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Assessing the Emerging Illiberal Order for Trade

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What remains of trade multilateralism, and what comes next? The Trump Administration is creating a ‘pay-to-play’ trading order in which rules are stacked against foreign partners. Yet much of the technical project of liberalized markets remains. Looking back across the post-Cold War era, this panel contextualizes the unstable transition from an unfinished system of liberal rules to an emerging arrangement in which allies purchase access to markets. To better understand the new illiberal order for trade, Froese explores the shifting currents of the MAGA movement, explaining its contradictory embrace of free market conservatism and anti-liberal forms of social protection. Calvert et al show the varieties of response to the ongoing challenge of state capitalism and its continued centrality to global governance considerations. Bober et al document the securitization of trade politics on the front lines of Sino-American competition. Siles-Brugge et al argue that despite being sidelined by geopolitics, the WTO’s work on technical cooperation continues. Finally, Shepherd looks back to WTO negotiations in the 1990s, examining how the trade in services became a foundational feature of global governance. Her work shows how our chaotic present can only be understood with reference to the history of the postwar order.

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