Peer-reviewing in the World Trade Organization: The Activity of States in the Trade Policy Review Mechanism*

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Abstract

This paper offers the first comprehensive quantitative explanatory study of the World Trade Organization (WTO) member states' activity in the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM), the WTO's central monitoring instrument. We analyze both the written questions submitted and the oral declarations delivered by the WTO members in all 95 trade policy reviews in the six-year period of 2009–2014. Descriptively, we find that the European Union and the United States are the most active members, but that the so-called 'rising' powers – namely China, Brazil, and India – very closely follow. In addition, almost the entire membership is involved in reviewing activity, at least to some extent. The explanatory results reveal that activity in the TPRM is strongly associated with a country's market size. However, the member states' overall aggregate membership in international organizations plays an almost equally important role.

Keywords: Trade Policy Review Mechanism; World Trade Organization; reviewing; activity; monitoring; member states

DOI: 10.5817/PC2018-3-227

1. Introduction

The ability of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to ensure the credibility of multilateral trade cooperation depends to a considerable extent on the monitoring and dispute settlement activities of its member states. Individual WTO members provide the organization with notifications and reports in which they supply information on the changes in their trade policies and on their conformity with the trade regime rules and norms. They also collectively

* This research was supported by research grant GA15-12533S 'Member states in the WTO – preferences, compliance, and monitoring', from the Czech Science Foundation (GA ČR).

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engage in the periodic review of other members' policies, providing for a highly transparent, cooperative system. In addition, the member states seek to detect violations of commitments by other members and may initiate the use of formal dispute settlement procedures. All these activities are indispensable for the reduction of uncertainty and defection deterrence, and thus for the enabling of effective cooperation in trade matters (cf. Keohane 1984).[1]

Scholars working in the field of international political economy and international institutions have been interested for some time in explaining the variation in states' participation in dispute settlement in the WTO (for an overview, see e.g. Bernauer et al. 2012). Numerous quantitative studies are available that measure and account for the variation in state behavior in the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM). They focus particularly on the question of when states initiate dispute proceedings. Several determinants of this initiation have been pointed out, including economic factors (e.g. Bown 2005; Sattler, Bernauer 2011), state power (e.g. Sattler, Bernauer 2011), legal capacity (Busch et al. 2009; Kim 2008), and the type of domestic political regime (e.g. Busch 2000; Davis, Shirato 2007).

In contrast, the existing findings on the variation in states' participation in the monitoring pillar of the WTO remain limited. Research dealing explicitly with WTO monitoring largely falls into two categories. First, a small number of contributions examined the formal design of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) as the central and comprehensive monitoring procedure of the GATT and WTO (see e.g. Blackhurst 1988; Mavroidis 1991; Qureshi 1990). These contributions were largely written in the 1990s and thus their attention was limited to the formal delimitation of the Mechanism and its potential evolution. Second, more recent literature also explores the practical functioning of monitoring in the WTO and the related transparency efforts (e.g. Laird, Valdés 2012). A part of this literature offers general descriptions of state involvement in monitoring, but it does not aim at a systematic descriptive and explanatory analysis of it. Articles by Terry Collins-Williams and Robert Wolfe, and by Arunabha Ghosh, can be regarded as partial exceptions (Collins-Williams, Wolfe 2010; Ghosh 2008; 2010). Yet, even those articles provide primarily general descriptions of state participation in monitoring and do not seek to explain the variation in state activity.

The major discrepancy between the scholarly attention paid to the DSM and that paid to the monitoring pillar of the WTO has a very intuitive explanation. The decision to file a case in the DSM represents a more salient step than raising questions or delivering critical statements in the monitoring process. Moreover, the DSM represents a highly legalized system. In contrast, monitoring procedures explicitly exclude the possibility that their findings could have any direct legal repercussions. Such dissimilarities can illuminate why scholars have so far addressed very intensively states' participation in dispute settlement but only devoted little attention to monitoring. We argue, however, that this relative neglect of monitoring as one of the three core WTO pillars is undeserved. Our empirical evidence, based on the observed behavior of states in the monitoring procedures, together with the information provided by their representatives, shows that states attach considerable weight to the monitoring procedures, as these enable them to obtain crucial information about their peers' policies.[2] The monitoring activities of states clearly carry substantial importance and the lack of research in this area calls for systematic attention.

In this paper, we contribute to diminishing the gap in our understanding of states' participation in the WTO's monitoring function. We offer a descriptive as well as explanatory

quantitative account of the variation in the reviewing activity of all WTO member states in the TPRM in the years 2009–2014. This period corresponds to the standard cycle of the Mechanism, according to which each WTO member state should be reviewed at least once every six years. This enables us to evaluate the reviewing effort of each member state in potentially all possible cases, i.e. vis-à-vis all the other WTO members.

We have developed a comprehensive index of state activity within the TPRM that includes both types of state input into the Mechanism, i.e. their written questions as well as their declarations made at the sessions of the Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB). We collected and processed all the states' submissions and all meeting minutes from the 95 trade policy reviews (TPRs) conducted in the six years covered, within which 109 members were reviewed. Through a manual search, we identified altogether 2,910 declarations delivered and 1,872 sets of written questions submitted. The considerable size of the newly created dataset capturing these activities thus enables a very robust comparison of WTO member input. We further supplement the quantitative evidence with insights from several interviews with member states' representatives at the WTO headquarters in Geneva and with a member of the WTO Secretariat.

To explain the identified inter-state variation in reviewing activity, the paper tests the effects of a number of its possible determinants. These determinants draw on previous research on states' attitudes to trade policy, and to international institutions, as well as on their behavior in the DSM. To enhance the coherence and explanatory power of the selected factors, we subsume them under four general explanatory categories, represented by 1) economic size and wealth, 2) trade-related factors, 3) administrative capacities, and 4) political interests and institutions.

Descriptively, we find that a vast majority of WTO members are at least somewhat active in the TPRM, although most of the activity is carried out by relatively few members. Additionally, we find that the 'established' powers have only a marginal dominance over the 'rising' powers. This finding stands in contrast to the previously reported findings, covering the first decade of the TPRM's functioning (Ghosh 2010: 444). Furthermore, these results feed empirical evidence into the debate on the extent to which the rising powers take part in the running of global economic institutions, at least when it comes to their everyday work. In terms of the explanatory factors considered, we find the amount of activity to be strongly associated not only with the size of the economy of the reviewing states, but also with their aggregate membership in international organizations (IOs). Hence, even though market size appears to be the most powerful explanatory factor, we cannot understand the behavior of WTO members in the TPRM without considering their general participation in institutionalized international cooperation.

In the first section of the paper, we present a brief description of the monitoring function of the WTO and of state participation in this function. The second section defines and operationalizes the reviewing activity of states in the TPRM. In the third, theoretical section we outline the factors that we use to explain the variation in the reviewing activity of states. In the fourth section, we provide a descriptive account of states' activity. In the fifth section, the results of the explanatory analysis are presented. We conclude by discussing some implications of our findings and possibilities for further research.

2. The Participation of States in Monitoring in the WTO

Monitoring is one of the key functions through which international institutions support the credibility of interstate cooperation, together with dispute settlement and enforcement (Dai 2002; Joachim et al. 2007: 8–9; Rittberger, Zangl 2006: 108). It refers to the process of gathering and evaluating the information relevant to interstate cooperation. In a narrower sense, it concentrates on member states' implementation of an institution's agreements or their compliance with its rules. Yet, in other cases, its scope may be more extensive and comprise the broader compliance environment of the member states, the institution's effectiveness, or just the dissemination of relevant information in a more general sense.

Monitoring is based on a set of standard activities, namely reporting, reviewing, and verification (Dai 2002; Jo 2008; Joachim et al. 2007: 8–9; Seibel 2013). First, reporting refers to the regular submission of reports to an overseeing institution. Reports usually deal with the implementation and compliance outcomes of individual member states. They are provided by the monitored states themselves or by other actors. Second, reporting can be accompanied by reviewing. In a review process, state representatives or experts assess the submitted reports and may also propose recommendations or requirements concerning a particular course of action to the reviewed state. Finally, some international institutions also engage in on-site verification of state activities.

Monitoring also constitutes one of the key functions of the WTO. Within the WTO, it comprises 1) sectoral monitoring carried out in the WTO General Council's committees and 2) the comprehensive TPRM, taking place within the TPRB, which itself is a formation of the WTO General Council. The Council committees monitor the implementation of WTO agreements by the member states, as well as their trade policies, within their respective sectoral domains, for example agriculture or services (see e.g. Collins-Williams, Wolfe 2010). In contrast, the TPRM provides space for a comprehensive review involving practically all spheres of the organization's authority. The central aim of TPRs is to supply information on member states' trade policies (Ghosh 2010; Laird 1999: 741; WTO 1995). The Mechanism also enables evaluation of the conformity of those policies with the rules associated with the WTO, as those rules often serve as the assessment criteria employed in TPRs (Laird, Valdés 2012; Qureshi 1990; State representative D 2015; State representative F 2015).[3] The frequency of the reviewing of individual member states depends on their share of the world trade volume. For this purpose, individual countries are divided into three categories, with the following review frequency: 1) China, the EU, Japan, and the USA are reviewed every two years; 2) the next 16 member states are reviewed every four years; and 3) the remaining member states are reviewed every six years.

Let us now turn to how states participate in the WTO monitoring function. One way in which they are involved in this function is their reporting. With regard to reporting to the Council committees, the member states have a duty to notify the WTO about the measures that they adopt and that have something to do with the organization's treaties, or that affect other member states (Collins-Williams, Wolfe 2010). The overall number of actual notification obligations is approximately 170. States also submit additional reports to the Council committees. Reporting also takes place in the comprehensive TPRM setting, whereby each

state submits a report on its trade policies on the occasion of its periodic review (Laird, Valdés 2012: 468–76).

The core of our interest in this paper is the second way in which WTO member states participate in monitoring – their reviewing activities. WTO members can participate in reviewing again both in the Council committees and in the TPRM. On the former platform, state representatives consider the submitted notifications, together with other possible reports that member states provide (Collins-Williams, Wolfe 2010; State representative A 2015; State representative C 2015; State representative E 2015; WTO Secretariat representative 2015). Using those notifications and reports as the basis, they may pose their questions to the reviewed state, within the specific sectoral domain of the given committee.

As far as the TPRM is concerned, reviewing naturally constitutes the key activity of states in this mechanism. During TPRs, member states may use two specific tools to assess the policy of the reviewed state: written questions and oral declarations delivered during the TPRB meeting (Laird, Valdés 2012: 468–76; State representative B 2015; State representative C 2015; State representative D 2015; State representative F 2015). Both these tools react to the two reports on the reviewed states' policies, one provided by the reviewed state itself and the other by the WTO Secretariat. The WTO membership receives both reports in advance of the review meetings, and states may use them, together with other available information, e.g. from their businesses, to formulate their questions to the reviewed state. They submit those questions in a written form before the review meeting, or as additional follow-up questions at the actual meeting. During the two-day meeting of the given TPR in Geneva, the member states can also deliver their declarations, in which they comment on and assess the trade policy of the reviewed state.

3. The Reviewing Activity of States in the TPRM

The dependent variable to be analyzed and explained in this paper is the reviewing activity of WTO member states in the TPRM. In line with the discussion above, we define reviewing activity, in the WTO context, as a process of evaluating information on WTO member states' behavior that is relevant to the multilateral trade regime. Given the enormous amount of relevant data, we focus our analysis on the reviewing activity carried out by states within the TPRM and do not deal with their reviewing in the Council committees. There are two main reasons for this choice. First, the TPRM reviews trade policies in a comprehensive manner and reveals all thematic (sectoral) concerns of the member states. In this sense, it is by far the most suitable level to consider when we are aiming at an overall mapping of WTO members' reviewing activity. Second, unlike the individual Committees, the TPRM uses a standardized reviewing format applicable uniformly across different trade policy areas.

To operationalize the reviewing activity of states in the TPRM, we include in our measure both the oral declarations that WTO member states make at the meetings of the TPRB and written questions that they can submit before those meetings. During the interviews that we conducted, WTO members' representatives and a WTO Secretariat member pointed out those two key types of input have approximately equal importance (e.g. State representative

A 2015; State representative D 2015; State representative F 2015; WTO Secretariat representative 2015). Therefore, we find it crucial to include both of them in our operationalization. In particular, we consider whether and how frequently states participate in the delivery of declarations and submission of written questions and, if they do so, the length of the text they submit.[4] Hence, we operationalize reviewing activity as consisting of:

1. The number of sets of written questions (SWQ), capturing the participation in the posing of written questions, where a reviewing state always scores 1 when it asks in the given TPR at least one question, and 0 otherwise;
2. The length of the body of the text of the written questions (LWQ), measured as the number of characters;
3. The number of declarations (NOD), capturing the participation in declarations delivery, where a reviewing state always scores 1 when it delivers an oral declaration during the TPRB meeting, and 0 otherwise;
4. The length of the body of the text of the oral declarations (LOD), measured as the number of characters.

In constructing our activity indicator, we first construct four relative measures expressing the above-mentioned four dimensions of activity. Each of these measures is based on the given state's share in overall activity by all WTO members combined. In other words, for each of the four indicators we establish as our benchmark the total sum of the given activity we are interested in, and calculate what share of this total was contributed by every single state.[5] Therefore, for any activity *k* of the four types that we identified, the value of the indicator for state *i* is defined as the amount of that activity by the state, divided by the sum across all N = 125 WTO members, as stated in the following formula:

$$activityindicator_i = \frac{activity_i^k}{\sum_{i=1}^{N} activity^k} \times 100.$$

Such a construction of the indicators is elegant in that for each state we obtain its percentage share in the volume of activity performed by the entire WTO membership combined. Hence, the indicators have a very natural substantive meaning. At the same time, by constructing the indicators in this way we are able to provide a unified framework that allows for an easy aggregation of the indicators. Our resulting activity index (AI) is an average of these four partial indicators, where each of the four indicators carries the same weight of 0.25. The overall activity index for state *i* is then defined as:

$$AI_i = \frac{SWQ_i + LWQ_i + NOD_i + LOD_i}{4}$$

The index can, in principle, range from 0 to 100, but since it reflects the percentage share of the activity of individual states on the sum across all of them, we can rather expect the values to be in units or unit fractions.

The cases analyzed in the paper are the individual WTO member states and their reviewing activity in the TPRM in the years 2009–2014. The reason for gathering data from a six-year period is that the trade policy of each WTO member state should be reviewed in the TPRM at least once every six years. The years 2009–2014 formed the most recent six-year period of reviews that had been finalized at the moment when our gathering of the empirical data started. A detailed description of the dataset on reviewing activity that we constructed is provided in the Appendix.

4. Explanatory Factors

Seeking to provide the first explanatory account of state activity in the TPRM, this study focuses on testing the effects of a larger number of potentially relevant explanatory factors rather than on developing a coherent theoretical model centering on one or two selected variables. To identify the possible determinants of the variation in reviewing activity, we proceed from three bodies of literature, dealing with the political economy of trade policy (for an overview, see e.g. Milner 1999), state activity in the DSM (for an overview, see e.g. Bernauer et al. 2012), and the large-n analysis of international institutions (e.g. Hafner-Burton et al. 2008). Our research finds a relevant inspiration in all three of these bodies of scholarship, given that we analyze state activity in a global organization devoted to trade. Like the majority of works in this scholarship, we structure our explanatory analysis around concrete variables rather than grand theories. To carry out a meaningful discussion of the selected explanatory variables, we (re-)establish their affinity with four general explanatory categories. As mentioned in the introduction, these are: 1) economic size and wealth, 2) trade-related factors, 3) administrative capacities, and 4) political interests and institutions.

The first of our explanatory categories considers the effects of economic size and wealth. With regard to economic size, we draw inspiration from the broad research field of the gravity models of trade. We proceed from an intuitive expectation that countries with larger markets, and hence a greater potential for trade, should be particularly interested in the proper functioning of the global trade regime. After all, economy size also figures prominently in studies on the DSM (e.g. Sattler, Bernauer 2011). To be sure, for a long time it has been argued that smaller countries have a stronger interest in open trade (Hankla, Kuthy 2013; e.g. Katzenstein 1985; Mansfield et al. 2007: 419; Saksena, Anderson 2008: 489). Yet, even the reverse relationship, wherein countries with larger markets can be more interested in constructing more rigid trade institutions and consequently also advance international oversight over national trade policies, has theoretical backing (Baccini et al. 2015: 768). Furthermore, powerful states may have reasons to support international institutions, as they tend to be able to control them more effectively than weaker states (Stone 2011). In this context, of course, economic size can be regarded as an indisputable indicator of a country's power (e.g. Sattler, Bernauer 2011). The literature on the political economy of trade policy also contains a claim that more developed countries are likely to benefit more from open trade (e.g. Hankla, Kuthy 2013; Milner, Judkins 2004: 106).

H1: The reviewing activity of a state increases with the size of its economy
H2: The reviewing activity of a state increases with its level of economic development

Moving to the second category of trade-related factors, we should bear in mind that the ultimate goal of WTO monitoring is to limit the room for unilateral and discriminatory trade policies, and to support compliance with multilateral trade rules. We use three simple variables indicating states' interest in the trade policies of others, namely trade dependence, trade openness, and export volumes. First, a relatively higher share of trade in GDP is likely to motivate a country to support a multilateral trade regime, and thus also to be more active

in the TPRM (Ehrlich 2007: 592; Kim 2008: 671; Rickard 2010: 9; Sattler, Bernauer 2011). Similarly, an open trade policy will provide a country with the incentive to support a liberal regime due to its integration into the world economy. Finally, similarly as with trade openness, a large volume of exports indicates that the country has, in absolute terms, high stakes in the maintenance of the trade regime.

H3: The reviewing activity of a state increases with its trade dependence
H4: The reviewing activity of a state increases with its trade openness
H5: The reviewing activity of a state increases with the amount of its exports

Inspired by the literature on the DSM and states' participation in it, we include the third predictor category of administrative capacities (Busch, Reinhardt 2003; Busch et al. 2009). With regard to general administrative capacities, we will examine the effects of government effectiveness (Davis, Bermeo 2009: 1043; Kim 2008). To approximate more closely the capacities available to states directly for the TPRM, we also consider the size of the country's Geneva diplomatic mission.

H6: The reviewing activity of a state increases with its government effectiveness
H7: The reviewing activity of a state increases with the size of its mission at the WTO

The fourth and final explanatory category underscores the role of the state's political interests and of political institutions. From one perspective, a state's activity may be proportional to its interest in maintaining and reinforcing the contemporary multilateral order built primarily by the USA and other Western developed democratic states. We use the degree of political affinity with the USA to capture the general interest in the existing multilateral order (e.g. Gowa 1995; Mansfield et al. 2007: 419). Moving to domestic political institutions, we also include in our analysis the type of domestic political regime. There seems to be a wide consensus in the literature that support for the free trade regime increases with the level of democracy, primarily due to a conformity between the interests of the median voter and the liberal character of the trade policy (Mansfield et al. 2002). The effects of democracy have also been confirmed by some scholars dealing with the DSM (e.g. Busch 2000). In line with this, we would expect democratic countries to be more active in the TPRM.

Finally, the large-n research on IOs has recently started to explore how states' behavior may be affected by their aggregate membership in IOs (e.g. Hafner-Burton et al. 2008). We expect the states with extensive aggregate IO membership to undergo the processes of learning and socialization in international institutions (Checkel 2005; Nye 1987). We propose that states tied closely to the web of institutionalized cooperation, and specifically IOs, are more likely to perceive it as appropriate and desirable to actively participate in the activities supporting institutionalized cooperation, including peer-reviewing. They are likely to develop an appreciation of, and interest in, the workings of the institutions, and they may understand active participation in them as desirable and even habitual. Relating back to our analysis, it is possible to expect that states' activity in the TPRM should be positively related to the degree to which states have been subjected to these learning and socialization effects, as reflected by the number of IOs in which a state participates.

H8: The reviewing activity of a state increases with its political affinity with the USA
H9: The reviewing activity of a state increases with its democratic character
H10: The reviewing activity of a state increases with the size of its IO membership

5. Descriptive Findings

Let us now turn to the key results of our descriptive analysis, the ranking of WTO members according to their activity as measured by our aggregate activity index, the AI. Table 1 shows the TOP25 most active WTO states, along with their values of AI as well as the individual partial indicators.

Table 1: Reviewing activity in the TPRM – the 25 most active states

	Reviewer	Questions	Questions length	Declarations	Declarations length	Activity index
1	EUU	6.19	13.93	4.09	6.52	7.68
2	USA	6.19	10.9	4.09	7.96	7.28
3	CAN	5.97	7.17	3.85	4.88	5.47
4	CHN	3.87	8.32	3.64	3.19	4.76
5	BRA	5.06	3.6	4.09	4.28	4.26
6	IND	3.71	3.85	3.88	5.08	4.13
7	JPN	4.63	3.79	3.78	3.45	3.91
8	AUS	3.66	5.48	2.32	2.59	3.51
9	MEX	4.14	3.88	2.88	3.15	3.51
10	COL	3.6	3.9	2.53	2.74	3.19
11	TWN	3.12	2.33	3.6	2.57	2.91
12	KOR	3.6	3.26	2.36	2.11	2.83
13	ARG	2.69	3.63	2.56	2.06	2.74
14	TUR	3.23	1.91	2.36	2.33	2.46
15	CHL	3.07	1.95	2.08	1.66	2.19
16	SGP	3.09	1.51	2.15	1.91	2.16
17	ECU	2.69	2.48	1.87	1.43	2.12
18	HKG	3.01	0.9	1.97	2.54	2.11
19	THA	3.52	1.88	1.56	1.07	2.01
20	PAK	2.64	0.95	2.22	1.99	1.95
21	CRI	2.04	2.74	1.56	1.09	1.86
22	NGA	0.27	0.04	3.06	3.79	1.79
23	CHE	1.94	1.85	1.32	1.4	1.63
24	NZL	1.99	1.17	1.63	1.54	1.58
25	DOM	1.8	1.68	1.32	0.85	1.41

Source: The authors.

Let us highlight several of the most interesting descriptive observations. First, the most active WTO member in 2009–2014 is the EU, with $AI_{EUU} = 7.7$ (meaning it accounts for 7.7% of the overall amount of activity). The EU is closely followed by the USA (7.3) and Canada (5.6). China, Brazil and India follow, all with an index value of between 4 and 5. These figures suggest that, perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a large amount of variation in WTO members' activity. If all 125 members included were equally active, they would each score $AI_i = \frac{100}{125} = 0.8$, which, by construction, is also the index mean (the median is equal to $med(AI) = 0.15$). As indicated in the table, however, the EU and the USA both exceed this theoretical mean score by almost ten times, and several other countries by five or six times. In addition, the large standard deviation of the index $sd(AI) = 1.43$ indicates that states vary in their activity very strongly.

Second, the results demonstrate that the 'rising' powers in the TPRM play a very active role, showing that the system is by no means run only by the 'established' powers, typically OECD members (cf. Stephen 2014). The high scores achieved by China, Brazil and India correspond to similar findings in the dispute settlement pillar of the WTO (Vickers 2012). Interestingly, the position of China near the top in the TPRM is in line with the accounts that see China as one of the two or three most powerful and important WTO members (cf. Wolfe 2015). At the same time, this contrasts with its less prominent public stance during the Doha negotiations, especially when compared to Brazil and India (Efstathopoulos 2012; Hopewell 2015).

Our findings diverge rather starkly from data previously reported by Ghosh, covering the activity in the TPRM in the period 1995–2007. For example, according to Ghosh's evidence, China's participation rate until 2007 was only around 30% and that of Brazil around 50% (Ghosh 2008: 26, 2010: 444). In contrast, in the 2009–2014 period, it is a very rare exception for China, as well as Brazil and India, not to take part in a TPR. In addition to these three powers, a number of other economically and dynamically rising countries are also present at the top of the ranking, including Mexico (no. 9), Turkey (no. 14), and Thailand (no. 19), as well as countries with not particularly sizable economies but with a major trading focus, such as Taiwan (no. 11) and Singapore (no. 16).[6] The top of the ranking includes several countries whose positioning is far from being obvious, especially Colombia (no. 10), Ecuador (no. 17), Costa Rica (no. 21), and even Dominica (no. 25). The ranking naturally 'omits' all EU members that are included as a single entity constituted by the EU, represented by the European Commission.

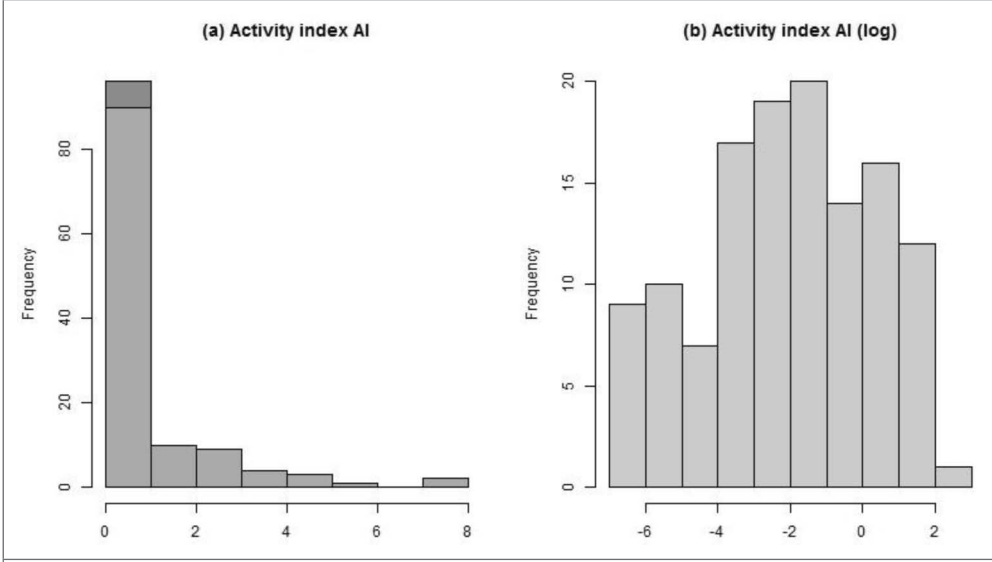
Our third observation is that a number of states one would intuitively expect to score high in fact show only low activity levels. This is the case, for example, for South Africa (no. 36). Given that Russia only accessed the WTO in 2012, the BRICS group is thus effectively reduced to BIC in the period explored.[7] In this connection, we should note that only one African country, Nigeria (no. 22), scores in the TOP25 list. Similarly, no Arabic countries are present at the top of the list, the first being Morocco (no. 34), with Saudi Arabia ranking as low as 38.

Finally and perhaps not surprisingly, there are WTO members that did not actively take part at all in the TPRM in the given period. Out of the 125 members, six (5%) did not participate in the TPRM at all, and there were another 18 members (15%) that only took part indirectly through 'their' group, which also participated in the TPRM on their behalf.

This is the case notably for some African and Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) countries, which on several occasions were represented by the respective chairs of their groups but never took part themselves directly. Such participation is reflected in the analysis, but the scores are always divided by the number of group members, giving each such indirect participation only a very small weight.[8] Overall, however, as many as 101 out of the 125 WTO members considered (81%) took part in the TPRM activities directly, making at least one declaration or posing at least one written question. Again, these results contrast to some extent with evidence about the period 1995–2007 presented by Ghosh, who reports that even among relatively large players, participation is rather rare (Ghosh 2010: 443). This suggests that a sizable shift in the activity patterns in the TPRM must have taken place between the first and second decade of TPRM's existence.

Figure 1(a) shows the overall distribution of the activity index. The indicator has a heavy positive skew, with the vast majority of WTO members achieving between 0 and 1% of the total activity in the TPRM. The darker section of the leftmost bin in the histogram shows the six WTO members that did not take part in the TPRM activities at all in the given period, either directly, or via representation by a members' group. Figure 1(b) shows the indicator after logarithmic (natural log) transformation, which is the variable used in the explanatory analysis.[9]

Figure 1: Histogram of the Activity Index (a) and of its natural logarithmic transformation (b)



Source: The authors.

Even though, in general, the four indicators forming the composite index correlate mutually very strongly (all mutual Pearson coefficients are higher than 0.8, and most of them are higher than 0.9), there is an interesting difference between the indicators related to written questions and those concerning oral declarations. The activity related to written

questions tends to be more concentrated in the few states with the highest overall activity. To illustrate the point, the six top scoring states account for almost 50% of all the text length of written questions, as compared to 32% of the text length of the declarations. We ascribe this difference to the fact that the written questions tend to be quite substantive and technical, whereas making a declaration may require a relatively low resource investment from the member states. Hence, while many states are ready to engage with the reviewed member through a declaration during a TPRB meeting, fewer are willing or able to invest resources into collecting the more technical and substantive information that would be necessary for a formulation of meaningful written questions.

6. Explanatory Findings

In this section, we report the results of our explanatory analysis. We present altogether six multiple regression (OLS) models, the first four reflecting the four broad categories of explanatory factors presented earlier, the latter two capturing synthetic models. A number of the variables included are heavily positively skewed, suggesting the use of logarithmic transformation (all the variables' descriptive statistics are presented in Table A2 in the Appendix). Table 2 summarizes the six models. All the models were subjected to standard post-regression diagnostics.[10]

Model 1 includes the two variables representing the core economic factors, namely the economy size (*GDP*) and the level of economic development (*GDP per capita*). The data for both of the variables were collected from the World Bank Databank (World Bank 2015). We expect both to be positively associated with TPRM activity, but we find that only the variable of economy size shows a significant effect. In fact, as we discuss later, *GDP* as a measure of market size turns out to be the predictor with the strongest explanatory power.

In Model 2, we include the three trade-related factors. The variable *Trade exposure* was calculated as the share of a country's exports in its GDP. *Applied tariff* reflects the average applied tariff weighted by commodities volumes. The variable *Exports* signifies the volume of goods and services exported. The data on all these three variables were collected from the World Bank Databank (World Bank 2015). We expect *Trade exposure* and *Exports* to have a positive effect on state activity in the TPRM and the *Applied tariff* level to have a negative effect. Empirically, however, only the result for the *Exports* volume confirms our expectations, with a sizable positive association. In contrast to our expectations, the level of *Trade exposure* shows a significant, yet negative effect, indicating that more activity is shown in the TPRM by the less trade-exposed states. From an exploration of the model residuals and added variable plots, it appears this counter-intuitive effect is driven by the fact that very large members tend to be both the most active and the most closed ones, and that this effect is manifest in the data even when we control for the amount of exports. In the later models the unexpected relationship disappears, as more relevant covariates are included.

In Model 3, we report the results for the administrative capacities variables. The *Government effectiveness* score of the Worldwide Governance Indicators is used to approximate

Table 2: Regression (OLS) analysis results						
	Dependent variable					
	AI (log)					AI (log) (std.)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
GDP (log)	0.770*** (0.061)				0.502*** (0.147)	
GDP per capita (log)	–0.063 (0.116)					
Trade exposure (log)		–0.837* (0.327)			–0.070 (0.372)	
Applied tariff		0.047 (0.041)				
Exports (log)		0.781*** (0.076)				
Gov. effectiveness			0.504* (0.203)		0.412˙ (0.227)	
Geneva mission (log)			1.698*** (0.229)		0.003 (0.329)	
USA vote affinity (log)				0.805˙ (0.484)	–0.679 (0.458)	
IOs number				0.103*** (0.013)	0.049*** (0.013)	
Polity IV				0.004 (0.034)		
GDP (log) (std.)						0.518*** (0.069)
IOs number (std.)						0.357*** (0.083)
Constant	–20.178*** (1.277)	–17.435*** (2.639)	–5.445*** (0.539)	–7.975*** (1.034)	–17.646*** (3.907)	–0.015 (0.057)
Observations	123	121	115	109	112	123
R2	0.547	0.557	0.394	0.457	0.614	0.615
Adjusted R2	0.540	0.545	0.384	0.442	0.591	0.609

Note: ‘p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; robust standard errors in brackets

Source: The authors.

domestic administrative capacities. To approximate the administrative capacities directly available to a country’s representation in Geneva, we rely on the size of the country’s *Geneva mission*. The data were collected from the so-called ‘blue book’ of Geneva diplomatic contacts.[11] Both variables point in the expected positive direction, hence both a more effective administration and a larger Geneva mission are associated with higher reviewing activity.

Model 4 presents the results for the variables concerning political preferences and institutions. First, we operationalize foreign policy orientations with the *vote affinity* of the given state to the USA in the United Nations General Assembly.[12] Second, we include the

number of IOs a state is a member of as a proxy for learning and socialization into the practices of institutionalized international cooperation, using data from the Correlates of War project (cf. Pevehouse et al. 2004).[13] Finally, turning to the domestic level, we include the *Polity IV* index as a measure of democracy.[14] Of the three variables, only the *IOs number* is positively associated with activity in the TPRM at the standard significance level. The *USA vote affinity* seems to be positively associated with activity as well, but only at a 10% significance level. Surprisingly, the *Polity* score shows no significant association, suggesting no systematic difference between democratic and non-democratic members, when other factors are controlled for.

Model 5 gives the results of a synthetic analysis whereby all four categories of predictors are combined. The model includes all the predictors that showed a significant association with TPRM activity in models 1–4, with the exception of the variable *Exports*, which drops out due to the inclusion of both the *GDP* and *Trade exposure* variables, itself being a product of the two. In this synthetic model, two of the five variables included retain their significant association with the TPRM activity, namely *GDP* size and *IO membership*. Both reveal a strong and robust association, whereby a higher activity in the TPRM is typical for countries that are economically large and those that have joined a large number of IOs, other things equal. In contrast, the previously identified effects of *Trade exposure,* the size of *Geneva mission*, and the *USA vote affinity* do not re-appear in this comprehensive model, and *Government Effectiveness* is only related to activity at the 10% significance level. Making use of the fact that a natural logarithmic transformation was used for the dependent variable, we can interpret the substantive effects sizes as percent changes in activity.[15] First, a 10% increase in economy size is associated with an approximately 4.9% increase in activity. Second, a unit increase in the number of IOs a state is a member of is associated with a 5% increase in activity. The model explains around 60% of the variation in the dependent variable, in spite of the fact that we cannot empirically account for the individual level factors, such as the personal competencies and motivations of the states' permanent representatives in Geneva.

For ease of interpretation of the relative weights of the predictors, Table 2 also includes Model 6, which includes the two core explanatory factors identified in Model 5, but scaled to standard deviations, hence providing standardized beta coefficients. Even this very parsimonious model shows a very solid explanatory power, where the two covariates explain around three-fifths of the variation in states' activity. The results reveal that more predictive power is carried by the variable capturing states' economy size, *GDP*, where a one-standard-deviation increase in the logged size of a country's GDP is associated with a 0.52-standard-deviation increase in activity. However, the weight of the second predictor, aggregate IO membership, is not much lower. A one-standard-deviation increase in the *number of IOs* is associated with a 0.36-standard-deviation rise in activity. Furthermore, the analysis of the residuals from Model 6 reveals that there is a range of states for which their IO membership represents a more powerful predictor of activity in TPRM than their economic size. These comprise especially a number of Latin American and several sub-Saharan African countries with very small economies but sizable multilateral membership. In Figures A1 and A2 in the Appendix, this is captured in the added variable plots of the two respective predictors of interest.

Overall, our analysis reveals that even though a great deal of reviewing activity results from the basic material interests of states, corresponding to economy size, those interests do not constitute the only significant factor. A number of scholars in the field of international political economy may tend to understand the classical material factors, such as economy size, as perhaps the more intuitive predictors of state behavior in the trade regime. Indeed, economy size turns out to be the strongest predictor of activity in TPRM, as our analysis reveals. At the same time, it seems that broader attitudes of states to international cooperation, and specifically their overall participation in IOs, play a role as well. A considerable part of the reviewing activity reflects states' overall membership in contemporary IOs. As we suggest, the reason for this could rest on the learning and socialization processes taking place in IOs. States with extensive experience with IO membership are more likely to learn to participate actively in the operations of IOs, and to perceive active participation as desirable or even necessary for IOs to be able to work.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we presented the first systematic mapping of the activity of WTO member states in the TPRM, combined with an explanatory analysis. We developed an original and comprehensive index of state activity, and applied it to all TPRs that took place between 2009 and 2014. We found that most WTO members, at least to some extent, participated in the TPRM, as only around 20% of the WTO membership failed to take part in reviewing activities directly, and a total of around 5% participated neither directly, nor indirectly, through their group. At the same time, several states were markedly more active than the rest, with the EU and the USA scoring highest. These two members, together with Canada, were closely followed by China, Brazil and India, suggesting that the traditional and rising powers in the WTO have a nearly equal position, at least in its everyday workings. These findings stand in contrast to the only somewhat comparable results previously reported by Ghosh (2010), for the period of 1995–2007. Our study reveals that substantial developments have taken place in the activity patterns in the TPRM over the last decade or so.

Furthermore, in our explanatory analysis we found that states' activity in the TPRM is associated not only with their economy size, but also with their aggregate IO membership. This finding essentially coincides with the comparable evidence on state participation in dispute settlement in the WTO, but it also supplements it. More specifically, our results demonstrate that, as in the DSM, the behavior of states in the TPRM is not solely driven by their economic interests and power size. Nevertheless, it is not the legal or administrative capacities of states, repeatedly emphasized in the DSM research, that, in addition to the conventional variables, affect states' activity in the TPRM. Instead, the additional causal force is in this case provided by the extent of states' membership in IOs in general. In our view, this reflects the degree of learning about, and socialization into, the practices of institutionalized cooperation.

We believe that the analysis presented in this paper opens a space for two particular lines of further research efforts. First, while the reviewing activity in TPRs certainly con-

stitutes a key dimension of states' involvement in monitoring in the WTO, it is not the only one. In future research, it would be desirable to conduct a similar kind of analysis to the one presented in this paper on the other aspects of states' participation in WTO monitoring. One way to do this would be to describe and explain how states take part in monitoring in working committees of the WTO General Council. In addition, the available knowledge could also be considerably increased with an analysis of the variation in states' reporting on their trade policies, via the elaborate WTO notification system. Second, our analysis identified aggregate IO membership as an important explanatory factor, but there may be possible ways in which this factor could be further explored, in particular with regard to the properties of IOs. For instance, we could expect different effects of IO membership for highly legalized as opposed to soft-law IOs. Similarly, different effects could ensue from extensive membership in PTAs as opposed to IOs in general. In any case, monitoring constitutes one of the key functions of international institutions and of the WTO specifically, and we believe that this area, relatively neglected so far, calls for significant research efforts.

8. Appendix

8.1. Reviewing Activity of States in the TPRM – the Dataset

The dataset on the reviewing activity of WTO member states in the TPRM that we constructed comprises in total 95 trade policy reviews that took place between January 1st, 2009, and December 31st, 2014. Our analysis only considers the states that were members of the WTO in 2009, and thus it excludes 11 of the current members, most notably Russia.[16] Taking this into account, and bearing in mind that in the TPRM the EU is only represented by the European Commission, our set involves 125 members.

Some of the states undergo the review jointly, which implies that the overall number of states reviewed (at least once) in the given period, 109, is higher than the total of 95 reviews mentioned above. Examples include the so-called Pacific Island Members and members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, as well as, for instance, Liechtenstein, which was reviewed together with Switzerland. In our analysis we consider each such case as a separate review. During the processing of the documents, when it was possible to determine clearly which state was addressed with the particular written questions or parts of oral declarations, such text was only ascribed to the one particular state. When it was not possible to determine this or when comments and questions explicitly addressed the whole group undergoing the joint review, the text was counted repeatedly for all group members.

The difference between the total membership size of 125 and the total of reviewed members of 109 signifies that 16 WTO members were not reviewed in spite of the prescribed cycle. Furthermore, of the larger WTO members, four were reviewed twice in the given period, and the EU, China, Japan and the USA were reviewed three times, following the two-year period for the largest states. This leads to a total number of 121 review instances in the dataset, or review-years, as summarized in Table A1.

Table A1: Overview of TPRs, 2009–2014			
Individual TPRs, some of which were group TPRs	Individual members reviewed at least once	Individual members not reviewed in 2009–2014	Review instances, including repeated TPRs of larger members
95	109	16	121
Source: The authors.			

All the documents were obtained from a publicly accessible database of documents maintained by the WTO; the documents we used carry the signs WT/TPR/M/ in the WTO documents system. As revealed by our manual search through the documents, 2,910 declarations overall were delivered in the 95 TPRs, and members raised one or more written questions 1,872 times. On average, a reviewed member received written questions from 15 states (standard deviation sd = 9) and was addressed with an oral declaration during a TPRB meeting by 24 states (sd = 9).[17] The high values of the standard deviations indicate a great deal of variation in attention paid to the individual WTO members. Indeed, the largest members are typically addressed with declarations by almost 50 WTO members, while the policies of some of the smallest ones are reviewed in as few as 15 declarations, and perhaps only 4 or 5 members deal with them in the submitted questions.[18]

On average, the length of the text of the declarations delivered during a single review amounted to 85,000 characters, approximately 15,000 words. The average length of the questions submitted was approximately 350,000 characters, thus approximately 60,000 words.[19]

8.2. A Qualitative Triangulation

As part of our more extensive research on WTO monitoring, we also conducted a large-scale manual content analysis of all state declarations made in the TPRB during the years 2013 and 2014, covering in total 1,043 declarations. In order to assess the extent to which the content of states' input may modify their overall reviewing activity, we examined three qualitative dimensions of their declarations, namely their depth, scope, and critical reviewing. In this way, we explored to what degree the statements made by individual states at TPRB sessions were concrete, comprehensive, and critical. We found that the qualitative indicators very strongly correlate with the quantitative indicators that we use in this paper and that they capture the frequency and length of the written questions submitted and oral declarations delivered (with r coefficients always exceeding 0.8 and mostly 0.9 as well). In other words, those states that are more active in quantitative terms are also, at the aggregate level, relatively more concrete, comprehensive, and critical in their assessment of others' policies. As a result, while this qualitative analysis is not discussed in detail in this text, we can reach an empirically substantiated conclusion that our quantitative measurement reflects the degree of peer-reviewing activity quite accurately.

8.3. Descriptive Statistics

Table A2: Descriptive statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
AI	125	0.80	1.43	0.00	7.68
AI (log)	125	–2.06	2.35	–7.00	2.04
GDP	123	545,432,830,117	2,286,569,510,701	411,593,553	17,599,304,237,288
GDP per capita	123	12,730.39	22,098.03	242.06	144,018.10
Trade exposure	121	46.42	26.51	13.03	216.12
Applied tariff	122	6.56	4.33	0.00	19.91
Exports	121	158,516,231,580	682,906,756,263	222,394,505	6,834,112,542,373
Gov. effectiveness	124	–0.07	0.89	–1.69	2.18
Geneva mission	116	11.11	11.04	1.00	64.00
USA vote affinity	122	–0.58	0.21	–0.82	0.56
IOs number	125	63.22	16.64	7.00	99.00
Diplomatic missions	123	39.74	34.56	2.00	159.00
Polity IV	111	3.90	5.80	–10.00	10.00

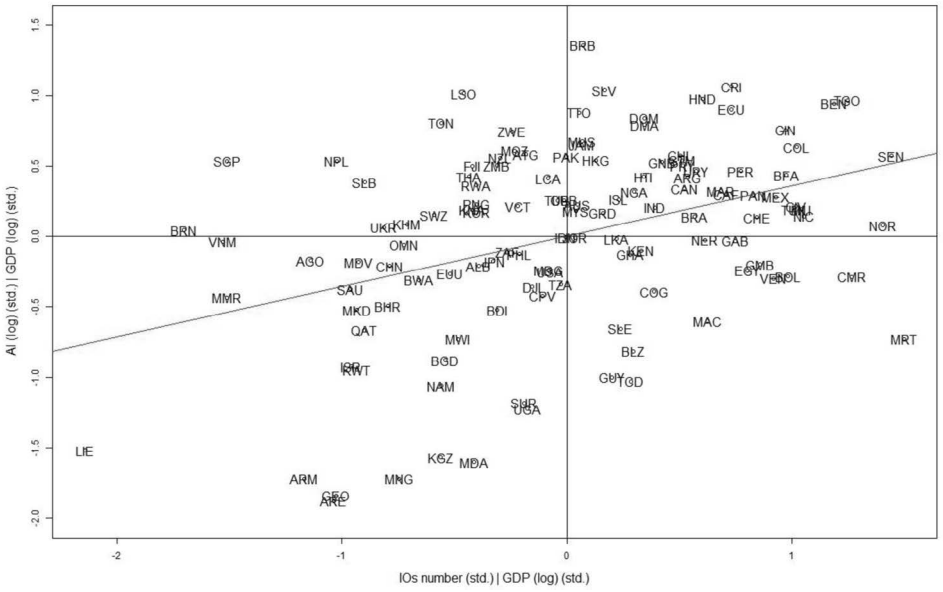
Source: The authors.

8.4. Explanatory Analysis – Added Variable Plots for Model 6

In order to further explore our results, we have constructed variable plots for both predictors in Model 6. This enables us to identify which WTO member activity (or passivity) tends to be more strongly associated with their economy size, and for whom their aggregate IO membership is relatively more relevant. Figure A1 shows the added variable plot for *IOs number*, i.e. the net effect of IO membership on activity, once economy size is controlled for. Even though it is not meaningful to draw any strict dividing lines across WTO states, it turns out that the socialization and learning mechanism, associated with extensive IO membership, may be systematically more relevant, especially for a number of Latin American countries that are located in the top-right segment of the plot, including Dominica, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, Costa Rica, and others. The same seems to be true for some African countries as well, such as Senegal, Benin, Guinea, and Togo. The activity of these countries corresponds to their participation in a wide range of IOs, and at the same time widely exceeds the levels that would be typical for countries of their economic size.

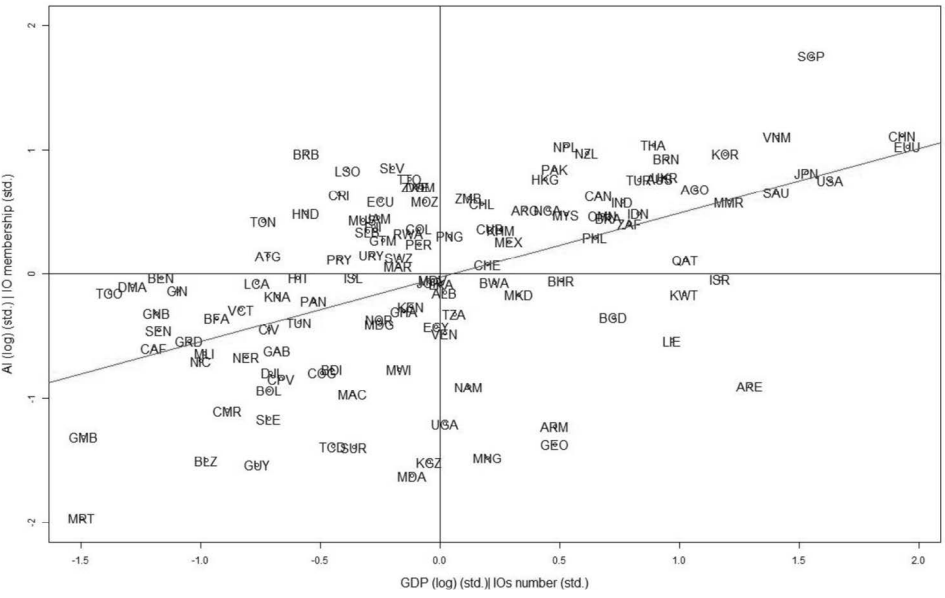
On the other side of the spectrum, the reverse logic applies to states marked by a less extensive overall IO membership. Those states are, on the average, involved in TPRs to a lesser extent than the size of their economies would otherwise indicate. Again judging from the added variable plot of *IOs number* in Figure A1, good examples include several Middle East states (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Israel, United Arab Emirates) and some post-socialist republics (Armenia, Georgia, Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova), as well as Liechtenstein and Myanmar for example, all in the bottom-left segment of the plot.

Figure A1: Added variable plot of IO membership



Source: The authors.

Figure A2: Added variable plot of GDP size



Source: The authors.

Figure A2 presents analogous information with regard to the net effect of economic size on activity. There, however, the picture is broadly intuitive and corresponds to the widely known data about the distribution of economic output (GDP) across countries, for example with China, the EU, the USA, and Japan in the top-right corner, suggesting that their activity patterns are more strongly associated with their very high economic power, as opposed to their IO membership.

Footnotes:

1. We do not claim that states are the only key actors in WTO dispute settlement and monitoring. In dispute settlement, a considerable amount of authority was vested in dispute settlement panels and the Appellate Body (Elsig 2011). As for monitoring, the WTO Secretariat plays a crucial role in compiling information about states' compliance. Our primary reason for focusing on the behavior of states is that the variation in their behavior constitutes a fundamental and also puzzling feature of WTO functioning in both areas.
2. The representatives of WTO member states whom we interviewed repeatedly stressed the important role that the TPRM ensures in supplying states with information on trade policies of individual WTO members (State representative A 2015; State representative D 2015; State representative F 2015).
3. Apart from those principles, norms, and rules, the TPRM assesses trade policies on the basis of their economic efficiency (WTO Secretariat representative 2015).
4. Our empirical observations reveal that the participation rates correlate relatively closely with the length of the texts. Nevertheless, as we discuss our descriptive analysis, there are interesting deviations from this pattern worth detecting and exploring.
5. For the purpose of calculating the indicator values, we ignore the fact that some countries could have participated in all 95 reviews, while for instance the EU, which was itself three times a subject of the review, only in 91. There seems to be no obvious way of incorporating this fact into the calculations, and the difference its inclusion would introduce is perfectly negligible with regard to the overall results.
6. Mexico and Turkey are also OECD members, but they are often characterized as dynamically rising rather than established economic powers, falling under the 'MINT' or 'Next Eleven' labels.
7. The orientation around BICs, rather than BRICS, is also present in much current literature on the role of the rising powers in the global trade regime (e.g. Nölke et al. 2015).
8. For instance, the ACP group has 62 WTO members, meaning that participation only via group chair has a weight of as little as 1.6% of a standard individual participation.
9. Normally, the logarithmic transformation leads to a situation where the six observations with null activity get lost, as log(0) = –inf. In order to prevent this, we have substituted the missing values with a score of –7, the closest integer lower than the minimum score of the dataset (–6.28). The results are robust under varying specifications of this substituted value. We believe this is a substantively justified substitution, as we do not see any principal reasons for drawing a strict line between 0 participation and, for example, one indirect participation through a grouping, leading to an AI score of 0.002.
10. In each of the models, we check for multicollinearity by calculating the variance inflation factor. Autocorrelation is tested for with the Durbin-Watson test. Heteroscedasticity is checked with the Breusch-Pagan test. In all the models except Model 3 the Breusch-Pagan test reveals heteroscedasticity, hence robust instead of regular standard errors are reported. Cook's distance was used to evaluate the presence of influential observations.
11. The variable contains all diplomatic staff in Geneva, not only those assigned to the WTO. This is suitable, as especially small members tend to assign one staff member to more than one IO. The blue

book (or formally the publication 'Missions permanentes auprès des Nations Unies à Genève') is available at http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600582E34/(httpPages)/847EEBA0FBF05A98C125791F-002986B6?OpenDocument (accessed 5.4.2016). In our case edition No. 113 has been used.

12. The data used were assembled by Gartzke; the dataset 'The Affinity of Nations: Similarity of State Voting Positions in the UNGA' is available at http://pages.ucsd.edu/%7Eegartzke/datasets.htm (accessed 7 January 2016).
13. The dataset (version 2.3) is available at http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/IGOs/international-organization-v2.3 (accessed 10 February 2016).
14. The Polity IV: Regime Authority Characteristics and Transitions Dataset, version 2014 was used. The updated dataset is available at: http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html (accessed 5 July 2016).
15. For an overview of the interpretation methods for log-transformed regression, see Benoit (2011).
16. The group of excluded countries comprises Afghanistan, Liberia, Kazakhstan, Seychelles, Yemen, Tajikistan, Laos, Vanuatu, Russia, West Samoa, and Montenegro.
17. These values disregard group participation, so only consider statements delivered on behalf of individual WTO members.
18. In 3 TPRs, no written question has been submitted, based on our data source.
19. Due to the extreme amount of empirical data, in the text of the written questions we did not separate the questions from the answers, and counted the number of characters of the entire exchange between the reviewing and reviewed state. A detailed study of a small sample of questions and answers revealed, at the aggregate level, a high correlation between question and answer length, validating our approach.

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