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DEBATE

Decompensating domestically: the political economy of anti-globalism

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ABSTRACT

The rise of populism across advanced industrial countries presents a challenge to the institutions and norms that make up the current global order and threatens to undo the global system that has enabled decades of free trade and investment. We outline in this paper a domestic political economy account of the contemporary crisis of the global order, rooted in disenchantment with the redistributive bargain between globalization's winners and losers. We present individual and local-level evidence that is consistent with this account, first documenting the decline of the embedded liberal compromise over the past 40 years in Europe, and then providing individual-level evidence from the United States of growing protectionism and xenophobia in response to import exposure, particularly among respondents whose occupational profile is most risk-exposed.

KEYWORDS Populism; free trade; globalization; protectionism; xenophobia; liberalism

Introduction

The contemporary global order, which Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann (this issue: 2–3) characterize as the current state-led international order that 'promotes economic openness' and leads to increased trade and investment across countries, now faces a crisis of legitimacy. Scholars locate the origins of this crisis in the failure of international institutions (Colgan and Keohane 2017), a capitalist 'growth regime' that favors price stability over employment (Hopkin and Blyth 2019), or in the decline of U.S. leadership (Ikenberry 2018). In this essay, we argue that the crisis of the contemporary global order must also be understood as a crisis of domestic political economy.

The postwar global order rested on material progress, enabled by the combination of multilateralism and liberalization abroad with active efforts to manage economic dislocation at home. This open economic order, often termed the 'embedded liberal' compromise (Ruggie 1982), ensured that the

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aggregate gains from economic openness were distributed more broadly via a domestic redistributive bargain in which the individuals, groups, and regions which 'win' would direct some of their gains to those individuals, groups, and regions which 'lose'. This order originated in the post-WWII economic system constructed by the advanced industrial economies, but its economic principles form the core of the broader global order (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann this issue).

We propose that generations of insufficient redistribution have disillusioned the global order's material losers with the very concept of the bargain, shifting the political response from one at the policy margins of how to implement a redistributive agenda, to a deeper existential rejection. Those who now experience greater exposure to the risks of the global economy are less inclined to trust democratic institutions to protect them from the material risks accompanying openness; they are more attracted to appeals from far-right populist parties and politicians. As concomitant processes of globalization – in particular greater economic integration, facilitated by a growing range of international institutions and agreements – place greater constraints on national governments, domestic politics creates incentives, at the level of national leaders, for hostility toward international institutions and multilateral governance.

Our starting point is that the contemporary global order rests on domestic political support for its survival. Although we agree with Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann (this issue) that political liberalism is 'aspirational rather than foundational to the global order', in advanced industrial democracies, popular consent and democratic accountability were the foundation of the contemporary global order's liberal economic orientation. But individuals' attitudes regarding openness and risk – and how best to respond to it – vary, over time as well as within countries, and the political dynamics of the embedded liberalism compromise shift as a result. If the lived experiences of individuals differ markedly within countries, by virtue of local conditions (McNamara 2017), we can expect a growing polarization within countries regarding the value of the international order. The contemporary domestic politics of globalization vary not only between countries, but also within them.

We therefore propose to understand the domestic challenges to the contemporary global order via three levels of analysis within countries: the individual, the local, and the national. At the *individual* level, factors such as occupational mobility and offshorability, socioeconomic risk, and income inequality affect individuals' support for the political and economic status quo. These individual-level factors interact with material conditions in one's *local* community to shape individuals' perceptions of vulnerabilities to economic shocks. National-level political and economic institutions, in turn, condition governments' ability and willingness to shield citizens from this risk. As *national* institutions lose their ability to mitigate the risks of globalization

and individuals experience threats of labor market dislocation in the context of local economic shocks, we observe a rise in anti-globalization politics and a decline of trust in institutions.

We build this case by examining patterns of support for populist right-wing parties cross-nationally, demonstrating that the embedded liberal compromise no longer insulates open economies from support for far-right nationalism. We focus on the advanced industrial economies, as it is here where democratic politics has most recently come into conflict with economic liberalism. We then explore how individuals' job mobility – the ease or likelihood of finding another job with a similar task profile – interacts with local economic shocks to affect support for the global order. For this individual-level analysis, we focus on the United States, with the assumption that comparable processes are at work across other economically-advanced and open democracies.

Admittedly, our account helps explain support for far-right anti-globalist sentiments and illiberal attitudes, rather than for policies. We do not examine how such attitudes are aggregated into political outcomes, nor how they interact with challenges to the other, non-economic planks of the contemporary global order (see Goodman and Schimmelfennig this issue). Nevertheless, these anti-globalist attitudes represent a necessary, if not always sufficient, condition for domestically-rooted challenges to international economic liberalism. By focusing on the domestic political economy of the contemporary global order, we highlight how domestic political institutions created to address the problems of the 1950s are inadequate in the face of long-term structural changes to the conditions of employment and the nature of economic globalization.

From embedded liberalism to far-right anti-globalism

In our account, the crisis of the contemporary global order begins at home. While the erosion of democratic governance is a concern in newer democracies, as in central and eastern Europe, politics in western Europe and North America remain largely democratic in form. Walter (2018) points to the increasing role of mass publics in driving non-cooperative foreign policy, which gives such policy decisions greater democratic legitimacy. Political parties adopt positions critical of the contemporary global order; some voters reward such parties at the ballot box; and government policies take an increasingly illiberal turn, restricting immigration, withdrawing from intergovernmental institutions, and imposing new barriers on trade. The clearest example of the domestic politics of the crisis of the global order is what Walter (2017a) terms 'the mass politics of disintegration'. In these events – such as Brexit, or the 2015 Greek bailout referendum – a significant proportion of voters supports policies that seek to upend key institutional foundations of

the contemporary global order, such as membership in the European Union or compliance with WTO agreements.

These referenda on multilateral institutions are but one manifestation of the domestic challenges to the global order. Often, politicians campaigning in national elections bundle anti-internationalist claims with illiberal and exclusionary domestic policy platforms. These platforms typically use in-group/out-group framing to raise the salience of economic policies regarding the mobility of labor, capital, and goods and services. This describes the election of Trump in the U.S., the rise of the AfD in Germany, and the increasing influence of Euroskeptic parties. These outcomes reflect a growing sense that the *economic policies* implemented as part of the postwar economic order – free trade, market-oriented economic liberalization, and a generally inclusive approach to immigration – are insufficiently attentive to the needs of an electorally decisive bloc of voters.

To demonstrate these changes, we compare support for populist right-wing parties by level of economic openness over time. Political support for right-wing populist parties is a useful metric of the domestic politics of the crisis of the contemporary global order: that order rests on a foundation of international trade, multilateralism, and social inclusivity, and these are parties that promise exactly the opposite. In Figure 1 we predict votes for (left panel) and seats of (right panel) right-wing populist parties, as defined and measured by Swank (2013), between 1961 and 2011 (which is the

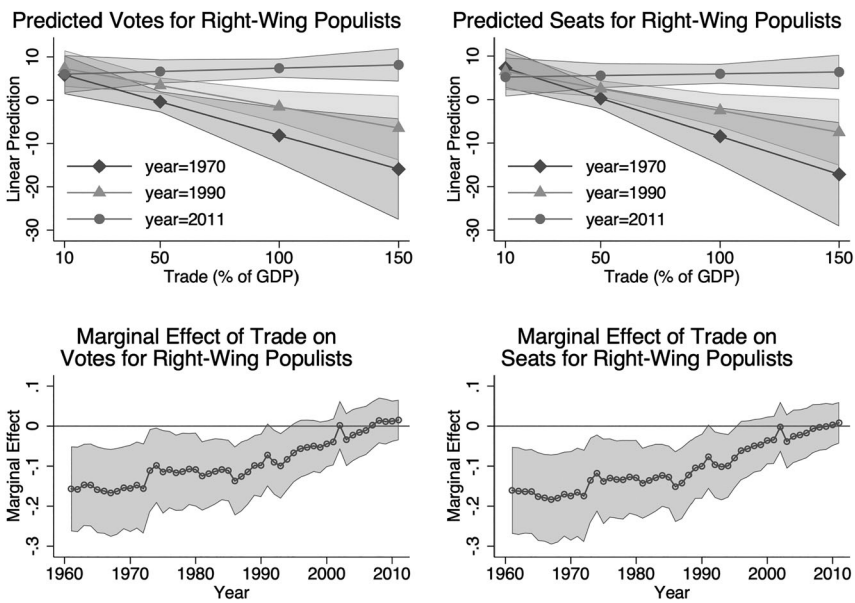

Figure 1. Openness and support for right-wing populists (1970–2011).

latest year for which data are available), as a function of economic openness as measured by total trade as a percentage of GDP.[1] Although international trade is only one plank of the contemporary global order, it captures a core objective of postwar multilateral institutions. In our interpretation, trade openness is a measure of how exposed a country is to economic openness; the corresponding support for right-wing populist parties is an indication of how able national political economies have been to inoculate voters from anti-globalist responses to externally-generated material risk.

Whereas openness to trade once predicted significantly less support for right-wing populists, by the 2010s this is no longer true. Of course, support for these parties also might reflect voters' increasing authoritarianism (but see Ballard-Rosa et al. 2017) or a rise in the 'cultural' dimension of partisan competition along a new transnational cleavage (see e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2018), but to produce the relationships identified above, these would need to covary with trade openness and net of country and year effects.

The national implications of the crisis of domestic political economy extend further. We also identify a dynamic unraveling of trust in domestic political institutions writ large, again associated with greater trade openness. Figure 2 plots predicted levels of trust (as national averages from the European Social Survey) for key political institutions, comparing countries by level of openness to trade in 2004 and 2014 (the years for which data are available).[2]

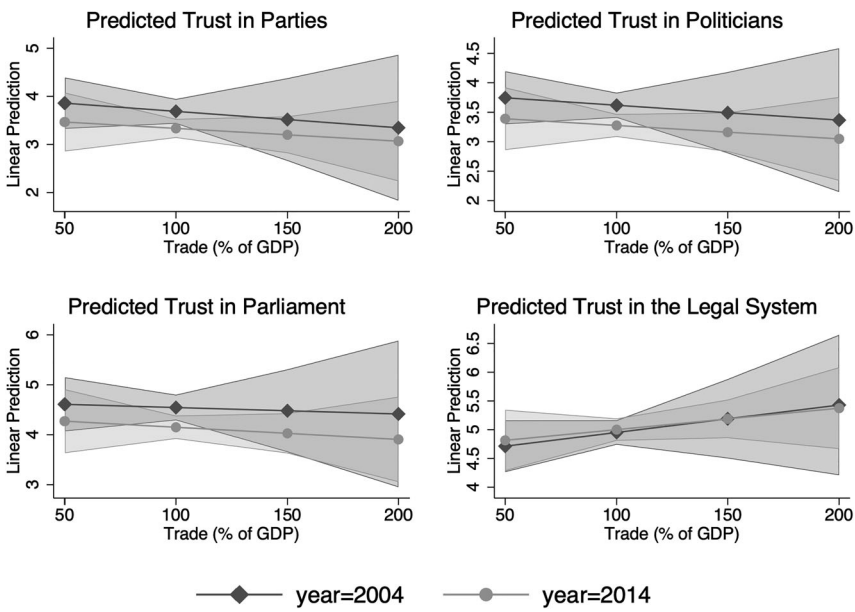

Figure 2. Openness and trust in institutions (ESS, 2004–2014).

Across dependent variables, citizens of more open economies consistently have lower predicted trust in government (although the wide confidence intervals do not allow us to conclude that these differences are statistically significant), and the baseline level of trust has decreased in the past decade. This is evidence of growing dissatisfaction not only with the *parties and policies* of the contemporary global order, but also with *domestic political systems* more generally. The one exception to these patterns is the predicted trust in the legal system (bottom-right plot), which emphasizes the specificity of these trends to political rather than legal institutions.

Individual and local forces

Figures 1 and 2 offer national-level evidence that economic openness is no longer inconsistent with right-wing populist party success, and is associated with lower trust in political institutions. But these macro-level trends are rooted in individual perceptions and vote choices. The domestic bargain of the contemporary global order offers the society-wide benefits of economic integration in exchange for the system-level provision of insurance against material risk. Individuals who trust that the state will provide social insurance are less sensitive to labor market and local economic risks, and are therefore more inclined to support – or at least, not to oppose – continued openness to the international system.

Many factors affect an individual's perception of labor-market risk: the degree to which one's occupation is offshorable, or potentially replaceable by automation, for instance. An individual's skills, education, and experience interact with her industry of employment to affect current and expected future wages. Housing costs, shifting demographics, and even income inequality, all also influence individual perceptions of economic risk.

These attributes are largely at the individual level, and they have been the central focus of many analyses of globalization-related attitudes. But local conditions matter as well: two individuals with similar skills, education and occupational profiles, but living in cities experiencing markedly different economic conditions, are likely to view the international system quite differently. That is, local manifestations of global forces can magnify the effect of individual attributes on risk perceptions. For instance, when local manufacturing plants in one's vicinity close due to competition from imports, individuals' perceptions of their own labor market risks are heightened, even when those individuals work in different occupations or have different skills.

One could assess individuals' material sensitivities to openness in various ways. Owen and Johnston (2017) draw from the task literature in economics; they highlight the offshorability and routineness of job tasks as drivers of globalization-related attitudes. Scheve and Slaughter (2001) focus on ownership of fixed assets, finding that home ownership is associated with more

protectionist attitudes, as individuals worry about the effects of external shocks on the value of their homes.

We instead highlight the task profile of one's occupation as a key determinant of sensitivity. A job with a very unique task profile is one in which there are few other jobs for which an individual is well-suited. Increased specialization and differentiation of occupational tasks is a general feature of wealthy economies. But task uniqueness varies among individuals, even in the same community, and with similar incomes and levels of formal education. Job mobility is greater and risk is lower when task profile uniqueness is lower. Put differently, if an individual in a high task uniqueness job is downsized for any reason, that individual faces lower prospects of finding a similar job. Task profiles therefore contribute to perceptions of occupational risk. This concept of mobility is, of course, closely related to the traditional notion of factor mobility in the international trade literature; but task uniqueness often varies among otherwise similar individuals.

Individual perceptions of risk to well-being affect political attitudes and behaviors (Walter 2017b). Anxiety is a great driver of attitudes, and anxiety primes the salience of identity (Ehrlich and Maestas 2010). As an individual's perceived risk intensifies, she becomes more likely to adopt and express attitudes antagonistic to the perceived sources of these shocks. Of course, the perceived sources of the shocks may or may not be the actual causes of dislocation, and political elites play a role in individuals' attribution of blame. For instance, workers may face dislocation because of automation rather than because of trade liberalization, but they may incorrectly blame globalization – perhaps motivated by elites or parties that frame job loss in terms of global competition (Kuk et al. 2018). Heightened labor market risk can activate previously latent attitudes about 'others', defined in terms of race, gender or class (Guisinger 2017). Heightened risk perceptions therefore could lead to backlash against international trade and trade agreements, foreigners and immigrants, Wall Street bankers and financial elites who profit off foreclosures.

We suggest that when individuals with low occupational mobility are confronted with adverse local conditions, such as plant closings or mass layoffs, they become more likely to express increased hostility toward globalization and immigration, as well as greater support for increased border security, stricter citizenship requirements and stricter enforcement of laws preventing the employment of undocumented aliens. Increased perceptions of risk – to one's household as well as to one's local economy – activate these anti-other sentiments.

In related work, we use survey data from the United States to consider the effect of local economic conditions and individual-level task uniqueness on a range of issues related to the contemporary global order. Specifically, we consider attitudes among respondents to the 2012 US Cooperative Congressional Election Study, which surveys a stratified national sample of registered voters as

well as non-registered adults. The 2012 CCES Survey indicates the occupation of the respondent, allowing us to calculate a measure of occupational mobility, which we interpret as a measure of individual occupational risk.[3] At the individual level, higher mobility corresponds to lower occupational risk since it implies an individual's skills are more transferrable to other occupations. (We invert the measure such that higher values indicate greater risk.) We also calculate for each respondent the number of international trade related job-layoffs during the previous five years within her Congressional district.

Together, these two variables – individual occupational risk and local-level economic conditions – interact to shape anti-outsider views. In this way, individual and local factors feed skepticism not only of economic integration, but also of migration, national community, and social solidarity (see also Goodman and Schimmelfennig this issue). In Figure 3, we plot the effects of local economic shocks on attitudes towards outsiders across various levels of individual occupational risk.[4]

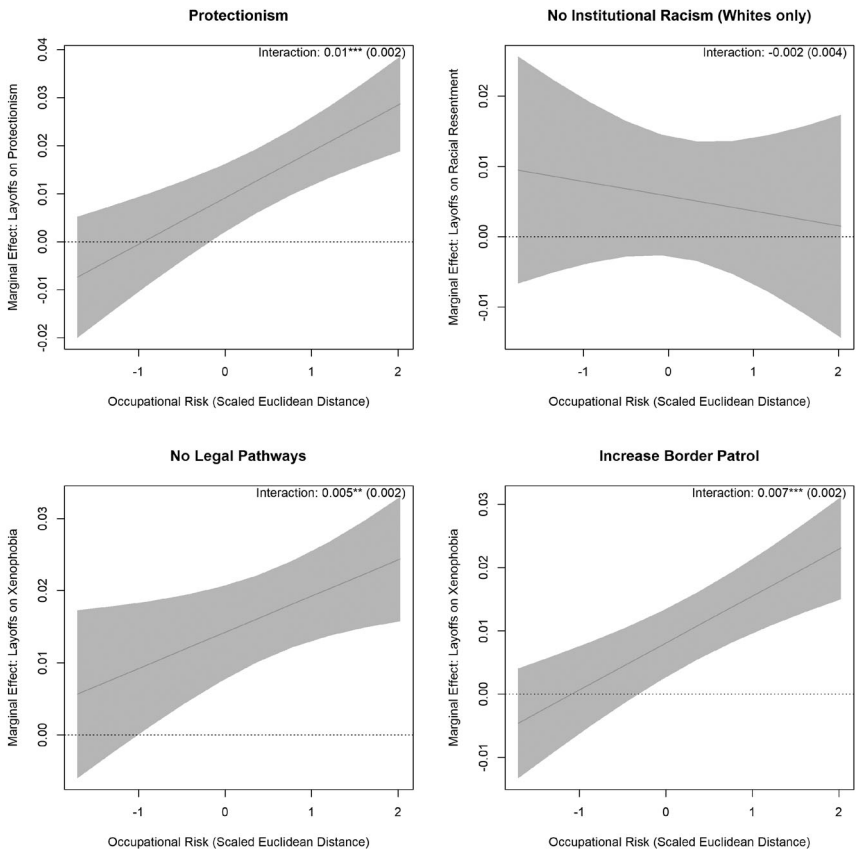

Figure 3. Effects of layoffs on outsider attitudes, moderated by occupational risk.

The upper left panel suggests that, at high levels of occupational risk, a one standard deviation increase in trade-related layoffs in the respondent's congressional district corresponds to a statistically significant increase in protectionist sentiment. This increase in sentiment is stronger the more occupational risk the respondent faces. The interactive effect for racial resentment (upper right) does not reach standard levels of significance, but the broader measures of xenophobia in the lower two panels vary with occupational risk and proximity to layoffs. Proximity to layoffs among those with higher occupational risk predicts less support for creating legal pathways to citizenship for undocumented aliens, and more support for increasing the size and strength of patrols on the US border.

Although we focus on local labor market conditions, other local-level political economy considerations also likely contribute to the contemporary crisis. Of particular interest across Europe and North America is housing. Home ownership can serve as a form of self-insurance against the downside risks from economic openness, and might mitigate anti-liberal sentiments. Ansell (2014), for example, explores how home ownership, and shifts in house prices, affect support for public-sector insurance and redistribution across advanced industrial democracies. But because housing markets themselves depend on local economic conditions, we expect that negative economic shocks may also undermine the ability of home ownership to serve as mechanisms for self-insurance.

And, in the face of changes in sources of individual risk perceptions – following the housing market crisis of 2008 and the restructuring of production characteristic of increasingly global supply chains – national government policies have not kept pace. The tendency of governments to respond to the crises of the late 2000s with austerity and retrenchment, rather than with welfare state expansion, exacerbates the divisions between those who benefit from the contemporary global order and those who are harmed by it. Even when global interest rates were historically low (Mosley 2017), most governments opted not to engage in counter-cyclical demand management (Copelovitch 2018). This, coupled with governments' decreased willingness or ability to tax wealthy individuals and corporations, has meant that individuals experiencing higher levels of perceived risk observe not greater public sector efforts to protect them, but rather increasing income and wealth inequality. Moreover, seen as part of a broader trend toward financialization, home ownership also could change individuals' expectations about how governments respond to financial and economic crises – and leave them frustrated when public policies do not provide the expected protection against market forces (Chwieroth and Walter 2019).

Is a new compromise possible?

In this short essay, we have sketched out a framework for thinking through the domestic political economy of crisis of the contemporary global order.

Occupational risk feeds anti-outsider attitudes, with respect to trade as well as immigration. These effects are amplified by local economic conditions. Given the declining ability or willingness of national governments to offer a safety net against individual and local risk, a far-right anti-globalist reaction to economic openness becomes more likely. The result is a bottom-up threat to the contemporary global order, entirely democratic in its procedural causes and responding to the material dislocations generated by the decline of the embedded liberalism bargain.

Conceptualizing the crisis of the global order as rooted in domestic political economy rather than as a problem of inherent to multilateral institutions (see Copelovitch et al. this issue) has both analytical and political implications. Understanding the crisis as a domestic problem reminds us that voters' concerns over material well-being, government responsiveness, and demographic changes in the post-industrial economy are of primary importance. These concerns are often associated with the *effects* of openness – in terms of labor market risk, income distribution and local economic conditions – rather than with openness itself. Voters turn against openness not because they have preferences over openness or about the multilateral institutions that facilitate it, but because other forms of social protection are no longer available.

Of course, globalization also constrains national governments in important ways (Mosley 2003), and scholars of international economic integration have considered strategies by which reforms to international institutions or 'brakes' on globalization might address the contemporary crisis of the global order (Copelovitch et al. this issue). But in our perspective, shoring up support for the contemporary global order is a challenge for domestic social and economic policies. Moreover, our focus on domestic politics explains how broad support for the EU (Fernández-Albertos and Kuo 2016) can coexist with growing populist challenges to the global order. The challenges are not to the order's architecture at the international level, but rather to its implications for domestic politics; although Hobolt (2016) and Hobolt and de Vries (2016) show that economic hardship increases support for Euroskeptic parties and platforms, this works *through* domestic parties and institutions except for in the rare cases of popular referenda.

Our domestic political economy approach holds that while some of the perceived causes of economic dislocation are external in nature (trade, offshoring, supply chains), domestic policy is where the potential solutions lie. The problems are not novel: social policies under embedded liberalism were designed to blunt some of the downsides of economic openness. What is new is that domestic social policies over the past three decades instead have facilitated growth in income and wealth inequality, so that gains from openness are increasingly accruing to those at the top of the ladder. This allows for a politics of resentment (Cramer 2016) – often directed at 'undeserving' outsiders, but also to 'unresponsive' elites – to operate. A disaggregated political economy approach gives us three entry points into designing policies to address this resentment: mitigating

the downsides of occupational risk, addressing the dislocation that affects local communities, and updating national welfare models to reflect the nature of work in the twenty-first century. In the same way that these three levels of analysis interact to produce the domestic political economy of the current crisis, our bet is that an effective solution will address the three in combination as well.

Notes

1. These figures were generated from two OLS regressions that predict seats and votes as a function of trade openness, year fixed effects, and their interaction, controlling for GDP growth, GDP per capita, and country fixed effects: $y_{it} = \text{Trade}_{it} + \tau_t + \text{Trade}_{it} \times \tau_t + X_{it} + \phi_i + \varepsilon_{it}$. Fractional logistic regressions produce qualitatively similar results. The country sample includes Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, (West) Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. Economic data are from the World Development Indicators.
2. The country list for these figures also includes former communist East and Central Europe as well as Turkey and Israel, but excludes the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.
3. We generate these measures by applying O*NET task-intensity measures to each occupation. For each dyad pair of occupations, we calculate the Euclidean distance based on these task-intensity vectors. We characterize occupational mobility as the Eigenvector centrality for each occupation. We invert this measure of task centrality to characterize occupational risk.
4. These figures were generated from OLS regressions that predict each response as a function of occupational risk, total layoffs, and their interaction, controlling for a range of respondent demographic characteristics and district fixed effects: $y_{id} = \text{Risk}_{id} \times \text{Layoffs}_d + X_{id} + \delta_d + \varepsilon_{id}$.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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