO).²¹

B. *The Rise of Neoliberalism: A (Very) Brief Overview*

Scholars tend to place the timing of neoliberalism’s *dominance* in both the U.S. and internationally at the late-1970’s and early-1980’s, corresponding with the rise of a slate of conservative leaders in the West (such as Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan in the United States, and Malcom Fraser in Australia).²² Yet neoliberal policies and

¹⁷ Leonard, *CONNECTIVITY WARS*, *supra* note 11, at 16.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 17-18.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 19.

²⁰ *Id.* at 21.

²¹ See SIMON SPRINGER ET AL., *THE HANDBOOK OF NEOLIBERALISM* 1-15 (Routledge, 2016); see also NATALIE GOLDSTEIN, *GLOBALIZATION & FREE TRADE* 29-60 (Infobase Publishing, 2007).

²² See MANFRED B. STEGER & RAVI V. KOY, *NEOLIBERALISM* 21 (Oxford University Press, 2010) (“The rise of neoliberalism in the English-speaking world is most notably associated with US President Ronald Reagan (1981–8) and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979–90). Their fervent campaign to put an end to Keynesian-style ‘big government’

institutions began their *ascent* in the years immediately following the Second World War. Neoliberalist policies place a high degree of emphasis on the importance of international institutions, which neoliberals believe play a vital role in facilitating international economic growth and stability.²³ Many of the international institutions that neoliberals value—such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank—emerged during the early post-war era. These institutions were products of the Bretton Woods system: a post-war system designed to establish an international legal framework around issues of monetary policy, trade, and investment.²⁴

Although neoliberal internationalism was beginning to develop in the early-post war era, domestic neoliberalism had yet to begin its ascent. It took nearly forty years after the establishment of Bretton Woods for the West to transition from Keynesian domestic economics to neoliberal domestic economics. The rise of neoliberal economists (such as the Chicago School economists) had a profound impact on conservative policy positions, and neoliberalism began its dominion over Western domestic politics with the rise of conservative governments in the 1970’s and 80’s. Thatcher, Reagan, and others implemented core aspects of neoliberal doctrine: tax-cutting, deregulation, market liberalization, and privatization.²⁵ Neoliberalism cemented its hold over domestic politics when the leftist successors to the conservative governments similarly embraced neoliberal agendas in the 1990’s. From Bill Clinton in the U.S., to Tony Blair in the U.K., to Jean Chrétien in Canada, the center-left leaders of the 1990’s largely did not re-implement hard left economic policies and instead reaffirmed neoliberalism’s dominance.²⁶

Neoliberalism’s grip began to further harden in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Former Warsaw Pact nations, and nations in East Asia and South America, began to adopt neoliberal policies—often with much success. A number of East Asian neoliberalist governments, including in South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand, presided over a period of immense economic growth

was shared by the Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975–83) and the Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (1984–93).”).

²³ For a good outline of this theory, see Arthur A. Stein, *Neoliberal Institutionalism*, in *THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF INT’L RELS.* 201-221 (Christian Reus-Smit & Duncan Snidal eds., 2008).

²⁴ See Sandra Kollen Ghizoni, *Creation of the Bretton Woods System*, FED. RESERVE HISTORY, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/bretton-woods-created>.

²⁵ See STEGER & KOY, *supra* note 22, at 21-22.

²⁶ See, e.g., Deborah Phillips & Gary Whannel, *Neoliberalism and New Labour: From Thatcher to Blair*, in *THE TROJAN HORSE: THE GROWTH OF COMMERCIAL SPONSORSHIP* 67-92 (Bloomsbury, 2013); Daniel Altman, *The irresistible, unassailable Third Way? Not anymore*, N.Y. TIMES, July 6, 2005.

in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War.²⁷ At the same time, a number of developments at the international level helped to further neoliberalism's dominance. The creation of the WTO in 1995 helped to extend the influence of neoliberal international institutions,²⁸ while the creation of a number of multilateral free trade pacts (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA) cemented neoliberalism's dominance over international trade.²⁹

One of the major results of these developments was a further integration of the world's economies. Neoliberal policies and institutions helped to encourage greater economic specialization among global economies,³⁰ which resulted in many nations moving further from autarky and closer to globalized interdependence.³¹ This increasing interdependence created a world in which domestic economic decisions in one nation increasingly impacted the economies of foreign states. Additionally, this neoliberal facilitation of globalization helped to encourage the relocation of manufacturing hubs from developed nations to developing states with high amounts of low-wage laborers, such as China, Indonesia, and India.³² As we shall see, these two major developments—interdependence and manufacturing relocation—had important impacts on both geoeconomics and American views on neoliberalism.

²⁷ See STEGER & KOY, *supra* note 22, at 76-79.

²⁸ For a good explanation of the ties between neoliberalism and the WTO, see Elaine Hartwick & Richard Peet, *Neoliberalism and Nature: The Case of the WTO*, 590 ANNALS OF THE AM. ACAD. OF POL. & SOC. SCI. 188-211 (2003).

²⁹ For a good outline of neoliberalism and free trade agreements in the post-Cold War era, see Cynthia Moe-Lobeda & Daniel Spencer, *Free Trade Agreements and the Neo-Liberal Economic Paradigm: Economic, Ecological, and Moral Consequences*, 10 POL. THEOLOGY 658 (2015).

³⁰ The relationship between specialization and global interdependence is well-outlined. See Carsten Eckel, *Globalization and Specialization*, 75 J. OF INT'L ECON. 219 (2008).

³¹ This is no better exemplified than with the global transition to interdependent supply chains. Professor Willy Shih provides the following apt description: "The days are long gone when a single vertically-integrated manufacturer like Ford or General Motors could design and manufacture all or most of the subassemblies and components it needs to make a finished product. Technology is just too complicated, and it is impossible to possess all the skills that are necessary in just one place. Consequently, manufacturers have turned to specialists and subcontractors who narrowly focus on just one area — and even those specialists have to rely on many others. And just as the world has come to rely on different regions for natural resources like iron ore or lithium metal, so too has it become dependent on regions where these specialists reside. . . . The end result is that we have many suppliers scattered around the world upon whom manufacturers depend for critical components." Willy C. Shih, *Bringing Manufacturing Back to the U.S. Is Easier Said Than Done*, HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW (Apr. 15, 2020), <https://hbr.org/2020/04/bringing-manufacturing-back-to-the-u-s-is-easier-said-than-done>.

³² See Erica R. H. Fuchs, *Global Manufacturing and the Future of Technology*, 345 SCI. 519 (2014).

C. *Challenges to the Neoliberal Order*

By the dawn of the 21st Century, neoliberalism had largely established its grip over the global economy. Even those states that proclaimed their hostility to liberal principles (such as China) began to adopt elements of neoliberal policies and participate in neoliberal international institutions.³³ Yet it was precisely at this point—the peak of neoliberalism’s dominance—that cracks in the neoliberal consensus began to develop.

Between the end of the Cold War and 2007, the world had not yet experienced a major instance of how global connectedness could have potentially devastating consequences. In this period, the global economy hummed at a remarkably productive level, with many nations achieving high levels of economic growth.³⁴ There were, of course, exceptions to this remarkable period of global growth. Major economic crises—such as the 1994 Mexican peso crisis, the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and Russia’s 1998 sovereign debt crisis—punctuated economic expansion. What is interesting to note about these periods of economic distress, however, is that international economic leaders often encouraged or forced neoliberal solutions to these crises. During the 1997 Asian crisis, for example, the IMF conditioned its support on a series of neoliberal economic measures, including: reductions in deficit spending, increases in interest rates, and allowing certain financial institutions to fail. Furthermore, these crises were rather isolated to particular regions and did not develop into global contagions. As a result, the globe did not experience any sort of world-wide reckoning with the potential drawbacks of a neoliberal international order.³⁵

The seeming endless bounty offered by neoliberalism met a stark reality, however, with brewing troubles in the U.S. housing market. The interconnectedness of the global economy extended itself to financial markets, as the trading of highly complex securities across borders became an increasingly common practice within the world’s major financial institutions. Among the most popular of financial products sold around the globe was the American mortgage-backed security (MBS), whose value was dependent on the values of the U.S. home mortgages that comprised each security. When the American housing market collapsed between 2006 and 2008, the many holders of MBSs (and the many investors that insured MBSs through credit default swaps) across the globe saw the value of their investments plummet.

³³ See Jane Duckett, *Neoliberalism, Authoritarian Politics and Social Policy in China*, 51 DEV. & CHANGE 523 (2020).

³⁴ See Nicholas Crafts, *The World Economy in the 1990s: A Long Run Perspective*, in THE GLOB. ECON. IN THE 1990’S 21 (Paul W. Rhode & Gianni Toniolo eds., 2006).

³⁵ See Neil Dias Karunartne, *The Asian Miracle and Crisis: Rival Theories, the IMF Bailout and Policy Lessons*, 34 INTERECONOMICS 19, 21–26 (1999).

This ultimately resulted in a global credit crunch, forcing many of the world's economies into either recessions or depressions.³⁶

The 2008 housing crisis, and the subsequent global economic catastrophe, illustrated both the extent to which the globe had become truly interconnected economically and the limits of such interconnectedness. On its face, a housing bubble in the United States did not necessarily seem like the kind of recipe for a global economic catastrophe. Yet the revolutionary effects of neoliberalism had transformed a relatively isolated market bubble in the American home mortgage industry into a worldwide economic calamity. It should also be noted that much of the cause of the 2008 crisis has been laid at the feet of neoliberal policies, as a number of economists have blamed deregulatory efforts in the housing and financial sectors for the crisis's origins.³⁷ This led many to question the neoliberal order: whether it was worth it to be so interconnected; whether liberal economic policies that largely favored deregulation were prudent; whether the crisis could have been mitigated, or outright avoided, if the world had not swung so heavily towards neoliberalism.

As the 2008 crisis forced a reckoning with neoliberalism, many began to argue that neoliberalism had produced issues long before the financial collapse. For the many Western economies that had adopted neoliberal policies, an ever-widening wealth gap began to emerge among the wealthiest of citizens (often pejoratively labeled the "one percent") and the middle and lower-classes.³⁸ In the United States, for example, upper-income Americans increased their share of aggregate U.S. income by 20 percent, while middle-income Americans lost 20 percent of their share, between the 1970's and 2010's.³⁹ Additionally, neoliberal policies helped to facilitate the movement of manufacturing hubs from Western states to developing states, thus partially contributing to the decline in manufacturing employment in the West.⁴⁰ As we

³⁶ See *The Global Financial Crisis*, RESERVE BANK OF AUSTRALIA <https://www.rba.gov.au/education/resources/explainers/the-global-financial-crisis.html> (last visited Sep. 23, 2023).

³⁷ See, e.g., Amar Bhidé, *An Accident Waiting to Happen: Securities Regulation and Financial Deregulation*, in *WHAT CAUSED THE FINANCIAL CRISIS* 69 (Jeffery Friedman ed., 2011); Brooksley Born, *Deregulation: A Major Cause of the Financial Crisis*, 5 HARV. L. & POL'Y REV. 231 (2011); Paul G. Mahoney, *Deregulation and the Subprime Crisis*, 104 VA. L. REV. 235 (2018).

³⁸ See, e.g., Maurizio Lazzarato, *Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social*, 26 THEORY, CULTURE & SOC'Y 109 (2009); Ian Watson, *Wage Inequality and Neoliberalism: The Australian Experience*, 58 J. OF INDUS. REL. 131 (2016).

³⁹ Juliana Menasce Horowitz et al., *Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Jan. 9, 2020), <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>.

⁴⁰ See *How Trade Did and Did Not Account for Manufacturing Job Losses*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INT'L PEACE (Dec. 10, 2018),

shall see, these concerns had a profound effect on right-wing populist movements in the U.S., with many coming to believe that the neoliberal system was “rigged” in favor elites at the expense of the “common man.”

D. Paving the Way for Geoeconomics

The interconnectedness that the neoliberal world helped to produce has created a situation that is ripe for geoeconomic statecraft. Because the economic affairs of one state are increasingly dependent on the economic affairs of the rest of the globe, nations have realized that they can more effectively utilize coercive economic tools. This is especially true in the context of specialization. Neoliberalism has championed the economics of specialization,⁴¹ but specialization means that states are increasingly vulnerable where resources that the state does not produce are at stake. For example, a state that specializes in mining may be particularly reliant on other states for electronics. The mining state is thus highly vulnerable if a major electronics-producing nation seeks to impose electronics-targeted geoeconomic strategies against the mining state.

The vulnerability of states due to specialization is further complicated by the fact that a select group of nations have developed great control over key “nodes” of the global economy.⁴² The United States, for example, has immense control over the globe’s financial markets, as tens of trillions of foreign dollars pass through American markets each year. China, by contrast, maintains a powerful grip over goods production, as the nation is the world’s largest manufacturing exporter.⁴³ This asymmetry leaves a select group of countries with powerful geoeconomic tools at their disposal to coerce states into compliance. As a result, geoeconomic relations have come to define many of the globe’s most pressing security concerns. News headlines have abounded in recent years of geoeconomic strategies employed by major states, from Chinese suspension of Australian meat imports due to Australia’s

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/12/10/how-trade-did-and-did-not-account-for-manufacturing-job-losses-pub-77794>.

⁴¹ See J.W. Mason & Arjun Jayadev, *Beyond Neoliberal Trade*, BOSTON REV. (Aug. 9, 2021), <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/beyond-neoliberal-trade/>.

⁴² See Farrell & Newman, *supra* note 11, at 44–46.

⁴³ LEONARD, *supra* note 11, at 22–25.

criticism of China's COVID-19 response,⁴⁴ to European Union sanctions on Turkey due to illicit gas drilling.⁴⁵

That neoliberalism has facilitated the rise of geoeconomics is one of the great ironies of the post-Cold War era. Neoliberalism's fostering of open trade and falling international barriers has created such interconnectedness that geoeconomic strategies—which are decidedly non-neoliberal in nature—now have much more of an impact when implemented by economically powerful states. As we shall see, the Trump Administration's policies were the perfect emblem of this irony. Trump rallied his populist base by decrying neoliberalism and vowed to use geoeconomic strategies to reverse the neoliberal sacking of American prestige and wealth. But in order to effectuate that geoeconomic change, Trump had to rely on channels and institutions that were constructed under the neoliberal banner.

As we shall see, the story of how populist right embraced geoeconomics against China is tied to many of the themes covered in this section. China has indeed benefitted from the neoliberal order, and many Americans have faced the negative consequences of neoliberalism. This fact has led many to believe that China has exploited the neoliberal order at America's expense. Among the groups that have come to believe this is the populist right.

III. THE POPULIST RIGHT RESISTANCE TO NEOLIBERALISM

The right wing of American politics has not always been hostile to neoliberalism. Ronald Reagan was one of the great purveyors of the domestic neoliberal agenda;⁴⁶ George H.W. Bush pushed for the adoption of liberal economies in post-Soviet states;⁴⁷ George W. Bush pushed for greater free trade with much of the world (including China);⁴⁸ and Republican presidential

⁴⁴ See Scott Waldron, *China's Tariffs on Australian Barley: Coercion, Protectionism, or Both?*, THE DIPLOMAT (June 19, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/chinas-tariffs-on-australian-barley-coercion-protectionism-or-both/>; Kirsty Needham & Colin Packham, *China halts beef imports from four Australian firms as COVID-19 spat sours trade*, REUTERS (May 12, 2020), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-china-beef/china-halts-beef-imports-from-four-australian-firms-as-covid-19-spat-sours-trade-idUSKBN22O0FB#>.

⁴⁵ Patrick Wintour, *EU Leaders Approve Sanctions on Turkish Officials Over Gas Drilling*, THE GUARDIAN (Dec. 11, 2020, 7:27 A.M.), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/11/eu-leaders-sanctions-turkey-gas-drilling>.

⁴⁶ See GARY GERSTLE, *THE RISE AND FALL OF THE NEOLIBERAL ORDER: AMERICA AND THE WORLD IN THE FREE MARKET ERA 107–188* (Oxford University Press 2022).

⁴⁷ See Jérôme Viala-Gaudefroy, *Neoliberal Metaphors in Presidential Discourse from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump*, 8 ANGLES: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE ANGLOPHONE WORLD 1, 2 (2019).

⁴⁸ See Ankit Panda, *Bush Gave China Permanent Normal Trade Relations Status With the US 15 Years Ago. What Did That Change?*, THE DIPLOMAT (Dec. 28, 2016), <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/bush-gave-china-permanent-normal-trade-relations-status-with-the-us-15-years-ago-what-did-that-change/>.

nominees Bob Dole,⁴⁹ John McCain,⁵⁰ and Mitt Romney⁵¹ all touted neoliberal trade policies during their respective presidential runs. Yet beneath this support at the highest levels of American politics, opposition was brewing within the right against the neoliberal order. This portion of the article focuses on why exactly the populist right in the U.S. developed such a loathing for neoliberalism.

I begin by outlining that two major blocs within right-wing populism are central to understanding the populist right’s opposition to neoliberalism: working-class whites and white Evangelicals. I describe the unique characteristics of each bloc, and go on to detail how each bloc developed its respective opposition to neoliberalism.

A. *The Two Blocs*

It would be wrong to suggest that right-wing populism is composed of a single group of like-minded individuals. Instead, a mosaic of demographic groups make-up America’s populist right, and each group is unique in its thinking and its relationship with right-wing populism. Arguably the two largest and most influential groups are working-class whites and white Evangelicals. The Trump campaign was uniquely dependent on both of these groups during the 2016 and 2020 elections,⁵² and they remained the most loyal of Trump’s supporters until the very end of his presidency.⁵³

⁴⁹ See Kenneth J. Cooper, *House Leader Announces Opposition to NAFTA*, WASHINGTON POST, Sep. 22, 1993 (stating: “Prospects for NAFTA are far brighter in the Senate, where Minority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) has predicted that the pact could get 60 to 65 votes—including the support of as many as 40 Republicans—if it survives in the House.”); *POLITICS: BOB DOLE; In His Own Words*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 17, 1996 (“Yes we have GATT, yes we have Nafta; that doesn’t mean we just have to sit back and do nothing. . . . The problem is not with Nafta or GATT. The problem is, we have an Administration that’s reluctant to stand up for the American worker.”)

⁵⁰ Michael Cooper and John M. Broder, *McCain Pushes Nafta in Visit to Canada as Obama, Again, Defends His View*, N.Y. TIMES, Jun. 21, 2008.

⁵¹ Mitt Romney, *China Must Respect the Free-trade System*, WASHINGTON POST, Oct. 13, 2011.

⁵² See, e.g., Jim Tankersley, *How Trump Won: The Revenge of Working-class Whites*, WASHINGTON POST (Nov. 8, 2016); Jason Husser, *Why Trump Is Reliant on White Evangelicals*, BROOKINGS INST. (Apr. 6, 2020, 4:30 AM), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/04/06/why-trump-is-reliant-on-white-evangelicals/>.

⁵³ See, e.g., Eugene Scott, *White Evangelicals Are Hailing the Trump Era. Will Their Alliance with Him Stunt Their Influence Going Forward?*, WASH. POST (Dec. 18, 2020, 11:34 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/12/18/white-evangelicals-are-hailing-trump-era-will-their-alliance-with-him-stunt-their-influence-going-forward/>.

Routinely defined as “Trump’s base,”⁵⁴ America’s white working-class has been the focus of attention of political commentators and academics trying to understand who exactly composes the electoral backbone behind the populist right.⁵⁵ The focus on the white working-class is largely due to the demographic cohort’s influence over conservatism: Trump captured nearly 70 percent of the working-class white vote in 2020,⁵⁶ and some estimates place this cohort at 45 percent of the total electorate.⁵⁷ Though there is some dispute as to a precise definition, the term “working-class” tends to refer to non-college educated, hourly wage laborers who earn modest incomes.⁵⁸ Among working-class whites, there is a tendency among commentators to describe this cohort as rural and largely engaged in industrial labor. The data, however, suggests that this is a very incomplete picture of this demographic cohort. While rural areas tend to be dominated by working-class whites, the average white working-class individual is most likely to live in a suburb of a major metropolitan area. At the same time, many working-class whites do not necessarily occupy industrial labor positions; instead, this cohort engages in a variety of hourly wage work, ranging from retail, to truck driving, to janitorial labor.⁵⁹ This is not to say that industrial labor is not a major employer for working-class whites; on the contrary, it is one of the largest sources of employment for this group.⁶⁰

There is another bloc in the populist right that must be considered in addition to working-class whites. White evangelicals are one of the most powerful factions within the populist right, as this group comprises 26 percent of the American electorate and overwhelmingly backed Trump in the 2016 and 2020 general election (and a plurality supported Trump in the 2016

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Domenico Montanaro, *Trump’s Base is Shrinking As Whites Without A College Degree Continue To Decline*, NPR (Sep. 3, 2020, 5:00 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/03/907433511/trumps-base-is-shrinking-as-whites-without-a-college-degree-continue-to-decline>.

⁵⁵ See Nicolas Carnes & Noam Lupu, *It’s Time to Bust the Myth: Most Trump Voters Were Not Working Class.*, WASH. POST (Jun. 5, 2017, 6:00 AM) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/05/its-time-to-bust-the-myth-most-trump-voters-were-not-working-class/>.

⁵⁶ Joan C. Williams, *How Biden Won Back (Enough of) the White Working-class*, HAR. BUS. REV. (Nov. 10, 2020) <https://hbr.org/2020/11/how-biden-won-back-enough-of-the-white-working-class>.

⁵⁷ Rob Griffin et al., *Voter Trends in 2016*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (Nov. 1, 2017), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2017/11/01/441926/voter-trends-in-2016/>.

⁵⁸ See Tamara Draut, *Understanding the Working Class*, DEMOS (Apr. 16, 2018), <https://www.demos.org/research/understanding-working-class>.

⁵⁹ Max Ehrenfreund & Jeff Guo, *If You’ve Ever Described People As ‘White Working Class,’ Read This*, WASH. POST (Nov. 23, 2016, 10:42 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/11/22/who-exactly-is-the-white-working-class-and-what-do-they-believe-good-questions/>.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

primary).⁶¹ Evangelicals are unique in that their political preferences are uniquely influenced by their religious beliefs.⁶² Conservative Evangelicalism adheres to a particular brand of fundamentalist Christian theology. In terms of doctrinal faith, Evangelicals practice a strict adherence to the literal word of the Bible. Academics Andrew M. Greeley and Michael Hout state the following on Evangelical doctrinal beliefs:

“There is no need for an organized church so long as the individual Christian has the sacred book available for study. God speaks directly to the reader in the book and God’s grace enables the reader to understand what He is saying. For the Conservative Christian the Bible is the bedrock of faith.”⁶³

Evangelicals tend to extend their literal interpretations of the Bible into the world of public policy. They believe that their personal religious beliefs should form the foundation of national policy positions, and thus champion public prayer, abstinence education in schools, and traditional concepts of the nuclear family. Evangelicals also denounce government sanctioning of “sinful” aspects of society, such as abortion and LGBTQ rights.⁶⁴ This extension of one’s personal religious beliefs into the political sphere is a unique attribute of white Evangelicals when compared to other Christian sects. Researchers have noted that the degree of organization and focus on partisan political activity is much greater in its intensity among white Evangelicals than other Christian sects in the U.S.⁶⁵

There is another unique element of white Evangelicalism in the U.S. White Evangelicals tend to infuse a great degree of American nationalism with their religious beliefs. Evangelical preachers will often speak of the virtues of American society—especially that the United States has a special connection with God. Sermons will frequently rehearse a history of the United States that is grounded in Christianity, highlighting that the nation was

⁶¹ Jason Husser, *Why Trump Is Reliant on White Evangelicals*, BROOKINGS INST. (Apr. 6, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/04/06/why-trump-is-reliant-on-white-evangelicals/>.

⁶² See Clyde Haberman, *Religion and Right-Wing Politics: How Evangelicals Reshaped Elections*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 28, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/us/religion-politics-evangelicals.html>.

⁶³ ANDREW M. GREELEY & MICHAEL HOUT, *THE TRUTH ABOUT CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS: WHAT THEY THINK AND WHAT THEY BELIEVE* 14 (2006).

⁶⁴ See *Evangelical Beliefs and Practices*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Jun. 22, 2011), <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/06/22/global-survey-beliefs/>.

⁶⁵ See John Fea et al., *Evangelicalism and Politics*, ORG. OF AM. HISTORIANS, <https://www.oah.org/tah/issues/2018/november/evangelicalism-and-politics/> (last visited Nov. 6, 2023); David Carry, *US Election Spotlight Mostly Bypasses Mainline Protestants*, WASH. POST, Sep. 13, 2020 (“In general, mainline denominations discourage their pastors from making political endorsements from the pulpit, or from issuing voter guides the way some conservative churches do.”).

founded by Christian men on Christian principles.⁶⁶ Additionally, polling indicates that white Evangelicals tend to profess higher levels of national pride (especially pride in the American military) than other Christian sects.⁶⁷ This explicit intertwining of religion and nationalism, combined with strong Biblical fundamentalism, is what separates conservative Evangelicalism from other strains of American Christianity. Furthermore, this focus on American nationalism by white Evangelicals will be crucial to our understanding of why Evangelicals detest both neoliberalism and the rise of China, and why they support Trump's geoeconomics.

It should be noted that there is an obvious overlap with conservative Evangelicals and working-class whites—i.e., there are working-class whites who are also Evangelical. Yet because their religion plays such a key part in defining their political preferences, research shows that Evangelicals tend to have differing political priorities and preferences from the non-Evangelical members of their socioeconomic cohort (note that this is not just a phenomenon among the working-class, but across all demographic cohorts).⁶⁸ In fact, polling indicates that the majority of working-class whites are not particularly religious, and are not typically motivated by the kinds of social issues that motivate Evangelicals, such as abortion and gay marriage.⁶⁹

There are, to be sure, other blocs that compose the right-wing populist base in the U.S. Yet the two aforementioned groups are unique due to their size, influence in the broader electorate, and media attention. Because each of these cohorts are uniquely situated, it would be wrong to suggest that each of these two groups have uniform views on China and neoliberalism, or support Trump's geoeconomics for the same reasons. Rather, each group is unique in

⁶⁶ A good description of this phenomenon can be found here: Philip Gorski, *Why Evangelicals Voted for Trump: A Critical Cultural Sociology*, 5 AM. J. OF CULTURAL SOCIO. 338 (2017); see also Steven K. Green, *The Legal Ramifications of Christian Nationalism*, 26 ROGER WILLIAM UNI. L. REV. 430, 430-37 (2021); Kimberly H. Conger, *The Christian Right in U.S. Politics*, OXFORD RSHC. ENCYC. OF POL. (Sep. 30, 2019), <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-810>;

⁶⁷ See Gorski, *supra* note 66.

⁶⁸ The following provide good examples of the political differences between Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals: Amy Walter, *Getting to Know White Voters*, COOK POLITICAL REPORT (Aug. 29, 2018), <https://cookpolitical.com/analysis/national/national-politics/getting-know-white-voters>; Ed Kilgore, *Democrats Won Big With a Key Demographic of Trump's Base During Midterms*, NEW YORK MAGAZINE (Dec. 13, 2018), <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/12/democrats-won-with-non-evangelical-white-working-class-women.html>; Husser, *supra* note 61.

⁶⁹ See Emma Greene, *The Death of Community and the Rise of Trump*, THE ATLANTIC (Mar. 5, 2017), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/religiously-unaffiliated-white-americans/518340/>; see also Robert P. Jones, *Beyond Guns and God: Understanding the Complexities of the White Working Class in America*, PUB. RELIGION RSCH. INST. (Sep. 20, 2012), <https://www.ppri.org/research/race-class-culture-survey-2012/>.

its thinking, and this section will attempt to shine light on the motivating concerns for each cohort.

The White Working-Class Resistance to Neoliberalism

There were certain demographic groups that won big gains during the neoliberal era, and others that lost much during this period. Working-class white Americans decidedly fell into the latter category. The 1970’s proved to be the last time working-class whites saw their incomes and household savings rising. Since that time, incomes have remained stagnant, net-worths have fallen, and more working-class whites are exiting the workforce all together due to diminishing employment prospects and lack of adequate wages.⁷⁰ This phenomenon is due, in part, to the decline of the American industrial base—a major employer for working-class whites. Low-skilled manufacturing jobs have seen a steady departure from the U.S. economy, as 5.7 million American manufacturing jobs evaporated between 2000 and 2009 alone.⁷¹ The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis was particularly hard on working-class whites, as job losses and personal bankruptcies spiraled.⁷² In the wake of these calamities, the white working class has seen startling increases in the rates of drug use, drug overdoses, and suicides.⁷³

Academics have drawn a direct line between neoliberal trade policies and the relative decline of America’s white working-class. Economists have noted that a number of U.S. free trade pacts, such as NAFTA, have contributed to the rapid erosion of the American industrial labor market.⁷⁴ Yet while free trade has often been highlighted as the main aspect of neoliberalism that has contributed to the decline of the white working-class, there are other aspects as well. The increasing globalization of the world economy that neoliberalism has championed has resulted in a situation in which the economies of

⁷⁰ See Eleanor Krause & Isabel V. Sawhill, *Seven Reasons to Worry About the American Middle Class*, BROOKINGS INST. (Jun. 5, 2018), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2018/06/05/seven-reasons-to-worry-about-the-american-middle-class/>.

⁷¹ Robert D. Atkinson et al., *Worse Than the Great Depression: What Experts Are Missing About American Manufacturing Decline*, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOUNDATION. 3, (Mar. 2012), <https://www.nist.gov/system/files/documents/2017/05/09/2012-american-manufacturing-decline.pdf>.

⁷² See Christian E. Weller, *Working Class Families Are Getting Hit From All Sides*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS (Jul. 26, 2018), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2018/07/26/453841/working-class-families-getting-hit-sides/>.

⁷³ Anne Case & Angus Deaton, *Rising Morbidity and Mortality in Midlife Among White Non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st Century*, 112 PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 15078 (2015).

⁷⁴ See, e.g., *NAFTA’s Impact on the U.S. Economy: What Are the Facts?*, WHARTON: THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA (Sep. 6, 2016), <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/naftas-impact-u-s-economy-facts/>.

developed nations are particularly vulnerable to currency manipulation by developing nations. Columbia Law Professor Robert E. Scott aptly explains how this phenomenon has hurt American industrial employment:

“Globalization and trade and investment deals have opened up trade with countries that engage in currency manipulation and other unfair trade practices to make their goods less expensive and undercut the competitiveness of U.S. product. . . . Currency manipulation acts like an artificial subsidy to the host country’s exports (making their goods artificially less expensive) and as a tax on all U.S. exports, which undercuts the competitiveness of U.S. products, especially manufactured goods (which make up 70 percent of all U.S. goods exports). As a result, the growth of trade deficits since the late 1990s has eliminated millions of U.S. manufacturing jobs.”⁷⁵

It should be noted that many developments—especially the advent of technological automation—outside of the neoliberal policy agenda have played just as crucial a role in the decline of employment prospects for the white working class.⁷⁶ However, the fact remains that neoliberal policies have played an important role in the decline of manufacturing employment. Even more important for our purposes, however, is that much of American media commentary regarding the loss of manufacturing jobs has focused not on automation, but rather neoliberal trade policies.⁷⁷ This asymmetry in news coverage thus makes it more likely that working-class whites find neoliberal policies (and the beneficiaries of those policies), rather than technological innovation, to be the primary cause of their woes.

As working-class whites have seen a precipitous decline in their well-being, certain groups have seen their prospects dramatically improve during the neoliberal era. William Carroll and Jean Phillippe Sapinski describe a “transnational capitalist class” that has emerged during neoliberalism’s ascendance. This group is made-up of wealthy elites who have taken advantage of falling trade barriers, globalization, and the relative ease of international finance to accumulate massive sums of wealth. This group was able to emerge from 2008 crisis with renewed strength, and have since accrued

⁷⁵ Robert E. Scott, *Currency Manipulation and Manufacturing Job Loss*, ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE (Jul. 21, 2016), <https://www.epi.org/publication/why-negotiating-great-trade-deals-is-not-the-answer/>.

⁷⁶ See Glenn Kessler, *Are Jobs Lost Due to ‘Bad Trade Policy’ or Automation?*, WASHINGTON POST (Oct. 16, 2019, 3:00 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/10/17/are-jobs-lost-due-bad-trade-policy-or-automation/>.

⁷⁷ See *id.*

even higher sums of wealth and control over global industries.⁷⁸ At the same time, powerful economic players—namely major corporations and financial firms—have come to enjoy a sort of “privileged status” in the neoliberal order. These players face low taxes, incentives to move operations to low-wage countries, and receive special protections and statuses through international legal institutions.⁷⁹ Finally, neoliberal policies have allowed certain developing nations to accumulate vast wealth and lift millions out of poverty. Among the greatest beneficiaries of the neoliberal order have been East Asian countries, from Vietnam, to Malaysia, to, yes, China. These nations have seen explosive GDP growth, decreasing poverty rates, and increasing standards of living—all partly attributable to neoliberal trade policies that have allowed these states to become richer due to Western consumption.⁸⁰

These developments—the contrast between the relative decline of American working-class whites, and the ascent of developing countries and the global elite—did not go unnoticed among the white working class. While large majorities of affluent voters from both political parties remained constant in their support for neoliberal policies such as free trade, support for these policies dwindled among working-class whites. In fact, polling experts noted that socioeconomic status was a greater predictor of one’s views on free trade policies than political party affiliation.⁸¹ A 2016 Public Religion Research Institute poll found that 49 percent of college educated whites believed that free trade benefited the U.S., while 42 percent thought that free trade was harmful; by contrast, only 33 percent of working-class whites thought that free trade was beneficial, while 60 percent found it harmful.⁸²

In sum, the neoliberal order did not benefit, and in many cases harmed, white working-class Americans. It is therefore unsurprising that working-class whites soured on neoliberal policies. Because a large majority of working-class whites expressed frustration with neoliberalism, and a large majority of working-class whites ultimately supported Trump, we can infer that there is a large overlap between those that hold these views and populist

⁷⁸ William Carroll & Jean Philippe Sapinski, *Neoliberalism and the Transnational Capitalist Class*, in *THE HANDBOOK OF NEOLIBERALISM* (Kean Birch et al. eds., 2016).

⁷⁹ See Jeff D. Colgan & Robert O. Keohane, *The Liberal Order Is Rigged*, *FOREIGN AFFAIRS* (Apr. 17, 2017), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-04-17/liberal-order-rigged>.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Simon Springer, *Neoliberalism in Southeast Asia*, in *ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN DEVELOPMENT 27* (Andrew McGregor et al. eds., 2017); Ian Yuying Liu, *The Chinese Dream, Neoliberalism, and International Legal Ideology*, 4 *CHINESE J. OF GLOB. GOVERNANCE* 81 (2018).

⁸¹ See Chris Ellis, *Why Fight Over Free Trade Confounds Partisan Divide*, *THE CONVERSATION* (Jul. 2, 2015, 6:20 AM), <https://theconversation.com/why-fight-over-free-trade-confounds-partisan-divide-44053>.

⁸² Joanna Piacenza & Robert P. Jones, *Americans Divided on Free Trade—But Most White Working Class Say Agreements Harmful*, *PRRI* (Jan. 23, 2017), <https://www.prri.org/spotlight/tpp-free-trade-agreements/>.

right working-class whites. This story of how working-class whites soured on neoliberalism is well reported in both the academic literature and the popular press. The story of how white Evangelicals soured on neoliberalism, by contrast, is less researched and more complicated.

B. White Evangelical Resistance to Neoliberalism

The opposition to neoliberalism among working-class whites was not necessarily based on any sort of broader political or moral philosophy; rather, the resistance to neoliberalism was largely the product of the lived experiences of working-class whites. White Evangelicals, by contrast, have come to view neoliberalism with a skeptical eye largely because of a deeper philosophical aversion. The combination of Christian fundamentalism and American nationalism has infused white Evangelicals with a deep distrust of the global community—and it is this distrust that has motivated a large portion of the white Evangelical opposition to neoliberalism.

At the outset of this discussion, it should be noted that not all Evangelicals have a deep distrust of neoliberalism, as there is a strain among white Evangelicals that does in fact advocate broader internationalism. This group, according to scholar Dennis R. Hoover, displays a “preference for multilateral rather unilateral approaches,” “support for generous international humanitarian aid and investment in economic development,” “preference for quiet diplomacy over belligerent rhetoric and demonstrations of power,” and “openness to refugees and diverse immigration.”⁸³ These Evangelicals are open to the internationalism and global cooperation championed by neoliberalism, and many see an increasingly globalized world as an opportunity to more easily evangelize their faith across borders.⁸⁴ Research suggests, however, that this sect of white Evangelicalism is limited to a small group of mostly “elite” (meaning those with high disposal incomes and high levels of education) Evangelicals.⁸⁵ The vast majority of white Evangelicals outside of this elite cohort, by contrast, reject these pro-internationalist views. Most white Evangelicals are deeply disaffected with neoliberalism, as they oppose the influence of international organizations, decry free trade and open immigration policies, and embrace isolationist agendas.⁸⁶

⁸³ Dennis R. Hoover, *Populism and Internationalism, Evangelical Style: An Introduction to the Fall 2019 Issue*, 17 REV. OF FAITH & INT’L AFF. 3, 1–6 (2019).

⁸⁴ Paul Rowe offers a good explanation of how American Evangelicals have historical roots in globalism, and that most Evangelicals outside the U.S. embrace globalization and active involvement in world affairs. Paul S. Rowe, *The Global—and Globalist—Roots of Evangelical Action*, 17 REV. OF FAITH & INT’L AFF. 3, 36–49 (2019).

⁸⁵ See James L. Guth, *Are White Evangelicals Populists? The View from the 2016 American National Election Study*, 17 REV. OF FAITH & INT’L AFF. 3, 21, 32 (2019).

⁸⁶ See Rowe, *The Global—and Globalist—Roots of Evangelical Action* at 36, 40.

The root of Evangelical resistance to neoliberalism is different from non-Evangelical working-class whites. Although a number of white Evangelicals have experienced the pains of neoliberalism’s policy failures, opposition to the neoliberal order extends deeper than personal economic circumstances. There is instead a broader philosophical chafing towards neoliberalism’s core tenants. Part of that philosophy is derived from Evangelical readings of Biblical prophecy. Evangelicals tend to view the Book of Revelation as a literal foretelling of the emergence of anti-Christ figure, seven years of tribulation, and the return of Christ to Earth. Within this final book of the Bible, the Apostle John speaks of several forthcoming events that are of deep concerns to Evangelicals. John speaks of the emergence of a powerful political leader who will exert a high degree of control over global governments—a leader that will not be able to be challenged by traditional political, military, or economic power-players. This leader will engage in widespread global wars, and will eventually come to dominate the entirety of the world’s politics and peoples through his raw power.⁸⁷ John then details how the world will experience a dramatic centralization of global commerce during this period. Under this new economic scheme, John states that all people will need to receive a special marking in order to participate in commercial activity—a marking that will be doled-out and regulated by the aforementioned political leader.⁸⁸ Finally, John details that a high degree of economic and personal pain will be caused by the aforementioned political leader and commercial centralization. Global commercial activity will dry-up, slavery will be reinstated across the globe, and all “luxury and splendor” will vanish “never to be recovered.”⁸⁹

These phenomena, according to Evangelicals, will not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, evil forces will gradually work over a long period to bring about these developments through incremental changes. A series of events will take place over a considerable period of time that will prepare the world’s economic markets, political structures, and social relations for the eventual biblical demise.⁹⁰

It is not difficult to see how this line of thinking extends itself to questions involving neoliberalism. The forces of globalization, free trade, and open immigration that neoliberals have championed are routinely derided by Evangelicals as further hastening Revelation’s foretold apocalypse. Professor Luke Herrington notes the following on the relationship between Evangelicals and globalization specifically:

⁸⁷ *Revelation* 13:1–8.

⁸⁸ *Revelation* 13:15–18.

⁸⁹ *Revelation* 18:11–17.

⁹⁰ For a good outline of these beliefs, see Daniel G. Hummel, *American Evangelicals and the Apocalypse* in *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE* 288–315 (Colin McAllister ed., 2020).

“Many fundamentalist Christians fear... globalization [], because in their worldview it represents the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. It is expected that world government will usher in the reign of an evil anti-Christ that will deceive Christians into abandoning their faith and salvation. Thus, political globalism is not something favored by Christians as a sign of prophecy fulfillment; it is instead something that must be opposed.”⁹¹

Below are a few examples that further highlight the relationship between neoliberalism, Evangelicals, and apocalyptic prophecy:

1. Former presidential candidate and well-known Evangelical televangelist Pat Robertson was among the first Evangelicals to draw a direct link between neoliberal policies and the apocalypse. Robertson came to national prominence during the end of the Cold War, and labeled neoliberal policies—including the establishment of transnational organizations (such as the then-still-in-development European Union), the liberalization of finance, and increased globalization—as part of a broader “new world order.” This new order, Robertson alleged, would eventually function to usher in the rise of an antichrist figure and bring calamity on the world’s peoples—thus reflecting the exhortations of the Book of Revelation.⁹²
2. David Jeremiah is the Senior Pastor of one of California’s largest Evangelical churches, runs a popular radio program with estimated listeners in the millions, and is considered one of the most influential Evangelical pastors in the U.S. among conservatives.⁹³ In 2010, Jeremiah wrote a book titled *The Coming Economic Armageddon: What Bible Prophecy Warns About the New Global Economy*. The text decries staples of the neoliberal order, including: Bretton Woods, the IMF and World Bank, the internationalization of finance, and America’s increasingly internationalist foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Each of these malevolent elements of American society, Jeremiah claims, are leading to apocalyptic doom and

⁹¹ Luke M. Herrington, *Globalization and Religion in Historical Perspective: A Paradoxical Relationship*, 4 RELIGIONS 1, 159 (2013).

⁹² See generally PAT ROBERTSON, *THE NEW WORLD ORDER: IT WILL CHANGE HOW YOU LIVE* (Word Publishing, 1991).

⁹³ See, e.g., Ed Stetzer, *The Most Influential Preachers*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Apr. 13, 2010), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/april/most-influential-preachers.html>; Jen Krausz, *Newsmax’s 100 Most Influential Evangelicals in America*, NEWSMAX (Nov. 17, 2017, 09:07 AM EST), <https://www.newsmax.com/BestLists/evangelicals-influential-america-list/2017/11/15/id/826258/>.

the return of Christ.⁹⁴ A good example of this is highlighted in the following quote: “The World Bank, the IMF, and now the [Financial Stability Board] are organizations-in-waiting. The leader of the one-world government of the Tribulation will need such organizations in order to control the economic lives of nations and their people.”⁹⁵

3. Mark Hitchcock is an Evangelical author and pastor who regularly appears on popular news outlets and whose books have sold over a million copies.⁹⁶ His 2013 book, *The End of Money: Bible Prophecy and the Coming Economic Collapse*, details how an increasingly interconnected economy, the rise of high finance, and the influence of international economic institutions will all contribute to the rise of an antichrist figure.⁹⁷
4. Britt Gillette is a popular Evangelical writer who specializes in biblical prophecy. In his book *The End Times*, Gillette claims that neoliberalist policies and institutions are hastening the arrival of the apocalypse, stating: “Since the Tower of Babel, nationalism, borders, different languages, and diverse cultures have prevented world government . . . Today, we can see the framework of a future global government in the structure of the United Nations . . . Free trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and alliances like the European Union facilitate open borders, and the Internet destroys many of the remaining barriers.”⁹⁸

These examples highlight a broader trend within the Evangelical community that sees neoliberal policies and institutions as tools for a malevolent scheme. Yet there is an additional explanation that exists for Evangelical hostility to neoliberalism—an explanation that exists outside of Evangelical interpretations of biblical literature. Researchers have observed that white Evangelicals harbor deep isolationist views. These views are largely informed by the sense that Evangelicals can only trust their own—that one can only rely on fellow Christians, and that other, non-Christian societies and peoples cannot be trusted. This sort of thinking informs not just Evangelical foreign policy thinking, but also thinking relating to education, immigration, and the welfare state. The insularity of this thinking tends to make Evangelicals skeptical of those that fall outside of their Christian-

⁹⁴ See generally DAVID JEREMIAH, *THE COMING ECONOMIC ARMAGEDDON: WHAT BIBLE PROPHECY WARNS ABOUT THE NEW GLOBAL ECONOMY* (Faith Words, 2010).

⁹⁵ *Id.* at 62.

⁹⁶ See *About*, MARK HITCHCOCK, <http://marklhitchcock.com>.

⁹⁷ See generally MARK HITCHCOCK, *THE END OF MONEY: BIBLE PROPHECY AND THE COMING ECONOMIC COLLAPSE* (Harvest House Publishers, 2013).

⁹⁸ BRITT GILLETTE, *THE END TIMES: A GUIDE TO BIBLE PROPHECY AND THE LAST DAYS* 84–85 (2019).

American identity.⁹⁹ Neoliberal policies encourage just the opposite of this thinking: greater connectedness with the world, an embrace of global institutions, and falling barriers between borders. Neoliberal internationalism requires countries with radically different religious compositions—from the relatively Christian United States to the relatively non-religious Japan—to constantly interact with each other. It is not difficult to see why this openness fostered by neoliberalism does not mesh neatly with the kind of isolationism envisaged by modern white Evangelicalism.

Finally, neoliberalism does not comport with Evangelical nationalist views. Neoliberalism, to a degree, requires some surrendering of national autonomy to international organizations and the forces of the broader marketplace. This stands in contrast to the strong sense of nationalist pride felt by Evangelicals. The surrendering of autonomy to outside powers—powers often given pejorative labels such as “socialist” or “ungodly”—is incompatible with the sense that the United States is exceptional. The thinking goes that the U.S. is exceptional precisely because it is a godly, Christian society, and such a society should not be forced to surrender part of its autonomy to “godless” international forces.¹⁰⁰

We are thus left with two very different oppositions to neoliberalism: one grounded in lived experiences (the white working-class), and the other grounded in philosophical and religious beliefs (white Evangelicals). Nevertheless, both believe that neoliberal policies have harmed the U.S. and will continue to prey on the nation if left unchallenged. Because working-class whites and white Evangelicals display such a detestation towards neoliberal policies, it is unsurprising that they bear deep resentment to those individuals and entities they feel have benefitted from neoliberalism. For these groups, there has been one nation above all that has primarily benefitted from the neoliberal order, and has done so at the expense of the United States.

IV. THE POPULIST RIGHT RESISTANCE TO CHINA

The rise of China from third world status to major global power player in the short span of a few decades has been remarkable. China has enjoyed particularly notable growth during the last 20 years, as the nation has seen major increases in GDP, household wealth, international influence and

⁹⁹ There are several good outlines of this phenomenon. See Ruth Melkonian-Hoover & Lyman A. Kellstedt, *Populism, Evangelicalism, and the Polarized Politics of Immigration*, 17 REV. OF FAITH & INT’L AFF. 3, 50–67 (2019); see also Tara Isabella Burton, *The Bible Says to Welcome Immigrants. So Why Don’t White Evangelicals?*, VOX (Oct. 30, 2018), <https://www.vox.com/2018/10/30/18035336/white-evangelicals-immigration-nationalism-christianity-refugee-honduras-migrant>.

¹⁰⁰ See Gene Zubovich, *The Christian Nationalism of Donald Trump*, RELIGION & POLITICS, (Jul. 17, 2018), <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/07/17/the-christian-nationalism-of-donald-trump/>.

prestige, and foreign investment. At the same time, the last two decades have seen a diminishing of American influence abroad, a stagnation of middle-class wages, and an erosion in the nation’s industrial base. This has all occurred during the neoliberal age, and many within the populist right have drawn connections between neoliberalism, China’s ascent, and America’s perceived relative decline. This part of the article seeks to highlight both the real and perceived connection between these three phenomena.

I first briefly outline how China has indeed benefitted from the neoliberal age, discussing how neoliberal institutions and trade policies have facilitated China’s ascent on the world stage. I then describe how the two aforementioned segments of the populist right (working-class whites and white Evangelicals) have tied their anger towards neoliberalism with their anger towards China’s rise. To these groups, neoliberalism has harmed their own personal fortunes, weakened American primacy, and given strength to evil forces—and China has been the primary beneficiary of these negative elements. I will note that there are some reasons beyond frustrations with neoliberalism that form the basis of Evangelical resistance to China (such as Chinese treatment of Christian communities), but that anger towards neoliberalism forms the main basis of populist right resistance to China.

A. *China in a Neoliberal Age*

The perception among the populist right that China has benefitted from neoliberalism is not inaccurate. The contemporary history of China is littered with examples of how the nation has dramatically benefitted from the neoliberal order. China’s rise is inextricably linked to neoliberalism, and the nation has wisely used neoliberal institutions and policies to advance its place in the world and promote domestic economic growth.

Although China historically maintained its position as the world’s leading economy for several millennia (often accounting for more than a third of the world’s GDP), the nation was quickly surpassed by European powers in the 19th Century due to industrialization, advanced weaponry, and colonial ambitions.¹⁰¹ After facing more than 100 years of Western and Japanese colonial domination and subservience—often labeled the “Century of Humiliation” by Chinese leaders—communist revolutionaries lead by Mao Zedong sought to reclaim China from outside forces.¹⁰² Mao’s near-three decades of rule (1949-1976) were chaotic, as the nation was wrought by

¹⁰¹ See JUSTIN YIFU LIN, *DEMISTIFYING THE CHINESE ECONOMY* 1–3 (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁰² See generally William A. Callahan, *National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism*, 29 *ALT.: GLOB., LOC., POL.* 2, 199–218 (2004), <https://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/CallahanChina.pdf>.

internal chaos and violence.¹⁰³ Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, sought to expand economic activity and reinvigorate the nation's global standing. Under Deng's decade-long rule over China (1978-1989), the leader opened the economy to greater foreign investment, cooperation with foreign states, and liberalization of domestic markets—all of which were part of Deng's "Four Modernizations" economic reform program. Deng was particularly focused on Chinese manufacturing, working to transform the nation's industrial base from heavy to light industry so that the nation could emerge as a major exporter of goods.¹⁰⁴ Deng's leadership of China is notable for our purposes as it was the first time since the Chinese Communist Party seized power that the nation sought to implement a broad-based economic reform based on neoliberal principles. Although Deng was careful to label his reforms as "socialism with Chinese characteristics,"¹⁰⁵ his reforms nevertheless embrace some basic neoliberal tenets: global trade, elements of market liberalization, and limited acceptance of globalization.

Deng's nascent neoliberal policies came to further development under his successor, Jiang Zemin. Under Jiang's leadership, China embarked on an economic policy labeled "socialist market economy," which focused on further liberalization of the domestic economy.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, Jiang embraced the internationalism fostered by the neoliberal order, as China began to enter a number of neoliberal institutions.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the most prominent example of this was China's accession to the WTO in 2001.

China's entrance to the WTO was a major development in international affairs. Championed by then-U.S. President Bill Clinton, there was a sense within the United States that China's joining of the WTO—and by extension the neoliberal order—would encourage the development of democratic ideals and norms in the Far East. President Clinton explicitly stated: "By joining the WTO, China is not simply agreeing to import more of our products, it is agreeing to import one of democracy's most cherished values, economic freedom."¹⁰⁸ In exchange for permitting China's entry to the WTO, the U.S. extracted a number of concessions from Chinese leadership. As *The Wall Street Journal* describes the negotiations: "U.S. officials thought they were driving a hard bargain. The deal forced Beijing to slash tariffs, permit foreign

¹⁰³ See SULMAAN WASIF KHAN, *HAUNTED BY CHAOS: CHINA'S GRAND STRATEGY FROM MAO ZEDONG TO XI JINPING* 53–126 (Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹⁰⁴ See HENRY KISSINGER, *ON CHINA* 321–339 (Penguin Books, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Deng Xiaoping, *Building a socialism with a specifically Chinese character*, PEOPLE'S DAILY, Jun. 30, 1984, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/deng-xiaoping/1984/36.htm>.

¹⁰⁶ See Xiaoqin Ding, *The Socialist Market Economy: China and the World*, 73 *SCI. & SOC'Y* 2, 235–241 (2009).

¹⁰⁷ See Yin-wah Chu & Alvin Y. So, *State Neoliberalism: The Chinese Road to Capitalism* in *CHINESE CAPITALISMS: HISTORICAL EMERGENCE AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS* 113–114 (Yin-wah Chu ed., 2010).

¹⁰⁸ *Clinton's Words on China: Trade Is the Smart Thing*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 9, 2000.

investment in Chinese industries and give foreign banks more freedom to do business.”¹⁰⁹ In effect, China was forced to adopt even further neoliberal policies so that the nation could join a neoliberal international institution. U.S. leadership was thus not only supportive of the Chinese adoption of neoliberal policies, but also played a central role in forcing China’s hand to adopt neoliberalism. At the same time, the U.S. and China signed a Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) agreement, which provided the following benefits: major reductions of agricultural, industrial, and auto tariffs; elimination of high-technology tariffs; elimination of import quotas and licensing requirements; grant of import and distribution rights to Chinese corporations; full market access for financial firms; and a termination of the ban on telecommunication investment.¹¹⁰ This is a critical point for our purposes: as we shall see, the populist right has frequently alleged that U.S. leaders were themselves responsible for China’s ascent and America’s subsequent decline—and the 2001 WTO accession and PNTR has often played an important role in these allegations.

Jiang’s successors—Hu Jintao and the sitting leader, Xi Jinping—continued China’s march towards neoliberalism.¹¹¹ China further interacted with neoliberal institutions, becoming a force in organizations such as the WTO. At the same time, China has developed its own neoliberal international institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.¹¹² China has also aggressively expanded its export market, encouraged foreign investment, and embarked on its own litany of foreign investment projects.¹¹³ This cumulation of more than four decades worth of adoption of neoliberal ideas has had a profound and transformational effect on the Chinese economy. On the eve of Deng’s ascension to power, the average Chinese worker earned a yearly salary of 445 yuan; in 2019, the average Chinese worker earned 93,000

¹⁰⁹ Bob Davis, *When the World Opened the Gates of China*, WALL ST. J. (Jul. 27, 2018), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/when-the-world-opened-the-gates-of-china-1532701482>.

¹¹⁰ Nicholas R. Lardy, *Permanent Normal Trade Relations for China*, BROOKINGS INST. (May 10, 2000), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/permanent-normal-trade-relations-for-china/>.

¹¹¹ It should be noted that although China has adopted more and more neoliberal policies since Deng’s ascension to power, the country has nevertheless been critical of neoliberal institutions. The Chinese often feel as if they have no choice but to work within the neoliberal order, but that does not mean that they are not cautious when operating within this framework. The CCP is quick to note that many of these institutions were not created with Chinese input, and that neoliberal values do not necessarily reflect “Asian values.” See Dawisson Belém Lopes, *Asia’s Exceptional Neoliberalism*, THE DIPLOMAT (Aug. 7, 2017), <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/asias-exceptional-neoliberalism/>.

¹¹² See G. John Ikenberry & Darren J. Lim, *China’s Emerging Institutional Statecraft*, BROOKINGS INST. (Apr. 2017), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/chinas-emerging-institutional-statecraft.pdf>.

¹¹³ See generally Jane Duckett, *Neoliberalism, Authoritarian Pol. & Soc. Pol’y in China*, 51 DEV. & CHANGE 2, 523–539 (2020).

yuan.¹¹⁴ This, according to the World Bank, has resulted in nearly 850 million Chinese citizens being lifted from extreme poverty.¹¹⁵ When Deng assumed power, the nation's nominal GDP sat at roughly \$200 billion; in 2019, the nation's GDP eclipsed \$14.3 trillion.¹¹⁶ In 1978, China's annual exports amounted to a paltry \$7 billion; in 2019, China was the world's leading exporter, with total exports exceeding \$2.6 trillion.¹¹⁷

Yet as China has prospered within the neoliberal order, the country engaged in a series of perceived malevolent actions that has earned the ire of many governments in the developed world. One of the more frustrating aspects of China's rise has been its willingness to work within neoliberal institutions to its benefit while simultaneously taking advantage of ambiguities in the system. Professor Mark Wu details how the current structure of the WTO, for example, was not equipped to handle China's complex and rapidly evolving economy. Wu explains that as a result of this, Chinese leaders are able exploit WTO rules to advance its economic expansion abroad while simultaneously insulating its domestic market from certain elements of foreign competition.¹¹⁸ *The Wall Street Journal* gives the following example of this phenomenon: "In one case [China] blocked exports of scarce raw materials needed by high-tech industries, hurting foreign firms. When the WTO ruled against Beijing on one set of restrictions, it removed the barriers—but then blocked another set of raw materials."¹¹⁹ Additionally, domestic Chinese firms have engaged in widespread theft of foreign intellectual property. This frequent occurrence by Chinese businesses has not only gone largely unpunished by Beijing, but some scholars argue that the current legal structure incentivizes such theft from foreign firms.¹²⁰ Many developed nations (particularly the U.S.) have also criticized China's artificial devaluation of the yuan—a policy claimed by some to be currency manipulation.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ *China Average Yearly Wages*, TRADING ECON. (2020), <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/wages>.

¹¹⁵ *The World Bank in China*, THE WORLD BANK, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>.

¹¹⁶ *China GDP*, TRADING ECON. (2020), <https://tradingeconomics.com/china/gdp>.

¹¹⁷ *China Exports 1960-2021*, MACROTRENDS (2020), <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CHN/china/exports>.

¹¹⁸ See generally Mark Wu, *The 'China, Inc.' Challenge to Global Trade Governance*, 57 HARV. INT'L L. J. 1001, 1001–1063 (2016).

¹¹⁹ Davis, *supra* note 109.

¹²⁰ See Daniel Rechtschaffen, *How China's Legal System Enables Intellectual Property Theft*, THE DIPLOMAT (Nov. 11, 2020), <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/how-chinas-legal-system-enables-intellectual-property-theft/>.

¹²¹ The discussion around whether China's currency valuation retooling constitutes "manipulation" is complex from a legal perspective. For a short explanation of this debate, see Brad W. Sester, *Is China Manipulating Its Currency?*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELS. (Aug. 8, 2019), <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/china-manipulating-its-currency>.

The totality of these aggressive moves by Beijing have served as a partial catalyst for the anger directed by the populist right. The populist right will often cite the aforementioned actions as examples of China’s use of the neoliberal system to benefit itself and harm the United States in the process—that China is a “cheat” and America pays the bill. But there are factors beyond these examples of “cheating” that play an even greater role for the anger directed at China. China’s honest (i.e., non-“cheating”) embrace of neoliberal principles, such as globalized trade and encouragement of foreign investment, has also earned the ire of much of the populist right.

For much of the last forty years, Western businesses have taken advantage of the fact that Chinese laborers cost a fraction of Western labor. The lack of trade unions, no uniform national minimum wage, and little mobilization among workers to demand higher wages has resulted in very low labor costs in China.¹²² At the same time, the implementation of American neoliberal trade policies with China—particularly PNTR—has removed key barriers for U.S. corporations, thus opening access to Chinese markets. For American manufactures, the removal of trade barriers has provided the incentive to abandon highly expensive domestic labor and embrace cheaper labor in China. Economists estimate that liberalized trading policies between the U.S. and China have resulted in the net loss of several million U.S. manufacturing jobs.¹²³ Of course, there have been other reasons behind the decline of American manufacturing. Domestic firms have taken advantage of cheap labor beyond the Chinese marketplace (including India, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, and Vietnam).¹²⁴ Additionally, high-tech automation has resulted not in the transfer of jobs from one region to another, but rather the total evaporation of certain manufacturing positions.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, it is the *perception* that China has been the central culprit behind the decline of U.S. industry that has influenced thinking among the populist right.

B. *The White Working-Class Resistance to China*

For working-class whites, China’s rise has been facilitated by neoliberal policies—and it is American workers that have paid the price. China has used

¹²² See Paul W. Beamish, *The High Cost of Cheap Chinese Labor*, HARV. BUS. REV. (Jun. 2006), <https://hbr.org/2006/06/the-high-cost-of-cheap-chinese-labor>.

¹²³ See Justin R. Pearce & Peter K. Schott, *US Manufacturing Jobs and Trade Liberalization with China*, MICROECONOMIC INSIGHTS (Jul. 10, 2018), <https://microeconomicinsights.org/us-manufacturing-jobs-trade-liberalization-china/>.

¹²⁴ See Dimitra DeFotis, *Why India Labor Will Be Outsourced For Another 25 Years*, BARRON’S (Sept. 6, 2017), <https://www.barrons.com/articles/why-india-labor-will-be-outsourced-for-another-25-years-1504733005>.

¹²⁵ See Luaren Aratani, *Robots on the Rise as Americans Experience Record Job Losses Amid Pandemic*, THE GUARDIAN (Nov. 27, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/nov/27/robots-replacing-jobs-automation-unemployment-us>.

the neoliberal order to rip-off American workers, cheat the system, and aggrandize itself at the expense of the everyday American. Prominent pollster Mark Penn concludes the following from his findings: “[T]he truth is a lot of people in the working class have fingered China for being responsible for low wage growth here in America, and they want this unfairness corrected.”¹²⁶ To figure out how exactly working-class whites linked their woes, neoliberalism, and China’s rise together, a historical analysis must be conducted over the last several decades.

China did not rise to economic prominence until recently, and trade relations were not normalized until the signing of the PNTR at the dawn of this century. Yet the roots of the white working-class discontents with China extend beyond both the 21st Century and China itself. The decline of American industry, and the subsequent harm incurred by working-class whites, began in earnest with another country in the Far East: Japan. The 1980’s saw the first period of decline in American manufacturing, as Japanese industry leaders invented new industrial organizational measures that cut costs and increased production speed. Bolstered by liberalized trade developments with the U.S., Japanese manufacturers aggressively competed with American industrial giants, primarily in the automotive and electronics industries. The end result was a net loss of several million American manufacturing jobs—mostly held by working-class whites.¹²⁷ This would foreshadow much of what was to come with China nearly twenty years later. In the wake of intense job losses, media outlets and major unions decried Japan’s rise. One 1982 headline from *The Wall Street Journal* proclaimed, “UAW vs. Japan,” highlighting that the powerful United Auto Workers union was attempting to rollback neoliberal trade policies and impose quotas on Japanese automotive imports.¹²⁸ As a result of these movements, political leaders encouraged government action—i.e., geoeconomic action—to curb Japan’s growing industrial power and stop the hemorrhaging of American jobs. In 1985, for example, Republican Senator John Danforth of Missouri introduced an “Anti-Japan” bill to curb Japanese industrial imports. According to Danforth, this

¹²⁶ Julia Manchester, *Mark Penn: Working Class Blames China for Low Wage Growth*, THE HILL (Jul. 12, 2018), <https://thehill.com/hilltv/what-americas-thinking/396728-mark-penn-working-class-blames-china-for-low-wage-growth>.

¹²⁷ See Linette Lopez, *The White House is Only Telling you Half of the Sad Story of What Happened to American Jobs*, BUS. INSIDER (Jul. 25, 2017), <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-happened-to-american-jobs-in-the-80s-2017-7>; see also Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld et al., *The Decline and Resurgence of the U.S. Auto Industry*, ECON POL’Y INST. (May 6, 2015), <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-decline-and-resurgence-of-the-u-s-auto-industry/>.

¹²⁸ Robert L. Stimson, *UAW vs. Japan: Car-Import Bill Gains Strength in Congress*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Sep. 3, 1982.

bill was necessary because Japan was an “unfair trader”¹²⁹—a claim that in many ways mirrors that attacks that President Trump would make on China some 25 years later.

Although Japan’s dominance faded by the 1990’s, and the hemorrhaging of American manufacturing was temporarily halted, a narrative had nevertheless developed that the U.S. had been effectively cuckolded by a Far Eastern nation. Neoliberal open trade policies had come to haunt the U.S., and American manufacturing workers paid the price—all while Japan grew richer and more prosperous. This narrative resurfaced in the 2000’s, as American manufacturing was once again under siege. During the period between the signing of PNTR and the 2008 recession, China experienced drastic expansions in its industrial base and dramatically increased its trade with the U.S.; America’s industrial heartland, by contrast, experienced a vast shrinking.¹³⁰ It was, it seemed, a replay of the 1980’s—but with a twist. Japan’s domination over American manufacturing was largely the product of reimagined industrial organization. In other words, tactical management decisions by Japanese business executives played a central role in the nation’s success over American industrial firms.¹³¹ By contrast, much of the discussion on China’s rise focused not on any sort of superior business techniques, but rather on China’s cheap labor market.

The white working-class frustrations towards China, its cheap labor force, and the neoliberal system that perpetuated China’s rise began to develop in the mid-2000’s. A 2004 article from the *Atlantic* provides a good outline of the sentiment felt by working-class whites:

“In the here and now, though, the anger is concentrated in places like Rockford, Illinois, a once thriving center of machine-tool industry about an hour’s drive from Chicago. . . . ‘We’re on our way to becoming a Third World nation,’ says Donald Manzullo, a Republican member of Congress. . . . What’s the state of mind of his constituents? ‘They are angry because they lost their jobs,’ he says, ‘angry because the jobs are going overseas, and angry because the Chinese work for such a low wage.’ The anger is starting to turn inward, into depression: ‘A lot of people have given up hope.’”¹³²

These frustrations quickly billowed into calls for action. By the mid-2000’s, a number of trade organizations and lobbying groups developed in response to China’s rise at the perceived hands of neoliberal policies. These

¹²⁹ Clyde H. Farnsworth, *Anti-Japan Trade Bill In Senate: Nation Called ‘Unfair’ in Plea For Retaliation*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 27, 1985.

¹³⁰ See generally, Craig K. Elwell, *Is China a Threat to the U.S. Economy?*, CONG. RSCH. SERV. (Jan. 23, 2007), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33604.pdf>.

¹³¹ Lopez, *supra* note 127.

¹³² Paul Starobin, *The Angry American*, THE ATLANTIC, Jan. 2004.

groups included Saving American Manufacturing, the Manufacturing Coalition, Fair Trade USA, MADE in USA, and American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition.¹³³

This focus on China by working-class whites also corresponded with the rise of popular conservative media sources that also focused on Chinese displacement of American workers. It is unclear which developed first—white working-class resistance to China or conservative media resistance to China. Each phenomenon could have caused the other, or the two could have developed in-tandem and simply worked to amplify each other’s sentiments. Whatever the explanation, popular conservative media personalities also jumped on the anti-China bandwagon. Lou Dobbs neatly summed up the position of much of conservative media in a 2006 opinion editorial for CNN in which he highlighted that China had created a major trade deficit with the U.S. and “dismantled” American industry. Dobbs was quite clear on what was to blame for China’s rise: neoliberal policies. He stated:

The fault [of China’s rise] lies entirely with the U.S. government, our lack of strategy and our failed policies . . . Make no mistake: Our leaders are the fools, and China’s leaders are not to be blamed for taking advantage of this administration’s commitment to faith-based economic theories and so-called free trade that permits the Chinese access to the world’s richest consumer market while China denies our businesses access to its emerging market.¹³⁴

Noted conservative media personality and former presidential candidate Pat Buchanan articulated similar thoughts. In a 2003 editorial for *The American Conservative*, Buchanan decried neoliberal policies, claiming that “open-borders free trade is killing American manufacturing” and that “free trade does to a nation what alcohol does to a man: saps him first of his vitality, then his energy, then his independence, then his life.”¹³⁵ He then connected these policies to China’s rise, stating: “The U.S.-China relationship cannot truly be described as trade. It is rather the looting of America by China and its corporate collaborators in the United States.”¹³⁶

Anti-China feelings were only strengthened among working-class whites after the 2008 crisis. If there was ever a better illustration of the simultaneous

¹³³ See, e.g., *A Seething Political Anger Rises In America’s Industrial Heartland; Small Manufacturing Owners Lead Grass-Roots Efforts To Save U.S. Industry*, MFG. & TECH. NEWS (Sep. 3, 2003), <https://web.archive.org/web/20210126182119/http://www.manufacturingnews.com/news/03/0903/art1.html>.

¹³⁴ Lou Dobbs, *Hu’s Visit Shows Who’s in Charge*, CNN (Apr. 19, 2006), <https://www.cnn.com/2006/US/04/19/dobbs.hu/index.html>.

¹³⁵ Patrick Buchanan, *The Death of Manufacturing*, THE AM. CONSERVATIVE (Aug. 11, 2003, 12:00 AM), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/death-of-manufacturing/>.

¹³⁶ *Id.*

success of the burgeoning Chinese economy and the decline of the white working-class, it was economics of 2008-2009. As the world was reeling from economic calamity, China enjoyed relative prosperity. According to the World Bank, China enjoyed an eye-popping 9.7 percent increase in GDP in 2008, and a 9.4 increase in 2009.¹³⁷ By contrast, U.S. GDP fell by .1 percent in 2008, and 2.6 percent in 2009.¹³⁸ At the same time, working-class whites saw high rates of home foreclosure and unemployment,¹³⁹ and more than 25 percent of working-class white men simply exited the workforce.¹⁴⁰ This did not go unnoticed by the popular press, as major media outlets routinely claimed that Chinese cheap labor was making the economic crisis even worse for working-class whites by permanently dislocating blue collar jobs.¹⁴¹

Yet while the American economy was collapsing, and China was gaining, most working-class whites had yet to fully jump onto the populism bandwagon. Only 13 percent of working-class whites considered themselves supporters of the Tea Party—the paragon of right-wing populism of the early 2010’s—and a large chunk of working-class whites (around 35 percent) were sympathetic to the policies of the Obama Administration.¹⁴² This stood in stark contrast to the political preferences of working-class whites in 2016, the overwhelming majority of whom backed Trump.¹⁴³ That the Tea Party was

¹³⁷ *GDP Growth (annual %) - China*, THE WORLD BANK, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=CN>.

¹³⁸ *GDP Growth (annual %) - United States*, THE WORLD BANK, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=US>.

¹³⁹ See Robert Cherry, *Who Speaks for the Working Class?*, CITY J. (Apr. 18, 2016), <https://www.city-journal.org/article/who-speaks-for-the-working-class>; J. Gregg Robinson, Robert Cherry, *The White Working-Class and the Foreclosure Crisis: Tracing the Roots of a Failed Movement in Southern California*, 56 SOC. PERSP. 131, 131–56 (2013).

¹⁴⁰ Hannah Rosin, *2008: Men Felt Punished*, NEW YORKER MAGAZINE, 2018, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/08/america-10-years-after-the-financial-crisis.html>.

¹⁴¹ See, e.g., *Where America’s Jobs Went*, THE WEEK (Mar. 18, 2011), <https://theweek.com/articles/486362/where-americas-jobs-went>; Chrystia Freeland, *As Jobs Go Global, U.S. Workers Pay*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 2, 2012); Tom Orlik, *Heard on the Street: China’s Collaring U.S. Employment*, WALL ST. J. (Jul. 27, 2012), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10000872396390443343704577552481106352066>; Michael Snyder, *Why Blue Collar Jobs are Disappearing*, BUS. INSIDER (Jan. 17, 2013), <https://www.businessinsider.com/why-blue-collar-jobs-are-dissapearing-2012-1>; Will Kimball & Robert E. Scott, *China Trade, Outsourcing and Jobs*, ECON. POL’Y INST. (Dec. 11, 2014), <https://www.epi.org/publication/china-trade-outsourcing-and-jobs/>; Heesun Wee, *The Rise of ‘Made by China’ in America*, CNBC (Feb. 6, 2015), <https://www.cnbc.com/2015/02/05/the-rise-of-made-by-china-in-america.html>.

¹⁴² Molly Ball, *Everything You Think You Know About White Working-Class Voters Is Wrong*, THE ATLANTIC (Sept. 20, 2012), <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/09/everything-you-think-you-know-about-white-working-class-voters-is-wrong/262619/>.

¹⁴³ *NBC News Exit Poll: Trump Dominates Among Working-Class Whites*, NBC NEWS (Nov. 8, 2016), <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/data-points/nbc-news-exit-poll-trump-dominates-among-working-class-whites-n681146>.

not a home for working-class whites in the early 2010's is further reflected by the fact that polling indicated Tea Party supporters in 2009 and 2010 were more likely to be affluent and well-educated.¹⁴⁴ This is, perhaps, unsurprising given the early focus and rhetoric of the Tea Party. Much of the Tea Party's early days were focused on issues such as debt reduction, taxes, and the size of the federal government—issues that were not particularly salient to working-class individuals, but were highly relevant to more affluent voters.¹⁴⁵ A search through transcripts from major Tea Party events shows that leaders within the populist right—such as Congresswoman Michele Bachmann¹⁴⁶ and former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin¹⁴⁷—were also focused on these issues that had little salience for working-class whites. Additionally, transcripts of Republican debates during the 2012 primary, alongside analysis of speeches given by major Tea Party leaders, reveal scant references to China. In fact, some Tea Party leaders even flat-out rejected making geoeconomic moves against China. Former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum stated in a 2011 Republican presidential primary debate: “Some have suggested we need to go into a trade war with China and have tariffs. That just taxes you. I don't want to tax you.”¹⁴⁸

The Tea Party was not alone in its lack of attention on China, as popular conservative media outlets and personalities also failed to focus on the East Asian power. A search of the major conservative media personalities from the early 2010's, from Bill O'Reilly to Glenn Beck, reveals very few references to China. Steve Bannon, the former executive chairman of the populist right website Breitbart and one of the leading anti-China voices in the Trump Administration, appears to have made scant references to China prior to Trump's ascendance in the 2016 primary. This was a stark contrast to the language from the 2000's, when conservative commentators routinely ripped China and neoliberal policies that purportedly advanced Chinese interests. Thus, while working-class whites may have been concerned with

¹⁴⁴ See Kate Zerinke & Megan Thee-Brenan, *Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and More Educated*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 14, 2010.

¹⁴⁵ See Russell Berman, *Gallup: Tea Party's Top Concerns are Debt, Size of Government*, THE HILL (Jul. 5, 2010, 9:45 PM), <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/107193-gallup-tea-partys-top-concerns-are-debt-size-of-government>.

¹⁴⁶ In her 2011 “Tea Party Response” to the State of the Union, for example, Bachmann spent considerable time lamenting the nation's debt, tax code, and “government spending.” Michele Bachman, *Tea Party Response from Rep. Bachmann*, NPR (Jan. 26, 2011), <https://www.npr.org/2011/01/26/133230238/transcript-tea-party-response-from-rep-bachmann>.

¹⁴⁷ Much like Bachmann's State of the Union response, Governor Palin's 2010 keynote address at the Tea Party Convention attacked the Obama Administration's policies on debt, taxes, and spending. Sarah Palin, *Keynote Speech at the Inaugural Tea Party Convention*, AM. RHETORIC (Feb. 6, 2010), <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/sarahpalin2010teapartykeynote.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ Erin Kitzie, *Full Transcript: Republican Debate*, CNBC (Nov. 10, 2011, 8:16 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/id/45074943>.

China’s perceived ripping-off of American workers, and the popular press regularly commented on this phenomenon, it does not appear that the Tea Party nor the conservative media apparatus was particularly concerned with Chinese advances and the decline of domestic manufacturing.

This disconnect between the frustrations of working-class whites and the focus of media personalities and political leaders on the right would not last. As Part IV will demonstrate, there was one man who brought China to the forefront of the populist right, thus helping to engage and motivate working-class whites to join the populist right’s ranks. That man, of course, was Donald J. Trump.

C. *White Evangelical Resistance to China*

While the white working-class resistance to China is a clear story of economic disruption and anger, the Evangelical resistance is a murkier tale. Polling has indicated that white Evangelicals have historically tended to place a high priority on social issues (e.g., abortion, gay marriage, “morals” in society) and less of an emphasis on economic issues when compared to non-Evangelicals.¹⁴⁹ (Note that there is evidence that this phenomenon is fading, and that white Evangelicals have begun focusing more on bread-and-butter issues since the 2016 election.)¹⁵⁰ Thus, it is unsurprising that China’s rise, and the perceived corresponding domestic economic troubles, have not necessarily been a dominant political focus for white Evangelicals. This is not to say, however, that Evangelicals are totally agnostic towards China and its relation to neoliberalism. Trump was dependent on Evangelical votes, and it is hard to imagine that the campaign would have focuses so intensely on China had there not been some salience with the issue among the religious right. An analysis into Evangelical thinking on China reveals that although Chinese dominance was not a highly important issue to the religious right, there was nevertheless concern. Much of this concern was tied with the Evangelical philosophical aversion to neoliberalism, but there are reasons beyond the neoliberal framework that help to explain the religious right’s anger towards China.

As we have explored, the deep aversion among Evangelicals towards the neoliberal order is partly grounded in the idea that neoliberalism will usher in the end times as foretold in biblical prophecy. But there is an intermediate

¹⁴⁹ See Laurie Goodstein & William Yardley, *Bush Benefits From Efforts to Build a Coalition of the Faithful*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 5, 2004; see also Joseph Liu, *Issues and the 2008 Election*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Aug. 21, 2008), <https://www.pewforum.org/2008/08/21/publicationpage.aspxid1078/>.

¹⁵⁰ See Ryan P. Burge, *Retired Evangelicals Care A Lot about Immigration, Less about Gay Marriage*, RELIGION IN PUB. BLOG (Sep. 10, 2018), <https://religioninpublic.blog/2018/09/10/retired-evangelicals-care-a-lot-about-immigration-less-about-gay-marriage/>

step in-between neoliberal ascendance and biblical apocalypse. During this period, many Evangelicals believe that the forces of globalization will chip away at the autonomy and economic strength of the United States—and America’s enemies will benefit from this. Recall Pastor David Jeremiah’s popular 2010 book, *The Coming Economic Armageddon: What Bible Prophecy Warns About the New Global Economy*, in which Jeremiah attacked neoliberal principles. The first chapter of Jeremiah’s text is entitled “The Fall of the American Economy.” In this chapter, Jeremiah details how neoliberal forces have eroded American economic security and have made the nation dependent on foreign nations, especially for debt financing purposes. Jeremiah details that he believes the U.S. will slowly falter, and that several nations will benefit—especially China.¹⁵¹ In subsequent chapters, Jeremiah details how China will grow powerful in the wake of America’s decline, how the yuan will emerge as a central reserve currency for the world’s nations, and how China will emerge as a central character in the end times.¹⁵²

Evangelical resistance to China can also be seen through the isolationism that is prevalent among the religious right. As discussed in Part II, Evangelicals have long held a skepticism towards the internationalist pillars of neoliberalism: internationalism requires an uncomfortable interconnectedness with worlds outside of Christian-America. There is perhaps no country in the mind of Evangelicals that better exemplifies the antithesis of Christian-American than China. Frequently dubbed an “atheist empire” by the religious right, China is often seen as the apex of an ungodly world.¹⁵³ This language by the religious right is nothing new, as Evangelicals routinely decried the Soviet Union as a godless empire throughout the Cold War.¹⁵⁴ Yet there is a categorical difference in the relationship between the U.S. and China and the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The U.S. was in strict strategic geopolitical competition with the Soviet Union and had few economic ties to Warsaw Pact nations.¹⁵⁵ By contrast, neoliberal policies have ensured that the economy of the modern “atheist empire” of China is inherently intertwined with, and co-dependent on, the United States. This has had an unsettling effect on Evangelicals who are wary of societies outside of Christian-America—particularly societies like China that have dubious

¹⁵¹ EREMIAS, *THE COMING ECONOMIC ARMAGEDDON*, *supra* note 94, at 1–27.

¹⁵² *See generally id.*

¹⁵³ *See* Nahal Toosi, *An ‘Atheist’ Empire? Trump Aides Rally Evangelicals in China Fight*, POLITICO (Dec. 12, 2018, 7:30 AM), <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/30/trump-china-evangelicals-trade-fight-1076488>.

¹⁵⁴ *See* DAVID E. SETTJE, *FAITH AND WAR: HOW CHRISTIANS DEBATED THE COLD AND VIETNAM WARS* 1–22 (New York University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁵ *See* Zachary Karabell, *There’s No Cold War With China*, FOREIGN POLICY (Aug. 14, 2020), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/14/cold-war-china-misuse-of-history-united-states-soviet-union/>.

records on human rights, and often engage in persecutions of Christian churches.¹⁵⁶

Part II also highlighted that Evangelical resistance to neoliberalism is also grounded in the religious right’s fervent nationalist streak. That the neoliberal order has allowed China to enjoy immense economic advances and ultimately challenge American primacy is unacceptable to those who place a religious value on American exceptionalism. In an article for the *South China Morning Post*, Professor Peter T. C. Chang has described this phenomenon in the following manner:

China is seen as subverting a divinely ordained world order and affronting a divinely anointed US global leadership. But the evangelicals set this superpower tussle within a wider theological narrative. As the ‘chosen nation’, America is commissioned to evangelise the world in preparation for a new heaven and Earth. Thus any challenge to U.S. supremacy, to wit China, is deemed as thwarting the advent of the kingdom of God.¹⁵⁷

Professor Chang’s analysis is strong, but it is missing a key piece. The current frustration among Evangelicals is not just that China threatens to challenge the U.S.; rather, there is a deep fear that China will surpass the U.S. Recall that Pastor David Jeremiah’s book described the rise of China as corresponding with the collapse of the American economy. Jeremiah saw China’s rise not as just a challenge to American power, but also as the doom to American prosperity and primacy.

For Evangelicals, neoliberal policies have allowed China to become rich, threaten American primacy, and give way to apocalyptic ends. But it would be inaccurate to argue that the entirety of Evangelical frustration with China is grounded in the religious right’s broader distaste for neoliberalism. One major area of anger that exists outside the neoliberal framework concerns human rights. Evangelicals have watched with intense interest and horror at Beijing’s treatment of the Chinese Christian population for decades. Evangelicals within the George W. Bush Administration, for example, pushed the State Department to get tough on the CCP’s crackdowns of Christian churches and guided the U.S. president into adopting tougher rhetoric on China’s treatment of Christians.¹⁵⁸ More than a decade later, Vice President

¹⁵⁶ See Toosi, *supra* note 155.

¹⁵⁷ Peter T. C. Chang, *What the Christian Evangelical Grip on America Means for China and the World*, S. CHINA MORNING POST (Nov. 14, 2020), <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3109596/what-christian-evangelical-grip-america-means-china-and-world>.

¹⁵⁸ See, e.g., Elisabeth Bumiller, *Bush, Calling U.S. ‘a Nation Guided by Faith,’ Urges Freedom of Worship in China*, N.Y. TIMES (Feb. 22, 2002), <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/22/world/bush-calling-us-a-nation-guided-by-faith-urges-freedom-of-worship-in-china.html>; *Bush: ‘May God bless the Christians of China’*, CNN (Nov.

Mike Pence—who is perhaps currently the nation’s most prominent Evangelical politician—stated that China’s “avowedly atheist Communist Party” has been “tearing down crosses, burning Bibles and imprisoning believers.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, when considering why exactly the religious right has soured on China, one cannot ignore the concern Evangelicals have for fellow Christians in distant lands.

In sum, this part has attempted to link China’s rise within the neoliberal order and the populist right’s anger towards China. For working-class whites, China has taken advantage of the neoliberal system, allowing itself to enjoy major trade surpluses and deftly maneuvering within the weaknesses international legal frameworks. As a result, working-class whites have come to believe that they are the ones that have paid the price for Chinese ascendance. Evangelicals, by contrast, tend not to look at the rise of China through a wholly self-interested lens. Instead, they see the situation through a more philosophical lens, linking China with the broader rise of neoliberalism that will usher in biblical end times and challenge American primacy. Evangelicals are also mindful that China is the antithesis of Christian-America, and that the country engages in aggressive persecution of fellow Christians. For these reasons, the two largest cohorts within the populist right have developed a deep, simmering anger towards the Chinese state. The next part will demonstrate how this anger provided the Trump Administration with the political capital to utilize a geoeconomic arsenal against China.

V. THE POPULIST RIGHT SEIZES GEOECONOMICS

By the time of the 2016 election season, working-class whites and white Evangelicals were solidly in the anti-China camp. Yet as we have noted, few prominent leaders on the right were focused on the issue of China—except for one. Donald Trump was the individual within the populist right that centered on China with a laser-like focus, obsessively attacking the East Asian giant in virtually every campaign rally, debate, and major public appearance from 2010 to his 2016 victory. For Trump, the political benefits were obvious: the populist right had yet to fully envelope working-class whites into its ranks, and a focus on China would help to secure this demographic segment; at the same time, Evangelical voters (who were already solidly in the populist right camp) would not be turned off from such rhetoric, as they too were anti-China. It was not enough, however, for candidate and President Trump to simply

19, 2005), <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/asiapcf/11/19/china-us.bush/>; Matt Spetalnick & Jeremy Pelofsky, *Bush presses China on religious freedom in visit*, REUTERS (Aug. 9, 2008), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-bush/bush-presses-china-on-religious-freedom-in-visit-idUSN0947249120080810>

¹⁵⁹ Nahal Toosi, *An ‘Atheist’ Empire? Trump Aides Rally Evangelicals in China Fight*, POLITICO (Dec. 30, 2018), <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/12/30/trump-china-evangelicals-trade-fight-1076488>.

complain about how the neoliberal order had allowed China to rip-off the American people. Action was required, and geoeconomics was the solution. In Trump’s eyes, geoeconomic strategies would not only help America to regain its strategic foothold both in industry and in global prestige, but they would also function as a sort-of Old-Testament-style retributive justice against China.

China and Geoeconomics on the Campaign Trail

How exactly the populist right eventually came to reflect the views of working-class whites and embrace a frustration towards China can be seen through the lens of one man: Donald Trump. The media mogul wisely identified the strong anti-China current in the body politic long before most leaders in the populist right and attacked the East Asian country for much of the early-2010’s. These attacks prefaced what would soon be a central feature of his presidency’s foreign policy: geoeconomics. Throughout the early-2010’s, Trump repeatedly called to place a tariff on all Chinese goods and label the country a currency manipulator. These geoeconomic tools, Trump assured, would help to remedy the U.S.’s growing trade deficit with China and allow the United States to gain the upper hand in Sino-American relations.¹⁶⁰ In a 2011 address to the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), Trump called for a 25 percent tariff against Chinese products in order to rebuild American manufacturing and punish China for its alleged currency manipulation.¹⁶¹ In a 2011 CNN interview, Trump blasted China for “ripping off” American workers, and argued that if a trade war developed between the U.S. and China, it would “cause a depression in China.”¹⁶² Articles began regularly appearing in the popular press detailing Trump’s near-obsession with getting-even with the Chinese.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ See Chris Isidore, *How ‘The Donald’ Could Incite a Trade War*, CNN MONEY (Apr. 18, 2011), https://money.cnn.com/2011/04/17/news/economy/trump_china_trade_war/index.htm.

¹⁶¹ Annalyn Censky, *Trump: U.S. is a ‘Laughing Stock’*, CNN MONEY (Feb. 10, 2011), https://money.cnn.com/2011/02/10/news/economy/donald_trump_cpac/index.htm.

¹⁶² *The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer: Donald Trump on China, “These Are Not Our Friends. These Are Our Enemies.”*, CNN (Jan. 20, 2011), <https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2011/01/20/the-situation-room-with-wolf-blitzer-donald-trump-on-china-these-are-not-our-friends-these-are-our-enemies/>.

¹⁶³ See, e.g., John Tamny, *Due to Your China Stance, Donald Trump, You’re Fired*, FORBES (Dec. 19, 2010), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johntamny/2010/12/19/due-to-your-china-stance-donald-trump-youre-fired/?sh=23c2aa2c3678>; Thomas E. Ricks, *China, Donald Trump, and the Threat*, FOREIGN POLICY (Mar. 11, 2011), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/03/11/china-donald-trump-and-the-threat/>; Dan Amira, *Trump to China: ‘Listen You Motherf—ers, We’re Going to Tax You 25 Percent’*, N.Y. MAGAZINE (Apr. 29, 2011), https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2011/04/trump_to_china_listen_you_moth.html; Peter Grier, *Did Donald Trump Endorse Mitt Romney Because of China?*, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR (Feb. 3, 2012), <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/The-Vote/2012/0203/Did-Donald-Trump-endorse-Mitt-Romney-because-of-China>.

When the media mogul descended from the escalators of Trump Tower in June 2015 and declared his candidacy for president, he made China a central focus of his campaign speech. “China has our jobs,” he declared, “They are ripping us. We are rebuilding China.” Trump made a direct connection between neoliberalism and China’s ripping-off of the American people, arguing that neoliberal trade deals were the direct cause of American decline and Chinese ascendance. He further noted a current that has been identified in this article: that other leaders on the right had yet to make China a central focus. Trump specifically stated: “I hear my fellow Republicans and they’re wonderful people. I like them... I hear their speeches . . . They don’t talk China. When was the last time you heard ‘China’s killing us?’”¹⁶⁴

The disconnect between Trump and the rest of the leaders on the populist right with regards to China persisted into the 2016 presidential primary. A review of the transcripts from every 2016 Republican primary debate reveals that only Trump was routinely concerned with China and the issue of neoliberal trade policies. The real estate mogul again and again savaged neoliberal trade policies that allowed China to “kill[] our country,”¹⁶⁵ “totally take advantage of everyone,”¹⁶⁶ and “make it impossible” for certain sectors of American manufacturing to succeed.¹⁶⁷ By contrast, other Republican candidates—including populist right figures such as Ben Carson and Rand Paul—rarely discussed China. In some instances, popular Tea Party conservatives outright rejected geoeconomic action against China. Tea Party darling Florida Senator Marco Rubio stated in a January 2016 South Carolina debate: “We are all frustrated with what China is doing. I think we need to be very careful with tariffs, and here’s why. China doesn’t pay the tariff, the buyer pays the tariff.”¹⁶⁸ Texas Senator Ted Cruz echoed a similar sentiment at March 2016 Florida debate in which he attacked Trump’s proposal to impose a 45 percent tariff on China: “[Trump’s] solutions don’t work... [T]he

¹⁶⁴ *Full Transcript of Donald Trump’s 2016 Presidential Announcement*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS (Apr. 27, 2017), <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/transcript-donald-trump-2016-presidential-announcement-article-1.2260117>.

¹⁶⁵ *Transcript of Republican Debate in Miami, Full Text*, CNN (Mar. 15, 2016), <https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/10/politics/republican-debate-transcript-full-text/index.html>.

¹⁶⁶ Charlotte Alter, *Transcript: Read the Full Text of the Fourth Republican Debate in Milwaukee*, TIME MAGAZINE (Nov. 11, 2015), <https://time.com/4107636/transcript-read-the-full-text-of-the-fourth-republican-debate-in-milwaukee/>.

¹⁶⁷ See Roslind S. Helderman & Tom Hamburger, *Trump has Profited from Foreign Labor He Says is Killing U.S. Jobs*, WASH. POST, (Mar. 13, 2016) https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-decries-outsourced-labor-yet-he-didnt-seek-made-in-america-in-2004-deal/2016/03/13/4d65a43c-e63a-11e5-b0fd-073d5930a7b7_story.html.

¹⁶⁸ Tim Fix, *6th Republican Debate Transcript, Annotated: Who Said What and What it Meant*, N.Y. TIMES (Jan. 14, 2016), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/01/14/6th-republican-debate-transcript-annotated-who-said-what-and-what-it-meant/>.

effect of a 45 percent tariff would be when you go to the store, when you go to Walmart, when you are shopping for your kids, the prices you pay go up 45 percent.”¹⁶⁹

The dichotomy between Trump and the rest of the populist right leadership highlights that it was indeed Trump who brought the issue of China to the forefront of populist right politics. Trump’s 2016 campaign neatly linked the perceived connection between neoliberal trade policies, China’s rise, and the faltering of American industry. The real estate mogul routinely claimed throughout his campaign that neoliberal institutions (the WTO was a favorite target of Mr. Trump)¹⁷⁰ and trading policies allowed China to engage in the “biggest theft in the history of the world.”¹⁷¹ This theft, according to Trump, resulted in the stealing of “the majority of U.S. manufacturing jobs.”¹⁷² As Trump focused on China with laser-like precision, commentators noted a “consensus” had developed that “Trump’s message of . . . taking a hard line on trade with countries like China” was deeply resonating with working-class whites.¹⁷³ Stories abounded in the popular press on how Trump’s China attacks were both a purposeful and successful attempt by the campaign at bringing over large swaths of white working class voters to support Trump.¹⁷⁴

The fact that the Trump campaign realized that a focus on China would be beneficial for the real estate mogul’s electoral fortunes with working-class whites is particularly notable for our purposes. Trump did not simply bemoan Chinese expansion (although there was certainly much complaining); he also

¹⁶⁹ CNN, *supra* note 167.

¹⁷⁰ See Andrew Walker, *US Election 2016: Are Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders Right About Trade?*, BBC (Apr. 10, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-35981784>.

¹⁷¹ Rana Foroohar, *Fact-Checking Donald Trump on Free Trade*, TIME (Mar. 11, 2016), <https://time.com/4255900/donald-trump-trade-tariffs/>.

¹⁷² *Id.*

¹⁷³ Lindsey Cook, *America’s New Working Class*, U.S. NEWS (Apr. 5, 2016), <https://www.usnews.com/news/the-report/articles/2016-04-05/americas-new-working-class-are-not-trump-supporters>.

¹⁷⁴ See, e.g., Justin Gest, *Strange Bedfellows: Donald Trump and the White Working Class*, REUTERS (Aug. 25, 2015), <https://www.reuters.com/article/gest-trump/column-strange-bedfellows-donald-trump-and-the-white-working-class-idUSL1N11016W20150825>; Charles Murray, *Trump’s America*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Feb. 12, 2016), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trumps-america-1455290458>; Peter Grier, *Can White Working Class Voters Carry Donald Trump to White House?*, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR (Jun. 7, 2016), <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/Decoder/2016/0607/Can-white-working-class-voters-carry-Donald-Trump-to-White-House>; Paul Wiseman, *Losing Out to China, Workers Embrace Trump*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Sept. 14, 2016), <https://web.archive.org/web/20220521030512/https://www.ap.org/explore/divided-america/losing-out-to-china-workers-embrace-trump.html>; Vassilis K. Fouskas, *How Class and the Rise of China Won Trump the White House*, THE CONVERSATION (Dec. 6, 2016), <https://theconversation.com/how-class-and-the-rise-of-china-won-trump-the-white-house-69515>.

provided a dual solution to perceived Chinese advances: deconstructing the neoliberal order and advancing a geoeconomic agenda. Trump routinely called for an end to such neoliberal pillars as free trade,¹⁷⁵ globalization and internationalism,¹⁷⁶ and international economic institutions such as the IMF and the WTO.¹⁷⁷ At the same time, Trump saw geoeconomic strategies—from imposing a 45 percent tariff on all goods,¹⁷⁸ to placing sanctions on certain companies,¹⁷⁹ to formally labeling China a “currency manipulator”¹⁸⁰—partially as a way to rebuild manufacturing. Yet the rebuilding of America’s manufacturing base was not the sole reason behind his geoeconomic rhetoric. Trump saw his geoeconomic strategies as punitive in nature, as they were designed to “get back” at China for its perceived malevolent behavior within the neoliberal framework.¹⁸¹

In June 2016, Trump gave a major address on trade that perhaps best encapsulates his campaign’s attitude towards China. Trump lamented China’s rise, blaming neoliberal trade policies for China’s success and stating that “China’s entrance into the World Trade Organization has enabled the greatest job theft in the history of our country.”¹⁸² Trump then identified three major geoeconomic strategies that he would employ against China if elected, stating:

1. “I’m going to instruct the U.S. trade representative to bring trade cases against China, both in this country and at the WTO.”
2. “I’m going to instruct my treasury secretary to label China a currency manipulator, which should have been done years ago.”
3. “If China does not stop its illegal activities, including its theft of American trade secrets . . . I will use every lawful presidential

¹⁷⁵ See Edward Alden, *The Biggest Issue That Carried Trump to Victory*, FORTUNE (Nov. 10, 2016), <https://fortune.com/2016/11/10/trump-voters-free-trade-globalization/>.

¹⁷⁶ See Stewart M. Patrick, *Goodbye to All That? World Order in the Wake of Trump*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELS. (Nov. 9, 2016), <https://www.cfr.org/blog/goodbye-all-world-order-wake-trump>.

¹⁷⁷ See Geoff Dyer, *Donald Trump Threatens to Pull US Out of WTO*, FINANCIAL TIMES (Jul. 24, 2016), <https://www.ft.com/content/d97b97ba-51d8-11e6-9664-e0bdc13c3bef>.

¹⁷⁸ Bob Davis, *How Trump’s Hard Line on Trade Could Backfire*, WALL STREET J. (Mar. 24, 2016), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-trumps-hard-line-on-trade-could-backfire-1458848243>.

¹⁷⁹ *Id.*

¹⁸⁰ See Saumya Vaishampayan, *Donald Trump Charges China With Yuan Manipulation—Again*, WALL STREET J. (Sept. 26, 2016), <http://www.wsj.com/articles/donald-trump-charges-china-with-yuan-manipulationagain-1474943701>.

¹⁸¹ See Nick Corasaniti, *Donald Trump Vows to Rip Up Trade Deals and Confront China*, N.Y. TIMES (Jun. 28, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/29/us/politics/donald-trump-trade-speech.html>. See also Keith Bradsher, *In China-U.S. Trade War, Trump Would Have Weapons*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 10, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/11/business/international/trump-china-us-trade-war.html>.

¹⁸² Read *Donald Trump’s Speech on Trade*, TIME MAGAZINE (Jun. 28, 2016), <https://time.com/4386335/donald-trump-trade-speech-transcript/>.

power to remedy trade disputes, including the application of tariffs consistent with Section 201 and 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, and Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962.”¹⁸³

This speech was, to its core, anti-neoliberal. Trump not only proposed restricting free and open trade, but he also noted that neoliberal policies were the direct and proximate cause of China’s rise. Ironically, however, Trump’s geoeconomic proposals would have been totally ineffective in the absence of neoliberalism. The intense interdependence between the U.S. and China that would make tariffs so effective was created by neoliberal policies. At the same time, Trump suggested using the WTO—perhaps the greatest embodiment neoliberal institutionalism—to launch geoeconomic legal attacks on China. Trump’s policy of deconstructing neoliberalism’s great beneficiary (China) thus ironically required him to use tools provided by neoliberalism.

Overall, the Trump campaign accurately perceived that this aggressive anti-China, anti-neoliberal posturing would resonate well with working-class whites. Trump keenly identified a simmering tension that had long existed among working-class whites, but had yet to be fully utilized by populist political figures on the right. According to experts, Trump’s ability to discover and exploit this undercurrent played a key role in dramatic increase in white working-class support for the Republican ticket in 2016 when compared to white working-class support for the Romney-Ryan ticket in 2012.¹⁸⁴

Geoeconomics as White House Policy

When Trump won the 2016 election, there were many questions as to whether Trump’s campaign rhetoric would channel into actual policy moves.¹⁸⁵ As this section will demonstrate, Trump made good on his word. Trump’s good fortune in the electoral process was in large part due to his strength among the two core blocs of the populist right: white Evangelicals and working-class whites. Because a large part of Trump’s appeal among these groups (particularly working-class whites) was his focus on China, Trump had much political incentive to follow through on his geoeconomic platform. This resulted in the Trump Administration’s transformation of the Sino-American relationship from one of strategic yet respectful competition into one of geoeconomic confrontation.

Trump’s geoeconomic agenda was far-ranging. Perhaps the most notorious and controversial of his tactics was the application of tariffs to a variety of Chinese goods. Trump’s tariff campaign began not with a sole focus on China, but rather a broad-based application of tariffs for all imports.

¹⁸³ *Id.*

¹⁸⁴ The *Washington Post*’s Jim Tankersley provided an excellent analysis of economic and polling data that explored this phenomenon. See Tankersley, *supra* note 52.

¹⁸⁵ See Robert Howes, *What Will Stop Trump From Starting a Trade War With China*, FORTUNE (Dec. 20, 2016), <https://fortune.com/2016/12/21/donald-trump-trade-war-china/>.

In January of 2018, the president announced his first round of tariffs, focusing on solar panels and washing machines—products that account for a high share of Chinese imports.¹⁸⁶ President Trump relied on Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974, which allows the president to impose tariffs on a foreign state if: “the rights of the United States under any trade agreement are being denied;” or an action by a foreign country “violates, or is inconsistent with, the provisions of, or otherwise denies benefits to the United States under, any trade agreement, or is unjustifiable and burdens or restricts United States commerce.”¹⁸⁷ Just two months later, in March 2018, Trump launched his first round of tariffs directed specifically at Chinese goods, targeting \$50-60 billion worth of imports. These imports included “flat-screen televisions, medical devices, aircraft parts, and batteries,”¹⁸⁸ and Trump justified the actions under Section 301 by highlighting China’s “unfair” trading practices and the growing Sino-American trade deficit.¹⁸⁹ Trump leveled more tariffs on China just several months later in June 2018, slapping a 25 percent tariff on an additional \$50 billion worth of goods, totaling over 1,000 imports.¹⁹⁰ Tariffs continued to spiral upward when in September 2018, Trump announced a 25 percent tariff on an additional \$200 billion worth of Chinese goods.¹⁹¹ By August of 2019, Trump announced that all Chinese imports would face some sort of tariff.¹⁹²

Trump’s tariffs were both controversial and resulted in profound economic effects. Beijing responded to Trump’s trade antics with retaliatory tariff schemes of their own, directly targeting American agricultural and

¹⁸⁶ See Jacob M. Schlesinger & Erin Ailworth, *U.S. Imposes New Tariffs, Ramping Up ‘America First’ Trade Policy*, WALL STREET J. (Jan. 22, 2018), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-imposes-trade-tariffs-signaling-tougher-line-on-china-1516658821#>.

¹⁸⁷ 19 U.S.C. § 2411(1).

¹⁸⁸ Ana Swanson, *White House Unveils Tariffs on 1,300 Chinese Products*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 3, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/us/politics/white-house-chinese-imports-tariffs.html>.

¹⁸⁹ Jeremy Diamond, *Trump Hits China With Tariffs, Heightening concerns of Global Trade War*, CNN (Mar. 23, 2018), <https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/22/politics/donald-trump-china-tariffs-trade-war/>.

¹⁹⁰ Pamela Brown & Julia Horowitz, *Trump Announces Tariffs on \$50 Billion Worth of Chinese Goods*, CNN (Jun. 15, 2018), <https://money.cnn.com/2018/06/14/news/economy/trump-china-tariffs/index.html?adkey=bn>.

¹⁹¹ Yawen Chen & David Lawder, *China Says Trump Forces Its Hand, Will Retaliate Against New U.S. Tariffs*, REUTERS (Sept. 17, 2018, 3:53 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-china-tariffs/trump-slaps-tariffs-on-200-billion-in-chinese-goods-threatens-267-billion-more-idUSKCN1LX2M3>.

¹⁹² See Yun Li, *Trump Says US Will Impose 10% Tariffs on Another \$300 Billion of Chinese Goods Starting Sept. 1*, CNBC (Aug. 1, 2019, 1:29 PM), <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/01/trump-says-us-will-impose-10percent-tariffs-on-300-billion-of-chinese-goods-starting-september-1.html>.

industrial imports. This tit-for-tat quickly blossomed into a much-publicized trade war between the world’s two economic superpowers.¹⁹³

A study by Moody’s Analytics revealed that the trade war had cost 300,000 American jobs and .3 percent of U.S. real GDP.¹⁹⁴ As Trump prepared to leave office in January 2021, commentators were quick to point out that during the Trump Administrations, Chinese imports to the U.S. reached an all-time high and the American trade deficit with China had grown to highest level in history.¹⁹⁵ It thus appears that Trump’s goal of reclaiming American manufacturing from the clutches of the China had failed to come to fruition. But recall that Trump had an additional goal with his geoeconomic strategies: inflicting retribution on the East Asian giant. In this measure, he may have succeeded to a degree. Economic analysts noted that the trade war had weakened China’s economic standing, as investments in Chinese manufacturing declined. In 2019, China had its weakest GDP growth in three decades—a trend that some analysts claim Trump’s trade war played a key role in.¹⁹⁶

Though Trump’s trade war was his most notorious geoeconomic attack on China, it was not his only one. At some point in the past, one of China’s most effective mechanisms for challenging the Trump Administration’s tariffs would have been to litigate the issue before the WTO. And in fact, China did just that in 2018. Beijing filed a complaint against the U.S., arguing that because the U.S. did not uniformly apply the tariffs to all members of the WTO, Trump’s tariffs scheme violated the WTO’s most-favored treatment provision.¹⁹⁷ The WTO agreed with China, stating that “the United States had not met its burden of demonstrating that the measures are provisionally justified” under the WTO’s rules.¹⁹⁸ In a pre-Trump era, this would have been a major win for the Chinese. Yet the Trump Administration had already used geoeconomic tools to prevent Chinese victories in the WTO. Starting as early

¹⁹³ See Heather Long, *Was Trump’s China Trade War Worth it?*, WASHINGTON POST (Jan. 15, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/01/15/was-trumps-china-trade-war-worth-it/>.

¹⁹⁴ Mark Zandi et al., *Trade War Chicken: The Tariffs and the Damage Done*, MOODY’S ANALYTICS (Sept. 2019), <https://www.moodyanalytics.com/-/media/article/2019/trade-war-chicken.pdf>.

¹⁹⁵ Mark Zandi et al., *Trade War Chicken: The Tariffs and the Damage Done*, MOODY’S ANALYTICS (Sept. 2019), <https://www.moodyanalytics.com/-/media/article/2019/trade-war-chicken.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ See Naomi Xu Elegant, *The U.S. Trade War Slowed China’s 2019 Economic Growth to its Weakest Pace in Nearly 30 Years*, FORTUNE (Jan. 17, 2020, 1:38 AM), <https://fortune.com/2020/01/17/china-gdp-growth-2019-weakest-30-years-trade-war/>.

¹⁹⁷ See Bryce Baschuk, *U.S. Violated Trade Rules With Tariffs on China, WTO Says (3)*, BLOOMBERG L. (Sept. 15, 2020, 8:51 AM), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/international-trade/u-s-violated-trade-rules-with-tariffs-against-china-wto-says>.

¹⁹⁸ Panel Report, *United States—Tariff Measures on Certain Goods from China*, WTO Doc. WT/DS543/R (adopted Sept. 15, 2020).

as 2017, Trump's trade team quietly began implementing efforts to weaken the WTO in an attempt to gain the upper hand against China. A key aspect of this plan involved the WTO's Appellate Body. Under the WTO's rules, a decision from a panel can be appealed to the Appellate Body—yet there must be at least three members of the body to hear a case. Starting during the Obama years, the U.S. began a process of hollowing out the Appellate Body by blocking appointments to the group. Trump accelerated this weakening of the body by blocking all appointments, which ultimately brought the Appellate Body below its three-member threshold in 2019.¹⁹⁹ Without a properly functioning Appellate Body, the U.S. could appeal any adverse decision “into the void”²⁰⁰—meaning that the litigation would be held in virtual limbo and thus render any decision by a WTO panel “effectively moot.”²⁰¹ That is precisely what happened with the Chinese WTO litigation: the U.S. appealed the decision in October 2020, thus rendering the Chinese suit moot.²⁰² Therefore, not only did Trump's geoeconomics directly impact the Chinese economy, but they also ensured that China did not have an opportunity to fully challenge his actions before a key international legal institution.

An additional geoeconomic strategy employed by the Trump Administration involved pressuring third states (i.e., states outside of China and the U.S.) to turn their economic backs on China. One of the most notorious illustrations of this tactic involved the United Kingdom's attempts to secure a nationwide 5G system. Beginning in the mid-2010's, the U.K. had relied on the Chinese megacorporation Huawei to help develop the nation's 5G infrastructure. Yet upon Trump's ascendance to the presidency, the U.S. began to complicate matters. In a number of meetings between U.S. and U.K. leaders, including a notoriously aggressive phone call between Trump and Prime Minister Boris Johnson in February 2020,²⁰³ Trump officials pressured America's ally to drop the longstanding ties with Huawei. Although Johnson and his cabinet initially refused American demands, pressure became overwhelming. In July 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the U.K.

¹⁹⁹ As of February 2021, there are currently no members in the Appellate Body. See Chad P. Brown, *Why Did Trump End the WTO's Appellate Body? Tariffs.*, PETERSON INST. FOR INT'L ECON. (Mar. 4, 2020, 11:30 AM), <https://www.piie.com/blogs/trade-and-investment-policy-watch/why-did-trump-end-wtos-appellate-body-tariffs>.

²⁰⁰ Ana Swanson, *W.T.O. Says American Tariffs on China Broke Global Trade Rules*, N.Y. TIMES (Sep. 15, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/15/business/economy/wto-trade-china-trump.html>.

²⁰¹ Baschuk, *supra* note 199.

²⁰² See Bryce Baschuk, *U.S. Appeals WTO Ruling That Trump's China Tariffs Were Illegal*, BLOOMBERG (Oct. 26, 2020), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-10-26/u-s-appeals-wto-ruling-that-trump-s-china-tariffs-were-illegal>.

²⁰³ See Tim Ross, *Angry over U.K. Refusal to Ban Huawei from its 5G Networks, Trump Berates PM Johnson in Heated Phone Chat*, FORTUNE (Feb. 7, 2020, 3:16 AM), <https://fortune.com/2020/02/07/trump-johnson-huawei-ban/>.

would be severing its ties with Huawei, with the British newspaper *The Guardian* reporting: “The British government privately told the Chinese technology giant Huawei that it was being banned from Britain’s 5G telecoms network partly for ‘geopolitical’ reasons following huge pressure from President Donald Trump.”²⁰⁴ The Trump Administration applied similar pressure to Brazil, hoping that the country’s Trump-friendly president, Jair Bolsonaro, would also ban Huawei.²⁰⁵

Trump’s third party geoeconomic pressure was also implemented via treaty negotiations. The strongest manifestation of this can be seen through American efforts to shape the language of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). International law scholars Anthea Roberts, Henrique Choer Moraes, and Victor Ferguson outline this:

Economically, the USA is seeking to pressure others to choose between it and China. For example, the USA inserted into the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement a ‘poison pill’ that requires each treaty party to notify the others if it wishes to engage in free trade agreement negotiations with a non-market economy (here, read China) and permits the other treaty parties to terminate the agreement unilaterally if a free trade agreement deal with China is reached.²⁰⁶

Trump’s geoeconomic strategies have also involved harassing certain companies and industries in China. One of the more notorious examples of this was Trump’s attempt to try and ban the popular Chinese social media platform TikTok from U.S. marketplaces. In July 2020, Trump toyed with the idea of signing an executive order to ban TikTok, claiming that “TikTok could be used as an arm of the Chinese Communist Party to spy on American citizens or cause other mischief.”²⁰⁷ Yet many commentators noted that one of the real motivations behind the proposed ban was to simply exact retributive pain on China.²⁰⁸ Another example occurred just weeks before

²⁰⁴ Toby Helm, *Pressure from Trump Led to 5G Ban, Britain Tells Huawei*, THE GUARDIAN (July 18, 2020, 3:34 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/jul/18/pressure-from-trump-led-to-5g-ban-britain-tells-huawei>.

²⁰⁵ See Oliver Stuenkel, *Huawei or Not? Brazil Faces a Key Geopolitical Choice*, AMERICAS QUARTERLY (June 30, 2020), <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/huawei-or-not-brazil-faces-a-key-geopolitical-choice/>.

²⁰⁶ Anthea Roberts et al., *Toward A Geoeconomic Order in International Trade and Investment*, 22 J. OF INT’L ECON. L. 655, 673 (2019).

²⁰⁷ Bobby Allyn, *Trump’s TikTok Deal: What Just Happened And Why Does It Matter?*, NPR (Sept. 21, 2020, 6:30 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/21/915043052/trumps-tiktok-deal-what-just-happened-and-why-does-it-matter>.

²⁰⁸ See *Trump is Treating TikTok as a Cudgel Against China. It’s the Wrong Approach.*, WASH. POST (July 16, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-is-treating-tiktok-as-a-cudgel-against-china-its-the-wrong-approach/2020/07/16/e48e45f8-c6c8-11ea-a99f-3bbdfb1af38_story.html; Geoffery Gertz, *Why is the Trump Administration Banning*

Trump was set to leave office. In December 2020, the president signed an executive order that banned American citizens from investing in 31 Chinese companies, including aerospace, construction, and shipbuilding firms. The goal was to weaken these Chinese industries, which are not only major manufacturing centers, but also have connections to the Chinese military. For example, one company that was listed by the Trump Administration, Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Co., develops video surveillance equipment for the People's Liberation Army.²⁰⁹ Though these actions by the Trump Administration did not cause these companies to go extinct, the strategies nevertheless made life harder for Chinese business, thus helping to fulfill Trump's goal of retribution.

These measures highlight that Trump did in fact make good on his word to use geoeconomic strategies against China. At the same time, these strategies have also had the additional benefit of weakening the neoliberal order. That the WTO was severely wounded by the Trump Administration's blocking of members for the Appellate Body, that the Trump Administration at times successfully discouraged open trade between China and American allies, and that a global trade war developed are all signals that Trump left serious long-lasting damage to the neoliberal order. Trump's actions thus not only targeted the primary beneficiary of neoliberalism, but they also successfully weakened the populist right's hated neoliberal order. In turn, Trump's populist base rewarded him with high approval ratings for his tariff policies²¹⁰—despite a broader disapproval for the tariffs among the general public and non-populist elements of the Republican Party.²¹¹ In fact, to make sure that the tariffs remained popular among Evangelicals, the Trump Administration specifically included a tariff exception for Bibles produced in China. The exception, naturally, thrilled Trump's Evangelical supporters.²¹²

In sum, the emergence of geoeconomics towards China can be traced to Trump's prescient understanding of the populist right base. Trump

TikTok and WeChat?, BROOKINGS INST. (Aug. 7, 2020), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/08/07/why-is-the-trump-administration-banning-tiktok-and-wechat/>.

²⁰⁹ See Gordon Lubold & Dawn Lim, *Trump Bars Americans From Investing in Firms That Help China's Military*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Nov. 12, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-bars-americans-from-investing-in-firms-that-help-chinas-military-11605209431>.

²¹⁰ See John Harwood, *Trumpist GOP Doesn't Mind Wall Street's Tariff Heartburn*, CNBC (Apr. 6, 2018, 6:48 PM), <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/06/trumpist-gop-doesnt-mind-wall-streets-tariff-heartburn.html>.

²¹¹ See Bradely Jones, *Americans are Generally Positive About Free Trade Agreements, More Critical of Tariff Increases*, PEW RSCH. CNTR. (May 10, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/10/americans-are-generally-positive-about-free-trade-agreements-more-critical-of-tariff-increases/>.

²¹² See Jeremy Weber, *Bibles Escape Trump's Tariff Fight With China*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Aug. 13, 2019, 8:58 PM), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/august/china-bibles-exemption-trump-tariffs.html>.

understood the deep disaffection felt towards China and the neoliberal order by the core groups comprising the populist right, and realized that disaffection could be mobilized into a powerful base of campaign support. Trump displayed that his campaign rhetoric was not simply rhetoric, however, as he turned to a host of geoeconomic tools to follow-through his campaign promises.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to provide the story behind Trump’s geoeconomics with China by focusing on a key group: Trump’s base, the populist right. Trump received the support of the populist right in part because of his tough-on-China stance, and he made good on his word to enact economic pain on China once sworn in as president. Why the populist right supported Trump’s geoeconomic rhetoric and strategies is largely grounded in a long-simmering anger harbored by the two largest segments of American right-wing populism: working-class whites and Evangelicals. Both groups have developed a strong aversion to the international neoliberal order—a system that places a high emphasis on laissez faire trade economics, globalization, and international institutions—and have come to view China as the primary beneficiary of such an order. In the eyes of working-class whites, neoliberal policies have directly led to the decline of American industry, the stagnation of wages, and the hollowing out of the middle class. In their view, China has reaped the benefit of this decline, parasitically using neoliberal policies and institutions to become wealthy and greatly expand its industrial base. For white Evangelicals, they criticize neoliberalism through a variety of philosophical lenses, including biblical and nationalist lenses. They see China—an “atheist empire”—benefitting from the neoliberal system, thus weakening American primacy and giving way to biblical end times. Both working-class whites and Evangelicals were thus supportive of taking a hard line on China—and Trump aptly perceived this undercurrent in American politics. Yet while Trump was the first to herald a new and brutal geoeconomic age, he was certainly not the last.

This article has focused on the right, but there is another story that is emerging on the left. The Biden Administration has employed Trump’s geoeconomics to even greater effect, widening the scope of America’s economic pressure on its greatest rival. That, however, is a story for another article.