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Trends. A Standard Standard of Proof: Is the World Trade Organization Good or Bad for Democracy?

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A member of the United States (US) House of Representatives has recently attacked the World Trade Organization (WTO) as being detrimental to democracy. The standard of proof cited by this member is that a country challenging another country's democratically created law has emerged victorious in 29 out of 33 cases. The member implicitly posits that, if a law is democratically created, then it must ipso facto be appropriate for the welfare of those in a national democracy; then its assumed benefit for those participating in a national democracy should override international and global consequences; and then its purported benefits for environmental, health, and labor concerns must be taken at face value without consideration of motives for economic protectionism and other special interests. The member also implicitly posits that the 29 to 33 ratio ipso facto implies some noxious bias against democracy as opposed to reflecting the very necessity for the existence of the WTO: that there are so many cases of unfair trade practices in the world that most challenges (at least in the short term) may well turn out to be supported by WTO adjudication.

The US representative may have a case. However, his own efforts mitigate against it. (See Brown, S. (January 23, 2001). W.T.O. vs. democracy. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Busch, M. L. (2000). Democracy, consultation, and the paneling of disputes under GATT. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44, 425-446; Clayton, S. (2000). Models of justice in the environmental debate. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56, 459-474; Howard, S., & Gill, J. (2000). The pebble in the pond: Children's constructions of power, politics and democratic citizenship. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30, 357-378; Schminke, M., Ambrose, M. L., & Cropanzano, R. S. (2000). The effect of organizational structure on perceptions of procedural fairness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85, 294-304; Schwartz, S. H., & Sagie, G. (2000). Value consensus and importance: A cross-national study. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 31, 465-497.) (Keywords: Democracy, Trade Practices, World Trade Organization, WTO.)