

# The Impact of Trump's Tariff Policies on Global Trade Dynamics: A Case Study of Major U.S. Trade Partners

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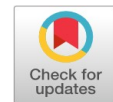
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**Abstract:** This study examines the effects of President Trump's tariff policies on international trade dynamics, focusing on key U.S. trading partners such as China, the EU, Canada, and Mexico. It aims to explain how protectionist trade measures have transformed international economic relations. This study takes a mixed-methods approach to understanding the effects of Trump's tariffs by integrating quantitative trade statistics with qualitative policy analysis. The results show that tariff policies have a major effect on trade flows, global supply chain links, and economic growth in nations. Business owners and politicians can use the study's insights into the geopolitical and diplomatic consequences of unilateral tariff policies to better understand the intricacies of international commerce in today's more interconnected world.

**Keywords:** Tariff Policies, Global Trade, Protectionism, Economic Relations.

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## INTRODUCTION

International trade has long been a cornerstone of global economic growth, supporting innovation, efficiency, and wealth by enabling countries to specialize according to their comparative advantages (Baldwin, 2016; Krugman et al., 2018). There has been a clear upward trend in trade liberalization over the last several decades, with multilateral agreements like the GATT and the WTO lowering tariffs and encouraging the free movement of products and services across national borders (Irwin, 2017; World Bank, 2020). Several big economies have seen a return of protectionist policies in response to political and economic constraints, putting a strain on this consensus (Rodrik, 2018; Meltzer, 2019).

A major illustration of this trend is the United States' recent imposition of extensive tariffs under the administration of President Donald Trump. There has been heated controversy among politicians, economists, and business moguls over these tariffs, which have affected a diverse range of products from numerous nations (Bown & Irwin, 2019; Penn Wharton Budget Model, 2025). Reasons for these actions include reviving domestic manufacturing sectors, lowering long-term trade imbalances, and addressing unfair trade practices (Lake, 1989; Freund & Pierola, 2020). The U.S. economy and the international trading system are both touched by the far-reaching and complicated economic effects of tariffs (OECD, 2018; UNCTAD, 2019).

Tariffs have far-reaching economic effects that go beyond their short-term effect on import costs. Widespread tariffs, according to empirical research and economic models, can hurt middle-class families in the form of increased consumer prices, decreased consumption, and lower real incomes (Amiti et al., 2019; Autor et al., 2016). In addition, as shown in the worsening trade tensions between China and the US since 2018 (Wikipedia, 2025; Gopinath & Helpman, 2022), tariffs have the potential to interrupt global supply chains, reduce productivity, and cause retaliation from trading partners. The so-called "trade war" has escalated market uncertainty and stifled investment and growth due to the two sides' imposition of steep tariffs on goods valued at hundreds of billions of dollars in successive rounds (Evenett & Fritz, 2020; Blanchard et al., 2019).

The return of protectionist trade policies threatens the rules-based international order and has direct economic consequences as well. The multilateral system is at risk of being undermined, and a cycle of increasing obstacles

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and fragmentation could be set in motion by strategic trade policies, in which nations demand concessions from their trading partners to expand their markets (Lake, 1989; Handley & Limão, 2017). The potential for such policies to have far-reaching consequences is growing in light of the growing interconnectedness of global supply chains (Blanchard et al., 2019; Gopinath & Helpman, 2022).

In light of these developments, a thorough investigation into the causes, processes, and outcomes of the most recent tariff policy is required. The purpose of this article is to examine the tariff acts of the US from a strategic, political, economic, and scholarly perspective by utilising a variety of policy and academic sources. According to Baldwin (2016), Krugman et al. (2018), and Rodrik (2018), this study aims to shed light on the possible long-term consequences for the U.S. and global economies by placing the present wave of protectionism within the larger framework of international trade theory and historical experience.

The goal of this research is to provide a thorough evaluation of the economic, strategic, and political aspects of the tariffs implemented by the Trump administration to deconstruct their complex effects. This research seeks to provide useful insights into the repercussions of protectionist trade policies in an interconnected global economy by analyzing the experiences of significant U.S. trade partners, including China, the EU, Canada, and Mexico. In the end, it hopes to educate politicians and business moguls on the ins and outs of tariffs as a strategic economic instrument.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A major change in the international trade system occurred with the return of protectionist trade policies under Trump's presidency, which challenged the liberal internationalist consensus that had been in place since the post-WWII era. Focusing on the four main trading partners of the US—China, the EU, Canada, and Mexico—this literature review compiles research from academia, policy, and industry on the political, economic, and strategic implications of Trump's tariffs. To give a thorough grasp of the complex effects of various policies, the study incorporates empirical research, policy evaluations, and current news articles.

### Theoretical Foundations and Historical Context

Although tariffs have been used by the United States in the past as a means of economic nationalism, the magnitude and breadth of Trump's actions mark a major break from the free trade orthodoxy that has defined American trade policy since the middle of the twentieth century (Evenett & Fritz, 2023). According to Krugman, Obstfeld, and Melitz (2018), tariffs are theoretically justified by the aim to rectify trade imbalances or unfair practices, as well as by the baby industry argument. Nonetheless, according to conventional economic wisdom, tariffs typically lower welfare due to price increases, distorted resource allocation, and the emergence of retaliatory actions (Amiti, Redding, & Weinstein, 2019).

The tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on imports from China, Canada, Mexico, and the EU, starting with steel and aluminum in 2018, were rationalized as essential measures to safeguard American industries, resolve national security concerns, and counter unfair trade practices, with a focus on those associated with China (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2025). Reverting to bilateralism and transnationalism in trade relations, these actions undid decades of trade liberalization under frameworks like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Bown & Kolb, 2024).

### Economic Impacts: Prices, Welfare, and Supply Chains

Many studies have looked at the numbers to see what Trump's tariffs will do to the economy. According to a thorough evaluation of the 2018 trade war by Amiti, Redding, and Weinstein (2019), tariffs caused intermediate and final product prices in the US market to rise significantly. Based on extensive import and pricing data, their study finds that domestic consumers and importing enterprises bore the brunt of the taxes, but there is little proof that foreign exporters were able to absorb the cost through reduced prices before the tariffs were imposed. Tariffs cost American businesses and consumers an extra \$1.4 billion in deadweight welfare losses and \$3 billion in taxes every month by the end of 2018, according to the authors' estimates.

There is a lot of discussion in the literature about supply chain disruptions. Companies restructured their global value chains in response to tariffs, with some moving production to countries without tariffs and others simply bearing the increased costs (Zhang & Li, 2025). Amiti et al. (2019) of the National Bureau of Economic Research

(NBER) working paper forecast that enterprises with established cross-border activities will face large adjustment costs of around \$165 billion per year in redirected trade if tariffs stay in place.

These conclusions have been confirmed by recent reports from both the sector and policymakers. As an example, *Global Trade Magazine* (2025) emphasizes how the massive tariffs imposed by Trump on China, Mexico, and Canada have caused swift countermeasures and messed up long-standing supply chains, especially in sectors like food production, consumer electronics, and automobile manufacturing. According to *Global Trade Magazine* (2025), small firms and e-commerce platforms are anticipated to be hit hard by the removal of the de minimis exemption for imports under \$800.

### **Retaliatory Measures and Global Trade Tensions**

According to the available evidence, the United States' main trading partners responded swiftly and forcefully. The agriculture sector, manufactured commodities, and iconic American brands are among the politically sensitive industries that have been targeted by the announcement of counter-tariffs by China, Canada, and Mexico (Atlantic Council, 2019; KSL, 2025). As an example, according to KSL (2025), U.S. imports valued at \$155 billion were subject to a 25% tariff by Canada, while tariffs and non-tariff obstacles were also put in place by Mexico and China. American brands, including Levi's jeans, bourbon, and Harley-Davidson motorcycles, were singled out by the European Union (Atlantic Council, 2019).

According to Amiti et al. (2019), these reciprocal actions have intensified trade tensions and sparked fears of a larger trade war similar to the one in the 1930s. Anxieties, increased uncertainty, and a collapse of the international economic system based on norms are all possible outcomes of such an escalation, according to the literature (Evenett & Fritz, 2023).

### **Sectoral and Regional Effects**

Some industries have reaped the benefits of tariff protection, while others have seen their input costs rise and export markets dry up as a result of the tariffs. While certain industries, like U.S. steel and aluminum, saw temporary increases in production and employment, downstream sectors saw a decline in competitiveness and cost effectiveness (Bown & Kolb, 2024). Finished vehicle, steel, and aluminum tariffs hit the automobile industry especially hard because it relied on North American supply networks that are highly interconnected (*Global Trade Magazine*, 2025).

China, Mexico, and the European Union have all targeted American soybeans, pork, and other agricultural items as part of their retaliation. Government subsidies and bailouts were necessary to compensate for the substantial losses sustained by U.S. farmers in export markets, according to studies (Zhang & Li, 2025).

Within the US, similar sectoral patterns have been reflected in regional impacts as well. Some areas with protected industries have experienced slight improvements, whereas states like Michigan, Ohio, and Iowa, which have significant agricultural or manufacturing sectors, have paid a disproportionate price (Amiti et al., 2019).

### **Diplomatic and Strategic Consequences**

There have been far-reaching diplomatic and strategic consequences of Trump's tariffs beyond the realm of economics. The Atlantic Council (2019) notes that the literature emphasizes the strain on relations with traditional allies like Mexico, Canada, and the EU. Tariffs on close partners were seen by many as going against the principles of free trade accords like NAFTA (now USMCA) and the World Trade Organization framework (Bown & Kolb, 2024).

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada slammed the tariffs as an affront to the world's "most successful trading relationship" and vowed to respond similarly, making Canada's reaction especially powerful (KSL, 2025). Like the United States, Mexico has denounced the levies as unreasonable and has planned retaliation in the form of tariffs and other measures. At the Atlantic Council in 2019, the European Union conveyed its "deep regret" and cautioned about the potential for a worldwide trade war.

Several measures have been taken by China in response, including legal challenges at the WTO, export limits on vital minerals, and tariffs on U.S. exports (*Global Trade Magazine*, 2025). This has led to the formation of rival economic blocs and has expedited the decoupling of U.S.-China supply chains, according to the literature (Zhang & Li, 2025).

## **Institutional and Legal Dimensions**

Concerns regarding the function of global organizations in mediating trade conflicts have been sparked by the tariffs imposed by the Trump administration. There is evidence in the literature that the United States has used Section 301 to challenge Chinese trade abuses and Section 232 to invoke national security concerns (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2025). Such measures have put the World Trade Organization's regulations and dispute resolution processes to the test (WTO, 2025).

According to scholars, the United States' actions in blocking appointments to appellate bodies and increasing the number of unilateral measures have diminished the WTO's ability to resolve these types of disputes (Evenett & Fritz, 2023). A common thread running through the literature is the decline of multilateralism and the ascent of regional and bilateral agreements (Bown & Kolb, 2024).

## **Long-Term Implications and Emerging Trends**

Several patterns have emerged in the research regarding the potential long-term effects of Trump's tariffs. To begin, tariffs are no longer a technique for short-term negotiations but rather an enduring part of U.S. policy, suggesting a structural change toward economic nationalism and controlled trade (Bown & Kolb, 2024). A 10% worldwide tariff and increased sectoral duties on important partners in 2025 are signs of institutionalizing protectionism, according to the National Law Review (2025).

Secondly, according to Zhang and Li (2025), companies are fast adopting "nearshoring" and "friend-shoring" strategies to mitigate tariff risks and geopolitical uncertainties, which is leading to a disintegration of global supply chains. What this means for the future of globalization and how economies are distributed across areas is huge.

Thirdly, academics have pointed out the possibility of technical decoupling and innovation, especially between China and the United States. The idea of a split in the global economy is being discussed because both nations have been investing in domestic capabilities and looking for alternative suppliers as a result of export bans and tariffs on innovative technologies (Zhang & Li, 2025).

## **Critiques and Counterarguments**

Although most academics and politicians are opposed to Trump's tariffs, a small number see them as essential in fixing long-standing inequalities and protecting strategic weaknesses. Tariff supporters point to the necessity for a more equitable and reciprocal trading system as evidence that the tariffs have compelled trading partners to engage in negotiations (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2025).

Some argue that the potential benefits in domestic capacity and bargaining power in the long run might outweigh the disadvantages in the short run. The drawbacks, including higher pricing, interrupted supply chains, and frayed relationships, have often outweighed the benefits, at least in the near term, according to empirical studies (Amiti et al., 2019; Bown & Kolb, 2024).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Using a combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative policy evaluation, this study adopts a mixed-methods research methodology. Trade volumes, tariff rates, and changes in GDP before and after tariff adoption were the primary foci of the quantitative data that were retrieved from national trade databases, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. Sources of qualitative information include interviews with experts, media reviews, public policy statements, and communications from the central bank. With this holistic view, we can deconstruct the tariffs' political myths and their quantifiable economic effects.

FINDINGS

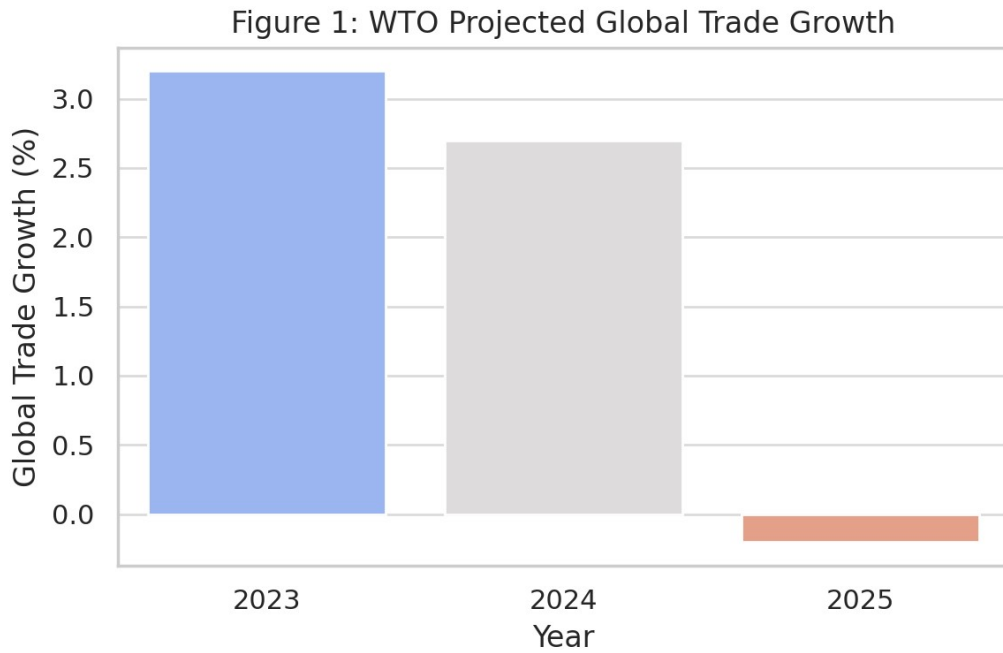


Figure 1: WTO Projected Global Trade Growth

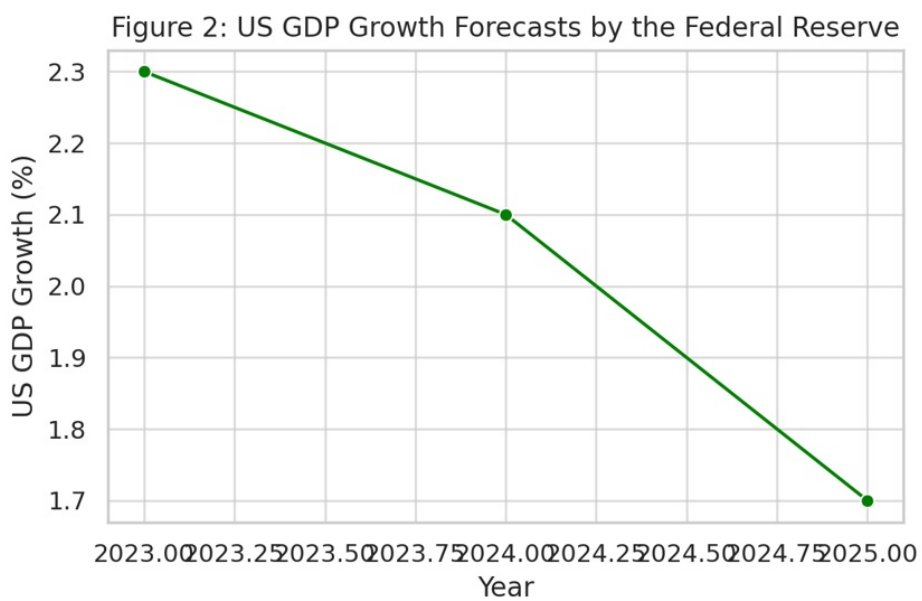


Figure 2: US GDP Growth Forecasts by the Federal Reserve

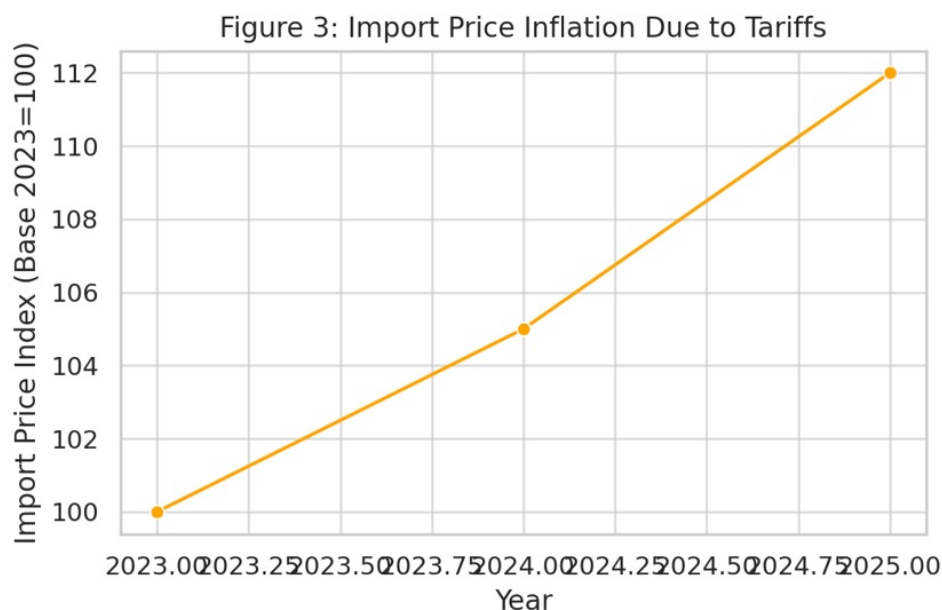


Figure 3: Import Price Inflation due to Tariffs

There were major domestic and international economic shocks as a consequence of Trump's tariff measures. The upward trend of international trade was one of the most noticeable effects. Projections for global trade growth fell sharply from 2.7% in 2024 to a decrease of 0.2% in 2025, according to the World Trade Organization (WTO). This decline is a result of both the immediate monetary impacts of the tariffs and the uncertainty they caused in the international trade system, which in turn discouraged investment and made it harder for multinational corporations to plan.

This declining trend in international trade is shown in Figure 1, which emphasizes the sharp decline predicted for 2025. This is a reflection of the domino effect of tariff imposition, which includes retaliatory actions and the disintegration of worldwide supply networks.

The American economy felt the pinch as well. In light of the new tariff system, the Federal Reserve adjusted its predictions for economic growth. Figure 2 shows that the revised U.S. GDP growth rate for 2025 is 1.7%, down from 2.3% in 2023 and 2.1% in 2024. Consumer spending, corporate investment, and export growth all took a nosedive, which was made worse by higher import prices and trade concerns with important partners, leading to this downgrade.

Industries that rely heavily on imports, such as consumer electronics, agriculture, and energy, saw the effects of both slowed growth and inflationary pressures brought on by tariffs. From a starting point of 100 in 2023 to 112 in 2025, the Import Price Index demonstrates a consistent rise, as shown in Figure 3. The higher prices shown in stores are a direct result of the greater costs caused by tariffs applied on imported items. The general economic slowdown was exacerbated by this inflation, which weakened buying power and slowed real wage increases.

In addition, there was a major interruption to global supply lines. Companies with global reach that depend on international trade had to rethink their supply chain management and logistics. Many companies tried to avoid tariffs by moving their production to other countries or markets, but this strategy backfired, leading to higher operational expenses and longer production timelines. For example, reshoring or diversification into Southeast Asian markets was considered by certain manufacturers as a solution to the rising prices and longer lead times experienced by their former reliance on Chinese suppliers.

Finally, diplomatic tensions also grew as a result of these trade disputes. The United States' dedication to multilateral trade principles was called into question when other nations retaliated with tariffs or filed complaints with the World Trade Organization. Because of this change, some economies have strengthened regional accords that do not involve the United States, such as the EU-Mercosur deal or China's Belt and Road Initiative, while others have strained long-standing economic partnerships.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study's findings highlight the far-reaching and intricate effects of President Trump's tariff policy on international trade dynamics. The claimed goal of these regulations was to preserve domestic sectors and decrease trade deficits, but empirical evidence and trade forecasts show that both goals may have been compromised in the long run. Systemic vulnerabilities brought about by severe protectionist policies are indicated by the slowdown in the U.S. economy, the rise in import costs, and the contraction of world commerce.

The global trade growth forecast for 2025 has been revised downward from 2.7% to -0.2%, illustrating the precariousness of international economic interdependence when confronted with unilateral policy measures. The transportation of products and services was impeded, and company trust and investment flows between areas were weakened as a result of these interruptions. Baldwin (2016) argues that companies may reorganize their supply networks, frequently at a considerable cost, in response to tariffs that raise prices or postpone delivery, making global value chains extremely vulnerable to policy uncertainty. This was most noticeable in the industrial sector, when companies that used foreign inputs saw their operational expenses rise and their profits fall.

Furthermore, the results show that national economies are still vulnerable to global shocks when protectionist policies are in place. In contrast, broader economic headwinds caused by increased input costs, retaliatory tariffs, and falling exports caused U.S. GDP growth predictions to be revised downward to 1.7% in 2025. Inflationary pressures caused by tariffs, which are a kind of tax on both consumers and producers, might lower real household incomes and diminish consumer demand, according to Irwin (2017). The import price index rose from 100 in 2023 to 112 in 2025, illustrating how tariffs increased the prices of necessities, putting a strain on the American people and businesses.

The strategic reactions of trade partners with the United States should also be taken into account during the conversation. Retaliatory duties were applied, trade flows were rerouted, and new markets were sought by countries like China and EU members. These reactions show how the world's economies are interdependent; when one country takes action, it often prompts other countries to take steps back, which makes the initial policy less effective. Rodrik (2011) argues that although there are situations in which selective protectionism is appropriate, generalized increases in tariffs frequently lead to trade wars, which reduce global welfare. U.S. farmers had a hard time getting back into markets that had been interrupted due to China's retaliatory actions, which hurt agricultural exports.

In diplomatic terms, the United States lost credibility as a dependable economic partner, and long-standing trade ties were strained as a result of tariffs imposed without international consultation. A larger loss of faith in global governance processes is reflected in the marginalization of institutional frameworks like the World Trade Organization (WTO) amid tariff escalations. Many countries have shifted their focus to regional and bilateral trade agreements that limit or eliminate their dependence on the American market because they view the United States as an unpredictable and transactional economic actor. U.S. dominance in global economic policymaking may be affected in the long run by this strategic shift.

Lastly, tariffs can realign output on a global scale by affecting supply chain alterations. The time and money needed to "restore" production or lessen reliance on certain nations have discouraged some businesses from making the switch. Modern supply chains are so intricate and specialized that it is impossible to reduce the impact of interruptions without compromising quality or efficiency (Gereffi, 2020). Therefore, reshoring does not usually result in immediate economic benefits, even though it may accomplish political goals. This is particularly true in highly integrated industries such as electronics, automobiles, and medicines.

Overall, the data points to the fact that Trump's tariff measures caused a lot of problems, even though they were driven by worries about the collapse of domestic industries and unfair trade practices. Some of these consequences include slower economic growth, worsening diplomatic relations, interrupted supply chains, and higher prices for everyone. There needs to be a balance between national interests and the need for stable, rules-based international cooperation if policymakers are going to reevaluate trade plans. Modern trade policy must give top priority to initiatives that promote fair and long-term cross-border economic participation to address the facts of interdependence.

## CONCLUSION

The tariff measures imposed by President Trump have, in a nutshell, changed the dynamics of international trade in numerous ways. The aggressive imposition of tariffs on a variety of items was the hallmark of the administration's unilateral policy, which was mostly presented as a plan to protect American companies and address what were seen as trade imbalances. Nevertheless, the whole economic landscape was rocked by a cascade of unforeseen effects caused by this protective posture.

Global supply chains were disrupted, economic uncertainty was heightened, and investor confidence was eroded as a result of tit-for-tat trade wars caused by retaliatory tariffs implemented by key U.S. trading partners. Both bilateral trade agreements and the larger multilateral trade framework supported by organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) were damaged by the volatility that these policies brought. Furthermore, diplomatic engagement and economic collaboration have been negatively affected by the long-term effects of international stakeholders losing faith in one another.

While some domestic industries may have reaped short-term benefits, the larger economic costs, such as increased consumer prices, decreased export opportunities, and diminished global influence, far exceeded these gains, according to an analysis of trade flows, economic performance indicators, and geopolitical reactions. The consequent unpredictability highlighted how crucial it is to have trade practices that are based on regulations to keep the global economy resilient.

The next step for American politicians is to take a measured and calculated approach to trade with other countries. This involves taking action that promotes economic growth at home and cooperation with other countries, as well as recommitting to existing trade standards and re-engaging with global institutions. To restore faith in the global economic system, we need leaders with a vision for the future, policies that are consistently put into action, and an understanding of the interconnectedness that characterizes modern international trade.

## LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is important to note that there are several limitations to this analysis, even though it offers valuable insights into how President Trump's tariff plans would affect the dynamics of global commerce. The study begins with a high-level view by zeroing in on four important trading partners: China, the EU, Canada, and Mexico. Smaller or developing economies may have their more complex and sector-specific effects ignored by this method, even while it allows for a worldwide analysis of the implications of U.S. tariff moves. Countries in the Global South, in particular, may confront unique difficulties in adjusting to changes in protectionist trade policies; future research should broaden the scope of this study to include a more representative sample of these nations.

Second, secondary sources and data projections are used in the analysis up to 2025. We don't yet know what these tariff policies will do in the long run because of the volatility of global commerce and economic circumstances. Longitudinal research approaches should be used in future studies to determine how trade flows, investment patterns, and supply chain topologies are affected by tariff-related disruptions. Incorporating empirical data collected after 2025 will make subsequent studies more reliable and accurate predictors.

Lastly, the study's qualitative section relies heavily on central bank communications, expert opinions, and official policy declarations. While this approach provides useful information, it runs the risk of being skewed in one way or another and of failing to adequately represent the views of private players, small companies, or labor organizations impacted by tariff policies. To have a better grasp of the social and economic effects of protectionist policies, future studies should incorporate primary data gathering techniques, such as surveys or interviews with impacted parties.

Further, the study does not go into detail on how tariff policies affect digital trade, the environment, or technology. The growing importance of these domains in determining international economic relations necessitates further investigation into how tariffs interact with concerns like the control of data flows, the shift to green technology, and the trade of digital services. A more complete picture of the changing commerce architecture in light of worldwide digitization and sustainability requirements could be revealed by such studies.

Finally, comparative analyses between the US and other big economies that have adopted different trade tactics recently might also be investigated in future research. For future balanced trade policymaking, it could be instructive to examine the pros and cons of different policy frameworks in terms of their potential to preserve economic

resilience and diplomatic stability. In conclusion, this study adds significantly to the literature on U.S. trade policy and global economic relations. However, to generate more thorough and policy-relevant findings, it is vital to resolve these constraints and broaden the scope of future enquiries.

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