Since the mid-1980s, competition (or antitrust) policy has spread rapidly across the Global South. Yet, in the absence of international rules, what has driven countries with different needs to introduce similar competition policies? Whilst previous studies have focused on domestic conditions, I analyse the role of international trade. I argue that countries without competition policies face formal and informal pressure from trade partners with such policies, with the latter aiming to ensure a level playing field. I assess this proposition using event history analyses of the adoption of cartel prohibitions, abuse of dominance prohibitions, and merger control. The introduction of these policies is strongly affected by requirements in trade agreements, though less so by prior policy adoption by a country’s import partners. Domestic conditions play a more limited and conditional role. The results show that the prevalence of competition policy cannot be understood without looking at trade relations.

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