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# Whose Preferences?: Latin American Trade Promotion Pacts as a Tool of US Foreign Policy

### Importante

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# Abstract

Since 1984, U.S. trade policy holds that all bilateral and multilateral trade agreements include provisions that condition the extension of trade benefits on protecting labor rights. However, few of these clauses have monitoring mechanisms, and even among the agreements that have clauses, little is known about how U.S. agencies determine whether or not trade partners are meeting the stadards for labor rights guarantees specified in the agreements. This work investigates how U.S. foreign policy interests in Latin America affects the application of these provisions and the decison to revoke the extended economic benefits to partner countries under one unilateral trade promotion program, the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).

Using original data drawn from all the petitions presented on the countries of Latin America from 1987 to 2005 to the Worker's Rights Country Practices panel, the paper presents probit estimates that test whether the goals of U.S. foreign policy inform how the government applies the conditionality clause in the region. The paper investigates: 1) the factors that determine whether a petition alleging violations of labor rights will be filed against certain states participating in the GSP, 2) the political and economic factors that influence whether these petitions are selected for formal review by the Office of U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), and finally, 3) how the USTR determines whether countries are "taking steps" to improve labor rights, are placed under an extended review period, or suspended from the GSP program.

## Resumen

Recument

Desde 1984 la política comercial de EE.UU. sostiene que todos los acuerdos comerciales bilaterales y multilaterales incluyen cláusulas que condicionan la extensión de los beneficios del comercio a la protección de derechos laborales. Sin embargo, pocas de estas cláusulas tienen mecanismos de vigilancia; y entre los acuerdos que sí tienen, poco se sabe sobre cómo las agencias de EE.UU. determinan si los socios cumplen o no con los estándares de las garantías de derechos laborales especificados en los acuerdos. Este trabajo investiga cómo los intereses geopolíticos de la política exterior de EE.UU. en América Latina influyen en la aplicación de estas cláusulas y en la decisión de revocar los beneficios económicos extendidos a los países socios bajo un programa unilateral de promoción del comercio: el Sistema Generalizado de Preferencias (GSP por sus siglas en inglés).

Utilizando datos originales construidos por todas las peticiones presentadas en los países de América Latina desde 1987 hasta 2005 al panel del Worker's Rights Country Practices, el documento presenta estimaciones probit que examinan los objetivos de política exterior de EE.UU. e informan cómo el gobierno aplica la cláusula de condicionalidad de derechos laborales en la región. El trabajo investiga: 1) los factores que determinan si una petición que alega violaciones de derechos laborales será presentada en contra de determinados estados que participan en el GSP, 2) los factores políticos y económicos que influyen si estas peticiones son seleccionadas para su evaluación formal por la Oficina del Representante Comercial de Estados Unidos (USTR), y finalmente, 3) cómo el USTR determina si los países se consideran "dando pasos" hacia la mejora de los derechos laborales, o están puestos bajo un periodo de revisión extendido o están suspendidos del programa GSP.

# Introduction

Current research offers rival perspectives on the effects of globalization on labor rights. While some scholars claim that competition for foreign investment has eroded labor standards in less-developed nations, others argue that globalization can potentially expand labor rights as nations converge on minimum standards (Cingranelli, 2002; Harrison and Scorse, 2003). As states shift to export-oriented industrial production, leaders in less-developed states face incentives to relax regulatory standards in order to lure foreign investment away from other poor countries in the same stage of export development (Rodrik, 1996; Ross and Chan, 2002; Gordon, 2000). Lessdeveloped states may then gain an unfair comparative advantage in trade when lax enforcement of labor regulations artificially suppress wages and intervene in market mechanisms that set the prices of goods and services.

States have attempted to reconcile labor rights protection and market integration by moving to incorporate the protection of core labor rights into the trade agreements, recognizing that the gains of trade liberalization may be best maintained with a social safety net (Mandle, 2003; Rodrik, 2002; Falk, 2002). Labor rights conditionality clauses attached to trade accords establish minimum standards of employment for all workers in states that are party to trade agreements, alleviating comparative advantages stemming from lax regulatory regimes. Since lax enforcement is a domestic problem, placing consequences for non-compliance at supranational levels of authority can cut through the political deadlock that sometimes complicates efforts to improve labor rights enforcement within states.

Though attempts to incorporate "social clauses" into the World Trade Organization (WTO) have yet to be successful, they are featured in a number of regional and bilateral agreements.<sup>1</sup> Notably, labor rights conditionality has become an enduring feature of US trade policy. A number of bilateral and multilateral trade agreements signed by the United States since the early 1990s feature labor clauses, and in the late 1990s and through the current decade, Presidential Trade Promotion Authority —"fast track" legislation was itself conditioned on reaching trade negotiations that included some form of labor provisions (Compa and Vogt, 2001; Weiss, 2003). Nevertheless, scholars are only beginning to investigate systematically the effects of linking trade to labor rights compliance on labor rights protections. In particular, little is known about the conditions under which such social clauses might induce states to adopt more vigorous enforcement of national labor standards. Even as some states are increasing turning to trade-based conditionality as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> These include Mercosur, NAFTA, CAFTA-DR, AGOA and CBERA, CARICOM, the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union, U.S. bilateral agreements with Jordan, Singapore, Australia, Chile, Peru and Panama, and Canadian bilateral agreements with Chile and Costa Rica, among others.

one method of protecting labor rights globally, little is still known about the effectiveness of the trade-based methods in promoting respect for labor rights within states. To evaluate the trade-based options, we need to first understand the ways in which mechanisms that enforce compliance with the GSP provisions are engaged by states and non-state actors. We need to understand how trade conditionality is implemented, that is, process by which the rules of conditionality are applied to trade partners.

In 1984, a conditionality clause was introduced into the GSP program that allowed any person or group to file a petition with the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), charging that any state receiving dutyfree treatment under the trade initiative was violating its commitment to any of the five internationally recognized labor rights subject to the agreement. After a consideration of the petition, the USTR can recommend to the President that a state be suspended from the program for labor rights violations. Case studies of the impact of the GSP process have suggested that simply the acceptance of a country practices petition for review has precipitated changes to labor law, advanced improvements in eliminating child labor, brought unions into state decisionmaking structures, promoted local level resolutions favorable to labor, and increased compliance with international labor standards within targeted states (Frundt, 1998; Compa and Vogt, 2001; Douglass et al., 2004). Though each state's experience with the GSP is conditioned on existing social and political relations with the United States, some common patterns of interaction between GSP beneficiary countries and the United States can be traced through statistical analysis of the petition process. This paper thus systematically explores the factors that determine how cases are chosen and resolved under the GSP labor rights clause, and therefore attempts to estimate the impact of trade-based social clauses on labor rights enforcement across states.

At the same time, part of the literature on the application of the GSP labor clause to participating countries claims that the review process is subject to cross-cutting institutional concerns within US government bureaucracies, and thus the application of the GSP clause is open to interpretation that allows for discretionary criteria. Though the intention of the labor clause is to prevent states with poor labor rights regulations from benefiting from preferential access to US markets, because it is an extension of US trade policy and foreign policy, implementation of the enforcement mechanism may be subject to these political influences. This analysis presents these institutional interests as a set of competing hypotheses, by which US promotion of labor rights enforcement through trade measures is driven either by concern for labor rights practices among trade partners, or is used by the US as a tool to advance foreign policy objectives. Second, the US extends preferential treatment to some countries out of a conviction that economic development and prosperity is best achieved in the developing countries through increased opportunities to enter the US market.<sup>2</sup> The second hypotheses is therefore that the application of the GSP labor rights clause responds not to labor rights concerns, but to larger US trade interests, including US access to export markets and competitiveness in import sensitive industries. Third, a number of authors have lamented that US interests in protecting labor rights globally have been compromised by overriding foreign policy objectives. The third hypotheses therefore is that application of the GSP clause is compromised by overall relationships with partner states, where the US will be less likely to engage in a dialogue over labor rights concerns with important regional partners. In sum, while the level of labor rights violation in a GSP partner drives the selection of states to be targeted with petitions, labor rights concerns may also be conditioned by trade policy and foreign policy objectives in the review of states' practices, or US decisions to revoke trade benefits.

This analysis thus explores the factors that determine which states are targeted with labor rights petitions, how cases are then selected for review by the USTR, and finally, reviews the outcomes of USTR investigations under the GSP labor rights clause. The paper begins by offering a discussion of the GSP clause and the filing process, sets up the logic of the competing hypotheses around labor rights concerns, economic interest and foreign policy objectives as guides for the GSP labor rights process. Original data constructed from the petitions submitted to the Country Practices Annual Review is used to predict which states are targeted with labor rights petitions, which of these countries are subject to a full in-country labor rights investigation by the USTR, and finally, predicts how cases may be resolved among countries that participate in the program. After reviewing the results, I conclude with final thoughts on the influence of US foreign policy objectives on US trade promotion in the Americas.

# The GSP Program and Country Practices Review

The GSP is a preferential trading program extended by the US to some 140 less-developed states, allowing duty-free importation of some 4000 products to U.S. markets. Since its reauthorization by Congress in 1984, the GSP program introduces mechanisms for labor rights protection. States must demonstrate that they are *"taking steps to afford internationally recognized worker rights"* in order to qualify to participate in the program [19 U.S.C.A. § 2462 (b)(2)(G), in Compa and Vogt, 2001]. Though the legislation states that any state's ability to enforce labor law should be considered within the bounds of its level of economic development, the USTR considers all states capable of enforcing five fundamental labor rights. These rights include the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> George White, Director of the Office of International Labor Affairs of the US State Department, in Rigby (2003).

right to association and collective bargaining, acceptable conditions of work, freedom from forced labor, and a ban on child labor.<sup>3</sup> Because the Democrat majority of the 98<sup>th</sup> US Congress needed Republican votes to pass the Renewal Act, this "taking steps" language was part of the compromise bill (Compa and Vogt, 2001). Rather than require immediate suspension of benefits, this language allows subsequent administrations to interpret "taking steps" subjectively, allowing wide discretion on levying sanctions.<sup>4</sup>

The GSP program includes an enforcement mechanism to monitor states' compliance with the labor rights clause. A complaint procedure allows any group or individual to file petitions with the Office of the US Trade Representative to initiate a review into the labor practices of any state that is eligible for GSP benefits.<sup>5</sup> Under the labor rights review process, once a petition is filed alleging labor rights violations, a GSP Subcommittee considers whether the USTR should conduct a formal review of a country's labor rights practices.<sup>6</sup> If a formal investigation of country practices is initiated by the USTR, State Department personnel and labor attachés in the US embassy in the state being reviewed are charged with examining labor rights practices throughout the country. These formal reviews investigate sectors beyond the areas in which alleged violations occurs, and do not focus solely on just the allegations listed in the petition.

The conclusions drawn from the formal investigation in turn determine whether or not the USTR recommends to the President that GSP benefits should be extended or suspended for specific countries. The USTR generally recommends two options, a suspension of country participation, at least for a period of time, or a designation that a country is "taking steps", during which further review of labor rights practices is unwarranted because the country is in compliance with the GSP mandate. Countries receiving "taking steps" outcomes continue to participate normally in the GSP program, and the possible suspension of benefits is lifted.<sup>7</sup> The USTR has also established a third option in practice, a continuance of the country review, in order to monitor progress on labor rights enforcement for an additional year. The continued review decision temporarily extends GSP benefits until the time in which the USTR decides either that governments are making a substantial effort to come

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> These overlap with the ILO's definition of 11 fundamental labor rights-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> This discretionary criteria is of course is one of the major critiques of the GSP program. See Frundt (1998), Alston (1993) and Collingsworth (1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Though the USTR could initiate this review under its own volition, it has only done so twice, once in the legallymandated first review of 1985-1986 where the USTR was obligated to review workers rights practices in all countries then participating in GSP, and once in 2000, for Guatemala (Compa and Vogt, 2001).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> The GSP subcommittee is composed of representatives from different branches of the federal government, including the Department of State, the Treasury, Agriculture, Commerce and the ITC. Representatives from the Department of Labor are considered the experts on the labor rights petitions for the Subcommittee. Interview, GSP labor representatives, Washington D.C., June 29, 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> In one case, Pakistan, the suspension was not applied to country participation, but to goods documented to involve child labor in their production (Compa and Vogt, 2001).

into compliance with the GSP labor rights clause ("taking steps"), or that a suspension is in order. States that do not or cannot come into compliance are suspended from the program with all GSP benefits revoked.<sup>8</sup> While the USTR counsels the President for the final determinations, GSP decisions are then formally made by the President by Executive Order.

Decisions to file cases are based on the individual strategies of transnational labor rights groups, most notably the AFL-CIO's international bureau and the International Labor Rights Fund (ILRF). While the filing procedure does not require contact between groups in the US and groups in the targeted countries, we know that petition filers in the US work with unions and labor rights NGOS in the countries they file in to prepare the petitions (Nolan García, 2009). In interviews with the main organizations involved in filing GSP petitions, all stated that they consider the GSP process as one tool they can use to bring attention from US officials to labor rights violations in the states where they are already working to strengthen labor rights guarantees.<sup>9</sup>

# US Foreign Policy Objectives in the GSP Process

Because the GSP Subcommittee is composed of varying governmental agencies, each with its own institutional agenda and set of preferences on trade policy, we should assume that the application of labor rights compliance under the GSP review may be subject to intervening political interests that have little to do with labor rights enforcement. The procedural design of the review process facilitates discretionary application of the statute in some areas, including compliance. The use of the "taking steps" language is of primary concern. On one hand, the use of discretionary "taking steps" criteria allows the USTR to determine whether their expectations for compliance on labor standards are appropriate for the level of development for the states in question. For example, inspection is key to determining compliance with domestic labor law, but poor states have fewer resources to commit to inspection regimes than the United States or other industrialized countries. Efforts to improve inspection may be considered "taking steps" by the USTR, even when establishing a US-style inspection regime is improbable. On the other hand, "taking steps" criteria creates a tension in the application of the statute, allowing the USTR to avoid creating concrete measures to assess compliance in favor of discretionary interpretations, which critics

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> While twelve states have been suspended from the program since 1986, six states have come into compliance after a suspension and have been reinstated in the GSP program.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> For example, the US-LEAP filed numerous petitions on Guatemala over the history of the program to supplement the work they were doing in the US to support Guatemala unionists during the civil war. Interviews, ILRF, July 25, 2007, Washington D.C.; US-LEAP, August 28, 2007, Chicago, IL., AFL-CIO, July 26, 2007, Washington D.C.

charge has lead to an arbitrary application of the trade law, including to advance foreign policy objectives.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, we should also assume that trade policy would be employed in the service of advancing larger political agenda in the relationship between states if we recognize that states' foreign economic relations are one component of a country's total foreign policy (Cohen, 1977). Trade policy has historically been used as one method to influence states economic and political preferences (Baldwin, 1985; Hirschman, 1969), and was the most important policy tool at the end of the Second World War, during the rebuilding of Europe and the creation of the liberal economic order. In marking the passage of the Renewal Act, it is possible that the Regan Administration saw the potential of the GSP conditionality clause to be used in this way, as a source of leverage to threaten states with compliance with larger trade policy objectives and foreign policy concerns, as a reason as to why the language of the statute was open to interpretation (Adams, 1989: 507).

The GSP may also serve as a mechanism for US political influence in developing countries through political trade dependence. Shadlen (2008) defines political trade dependence, PTD, as a country's sensitivity and vulnerability to the manipulation of preferential trade benefits (2008: 8).<sup>11</sup> Because the GSP is a unilateral program, all decisions about the application of the GSP, whether in the labor rights arena or in commercial interests, are subject to domestic political decisions. Because the GSP is conditioned on Congressional approval, it can be repealed at will. When the potential loss of GSP benefits is magnified by disgualification from the additional trade promotion initiatives, political trade dependence increases with the value of exports entering under these additional programs.<sup>12</sup> To the extent that trade with the US is valuable to participating countries, economic dependence through GSP maximizes US influence in other states' economic and political decisions. The US could potentially extract concessions —including labor rights concessions— from these states by using GSP benefits as leverage. States then would respond to the threat to revoke benefits by making the desired concessions. In turn, states are rewarded for allying with the US on economic and political goals through continued trade benefits, that is, if not the rewarding of new special considerations, at least a refusal to punish allies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Arbitrary application of the trade statute has been the most common criticism of the design of the program, even from within the government (Dorman 1989; US General Accounting Office 1995).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Shadlen specifically refers to the unilateral nature of GSP preferences here, which can be revoked at any time from any country (2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> For example, Shadlen's review of the Latin American and Caribbean countries shows that over the 1996-2003 period, 16 states are "hyperconcentrated" in their exports to the US, accounting for more than 40% of total exports, and in the cases of Venezuela, Haiti, El Salvador and Suriname, over 80% (Shadlen 2008:5).

Groups that have filed GSP petitions have long argued that indeed, the outcomes of country review decisions have been driven primarily by political concerns, rather than labor rights criteria.<sup>13</sup> In the earliest cases of the 1980s, USTR decisions on labor rights paralleled administration objectives to limit Marxist influence in Central America, when the USTR continually refused to review both El Salvador and Guatemala. Targeted assassinations of labor leaders was endemic and well documented in the GSP petitions sent during the 1980s, but critics charge that the USTR would never review them as long as US military funding was funneled there as last front of the Cold War.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Nicaragua was suspended from the program, not necessarily because of its labor rights record, but because the US wanted to limit the influence of the Sandinista revolution in the region, and was at the same time covertly funding the Contra army to overthrow them (Frundt, 1998). These cases of extreme violence against unionists and the USTR's politically motivated response generated much criticism on the USTR for its inaction, eventually leading to a 1990 lawsuit against the first Bush administration.<sup>15</sup> The USTR distanced itself from the State Department as the Cold War waned, eventually modifying its position and becoming more attuned to assessing labor rights violations alone as a determinant factor for reviewing cases (Frundt, 1998), especially as pro-labor officials took over posts at the USTR and Department of Labor under the Clinton Administration.

What results is a set of competing institutional interests that may affect when and how the GSP process is applied against participating states. In short, any analysis of the GSP labor rights review process must consider these institutional interests, especially as they relate to overall foreign policy objectives within different US administrations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> In a 1990 petition, the International Labor Rights Fund called application of the statutes "conveniently flexible", referring to the discretionary language of "taking steps" in the Malaysian case. Petition on file with author.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> In denying El Salvador a review, the USTR found the violence against unionists not to be labor related. They alternated between the positions that either petitions did not present new or sufficient information about the cases, or that union deaths could not be separated from the overall violent situation during the civil wars in these countries. A number of times the USTR alleged that unions were political fronts for the guerilla movements (GSP Subcommittee 1994; GSP Subcommittee 1991GSP Subcommittee 1993; GSP Subcommittee 1991). These allegations were roundly rejected by most observers of Central American labor politics. Personal Communication with Mark Anner, April 2006, and Frundt (1998); Davis (1995).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Interview, ILRF, July 25, 2007, Washington D.C.; AFL-CIO, July 26, 2007, Washington D.C. The lawsuit sought judicial review of the application of the GSP clause, and was lost on appeal. For information about the court case, see Collingsworth (1996).

# Theoretical Expectations

The likelihood that a petition is filed, is reviewed, and that cases are resolved in ways that enforce labor rights protection, should respond first to the level of labor rights abuse in a participating state. Since social clauses are incorporated into trade agreements in order to protect labor rights, countries where labor rights are already known to be weak should logically be targeted with petitions. However, this may not necessarily be the case for the petitions brought to arbitration and resolution under the GSP program. Because the GSP Subcommittee is composed of different governmental agencies, each with its own institutional agenda and set of interests in how trade policy should be applied, the labor rights petitions are subject to secondary intentions. Thus, the merits of the case alone may not provide sufficient reason to file a petition, or to influence whether the case is reviewed or how it is resolved.

First, the economic importance of the U.S. markets for target countries may also affect how the USTR responds to petition filings. Groups would be more likely to file labor rights petitions against countries that are dependent on U.S. markets for trade, because they could use the threat of sanctions and the loss of export markets as leverage against states to promote better compliance with international labor rights standards.<sup>16</sup> We should then expect a decrease in the likelihood that the petition will be accepted for review, given that the United States would refrain from putting forth any measure that limits its own benefits from trade. Moreover, we should expect that countries dependent on U.S. markets would be more likely to make changes in labor rights practices once petitions are filed in order to retain market access. Therefore, case outcomes would reward reforming countries, rather than punish them by revoking benefits.

The strategic geopolitical importance of countries to the United States may also affect whether petitions are filed, and how they are resolved. Therefore, the level of foreign assistance to countries (both economic assistance and military assistance, used here as a proxy for geopolitical alliance) is expected to show similar effects on case arbitration as trade interaction with the U.S.: labor rights advocates are more likely file petitions against states where levels of foreign assistance are high, using U.S. ties as leverage to pressure for changes in labor rights enforcement. Therefore, the likelihood that a case is filed against a given state should increase as US aid increases. At the same time, countries with higher levels of foreign assistance are more important to U.S. national interests, so it is less likely that the administration would accept these petitions for review or resolve these cases unfavorably, to avoid alienating countries strategically important to the U.S.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Interview, ILRF, July 25, 2007, Washington D.C.; US/LEAP, August 28, 2007, Chicago, IL.

over labor rights issues, which here are assumed to be located low in the preference ordering of states' interests.

Taken together, these assertions suggest the following working hypotheses:

- Widespread labor rights abuse will affect the filing, review, and outcomes of GSP labor rights petitions:
  - The probability that a petition is filed against a participating state *increases* as labor rights violations increase.
  - The probability that a petition is taken under review by the USTR *increases* as labor rights violations increase.
  - USTR resolutions will favor labor rights enforcement measures
- Country dependence on U.S. markets for trade will affect the filing, review, and outcomes of GSP labor rights petitions:
  - The probability that a petition is filed against a participating state increases as trade dependency increases.
  - The probability that a petition is taken under review by the USTR *decreases* as trade dependency increases.
  - USTR resolutions will favor trade partners.
- US geopolitical alliance considerations will affect the filing, review, and outcomes of GSP labor rights petitions:
  - The probability that a petition is filed against a participating state decreases as US aid increases.
  - The probability that a petition is taken under review by the USTR *decreases* as US aid increases.
  - USTR resolutions will favor allies

# Data and Quantitative Analysis

The universe of cases in the data is any state from the Latin American and Caribbean region eligible for GSP benefits during the program years 1987-2005. Latin American countries are most often targeted with petitions compared to other regions of the world. Latin American cases make up approximately 50% of the total petitions filed, and was chosen for special study for the first cut at data analysis following the rich literature on regional experience with the GSP. While prior research on the entire set of petitions filed on states from all regions has established that between 1985 and 1996, eighty-two petitions were filed, and of these, 47 were accepted for review (Elliott, 1998). Among Latin American cases in the years 1987-2005, 87 petitions were filed, 36 of these were reviewed, and Chile, Nicaragua and

Paraguay were suspended intermittently during these years.<sup>17</sup> Fifty-nine of the petitions allege violation of the freedom of association, alone or together with the 27 petitions citing minimum standards of employment, 17 petitions citing child labor, and 14 petitions citing forced labor.

The analysis uses Heckman selection models, where the selection equation in both models presented here is a probit on the probability that a case is filed. Multivariate analysis in stages allows for the testing of the effects of key variables on petition review and outcomes while controlling for selection effects in the filing stage. These models used probit analysis in the selection equation, since the dependent variables are dichotomous in stage one in both Models, with many observations where no petitions were filed. The dependent variable in selection stage for both models is a dichotomous measure where 1 indicates that a petition was filed targeting a country in a given year. The dependent variable in the second stage of Model 1 is also a dichotomous measure where 1 indicates a petition was accepted or for review by the USTR. In Model 2, the selection equation is again a probit estimation of whether a petition is filed. In the outcome stage an OLS regression is used, where the dependent variable is a scaled measure of four possible USTR outcomes used: whether a case was reviewed, suspended, continued on review for a subsequent year, or "taking steps," an assertion that the state in guestion is taking some measured to promote enforcement. The values measure from 1 indicating more severe consequences for non-compliance as 4, measurements increase up the scale. The dependent variables were constructed from case resolution records procured from the USTR GSP Labor Subcommittee.

In both equations the merits of the case *(Labor rights)* are operationalized as the measure of government respect for labor rights recorded each year, drawn from the Cingranelli and Richards *(CIRI) Human Rights Dataset*. This indicator is a three-point scale measuring 0 to 2, where 0 signifies states where worker's rights are severely restricted.<sup>18</sup> A measure of export dependence on the US (*export dependency*), expressed as the value of exports from a GSP state to the USA per year as a percent of total exports, was calculated using Kristian S. Gleditsch's *Expanded Trade and GDP Data*. The yearly value of U.S. Foreign Aid expressed as military aid and economic aid (*total US aid*) in thousands of dollars per capita, was collected from the USAID publication *Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorization*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The first two years of the program, 1985-1986 were a special two-year review and are not included in the data here. The first year with systematic filing and reporting requirements is 1987.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> A codebook with coding rules for these and all variables explains the measures in detail and is available from this author.

# USTR Review Probabilities and Petition Filing Dynamics

The first model estimates the probability that the USTR will move to formal review, within the selection estimation of the probability that a petition is filed against a state in a given year. Here, participation in the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) is the key selection variable that predicts whether a petition is filed, but should not also affect whether that petition is reviewed in the second stage. Twenty-five countries currently maintain GSP programs {272 Office of the United States Trade Representative 2009}, which were followed by an alphabet soup of preferential agreements in the form of overlapping trade commitments in multilateral, bilateral, and unilateral arenas. In the US, trade promotion initiatives in Latin America under the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act/ Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBERA/CBI) and Andean Trade Preference Act/ Andean Trade Promotion and Drug Eradication Act (ATPA/ ATPDEA), and in Africa under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), also include labor rights conditionality tied to the GSP review. The GSP program overlaps these other US trade promotion initiatives in two important ways. First, products that are excluded from the GSP program may qualify for duty-free importation to US markets through the additional trade promotion initiatives. Second, labor rights conditionality also extends to the trade promotion initiatives through the GSP Annual Review process. If a country is suspended from GSP, they are automatically suspended from other regional trade promotion initiatives as well.<sup>19</sup>

The economic impact of losing the additional TPI benefits is an important consideration for countries that come under GSP review, and can serve as an additional source of leverage on those states to make policy changes in order to retain trade benefits.<sup>20</sup> One of the most important examples is the trade in textiles. While nearly all textiles are excluded from GSP consideration, textile trade is at the core of the other trade promotion initiatives for poor countries.<sup>21</sup> For some states, textiles and apparel exports constitute a large share of their total export capacity, so states might export a greater volume of total products under the trade promotion initiatives for the GSP program. For example, in 2000, 43.5% of the total exports for the region to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Interview, GSP labor representatives, Washington D.C., June 29, 2007. Nicaragua is the only exception: while suspended from the GSP in 1987 after the first Annual Review, Nicaragua was invited to join CBI in 1990 as a way to lend support the newly elected Chamorro government. Nicaragua never rejoined the GSP, but today 7 of its 10 highest exports are apparel items covered under CBI rules (USITC, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Petitioners also take the implications of TPI losses into consideration when they determine who to file petitions against for the Annual Review for GSP. The possible loss of additional, and considerable, trade benefits in the GSP review serves as an additional source of leverage on states to make labor rights concessions. Interview, ILRF, July 25, 2007, Washington D.C.; US/LEAP, August 28, 2007, Chicago, IL.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> GSP creates an exception for hand loomed textiles used in decoration, but not for apparel. CBI, ATPA/ATPDEA and AGOA all allow apparel exports.

the US under the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) were textiles and apparel (USITC, 2003: 209).<sup>22</sup> The GSP review also conditions the entry of these products into the US, even though the commercial aspects are guaranteed by the TPIs. For modeling purposes, the CBI indicator is used as a factor that predicts selection (filing), but not outcome (review).

The outcome equation is a second probit estimation on the probability that a petition is reviewed by the USTR once it is filed. In addition to the labor rights, trade and aid variables, a number of additional measures are introduced. These measures are drawn from the petitions themselves, because petitioners likely strategize on how to include information that they believe will persuade the USTR to undertake a review.<sup>23</sup> Violence is one such indicator. Following John Kingdon (1984), problems can be propelled onto government agendas where crises or symbols call attention to them. In the early years of GSP, petitioning groups detailed individual cases of violent worker repression in the petitions, arguing that anti-union repression limited the right to association. In places like Haiti, where death threats against unionists meant that unions ceased to function in some cases, or in El Salvador, where unionists were common targets for assassination by death squads, petitioner groups used the GSP process to draw government attention to a larger context of human rights abuse and impunity. El Salvador holds the distinction of being targeted with the most petitions during the period -22-, including six during 1990 alone. Guatemala holds a close second place with 21 petitions. The second stage of the model thus includes a number of control variables. These are first, a violence indicator (violence). This indicator measures whether the petition includes allegations of threats, assault, kidnapping, illegal detention, torture, or targeted murder of labor leaders, workers, or union organizers. The probability that cases are reviewed should increase where there are allegations of violence against workers, and/or as violence increases. Also included are dummy variables for El Salvador and Guatemala, two states that suffered extreme levels of violence and thus are outliers. The number of fundamental labor rights that are listed as violated in the petition are also included (*petition issues*) as a second measure of labor rights performance. A dummy variable (*democrat*) appears in the second

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Under the Andean Trade Promotion Act (ATPA), Bolivia sold six times the value of exports under ATPA as under GSP in 2001, while Colombia exported nearly 10 times as the value of its products under ATPA as for GSP (United States International Trade Commission 2003). Some sectors are highly geared toward US markets. For example, 96% of all cut roses entering come from the Andean region under ATPDEA tariff concessions (Angeles Villareal, 2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> This necessarily assumes that the decision to choose which countries to file on for the yearly review is a separate decision than the strategizing that goes into creating a petition. Interviews with the major filing groups provides evidence that groups decide on countries first, and the write petitions based on information at hand, as well as the discussions on whether the USTR would be willing to review on a country. For example, the 2006 and 2007 Annual Reviews included petitions submitted by the AFL-CIO regarding post-invasion Iraq's new labor code. They submitted the petition as a way to comment on the rebuilding process, even while presupposing that the administration had more important concerns for Iraq than labor rights, and would not take up the review. They did not. Interview, AFL-CIO International Affairs Bureau, July 26, 2007, Washington D.C.

stage of Model 2 to test whether Democratic presidents are more likely to use the labor clause to promote labor rights protection globally, given the historic ties between the Democratic Party and organized labor.

Table 1 reports the results of probit analysis of Model 1, the probability that a petition is reviewed, once filed against a GSP eligible state:

	PETITION F	ILED	PETITION REV	IEWED
	COEFFICIENT	(SE)	COEFFICIENT	(SE)
LABOR RIGHTS	7853**	.1350	1721	.2328
TOTAL US AID	.0025**	.0007	0034*	.0018
EXPORT DEPENDENCY	0777**	.0141	.3912	.2120
CBI BENEFICIARY	.7599**	.0467		
VIOLENCE			6315	.2779
EL SALVADOR			0049*	.6600
GUATEMALA			6985*	.1186
PETITION ISSUES			1262	.0924
CONSTANT	.7073**	.1388	2.1541**	.3461
N=326, 64 UNCENSORE	D OBSERVATION	S	WALD $X^2 = 52$	551.38
LOG LIKELIHOOD= 146.	1405		$P > X^{2} =$	.00000
* SIGNIFICANT AT P $\geq$ .05, '	**P <u>&gt;</u> .01			

The table shows first that in stage one, the probability that a petition is filed against a given state, each of the indicators are statistically significant and in the expected direction. The labor rights measure shows a negative relationship, suggesting that as labor rights worsen, the probability that a petition is filed increases. The measure of alliances is significant as well: The probability that petition is filed increases with increases in the levels of US economic and military aid. The CBI beneficiary selection variable is also significant, where petitions are more likely filed against states that also participate in CBI than those that do not. Finally, export dependency is also significant, but in an unexpected direction: filing groups are less likely to target states with high levels of trade dependency on US markets.

In the second stage of the model, the probability that a petition is reviewed once it is filed, both the US aid and export dependence indicators are again significant, and in the opposite direction than in the first stage —as we would expect. This suggests that the political strategies of filing groups differ from the responses by the USTR in important ways. While filing groups intend to use the labor clause to secure reviews against states that are the worst labor rights offenders, the USTR instead uses the program to advance geopolitical interest when choosing which states to review. The data show that the USTR is less likely to review petitions among states that are regional allies, here operationalized as higher levels of US aid, but more likely to review states with high levels of export dependency. Further, the results presented here indicate that labor rights are *not a significant factor* in the decision by the USTR to take cases under formal review.

The USTR is also *less likely* to review petitions that report violence, not more likely to take such cases under review. This finding is not surprising when considered in context: Both El Salvador and Guatemala were targeted with multiple petitions during their years of civil war. The USTR stated in summaries of the reasons for rejection of these country's petitions that deaths and disappearances of labor-affiliated persons could not be attributed to union activities in the context of extreme civil war violence. In the case of El Salvador, the USTR further alleged that the major labor central was affiliated with the guerrilla army, and argued that labor repression was therefore the *natural* response of a government under siege. Including the El Salvador and Guatemala variables controls for the effect of these two cases on the results, but the equation shows that Guatemala is still significant.

Overall, Model 1 shows support for the hypotheses that labor rights violations condition whether petitions are filed against states that participate in the GSP, and supports the argument that the GSP process is subject to cross-cutting geopolitical interests aside from labor rights concerns. Among these, the data shows that while petitioners are targeting states that have closer ties to the United States, in turn, the US is less likely to take those allies under review. The data also shows support for the hypothesis that US trade relationships affect how the GSP provision is applied in that filers tend to not target states that are most dependent on US markets, but when they do, export dependency increases the probability of a review.

# Petition Filing Dynamics and USTR Outcomes

Once labor rights petitions are filed against GSP states, what factors predict how the USTR resolves these cases and determines whether states should continue to participate in the GSP program? The second model tests how the petitions filed are subsequently resolved by the USTR. Stage one is again the selection equation, where the dependent variable is an indicator that a petition is filed in a year, and the independent variables are the trade and aid indicators, the labor rights measure and the CBI selector variable, plus the controls. A Heckman probit equation is used in this model, with a probit to OLS routine. Because the second stage is OLS, the results can be used to interpret direction and significance, but not impact. In the outcome equation, the dependent variable is a scalar measure of the four possible outcomes for cases when a petition was filed: whether a case was reviewed, suspended, continued on review for a subsequent year, or "taking steps". The labor rights index, trade and aid indicators, and the violence indicator are all included in this stage as in Model 1, as are the El Salvador and Guatemala controls, together with an additional measure for whether the administration was headed by a Democrat.

Table 2 reports the results of the Model 2 probit and OLS equations:

	PETITION F	ILED	USTR REVI	EW
	COEFFICIENT	(SE)	COEFFICIENT	(SE)
LABOR RIGHTS	7874**	.1404	1731	2829
TOTAL US AID	.0026**	.0007	0034*	.0015
EXPORT DEPENDENCY	0864	.4233	8560	.7952
CBI BENEFICIARY	.7175**	.1834		
VIOLENCE			.2377**	.1304
EL SALVADOR			.2162	.5723
GUATEMALA			.7295*	.2948
PETITION ISSUES			1007	.1012
DEMOCRAT			.0342	.2066
CONSTANT	6927**	.2178	3.0482**	.4722
N=325,63 UNCENSORE	D OBSERVATIONS	;	WALD X <sup>2</sup> :	=42.31
log likelihood= -188	8.643		$P > X^2 =$	.0000
* SIGNIFICANT AT P $\geq$ .0	5, **P <u>&gt;</u> .01			

### TABLE 2. ESTIMATES OF USTR OUTCOMES

As in stage one of Model 1, labor rights in a GSP country is again a significant predictor of whether a petition is filed, as is the level of US aid, and the CBI predictor. Each of these indicators is statically significant and in the expected direction. The level of export dependency is not significant in this model in the filing stage.

In the second stage, which estimates USTR decisions once a petition is filed, export dependency again is not statistically significant. US aid is significant, meaning that petitions filed against allies are resolved differently than for states with lower levels of foreign aid, all other variables held constant. Violence in a petition also has an effect on how petitions are resolved, as in Model 1. The measure of respect for labor rights is not a determinant of petition outcomes in this model. The labor rights index is not significant in the second stage, meaning that respect for labor rights in a GSP country has *no significant effect* on how the USTR moves to resolve a case. The Democrat and number of violations indicators were also not significant.

# Discussion

The analysis reported here is mixed in showing support for the hypotheses. To begin, the models showed strong, consistent support for the hypothesis that the GSP process is propelled by the perception of labor rights in a GSP partner state. In both models, respect for labor rights in the target country was a strong indicator of whether a petition would be filed by petitioner groups, but was not a significant indicator of whether the USTR would consider a review of the petition in either model. Though the GSP process is intended to permit the USTR to review the worst offenders of five fundamental labor rights, such violations have no significant effect on the decision whether to review the petitions, or on the decisions on how to resolve them. The data also suggests that labor rights practices in a partner state is not a significant factor in determining how the USTR resolved cases once reviewed. The data from Model 1 show that while the USTR is targeted with petitions on states with poor respect for labor rights, it tends to not review states that are US allies. It is also less likely to review petitions that report violent repression of workers and unionists. In effect, though labor rights practice is important in determining how cases are selected, it has no bearing on USTR decisions. The USTR decision on outcome is essentially not driven by the perception of labor rights violations.

There was strong support for the hypothesis that the USTR considers US foreign policy objectives in determining how cases would be resolved. In both models, the level of US total foreign aid was a significant predictor on whether a petition was filed, and whether it was subsequently reviewed by the USTR. Petitioners targeted states with close ties to the US for the GSP review, but the USTR was less likely in general to punish allies over labor rights violations in the second stages of Models 1 and 2. There was weaker support for the hypothesis that export dependency affected petition filing, review decisions and outcomes, as this measure was only significant for Model 1. Petitions were less likely to be filed against states highly dependent on US markets, and as export dependency increased, the USTR was less likely to consider petitions for review, in contrast to the expected effects. Export dependency was not a significant predictor in either stage of Model 2.

Finally, there was little support for the thesis that violence would induce governments to take greater interest in some cases rather than others, because though statistically significant, the effect of violence was in an unexpected direction. The USTR was *less likely* to review petitions that cited violence, and among the outliers, El Salvador and Guatemala, the effect was seen only in Guatemala.

Additional tests of robustness showed each of the models were properly specified, and that no independent variables were collinear.

# Conclusions

Qualitative research on the GSP to date has shown merely having a petition filed has created enough leverage on some states to precipitate reforms to labor law or improve enforcement. Further, a USTR review has pushed states to reform labor codes, increase workplace inspections, resolve cases languishing in the labor courts and has led to investigations into unsolved crimes against unionists (Frundt, 1998).<sup>24</sup> The data presented here complements these case studies by testing the prior questions: identifying the underlying factors that determine which states are targeted with petitions, as well as whether these petitions are reviewed, and how they might be resolved.

The data presented here shows that in at least the filing stages, labor clauses may be employed just in the way they were intended: the most important concern for filers is decent labor rights practice in the partner state. However, once petitions are submitted, the outcome of the process *does not* depend on labor rights practices. USTR action is still subject to institutional interests that may contradict the intention of GSP review. In sum, how the labor rights clause is applied to countries is less a function of labor rights, than a function of US foreign policy and economic interests.

A number of US trade agreements with Latin American countries have been reopened in order to renegotiate the labor clauses.<sup>25</sup> Though most US trade agreements have not provided for the institutional mechanisms to investigate labor rights compliance, the GSP country practices review process is one of the templates actively under consideration for the new agreements.<sup>26</sup> Insight into how the GSP petition process has been used to promote US foreign policy interests thus is an important area for future research given the potential effects that the compliance mechanism has on labor rights protections, yet this analysis provides evidence that states' geopolitical interests—*rather than labor rights concerns*- inform whether and how trade-based labor rights clauses are eventually applied.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Frundt's in-depth case studies include Guatemala, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic and Honduras, with observations on Costa Rica, Panama and Nicaragua. Interviews with the ILRF, and AFL-CIO support Frundt's assertions, with the US/LEAP noting that in the case of Guatemala, labor repression would have been much worse without the GSP process, even though the USTR in the end did not sufficiently address labor rights concerns. Interview, Chicago, IL, August 28, 2007.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> These are the agreements with Panama, Peru, and Colombia. The CAFTA-DR has not been ratified by all member countries, and the Free-Trade Area of the Americas is on hold. All have labor provisions, but different institutions for enforcing labor rights conditionality.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> The NAFTA labor clause, for instance, mirrors the GSP process.

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