Sweatshop Boycotts: Can't Live with Them, Can't Live without Them

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This article explores the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts. We build explicitly on Tomhave and Vopat's (2018) framework for evaluating the moral permissibility of boycotts in general for the specific case of sweatshop labor. We argue that sweatshop boycotts are more likely to be morally justified when targeting forced labor compared to free labor and we explore the relevant moral tradeoffs associated with boycotts of free labor sweatshops. We analyze the morality of three cases of sweatshop boycotts—Indonesia in the 1990s, Bangladesh following the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster, and the Uyghur region in China—and then discuss how insights from these cases might provide a model to guide activists and business ethicists in analyzing the morality of other sweatshop boycotts.

Key Words: sweatshop, boycott, trade sanction, Uyghur

Numerous multinational corporations have been boycotted at various times over the last thirty years for sourcing from "sweatshops" because of the poor labor conditions borne by workers in these factories in less developed countries. A substantial amount of business ethics literature has considered the economics and ethics of sweatshops, and a relatively small amount of business ethics literature has explored the morality of boycotts in general. This article is the first at the intersection of these two literatures to specifically examine whether it is morally permissible to boycott multinational corporations that source goods from overseas sweatshops because of their substandard labor practices. We will argue that whether a sweatshop boycott is morally permissible is highly, though not exclusively, dependent on how the laborers became employed by the factories and will illustrate cases of both morally permissible and impermissible sweatshop-motivated boycotts.

It is worth defining a sweatshop boycott at the outset. We are not concerned with individual private consumer choices. Individuals may privately "boycott" products or companies for any number of subjective reasons related to or unrelated to moral issues. A single individual's idiosyncratic consumption choices are unlikely to have much aggregate influence on market outcomes. We follow Tomhave and Vopat

Business Ethics Quarterly 35:2 (April 2025), pp. 280–308. DOI:10.1017/beq.2024.5
Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Society for Business Ethics.
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https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2024.5 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(2018) in that we are interested in analyzing *organized* boycotts, where masses of consumers attempt to coordinate their boycott of a company or product in order to measurably impact market outcomes in the hope of changing firm behavior. The type of boycotts we are interested in are also consistent with those analyzed in Radzik (2017: 108), which are "collective actions, which are organized, publicized, and carried out by private parties, and involve the withdrawal or avoidance of consumer or cultural interaction or cooperation with a group or individual as a protest to perceived misdeeds." The specific type of "misdeed" we are interested in this article is the use of "sweatshop" labor standards by manufacturing firms. Although there is no precise universal definition of sweatshop, most academic critics and defenders of sweatshops agree that sweatshops generally have some combination of low wages (at least compared to developed country standards), poor health and safety working conditions, long hours, and often employ child labor or otherwise break local labor laws (Powell, 2014). Thus, the type of organized boycott we analyze is targeted at firms that either directly employ workers under some combination of these conditions or firms that source from suppliers who have these conditions. Typically, it is the multinational corporations that source from international suppliers and their subcontractors who are targeted for boycotts. Boycotts may be organized for a variety of motives that include avoiding complicity, as a form of speech to condemn something the boycotts object to, as a form of punishment, or as a form of social coercion (Radzik, 2017). Sweatshop-related boycotts can be motivated by any of these factors or some combination of them; however, most sweatshop boycotts tend to be best interpreted as what Radzik calls the paradigmatic case motivated by social coercion where "boycotters typically make demands regarding the target's future behavior" (2017: 118).

This article builds directly on Tomhave and Vopat's (2018) framework to evaluate the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts. They divide boycotts into two categories, expressive and consequential. Some boycotts are undertaken because the subject of the boycott expresses a view that boycotters object to. They argue that this type of boycott is analogous to censoring speech one disagrees with. As such, they argue, expressive boycotts unjustly coercively penalize people whose ideas boycotters disagree with, regardless of how repugnant the target's ideas are. They argue that the expression or holding of ideas should not be silenced by any method other than proper argumentation. Conversely, consequential boycotts target a behavior that is unethical and/or harmful to others rather than just expressing an idea. The argument they defend "holds that organized boycotts, that is, the organized use of coercive force may be justified to stop businesses engaging in harmful acts" (2018: 125). The proper subject of potentially justified boycotts is "consequential acts … taken by an individual, company, or company representative that are either illegal or unethical and can be said to be the proximate cause of harm to others" (Tomhave & Vopat, 2018: 128). However, as they explain, an illegal, unethical, or harmful act by itself is not enough to make a boycott morally permissible. Instead, "An act of boycotting is justified if and only if the boycott produces on balance, more good than harm" (2018: 129). They elaborate by writing:

https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2024.5 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> All justified organized boycotts are strategic, and their objective is always to change the morally offensive practices or policies that cause harm…. Determining whether a boycott is justified necessarily entails considering all the individuals that may be affected by the boycott. Undoubtedly, there will be situations in which the interests of those not responsible for the corporate act may be harmed. As with all consequentialist evaluations, the long-term versus short-term harms, severity of the harms, and the likelihood of the eventual effectiveness of the boycott must be considered before determining the moral acceptability of the organized action (2018: 130).

This is the standard that we will use to analyze the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts. Although numerous articles in the business ethics literature have explored factors related to the characteristics of people who participate in boycotts, what factors motivate participation, and factors that influence the length of time a consumer will participate in a boycott (see Sen et al., 2001; Russell, Russell, & Honea, 2016; Lim & Shim, 2019; and Lasarov, Hoffman, & Orth, 2023; for a few examples), Tomhave and Vopat note that, "There is very little in the philosophical analysis regarding the legitimacy of boycotts" (2018: 125). Two notable exceptions are Mills (1996) and Friedman (2001) who both explore the ethics of boycotts.[1] Neither of these treatments is as absolute in delineating justified and unjustified boycotts as Tomhave and Vopat. Both generally find ordinary consumer boycotts implemented for strategic reasons to influence a company to change a morally wrong behavior to be potentially less problematic than other types of boycotts that would be categorized as expressive in Tomhave and Vopat's framework. Similarly, neither gives blanket moral approval for ordinary consumer boycotts (even when the cause is just) and instead indicates that various harms to third parties need to be considered when evaluating the moral legitimacy of any boycott. Friedman's article concludes by noting that "Even ordinary, garden variety consumer boycotts have the potential to harm many innocent parties, including rank-and-file workers and the various economic entities that depend on the boycotted firms that employ these workers … Taken together, this discussion gives one reason to ask if instances ever arise in which a boycott's ends can be said to justify its means" (2001: 238). However, he goes on to suggest that some boycotts, particularly those that are media-centric rather than consumer-centric and seek to embarrass a company more than to decrease its sales, may cause little harm while achieving positive change and may be justified. We will return to the role of media-centric boycotts, as they are relevant for sweatshop boycotts in the next section. Here we will simply note that these earlier contributions—while not fully ruling out the moral legitimacy of alternative types of, and motivations for, boycotts as Tomhave and Vopat do—appear concerned with

[1] Stoll (2009) is another exception; however, her article focuses on the companies' perspective and how to respond ethically to boycotts. Some of her advice is consistent with the weighing of harms and benefits described in these other articles. In particular she advises, "Throughout this decision-making process, company leaders must be attentive to the likely consequences of their decisions upon both the public's sense of corporate character and on the company's ability to meet its other duties to shareholders, employees, and customers" (2009: 6).

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the same ethical tradeoffs involved in strategic consumer boycotts that Tomhave and Vopat make specific:

> The question of whether a boycott is justified is thus an empirical question…. To determine whether a boycott is justified it is necessary to consider all the stakeholders that may be affected. It is not enough that those in authority may be penalized; it must also be the case that greater harm isn't caused to the most vulnerable, for example, workers or the wider community (2018: 129).

Empirical tradeoffs regarding sweatshop wages and working conditions have been extensively debated, often on theoretical grounds, in the business ethics literature over the last twenty years. Most of these debates center on whether there are significant unemployment effects of implementing various improvements in wages and other working conditions that sweatshop activists demand. Most of these treatments start from basic economic price theory that indicates that all else equal, mandating things that make employing low-skill sweatshop labor more expensive will result in fewer of these jobs. Furthermore, these jobs are often a step up from the poverty faced in the informal or agricultural sectors. A series of articles (Arnold & Bowie, 2003, 2007; Arnold & Hartman, 2003, 2005, 2006; Arnold, 2010) argued that there were various factors that would undermine standard economic textbook predictions of disemployment effects of meeting various activists' demands. These factors include a lack of competitive markets, imperfect information, irrationality, efficiency wages, enhanced productivity due to working condition improvements, and a relatively small cost of safety improvements relative to revenue and profits. Powell and Zwolinski (2012) and Powell (2006, 2014) systematically analyze these factors and find that these arguments are seriously flawed, such that they do not undermine the traditional disemployment effects that standard economic theory predicts. Coakley and Kates (2013) adopt Powell and Zwolinski's framework but argue that sweatshop wage regulations pass a cost-benefit test when using a welfarist standard that weighs the losses to workers who lose their jobs due to these regulations against the gains to workers who keep their jobs. Sollars and Englander (2018) counter by surveying the vast empirical economics literature relevant to answering this question and argue that it supports Powell and Zwolinski's conclusions. Powell (2018) also responded by arguing that, with realistic estimates of the elasticity of labor supply and demand, losses to unemployed workers would be greater than the gains to those who keep their jobs. He also argues that there are other negative long-run tradeoffs and philosophical considerations of how to weigh gains to winners against losses to the unemployed that make it unlikely that most sweatshop regulations would pass a worker-welfarist cost-benefit test. The general framework we use to classify some sweatshop boycotts as morally permissible and others morally objectionable does not depend on a particular reading of the evidence in the above debate over the employment effects of sweatshop regulations since we will apply our analysis to three concrete empirical cases. The discussion section briefly considers how to derive more general implications that would depend on one's reading of this broader literature.

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During the development of the debate surrounding sweatshop regulations in the business ethics literature, justifications for sweatshop regulations on grounds other than improving workers' welfare have also been made. The arguments put forth by Kates (2015) and Preiss (2014, 2019) are the most relevant in this regard. Previously, Zwolinski (2007) had argued that sweatshop regulations are morally objectionable because they violate workers' autonomy. Kates counters that sweatshop regulations actually better help workers realize their autonomy because collective action problems in competitive markets impede them from exercising their autonomy in ways that reflect their "'desires, goals, and projects' that are 'expressive of their authentic self'" (2015: 196). If one agrees with Kates's argument and agrees that autonomy is an important value, one might believe sweatshop regulations are justified even if the welfare of workers is decreased on the net by these same regulations.[2] Preiss (2014, 2019) also argues that the defenses of sweatshops have not adequately addressed worker autonomy, but he does so in the context of a broader Kantian argument. Preiss argues that the disparity of bargaining power between sweatshop workers and employers results in exploitative offers and subjects workers to on-the-job coercion:

> Extreme inequalities of bargaining power make individuals dependent upon a given offer, and compelled to accept coercive working conditions that accompany that offer. Such an individual serves more than himself and the commonwealth, and is reduced to serving another in order to live (Kant 1996: 295). He is not his own master. Insofar as this characterization applies to sweatshop relationships, they fail to respect the humanity of all parties to that relationship. For the Kantian, it is dependence, rather than the existence of absence of a particular offer, that renders an individual, such as a sweatshop worker, unfree or not autonomous (2014: 71).

Sweatshop regulations can be morally justified in this framework, independent of their effect on worker welfare, because Kantian understandings of freedom are incompatible with the large inequalities in bargaining power that result in a failure to respect workers' humanity. Additionally, Preiss argues that sweatshop regulation can be morally justified if it helps promote global labor justice by impeding a "global race to the bottom" (2019: 889). Rodrick expresses this sentiment clearly when he wrote that international trade

> renders what is illegal (and illegitimate) in a national setting to suddenly be legal (and, in the eyes of many economists and technocrats, fully legitimate). A firm cannot import child workers and put them to work at home; but it is perfectly able to do so when it employs those child workers abroad (directly, or through a subcontractor). An economist looks at this, and sees gains from trade. For the labor advocate and social reformer, however, what is taking place is an undercutting of domestic labor standards. Effectively, domestic workers are told: if you want to compete with imports, you need to sacrifice your hard-earned labor rights (Rodrik, 2021: 6).

[2] In our view, how well Kates's rendering of the collective action problem of sweatshop workers as a prisoners' dilemma applies to the real world is the crucial question for resolving the debate between Zwolinski and Kates.

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Some people making such an argument can be interpreted as weighing the interests of relatively wealthy first-world workers over poor sweatshop workers. However, Preiss is careful to note that, "It is important not to conclude from this discussion that critics of sweatshops are essentially nationalist or protectionist" (2014: 74). Instead, Preiss and others might be best interpreted to believe that more extensive global labor regulations might promote the long-run broader interests and freedoms of all workers, including sweatshop workers, even if current sweatshop worker welfare, as measured by economic studies, is harmed.

There are at least two important ways that we believe we are justified in employing Tomhave and Vopot's consequentialist standard to evaluate sweatshop boycotts. First, many sweatshop boycotts are strategic with the immediate aim of ending a particular harm to workers and making them better off. Thus, the standard employed is a means-ends morality test. Will a boycott achieve its stated objectives of ending or improving moral harm? Second, we believe our analysis is also relevant for Preiss, Kates, and scholars who share the concerns they raise. Preiss states explicitly that he proceeds from a "broadly pluralist understanding of value" (2014: 55). In his response to Sollars and Englander, Preiss explicitly states that his earlier work did not "deny that economic analysis is relevant to many moral claims about global supply claims [*sic*]" and that "rather than denying that economic analysis is morally relevant, my work challenges several conclusions that prominent economists and philosophers draw from this analysis" (2019: 882). Similarly, the second half of Kates (2015) considers worker preference and choice rather than autonomy and even makes a back-of-the-envelope calculation of the impact on worker welfare of an Indonesian minimum wage we analyze below. Worker welfare and poverty alleviation generally are clearly among the moral concerns of Preiss, Kates, and other critics of sweatshops. However, short-run worker welfare is one among a host of ethical concerns they raise. Our below analysis may not be decisive in determining the moral acceptability of sweatshop boycotts for scholars who share their concerns, but it should influence their evaluation of the morality of these boycotts on the margin to the extent that worker welfare is among their ethical concerns. We elaborate on this point in the discussion section.

We proceed as follows. First, we examine two cases, Indonesia in the 1990s and Bangladesh after the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster, where we think a reasonable application of consequentialist analysis could judge anti-sweatshop boycotts morally unjustified. We choose these two cases because they are both widely known, and there are high-quality empirical studies in highly regarded economics journals estimating the employment impact of this activism that we can rely on to help establish the relevant moral tradeoffs. These empirical tradeoffs are specific to the two cases analyzed. We will then analyze boycotts of goods being made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China and will argue that both the direct effects of the boycott and the likely further effects if the boycott is successful indicate that this boycott is morally permissible under the framework we have outlined above. A discussion section focuses on factors scholars should consider when they try to apply our analysis to other sweatshop labor boycotts and how

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the tradeoffs identified relate to other non-consequentialist moral evaluations of sweatshop boycotts. A final section concludes.

FREE LABOR SWEATSHOPS

Most sweatshop boycotts target factories using free labor rather than forced labor. In free labor sweatshops, workers choose an offer of sweatshop employment because they believe that their other options are even worse. This choice, even though it comes out of a bad set of options and is driven by economic necessity, has important implications for our analysis that differ from the case of forced labor that we will analyze in the next section. Any action by consumers that lowers employment in free labor sweatshops means that some workers are losing what they previously viewed as their least bad alternative. Any judgment about the moral permissibility of boycotts needs to account for the harm to these workers.

Boycotts necessarily decrease the quantity demanded for the targeted goods in the short run. This could lead profit-maximizing firms to decrease the wages of workers making the targeted goods or to lay off workers. This harm is among the ones that the business ethics literature is concerned with. However, if firms capitulate quickly, the boycott is strategic, and consumers rapidly resume purchases, a boycott could, in principle, succeed in getting the desired outcome before firms adjust employment or wages. Boycotts are more likely to be morally permissible if they do not entail harm to innocent workers (and their communities). In fact, Friedman, in his response pushing back against Mills's (1996) critique of boycotts, emphasizes in his conclusion that "many contemporary 'boycotts' are not boycotts at all but threats of boycotts or calls for boycotts with no demonstrable effect on any group, neutral or otherwise" (2001: 238). Instead, modern boycotts are more often

> to be more media-orientated than marketplace oriented, with the emphasis less on decreasing corporate sales and more on tarnishing a corporate image. By using photo-ops to embarrass a company in the news media, the boycotters hope to pressure it into yielding to their demands. So if they succeed, the boycotters typically do so not through slashes in sales volume for the corporate target or its economic dependents but through public relations damage to the corporate image (2001: 238–39).

To the extent boycotts are of this style and do not ultimately decrease demand for the targeted good through the tarnished corporate image, they have the potential to affect change without harming workers. However, sweatshop boycotts are a little different because the morally objectionable action triggering the boycott is the wages and working conditions for the sweatshop employees. Any capitulation to boycotters' demands necessitates changes to factors, such as wages and working conditions that could decrease employment in sweatshop factories, even when the boycott itself does not impact consumer demand. Thus, sweatshop boycotts carry a "double risk" of harming innocent workers. They could harm them through decreased demand during a boycott, and they also could harm some workers by "succeeding" in getting the firm to cease sourcing from factories paying low wages

https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2024.5 Published online by Cambridge University Press

or that have bad working conditions, but at the expense of employment opportunities that were previously the least bad option for those sweatshop workers. Thus, even a successful sweatshop boycott that does not decrease sales and does change the targeted behavior may produce more harm than good and thus might not be morally permissible. This makes the moral permissibility of any individual sweatshop boycott a double empirical question. We must ask both, does that act of boycotting harm workers, and would capitulating to boycotters' demands harm workers? We will illustrate an analysis of these empirical questions with two prominent examples of sweatshop boycotts where there are good empirical studies of the relevant tradeoffs: Indonesia in the 1990s and Bangladesh after the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster.

Indonesia

The modern anti-sweatshop movement gained much of its visibility and momentum through a campaign against working conditions in Nike's Indonesian factories during the early to mid-1990s. The campaign began because of research led by Jeff Ballinger, who was working for the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in Indonesia, documenting factories producing for Nike that were paid the lowest wages among Indonesian export-sector factories. Ballinger publicized his findings in an article entitled "The New Free-Trade Hell: Nike's Profits Jump on the Backs of Asian Workers" for *Harper's Magazine* in 1992 and followed up with an appearance discussing his claims on CBS. Ballinger's own organization, Press of Change, as well as other groups like Global Exchange and the National Labor Committee, followed up by creating an international campaign to pressure Nike, and to a lesser extent also Reebok and Adidas, to change the conditions in their Indonesian suppliers' factories. Harrison and Scorse document that this campaign is exactly the type of media-centric boycott described by Friedman (2001). They write, "The campaign against Nike, Adidas, and Reebok in Indonesia was essentially a media campaign, which operated … through contacts with newspaper columnists, magazine writers, TV shows, and other outlets" (2010: 249). They document the success of this media campaign in generating coverage by observing the change in the ratio of articles about the Indonesian economy in global news outlets that mention sweatshops. They note that "The ratio of the number of articles on sweatshops or child labor relative to articles on general economic issues on Indonesia in major world newspapers increased from zero to a high of 10 percent of all articles at the peak in 1996" (Harrison & Scorse, 2010: 249–50).

The media pressure campaign was successful in generating changed practices within Nike. Nike developed a new Code of Conduct for labor practices for supplier factories just as this media campaign began (Murphy & Matthew, 2001: 6). However, the Code of Conduct was not fully implemented at these Indonesian factories until 1995–96 at the height of the media pressure campaign (Murphy & Matthew, 2001: 6). During that period, the Code of Conduct was implemented through Nike's production division with monitoring done by Ernst & Young. By 1996, Nike decided

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instead to set up a dedicated labor practices department. As Murphy and Matthew note in their business school case study of Nike:

> The decision to set up the labour practices department came at a time when Nike was facing growing media and activist pressure about working conditions in its Asian footwear and apparel factories. Activists' use of the Internet to disseminate critical reports about Nike was of particular concern. According to Dusty Kidd [the head of the labor practices department], there was a lot of discussion within the company about how best to respond to the criticism (2001: 7).

Similarly, Harrison and Scorse report that "As a result of activist pressure, these firms [Nike, Adidas, and Reebok] were induced to sign codes of conduct pledging to raise wages and improve working conditions in factories producing their products" (2010: 247).

The media campaign also helped to generate changes in government policy. The United States threatened to take away special tariff privileges for Indonesian exports if the government did not address the human rights issues in Indonesian labor markets that these media stories documented. The Indonesian government raised its legal minimum wage multiple times in response to this pressure. In total, the Indonesian real minimum wage doubled from 1989, when Ballinger first investigated factory conditions, to 1996, at the height of the media campaign (coverage dropped in 1997 as the Asian financial crisis took center stage).[3]

The boycott of Nike and Indonesian suppliers, more generally, appears to be a best-case scenario for a morally permissible boycott of a free labor sweatshop. The campaign was media-centric rather than focused on reducing sales during the boycott (in fact, Nike sales were growing at this time), and both the firm and the source country government implemented reforms desired by the activists. However, we also need to answer the second empirical question of how the implementation of reforms impacted the workers they were supposed to help.

Harrison and Scorse (2010) studied the impact of anti-sweatshop activism and the doubling of the Indonesian minimum wage (which, of course, was among activist demands) and published their findings in the *American Economic Review*. Overall, Harrison and Scorse find that across all of Indonesia, wages in foreign-owned and exporting firms in the textile, footwear, and apparel (TFA) industry increased real wages by 10 to 20 percent compared to non-TFA plants. However, much as standard labor economics predicts, they found "large, negative effects of the minimum wage increases on aggregate manufacturing employment" (2010: 248). Specifically, they found that the doubling of the minimum wage led to between 12 and 36 percent less employment depending on specification (2010: 263).

Harrison and Scorse also attempt to isolate the impact of targeted anti-sweatshop activism rather than national-level minimum wage policy. They take advantage of the fact that the media-centric boycotts were targeted at Nike, Adidas, and Reebok and that the suppliers for these firms were geographically clustered. So, they employ

[3] This is the inflation-adjusted increase in the minimum wage. The nominal minimum wage quadrupled.

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a difference-in-differences methodology to compare wage and employment growth in TFA plants in districts with subcontractors for these footwear firms against the wage and employment growth of TFA firms in other districts. Thus, this difference-in-differences methodology attempts to control for factors that affected the TFA industry overall (including the minimum wage increases), to isolate the effect of the activism on targeted firms. Harrison and Scorse find wage growth in districts with targeted firms was as much as 30 percent higher in large foreign-owned exporting firms (2010: 248). Although they found that this did cause the exit of small firms, unlike the national increase in the minimum wage, they did not find that targeted anti-sweatshop activism caused decreased employment in targeted districts.

However, a new study by Makioka (2021) published in the *Review of Development Economics* argues that the firms in districts with Nike, Reebok, and Adidas suppliers differed from the firms in other TFA districts on both observable and unobservable characteristics. Observable characteristics can be controlled for Harrison and Scorse's study, but their difference-in-differences methodology assumes that the firms in targeted and untargeted districts are alike on unobservable characteristics. To account for these unobservable differences, Makioka employs a synthetic control methodology. This method better matches targeted firms to untargeted firms, based on their trends prior to the advent of anti-sweatshop activism, to create a better counterfactual against which to evaluate activism-impacted targeted firms. Contrary to Harrison and Scorse, Makioka (2021) finds that employment decreased by 29.8 percent in firms targeted by activists. Makioka explains this main result:

> The estimate can be interpreted as the effect of the anti-sweatshop movement through firms' increasing compliance with minimum-wage regulations, offering voluntarily higher wages, and maintaining higher working standards, because having a similar log employment over the pretreatment periods implies that the treatment and control groups are similar in terms of both observed and unobserved determinants, including minimum wages (2021: 642).

Any wage gains for workers who keep their jobs from increases in the minimum wage or targeted anti-sweatshop activism have to be weighed against the losses experienced by workers who lose their jobs as a result of this activism. Taken together, the above studies indicate that national minimum wage and targeted activism each led to nearly one-third less employment in the firms they affected. Powell (2014) investigated how wages in firms identified as sweatshops in these media campaigns compared to other alternatives available in the Indonesian economy. He found that while more than half of the people in Indonesia were living on less than US$2 per day (purchasing power adjusted), and roughly 20 percent were living on less than US$1.25 a day, workers in firms targeted by anti-sweatshop activists, and identified in the media, paid approximately US$6 per day (purchasing power adjusted) (2014: 55–57). This indicates that sweatshop workers displaced by activists' actions have a high probability of ending up supporting themselves with jobs that provide living standards significantly below those provided by sweatshop jobs.

In this case, the moral permissibility of the media-centric boycott must weigh the wage increases for workers who keep their jobs against the likely wages lost for

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workers who lose their jobs.[4] Although the minimum wage was doubled, that did not double the wages for all workers who kept their jobs, since they were not all earning the minimum wage previously. So, a simple calculation of doubling the wages for two-thirds of workers who kept their jobs against a wage loss for the one-third of workers who lost their jobs would underestimate any harm caused by the increase. Without knowing the percentage of workers earning the minimum wage prior to increases, we cannot precisely calculate this. As for the additional effect of anti-sweatshop activist boycotts beyond the impact of the minimum wage, if we attribute 100 percent of the higher pay in foreign-owned exporting TFA plants to activism, it leads to a 10–20 percent gain to two-thirds of workers who keep their jobs, against a loss of more than 66 percent of their income for the one-third of workers who lost their job, if their new employment paid $2 a day, something more than half the people in Indonesia were unable to earn at that time. A social welfare function can be defined in such a way as to justify almost any conclusion. However, in this case, it is not hard to see that there are significant and substantial harms that could lead a reasonable person to deem this prominent boycott morally impermissible.

Bangladesh

The 2013 Rana Plaza garment factory collapse was the largest such disaster in modern times. The collapse killed 1,129 workers and injured another 2,500 workers (Reineck & Donaghey, 2015). The scale of the disaster generated worldwide media attention. This attention led multinational firms that sourced garments from Bangladesh to become concerned about how future disasters could tarnish their brand image. It also led anti-sweatshop activists in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to agitate for more safety regulation. The result was the creation of buyer-enforced nongovernmental safety standards and monitoring through agreements that included the cooperation of these anti-sweatshop NGOs, Unions, and multinational brands sourcing from Bangladesh. The Accord and the Alliance were two separate agreements where major international buyers agreed to only source garments from factories that met the safety standards laid out in their agreements. Essentially, the enforcement mechanism in these agreements was a boycott of all Bangladeshi subcontractors who did not meet the agreement's safety standards.

The Accord included more than 190 (eventually more than 220) international brands and garment retailers from more than twenty countries across four continents (Reinecke & Donaghey 2015: 725; Trebilcock 2020: 548). H&M, the largest garment buyer from Bangladesh, was the first brand to sign onto the Accord, only twenty-one days after the Rana Plaza disaster (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015: 731). Accord signatories agreed to source Bangladeshi garments from only those factories that allowed independent safety inspections by qualified engineers approved by the Accord; agreed to improve their factories to comply with building safety, fire, and electrical standards; maintained the employment of workers while remediating any

[4] Additionally, unemployed sweatshop workers increase the supply of workers to other industries causing wages to decrease in those industries as well. These losses should be included in any overall worker welfare calculation.

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safety deficiencies; allowed workers to participate in occupational health and safety training; and allowed workers to make complaints to the Accord and refuse unsafe work without retaliation (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015: 725). The inspections were paid for by the multinational buyers, who contributed on a sliding scale of up to $500,000 each, but the cost of making any safety improvements to comply with these standards was borne by the Bangladeshi firms (Donaghey & Reinecke 2018: 24). The multinational buyer signatories agreed to keep purchasing volume constant for source factories that live up to the standards of the agreement, while not purchasing from any new firms that fail to meet the standards and terminating contracts with current suppliers that failed safety inspections and then failed to remediate their deficiencies (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015: 725).

The Alliance agreement was created by twenty-seven North American brands, including Wal-Mart and the Gap, for the same purpose. Like the Accord, this agreement also used multinational brand-financed safety inspections to monitor conditions in subcontracting firms and the threat of boycotting non-compliant subcontractors as an enforcement agreement. It also shared the same common set of inspection and safety standards with the Accord. The main differences between the two agreements were that the Alliance did not bind multinational firms to maintain purchasing volume from compliant subcontractors and did not require legally binding arbitration in the case of disputes (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018: 26).

The Accord grew to cover more than 1,600 factories employing more than 2.5 million workers (Trebilcock, 2020: 550). The Alliance covered an additional 587 factories (Trebilcock, 2020: 552) and an estimated 537,214 workers (Donaghey & Reinecke 2018: 32). Combined, the Accord and Alliance covered approximately 40 percent of Bangladesh's garment factories and 75 percent of its garment workers.

Although the media coverage of the Rana Plaza disaster and protests of anti-sweatshop activists led to the creation of the Accord and Alliance, this boycott was not merely a media-centric campaign like the Indonesian case. Instead, it punished unsafe factories by boycotting them. However, it was the large multinational firms who signed these agreements, rather than downstream consumers, doing the boycotting. The brands that signed the Accord and Alliance boycotted roughly 60 percent of Bangladesh's garment factories. In addition, they boycotted non-compliant factories covered by the agreement. The Accord reports that 156 of the 1,645 factories inspected received closure orders and a similar number were relocated by January 2020 (Accord, 2020). The Accord also resulted in at least 50 temporary evacuation orders (Anner 2018: 2). Similarly, the Alliance suspended relations with 97 source factories and escalated remediation action against an additional 138 factories by late 2016 (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018: 28). In short, these boycotts were not paper tigers—they were enforced.

Assessing the benefits of these boycotts is complicated. Donaghey and Reinecke claim that "The best indication of the effectiveness of the Accord and Alliance is that, to date, there has been no other major industrial accident in Bangladeshi garment factories since Rana Plaza" (2018: 38). Although this is some indication that safety has improved, the Rana Plaza disaster was an outlier. We shouldn't expect

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another outlier event of similar magnitude even without reform. However, we do think that the reaction to the Rana Plaza factory disaster improved safety by some significant margins for the roughly 3 million workers in factories covered by the Accord and Alliance agreements. However, to judge the moral permissibility of these boycotts, we need to weigh any improvement in safety against any harm caused by the boycotts.

Like the Indonesian case, the vast majority of garment industry workers in Bangladesh choose to work in these factories because, in their judgment, this employment is their least bad option. Thus, like in Indonesia, when free laborers lose their employment due to the actions of boycotters, this constitutes a cost that must count against any good the boycott achieves.

There are at least three channels through which the Accord and Alliance boycotts could displace workers. The first and most obvious is by limiting the demand for goods from the roughly 60 percent of Bangladeshi factories that have not signed one of these agreements and thus limiting the number of workers these firms employ. The second is by terminating orders and relationships with factories that were part of the agreements but failed to meet safety standards, thus lowering the quantity of workers these factories demand. The third channel is by increasing costs for factories that maintain agreement safety standards. Safety is not free. If the costs of safety improvements are not matched by a proportional increase in worker productivity, firms could employ fewer workers and more machinery to produce the same number of garments. Finally, there is also the possibility that other multinational buyers will react to the choice between higher costs in safer factories or lower costs in less safe factories in Bangladesh by shifting their supply chains to other more developed countries that are both safer and more productive.

Grier et al. (2023) studied the overall reaction to the Rana Plaza disaster and published their findings in the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization.* They employed the same synthetic control methodology used in Makioka (2021) to study the impact of anti-sweatshop activism in Indonesia. They find that the combined effect of the Accord and Alliance organized boycotts, general unorganized boycotts engendered by the media coverage of the disaster, and overall reaction to the disaster led to 33.3 percent fewer garment factories in Bangladesh by 2016 and 28.3 percent fewer garment industry employees by 2017 (Grier, Mahmood, & Powell, 2023).

These lost jobs were a significant step up compared to alternatives for most of these workers. Mahmood and Powell (2023) found that the average pay of workers in Bangladeshi factories that were identified as sweatshops in the international media during the decade of the Rana Plaza disaster provided a living standard of $5.81 per day (purchasing power adjusted). Meanwhile, nearly 87 percent of Bangladesh's population lived on less than $6.85 per day and more than 51 percent lived on less than $3.65 per day. The potentially large forgone earnings for more than a quarter of Bangladesh's garment workers need to be weighed against any potential safety improvements generated by the boycotts.

Furthermore, the apparel industry has played an important role in Bangladesh's development. At the time of the disaster, the apparel industry comprised 13 percent of the country's GDP and accounted for 80 percent of its exports. Any slowdown of

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this process of development, which ultimately leads people out of poverty caused by boycotts, must also count as a long-run cost of boycotts. The apparel industry also helps to alleviate rural poverty, as 90 percent of garment workers come from rural households, and they remit about 25 percent of their earnings to those rural areas (Afsar, 2001). The industry is particularly important for disadvantaged women. The garment industry employs roughly 12 percent of women aged fifteen to thirty (Amin, 2014). In addition to providing wages higher than what rural women could otherwise earn, these jobs also empower women in other ways. These jobs helped to break down the stigma against women appearing in public alone, they help women delay marriage and pregnancy, which often come shortly after puberty in rural areas, and their control over their earnings gives them greater independence (Amin, 2014). These constitute additional costs that must be weighed against safety improvements.

Much like in Indonesia, in the case of Bangladesh, there are significant and substantial harms caused by boycotts. Even if we assume that the safety improvements generated by these boycotts prevented disasters, which in the aggregate, equal the scale of Rana Plaza, which seems unlikely, this means an evaluation of the moral permissibility of these boycotts would need to weigh 1,129 lives saved (and 2,500 injuries prevented) against the harms caused to roughly 1.13 million people who are not employed in the garment industry but otherwise would have been. These harms include a substantially lower living standard and other non-pecuniary harms for women. A reasonable person could easily judge these tradeoffs in such a way as to deem the boycotts morally impermissible.

FORCED LABOR SWEATSHOPS

Boycotts of forced labor sweatshops are fundamentally different from boycotts of free labor sweatshops because they do not entail the same risks of harming innocent workers. The very fact that the laborers are forced, with the threat of violence, to perform the job indicates that forced labor jobs are not the best available alternative for these workers. If the jobs were the best available option for workers, they would take them voluntarily, without being threatened. Thus, it becomes less likely, though not impossible, that a forced labor boycott would harm workers.

Like free labor sweatshops, there are the same two channels through which boycotts can impact workers. The first is through decreased demand for the goods being produced with their labor. However, in this case, if the firms employing forced laborers cut back their workforce because of the decreased demand for their product, these workers are helped rather than harmed. The necessity of forcing them to take the job illustrates that workers would be better off in other alternatives. The second way that boycotts impact workers is again through capitulation to the boycotters' demands. In the case of forced labor, capitulation usually means ceasing to use the threat of violence to force workers to perform their jobs. Capitulating to boycotts of forced labor sweatshops usually unambiguously helps all the directly impacted workers, unlike free labor sweatshops where meeting boycotter demands helps some workers and harms others. Since both channels through which forced labor boycotts impact workers move in the same direction for all affected workers, these boycotts

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are highly likely to produce more good than harm and do not require the complicated weighing of gains to some workers against losses to others. Unlike free labor sweatshop boycotts, even if ineffectual, they aren't likely to create much harm since decreased demand during a boycott does not harm the affected workers. Thus, the main key to evaluating whether a boycott is morally permissible for a forced labor sweatshop involves making sure it is actually targeting forced labor and not indiscriminately impacting free labor firms as well. We use the forced labor sweatshops in China's Uyghur region as an example to explore the moral permissibility of forced labor boycotts.

Is Uyghur Labor Forced?

In 2016, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) experienced a series of policy changes when Chen Quanguo was appointed as the region's party secretary. The soldier-turned-politician has been labeled as an innovator of ethnic minority regional policies.[5] In addition to a surveillance program on citizens' day-to-day activities, Chen's methods of controlling the ethnic minority population include a massive detainment program.[6] This detainment program is under the official guise of Vocational Education and Training Centers and is well-known as the reeducation camps across the region. According to several estimations (Hayes, 2019; Zenz, 2018), sixty-one detainment program facilities were built through government procurement bids in the region in 2017; the camps can hold around one million people.

Once reeducation camp detainees finish "training" of de-extremification, which aims at preventing religious extremism, they are released from camps and sent to manufacturing sites in the region and subjected to forced labor (Silvers, 2022). As indicated by a leaked document from a 2019 *New York Times* article, forced labor is "part of the government's targeted campaign of repression, mass internment, and indoctrination of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang" (Silvers, 2022: 11). Former camp detainees testified that the regional government had compelled Uyghurs into forced labor through coercive labor transfers.

Along with transferring former reeducation camps detainees to engage in forced labor, the regional "precise poverty alleviation" program is another source of forced labor. As part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's goal to eliminate absolute poverty by 2020, the region's "war on poverty" pressured each administrative level to achieve poverty alleviation through job creation, which primarily utilized coercive labor transfer (Zenz, 2020).

According to several policy documents from the State Council's Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, the precise poverty alleviation program in the XUAR

[5] During his tenure in the XUAR, Chen's policies have focused on two subjects: economic development and maintenance of social stability. Peng and Callais (2023) studied the effect of those policies. They concluded that the policies had no substantial impact on economic development, while the impact on social coercion is much larger in the forms of higher public security spending and higher arrest rate.

[6] While the region had established camps since the striking hard campaign in 2014, the scale of those camps reached unparalleled levels since Chen's tenure as the party secretary of the region.

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established a comprehensive database to monitor officials' progress in poverty alleviation and identify households that "need" assistance from the program. Unlike poverty alleviation programs that provide resources or opportunities to those in poverty, this program forces work on members of poor households. The program established a goal that more than two million poor people in 3,029 poor villages must escape poverty by 2020 through forced work.

The workers' training process after the coercive labor transfer requires a militarized management style and political indoctrination, which includes learning to appreciate the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) effort to lift poor people out of poverty. State propaganda also plays a crucial role in alleviating workers' resistance to the program and training.[7] According to the propaganda, Uyghurs' backward views on employment caused them to be stuck in their traditional ways of living. Those views also make Uyghurs lazy and lack work discipline. According to propaganda, the program and training would help Uyghurs to become more motivated and better workers, and eventually, people would cherish being part of the program, which would make them more open-minded and work hard to lift themselves out of poverty (Zenz, 2020).[8]

The goals of the training include "standardized behavior" and transforming Uyghurs' backward working attitude from "I am wanted to work" to "I want to work."[9] The training process can last between six days and six months. As Zenz (2020: 13) stated, the training process sends out a strong message that the state is in charge and transforms the Uyghur population in the region into "a second-class workforce" of exploited labor.

The coercive labor program also transferred Uyghurs out of the XUAR to factories across the country. Xu, Cave, Leibold, Munro, and Ruser (2020) identified twenty-seven factories in nine Chinese provinces that used Uyghur labor from the XUAR since 2017. Between 2017 and 2019, Xu et al. (2020) estimated that at least 80,000 Uyghurs were assigned to those factories through the labor transfer program. In addition to constant surveillance, Uyghurs under the program both inside and outside of the XUAR face "the threat of arbitrary detention," which "hangs over minority citizens who refuse their government-sponsored work assignments" (Xu et al., 2020: 3). In sum, there is ample evidence that the Chinese government, and companies working in conjunction with it, are using forced labor from the Uyghur population.

Targeting Forced Labor: Goods and Companies Involved

The XUAR is a major region of cotton production. In 2019, China produced about 23 percent of the world's cotton, and about 85 percent of Chinese production came from the XUAR (Lehr, 2020). While there has been an increase in mechanization in cotton picking, most of the cotton produced in the region was still hand-picked, which is a more expensive method of cotton picking. The rapid expansion of cotton

[7] http://www.kashi.gov.cn/Item/38964.aspx
[8] http://www.xj.chinanews.com/xinjiang/2018-11-29/detail-ifzahrcq0599454.shtml
[9] https://www.sohu.com/a/215881112_752235

https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2024.5 Published online by Cambridge University Press

plantations starting in 2006 has outpaced the process of mechanization (Zenz, 2020). In 2019, 1.9 million acres of cotton were harvested by machine, while 4.4 million acres of cotton were hand-picked (Zenz, 2020).

The poverty alleviation program made the hand-picked cotton production viable. Evidence of the utilization of forced labor in cotton picking in the XUAR has been discovered in Chinese government documents and media reports. Under the disguise of the "precise poverty alleviation" program, coercive labor transfers forced workers in rural areas into paid seasonal agricultural work, such as cotton picking, which normally requires physical relocations for the cotton-picking months. Although cotton picking is paid work, it is backbreaking labor, and the average earnings are below the XUAR's minimum wage level and the publicly stated low-skilled factory work wages. For example, the minimum wage in the XUAR was 1,820 RMB per month in 2018. While the regional government stated that workers in the labor transfer program could earn a monthly income of 4,800 RMB, some local governments reported that the actual average monthly income was about 1,670 RMB[10] to 1,805 RMB.[11]

Other industries also utilized the coercive labor transfer program in the region and across the country. China is one of the world's top auto parts suppliers. According to Murphy, Salcito, Uluyol, and Rabkin (2022: 1), there are ninety-six mining, processing, or manufacturing companies engaged in auto sector production, operating in the XUAR, and at least thirty-eight of those companies are involved in state-sponsored labor transfer programs. More than forty auto manufacturers in China and more than fifty international auto parts or car manufacturers source from the XUAR or from companies that have utilized Uyghur workers from labor transfer programs across the country. More than a hundred international auto parts or car manufacturers have been exposed to forced Uyghur labor-made goods.

Electronics manufacturing is another major sector using workers from the labor transfer program. O-Film Technology manufactured cameras for iPhones and touchscreen components for other companies such as Lenovo and Samsung. Hotan Prefecture of the XUAR reportedly transferred 700 Uyghurs workers to one of O-Film's factories in Jiangxi province in May 2017. Five months later, more than a thousand Uyghur workers were transferred to the factory after the Hotan government contacted O-Film to supply more workers (Xu et al., 2020). In the first eight months of 2018, 1,554 Uyghur workers were transferred from Awat County of the XUAR to Hefei Bitland Information Technology and Hefei Meiling in Anhui Province, and Mianyang Jingweida Technology in Sichuan Province.[12] Those companies are electronics suppliers to Google, Dell, and Toshiba.

The textile industry has also been involved in labor transfer programs. Between April 2017 and June 2018, Hoton Prefecture transferred more than 2,000 Uyghur workers to fifteen factories of Youngor Group, which supplies textile products to

[10] http://xj.sina.com.cn/news/b/2018-12-06/detail-ihmutuec6706039.shtml
[11] http://www.xjb.cas.cn/ztlm/fhjzt/201712/t20171215_4918279.html
[12] http://www.agri.cn/V20/SHXX/llzy/201808/t20180827_6226942.htm

https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2024.5 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lacoste, L.L. Bean, Tommy Hilfiger, and Uniqlo.[13] In November 2019, a satellite factory of Jiangsu Guotai International Group hired 3,500 Uyghur workers. The group is a major textile supplier to companies including Abercrombie & Fitch, American Eagle, Anthropologie, Calvin Klein, and Free People (Xu et al., 2020: 37). In May 2017, Qingdao Jifa Group, which is a supplier to Gap and Walmart, announced the opening of an industrial park in Shule County in XUAR.[14] The group helped the local government train potential Uyghur employees and hired 1,200 of them.

According to Xu et al. (2020), eighty-two major brands had several supply chain exposures to XUAR forced labor. Besides the brands mentioned above, those include Adidas, BMW, Calvin Klein, Honda, Fila, Ford, General Motors, H&M, Lenovo, Mercedes-Benz Group, Polo Ralph Lauren, Puma, Toyota, Tesla, Volkswagen Audi Group, and Zara.[15]

Boycotts on the Uyghur Forced Labor

The coercive nature of labor transfer programs and forced Uyghur labor have drawn international attention. A coalition of more than 190 organizations in thirty-six countries called for cutting ties with suppliers implicated in Uyghur forced labor in 2020 and ending all sourcing from the XUAR within twelve months (Paton & Ramzy, 2020). Several brands, whose supply chains were exposed to the Uyghur forced labor, raised concern regarding the treatment of Uyghur in the XUAR and or began changing sourcing practices. Both H&M and IKEA have stated they would no longer source cotton from the region (Milne, 2020). Nike, Adidas, Lacoste, and other members of the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) also expressed their concerns about cotton produced in Xinjiang (Flora, 2022).[16] Other companies like Amazon, BMW, and Samsung, made official statements that claimed they do not tolerate human rights violations.[17]

[13] https://www.sohu.com/a/243367464_114967.

[14] http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2017-05-14/doc-ifyfekhi7615774.shtml.

[15] See Xu et al. (2020) for the full list.

[16] China immediately retaliated against brands that boycotted. H&M became the first target following its statement to cut ties with cotton from Xinjiang. H&M was pulled from major e-commerce stores in China and blocked by review and rating apps. The first H&M flagship store in Shanghai shut down in 2022. Chinese celebrities terminated promotional work for the brand and cut ties with the brand. Other brands that raised concerns about cotton production also faced backlash from their Chinese market, as Chinese consumers ostracized those brands (Brant, 2021).

[17] Despite the international uproar, there has been very little criticism of China from governments of Islamic nations, which are mostly members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Callais, Caskey, and Peng (2023) found that the repressive measurements against Uyghurs only have an insignificant blowback effect on international trade between China and the OIC because a large majority of countries of the OIC are active participants in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

While governments of most Islamic nations remained silent over the treatment of Uyghurs, there have been boycotts from citizens of those nations. In 2018, one of the largest Islamist political parties, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, in Bangladesh threatened to boycott Chinese goods if Beijing did not release detainees from the camps (Page, Dou, & Shah, 2018). In Mumbai, India, a Muslim fundamentalist Islamist group, Raza Academy, organized a protest against the treatment of Uyghurs in China. Several hundreds of scholars and community leaders affiliated with the group advocate stopping using Chinese goods (Page et al., 2018).

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In 2020, the United States passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy, which condemns "gross human rights violations of ethnic Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang, and calling for an end to arbitrary detention, torture, and harassment of these communities inside and outside China." That same year, the United States Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on top CCP officials in the region. The sanctions froze those officials' assets in the United States and barred them and their immediate relatives from entering the United States. These sanctions were also backed by the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Canada (Wintour, 2021).

The United States also passed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) in 2021, which "ensure[s] that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China do not enter the United States market, and for other purposes." If customs officials identify a product is produced in whole or in part in the XUAR, the law requires importers to provide "clear and convincing evidence" that goods are not made with forced labor (Swanson, Edmondson, & Wong, 2021). The UFLPA essentially calls for companies to thoroughly investigate their supply chain as far down as possible for any potential exposure to Uyghur forced labor.[18] In the fiscal year of 2022, Customs and Border Protection issued six withhold-release orders and detained over 2,000 shipments under the rebuttal presumption of the UFLPA (Marquis, 2022).

Since the boycotts against Uyghur forced labor are relatively recent, documented evidence of the Chinese government's response to boycotts is rather sparse. However, we can trace out some of the theoretical consequences of those boycotts. If well-enforced, both boycotts and sanction legislation would lower the demand for Uyghur forced labor-related products because investigating brands' entire supply chain would be very costly, if not impossible. As the demand for the products decreases, the demand for forced labor in sectors that utilize the coercive labor transfer program also diminishes.[19] In the near term, this may lead the Chinese government to force fewer Uyghur people into the forced labor programs since they do not have the same size market for their products. Of course, other considerations, such as a drive for cultural assimilation, may lead China to continue to force the same number of Uyghur people into labor but it is hard to imagine a way in which the decreased market size would lead the Chinese government to force more of them into labor camps.

The real guesswork in evaluating the moral permissibility of this particular forced labor boycott is in attaching probabilities to the potential response of the Chinese government. In the best-case scenario, the Chinese government abandons the program, and Uyghurs, who were forced to be part of labor transfer programs, would be released to their pre-forced labor situation. The Uyghurs' lives would be improved as

Reformists criticize conservatives for hypocritically neglecting Uyghurs' situation in the XUAR (Markey, 2021: 137). A top Islamic jurist in Malaysia stated that political and religious leaders from the Muslim world should exert more economic and diplomatic pressure on the Chinese government for its human rights abuse of Uyghurs (Regencia, 2019).

[18] Both the United Kingdom and European Unions have proposed similar measures to address the forced labor issue regarding supply chains (Maizland, 2022).

[19] For example, it was the labor transfer program that made Chinese cotton production and auto parts manufacturers competitive. See Zenz (2020) and Murphy et al. (2022).

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a result since forced labor was not their least bad option. Alternatively, the Chinese government could continue to use forced labor in the same quantities to produce goods exclusively for their domestic market. This domestic production would likely be less profitable, but the Chinese government could counter market forces with state subsidies to keep the program viable. If the Chinese government responds in this manner the boycotts will do no good but aren't likely to cause any harm either. It is hard to imagine many likely scenarios where the Chinese government's response to the boycotts would make the Uyghur population worse off. We suppose, since these forced labor programs are clearly motivated to target a religious and cultural minority group that the CCP sees as a political liability, the government could respond to the lack of demand for goods made with forced labor by turning forced work camps into execution camps. Clearly, this would make the Uyghur population worse off. However, we know of no serious analysis that indicates this is a likely possibility.

The boycotts of Uyghur forced labor seem sufficiently targeted that they mostly impact only goods made with forced labor. If, instead, boycotts (or sanctions) were imposed on all of China or the global production of any company that has any exposure to Uyghur forced labor in any one of its products, the evaluation of the boycotts would become more complicated as boycotts would likely harm many free labor workers unconnected to the forced Uyghur labor. This is not to deny that there is no harm to at least some free laborers whose own outputs are inputs into products made jointly with forced labor outputs. However, based on the targeted nature of the boycotts described above, under most plausible scenarios, boycotting forced sweatshop labor from the Uyghur region seems likely to achieve more good than harm for the workers and population of the region and thus be morally permissible.

DISCUSSION

Tomhave and Vopat noted that there was little literature analyzing the philosophical aspects of the legitimacy of boycotts and characterized their own article as "an initial analysis which will raise numerous issues that may need clarification in future, potentially longer, treatments" (2018: 125). Similarly, Preiss had previously noted that "The business ethics literature (almost) completely ignores the ethical obligations of non-managerial stakeholders in the practice of sweatshops" (2014: 67). We have utilized Thomhav and Vopat's theoretical framework to systematically analyze the moral legitimacy of sweatshop boycotts in more detail. Ultimately, within this framework, the moral legitimacy of each sweatshop boycott is an empirical question that requires investigating the likely good and harm of each unique situation. However, the analysis of the three cases above can provide some useful "rules of thumb" and guideposts to aid in future judgments. However, as we recognized in the introduction, there are other theoretical frameworks that business ethicists have used to evaluate the moral permissibility of sweatshop regulations. This section first reviews the "within a framework" theoretical rules of thumb that our above case studies contribute. Then, we consider the likely moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts and the relevance of this article's contribution under multiple theoretical ethical frameworks.

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Tomhave and Vopat argue that the moral legitimacy of any boycott depends on the consequences that result from it. In the context of sweatshop boycotts, we have narrowed the relevant moral consequences to only those consequences experienced by poor workers in countries where sweatshops are located. Within this framework, any analysis of the moral legitimacy of a sweatshop boycott should begin by addressing whether the sweatshop is employing free or forced labor. Forced labor is not the workers' best alternative; thus, any aspect of the boycott that causes lost employment does not constitute harm to the workers. Unless there is a significant probability of the target of a forced labor boycott creating even greater harm to these workers or their communities in response to a boycott, boycotts of forced labor would rarely create greater harm than good as long as these boycotts are narrowly targeted on the forced labor product.

Boycotts of free labor sweatshops are more complicated in this consequentialist framework because these jobs are the best available alternative to workers, as demonstrated by their own choice of these jobs over the alternatives. Thus, boycotts that lead to job losses create harm for some workers that need to be weighed against any benefits created by the boycott. As noted previously in the literature, media-centric boycotts that do not change the quantity of the product demanded are less likely to displace and harm workers than consumer-centric boycotts. However, as our Indonesian case illustrates, even when boycotts are successful in changing the targeted behavior, that too can involve harming some workers for the benefit of others. In our judgment, the empirical magnitude of the tradeoffs involved could lead a reasonable person to judge the boycott as morally impermissible. Similarly, we think the large decrease in employment caused by the Bangladesh consumer (brand)-centric boycott could lead most reasonable people to conclude the boycott was morally impermissible despite an increase in safety. However, we realize that these judgments require both an understanding of the tradeoffs and a judgment of value about those tradeoffs. Some business ethicists could understand these same tradeoffs yet reach a different verdict if they employ different value judgments, in particular, if they share concerns raised by Preiss (2014, 2019) and Kates (2015), in addition to caring about the impact of boycotts on worker welfare. We will return to these alternative frameworks below.

Assessing the consequentialist tradeoffs associated with any boycott is difficult, and it is all the more difficult to assess these tradeoffs before a boycott is undertaken. However, we believe there are some "rules of thumb" that our study illustrates that can at least serve as a starting point for people who want to assess moral tradeoffs associated with undertaking a boycott. First, boycotts of forced labor are the most likely to be morally permissible since direct job losses do not harm displaced workers. Second, when it comes to free labor boycotts, those boycotts that directly reduce demand for workers and are sustained, such as the one in Bangladesh, are more likely to cause greater harm and are more likely to be judged morally impermissible. Third, media-centric boycotts, such as the Indonesian case, are the hardest to assess. The boycott itself did not decrease demand for workers, but instead, we must evaluate the secondary consequences of tradeoffs associated with meeting activists' demands. We think a reasonable person could judge the Indonesian case morally impermissible but

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recognize other scholars might judge the moral tradeoffs differently. What are the guides that can help someone think about the tradeoffs in cases like the Indonesian one in advance? The price sensitivity (what economists call elasticity) of the particular labor market supply and demand are key guideposts in evaluating the moral permissibility of boycotts of free labor sweatshops because these sensitivities determine the magnitude of the tradeoffs involved. When labor market demand is relatively insensitive to price changes (inelastic) and labor market supply is highly sensitive (elastic), any capitulation to boycott demands that involve increased labor costs by firms will not change the quantity of labor they employ very much. Conversely, when labor market demand is relatively more price sensitive (elastic) than labor market supply, much of the burden of any increase in labor costs will be borne by workers, often through layoffs. Boycotts of free labor sweatshops are more likely to create more harm than benefit in these later situations. Unfortunately, in most real-world markets with sweatshops, it is usually labor demand that is more price sensitive, as firms can quickly change supply chains to source from other countries, while economic necessity requires laborers to work, and they are usually stuck supplying labor in the country in which they reside because of immigration restrictions in more developed countries (Powell, 2018). To summarize, as a guide to assessing the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts within this framework, boycotts of forced labor are very likely morally permissible, consumer-centric boycotts are the least likely to be morally permissible, and media-centric boycotts fall somewhere in between, though the relevant elasticities indicate that they are likely to be problematic.

The above rules of thumb, derived from the case studies, only indicate the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts within a worker welfare consequentialist theoretical framework. A Kantian framework is a long-standing alternative framework in the business ethics sweatshop literature. More than twenty years ago, Arnold and Bowie wrote that companies engaged in trade have "a duty to ensure that those with whom they conduct business are properly respected" and that "respecting the dignity of persons requires that MNEs and their contractors adhere to local labor laws, refrain from coercion, meet minimum safety standards, and provide a living wage for employees" (2003: 226, 222). More recently, as mentioned in the introduction, Preiss has argued that Kantian understandings of freedom are incompatible with the large inequalities in bargaining power that result in firms' failure to respect workers' humanity (2014, 2019). Under a Kantian theoretical framework, boycotts of all types of sweatshops are very likely to be morally permissible since the employer-employee interactions occur with large inequalities in bargaining power and firms are unlikely to refrain from using that bargaining power to their advantage. Firms are more likely to interact with workers on terms that would fail to respect the dignity of workers.[20]

[20] This large inequality in bargaining power is directly the result of elasticity of labor supply and demand discussed previously.

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Kates (2015) argued that sweatshop regulations are justified because unregulated markets do not allow workers to exercise their true autonomous preferences. Kates asserts that collective action problems prevent workers from exercising their autonomous preferences and model workers in a prisoners' dilemma game where their decentralized decision-making leaves all workers in an equilibrium they would have avoided if they could have chosen collectively. If Kates is correct, then laws mandating unionized collective bargaining could help workers better realize their autonomous preferences. Thus, boycotts demanding such laws could be morally permissible under a theoretical framework that values worker autonomy. However, how widespread such collective action problems are is ultimately an empirical question that requires further investigation. That leaves the moral permissibility of any particular sweatshop boycott based on this framework uncertain. The permissibility would depend on whether it targets solving a collective action problem that would better allow workers to realize their autonomous preferences or not. However, it is fairly obvious that workers in forced labor sweatshops would be better able to exercise their autonomous preferences if they were freed to pursue them. Thus, most forced labor sweatshop boycotts are very likely permissible using this framework.

As mentioned in the introduction, Preiss (2014, 2019) has also argued that sweatshop regulations may be justified to promote "global labor justice." In this view, sweatshop regulations could contribute to impeding a global race to the bottom in wage and regulatory standards. If stronger global labor regulatory standards is the moral goal, then perhaps boycotting sweatshops that don't uphold these standards could be morally permissible. However, in the long run, if higher global labor standards are the by-product of economic development, as argued in Powell (2014), then boycotts of free labor sweatshops may actually slow the advance of higher global labor standards. It is beyond the scope of this article to argue which of these views is correct. It is a topic for further research and debate, and here we will simply leave the moral permissibility of free labor sweatshops on these grounds uncertain in this analysis. However, once again, the moral permissibility of forced labor sweatshop boycotts seems clear. Forced labor is per se impermissible in this framework, and we have no reason to think that boycotting forced labor would slow its elimination.

Finally, we should evaluate the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts using a more pluralistic understanding of value. This is perhaps the most relevant consideration, beyond our conclusions within the Tomhave and Vopat theoretical framework, because it has been a standard widely used in business ethics literature in evaluating the ethics of sweatshop regulation. Classic and contemporary contributions to the business ethics literature on sweatshops either explicitly or implicitly employ a pluralistic understanding of value. Preiss (2014, 2019) proceeds from a "broadly pluralist understanding of value" that includes all four of the above frameworks, when evaluating the morality of sweatshop regulation. Arnold and Bowie (2003) use both economic consequentialist reasoning and Kantian reasoning. Similarly, Kates (2015) raises concerns about both worker autonomy and economic consequentialist reasoning. How then should we evaluate the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts with a pluralistic theoretical framework?

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Table 1: The Moral Permissibility of Sweatshop Boycotts

	Forced labor	Consumer-centric	Media-centric
Worker welfare	5	1	2
Kantian—Respect/dignity	5	5	5
Autonomy	5	3	3
Global labor justice	5	3	3
Pluralistic	5	3	3

Note. 5 = Very likely; 4 = Likely; 3 = Uncertain; 2 = Not likely; 1 = Very unlikely.

Forced labor sweatshop boycotts are the easiest to evaluate with a pluralistic framework because all four of the frameworks above point in the same direction. They all argue that in most normal circumstances forced labor boycotts are very likely morally permissible. However, evaluating the permissibility of consumer-centric and media-centric boycotts of free labor sweatshops using a pluralistic framework leaves us with considerable uncertainty. Table 1 summarizes the likely moral permissibility of each type of sweatshop boycott under each theoretical moral framework.

There are two sources of uncertainty that need to be resolved to judge the moral permissibility of free labor sweatshops while using a pluralistic framework. The first source of uncertainty is how large (if they exist at all) the negative consequences for worker welfare are on the net in cases of any particular consumer-centric or media-centric free labor sweatshop boycott. The second question is how much moral weight to put on these welfare losses relative to the moral weights attached to improvements, if they exist, in one or more of the other frameworks. We need to know the answers to both of these questions to judge the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts under a pluralistic understanding of value.

We are not aware of any articles in the business ethics literature that explicitly argue how to weigh these various moral frameworks against each other when employing a pluralistic understanding of value. This is an area for future theoretical research. Our contribution in this article, through concrete examples of case studies, with empirical estimations of the consequentialist trade-offs in terms of worker welfare, has been to help to better understand how to answer the first of these two questions. Our analysis provides a solid guide to judging the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts to scholars who adopt a worker welfare consequentialist framework. Our analysis also provides necessary input to other scholars, who adopt a more pluralistic standard, which includes consequences for workers among other ends. However, to make a definitive judgment about the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts, they will need to argue how to weigh gains in some frameworks against losses in other frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The business ethics literature on the moral permissibility of boycotts had previously indicated that boycotts are most likely to be permissible when they are targeted at

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ending harmful unethical practices and where the consequences of ending these harms are not offset by greater harms to innocent parties. We have advanced this theory of boycotts to apply to sweatshop labor. Sweatshop boycotts are unique in that the harm being targeted is the treatment of the workers themselves. Thus, like other boycotts, one must measure the harm to workers caused by the boycott itself, but in the case of sweatshops, one must also evaluate the benefits and harms of the impact of capitulating to boycotters' demands.

We illustrate how to apply this theory of the moral permissibility of boycotts to three concrete case studies that are archetypes for a forced labor sweatshop, a media-centric free labor sweatshop boycott, and a consumer-centric free labor sweatshop boycott, and discuss how these results generalize. We argue that, in general, within this theoretical framework, forced labor sweatshops are highly likely to be morally permissible, consumer-centric free labor sweatshop boycotts are least likely to be morally permissible, and media-centric free labor sweatshop boycotts fall somewhere in between.

Although our focus has been on advancing a consequentialist theory of the permissibility of boycotts to apply to sweatshop labor, our contribution also relates to the ongoing debate in the business ethics literature about the moral permissibility of regulating sweatshop labor. In this larger debate, there are many non-consequentialist arguments in favor of such regulation that could also be applied to justify boycotts. However, as we have noted in our discussions section, many of the recent and prominent contributions arguing in favor of sweatshop regulation do so from a pluralistic standard of value that includes the consequences for worker welfare among their values. The consequentialist reasoning in this article will not be decisive for determining the moral permissibility of sweatshop boycotts for these pluralistic theories, but our findings are a necessary input to be weighed in making any such judgment employing a pluralistic theory.

Acknowledgements

We thank the editor and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on previous drafts of this article.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/beq.2024.5 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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