

**IMPACT OF WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION ON THE ECONOMIC
RELATIONS AMONG STATES**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project was carried out **WINIFRED CHINONSO IKEAGWU** in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

Dr. Emmanuel Toby
(Project Supervisor)

Prof. J.C. Nwaka
(Head of Department)

Date: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to the Almighty God for the strength to go through this phase of my life.

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To the one who suspended the heavens without a pillar, the Lord God almighty, the source of all life. To him be the glory and praise for this feat.

I am deeply thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Emmanuel Toby for his expert guidance and uplifting inspiration, continuous support and cooperation throughout this project without which this project would not have been possible. In spite of his busy schedule, he always extended full attention, patient hearing and complete support to me, without which the present work could not have come to light. For his keen interest, valuable discussion, constructive criticism, timely advice and able guidance, it has been possible on my part to plan, review and give shape to this project work.

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My heartfelt and unreserve appreciation goes to my parents Mr and Mrs. Ikeagwu for their love, support and encouragement thus far. you are loved.

A warm appreciation goes to my siblings Pete and Stephanie Ikeagwu for the love and support thus far. a thousand gratitude also goes to Aunty Amaka. You are noted ma. May your labour of love never go in vain.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The evolution of global trade governance has been central to the dynamics of international Economic relations among states. Since the mid-20th century, states have increasingly sought cooperative mechanisms to manage trade liberalization, address disputes and reduce barriers to international commerce. The establishment of the World

Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 marked a significant milestone in the institutionalization of this global economic order. The WTO succeeded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and was designed to promote free trade, facilitate economic cooperation and reduce barriers to international commerce.¹

The centrality of the World Trade Organization in shaping contemporary economic interactions cannot be overstated. It operates on the principle of non-discrimination, transparency and reciprocity, and oversees multilateral trade agreements covering goods, services and intellectual property.² As a forum for negotiation and dispute settlement the WTO plays a critical role in influencing how states emerge with one another economically for developing countries, it has been both a platform for integration into the global economy and a subject of criticism for perpetuating unequal power dynamics.³

The global economic landscape has witnessed profound transformations since the WTO's inception. Trade volumes have grown exponentially, and new actors including emerging economies like China, India and Brazil have assumed significant roles in global commerce.⁴ In this context, the WTO's effectiveness, relevance and fairness have come under increasing scrutiny. Issues such as the stagnation of the Doha Development Round, the proliferation of bilateral and regional trade agreements, and the perceived ineffectiveness of its dispute settlement mechanism highlight both the opportunities and challenges that the WTO presents in fostering equitable economic relations among states.⁵

The rise of regional trade agreements (RTAs) has also posed a challenge to the WTO's dominance in global economic relations. For example, the comprehensive and progressive Agreement for Trans-pacific partnership represent new forms of economic cooperation that often go beyond the WTO's standard rules, offering alternative avenues for trade liberalization and economic integration. These agreements allow countries to negotiate specific terms that cater to their regional needs, bypassing the more rigid and universal framework of the WTO.⁶

Moreover, in an era marked by rising economic nationalism, technological disruption and shifting geopolitical alliances, the WTO's role has become even more contentious. The organization has faced mounting criticism over its ability to adapt to the changing global economic order, as well as its failure to adequately address the specific needs and concerns of the Global South.⁷ The advent of the Covid- 19 pandemic further exposed vulnerabilities within the international trade system, reigniting debates over supply chain resilience, vaccine equity and the balance between liberalization and state sovereignty.⁸

Thus, in examining the impact of the WTO in international Economic relations is both timely and essential. It allows for a deeper understanding of how institutional frameworks mediate economic interests, how legal and political norms are negotiated at the global level and how states particularly those with asymmetrical power navigate the global trading system. This study aims to analyze these complexities, exploring the

multifaceted roles the WTO plays in shaping the contours of international Economic cooperation and competition.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to emphasize the impact of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on international Economic relations.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the history of the World Trade Organization (WTO)
2. To examine the impact of f WTO membership on the economic development of developing countries and their participation in the global economy.
3. To identify the challenges and criticisms faced by the WTO in influencing fair and balanced global trade relations.

Scope of the study

This study focuses on examining the impact of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on economic relations among member states, with particular attention to how policies and dispute mechanisms influence trade flows, cooperation and conflict resolution. The research covers both developed and developing countries, analyzing case studies to understand varying outcomes. The study will explore the WTO's legal framework, trade agreements and dispute mechanisms system from 1995 to the present. It will not cover pre- WTO trade institutions in depth such as GATT, nor will it provide a detailed analysis of internal WTO reform debates unless directly related to economic relations.

Methodology

This project will employ a historical approach, evaluation and case studies.

Through a comprehensive analysis of these sources, the project will seek to present a nuanced understanding of the impact of the WTO on the international Economic relations among states. In delving into the study, various research techniques will be employed.

Primary sources: will include official WTO documents, agreements and dispute settlement reports.

Secondary sources: will include Academic books, journal articles, policy papers and credible economic databases (e. g World Bank, IMF).

Significance of the study

This study is very important as it sheds light on the real-world impact of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on economic relations among states. By analyzing both legal frameworks and economic outcomes, the research helps clarify how the WTO influences cooperation, conflict resolution and trade balance between developed and developing countries. It contributes to academic knowledge by bridging the gap between legal theory and practical economic analysis offering insights valuable to students , scholars and policy-makers. The study also helps evaluate whether the WTO promotes fair and inclusive trade and reinforces global inequalities.

Literature review

The works that are review here are the ones that are relevant to this research topic, impact of World Trade Organization on the international Economic relations among states.

Some of them includes the work by J. H. Jackson, titled, *The World Trade Organization: constitution and Jurisprudence*.¹ The book provides a detailed legal analysis of the WTO's formation, structure and institutional role in regulating international trade.

The book outlines the WTO's formation, structure and institutional role in regulating international trade. The book outlines the WTO's constitutional framework, emphasizing the legal consistency and legitimacy it brings to the multilateral trading system. However, a key gap in Jackson's I is the limited attention given to how this legal framework affect actual economic relations among state. While Jackson focuses on the organization's legal integrity and structure, he does not fully assess the economic consequences of WTO membership on different categories of states. This project aims to fill that gap by examining not just the legal formality of WTO structures, but also how they play out in real-world economic interactions and relations among member states.

The other work is by B. Hoekman and Michel Kostecki in their book *The political Economy of the World Trading System*.⁴ The book offers a comprehensive view of how economic and political factors shape the functioning of the WTO. The authors examine the power dynamics within the WTO, especially how negotiations often reflect the interests of more powerful developed countries. The authors critically address how developing countries often lack the negotiation leverage and institutional support needed to fully benefit from WTO membership. However, the gap in their analysis lies in the lack of

detailed empirical case studies that demonstrate how these dynamics play out in specific economic relationships between countries. This project seeks to address that gap by applying case-based analysis to investigate how WTO frameworks influence real-world economic relations between states, particularly those involving developing countries.

Another major work in this category was A. H. Qureshi and A. R. Ziegler in their book *International Economic Law*.⁹ The book focuses on trade, investment and financial regulation. The book examines the legal obligation of WTO members, emphasizing how these obligations can limit domestic policy change and requires conformity with multilateral trade rules. The gap in their work is the limited exploration of how WTO rules, while legally equal may have unequal economic effects on member states, particularly in trade negotiations or enforcement. This research fills that gap by connecting legal obligations with their economic consequences especially in terms of trade asymmetry, negotiation outcomes and dispute resolutions involving states of unequal economic strength. Their work is useful to this study because it clarifies the legal structure of WTO commitments, providing framework to critically assess whether those rules help or hinder equitable economic relations among states.

R. Wilkinson titled *The Global Governance of Trade: WTO Reform, legitimacy and Development*.¹⁰ The book provides a critical evaluation of the WTO's structure and its implications of global trade governance. The book focuses on the legitimacy crisis facing the WTO, particularly in relation to its decision-making processes and the marginalization of developing countries in trade negotiations. The main gap in

Wilkinson's analysis is the limited empirical follow-up on how these legitimacy concerns translate into concrete economic effects such as reduced trade benefits or limited market access for weaker states. The book does not deeply trace how the political imbalances affect long-term economic relations among WTO members. This research project builds on the work by providing a more-grounded economic analysis of WTO-induced inequalities. The book is valuable to this study as it frames the governance and fairness challenges within the WTO, which are essential for understanding how institutional structures affect economic relations and trust among member states.

The journal by T. Hale titled, "The Rise of Protectionism and its impact on the WTO",¹¹ explores how the resurgence of protectionist trade policies has undermined the authority and functionality of the WTO. The journal highlights how protectionist trends weaken global cooperation and strain the dispute settlement system, as states begin to act unilaterally rather than within WTO rules. While this journal provides a compelling account of these developments, a gap in his analysis is the limited focus on how these shifts affect specific economic relationships between states, especially smaller or developing economies that rely heavily on trust-based system for fair access. This project seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how protectionism not only erodes the WTO's authority but also alters the economic dynamics between member states, leading to trade uncertainty, power imbalances and reduced trust in multilateral commitment. The journal is useful to this

research because it provides a timely and critical perspective on the evolving challenges the WTO faces in the 21st century.

The journal by R. Howse, titled “The limits of the WTO,¹² offers a critical examination of the institutional, legal and political boundaries within which the WTO operates. The book focuses on the tensions between trade liberalization and domestic policy autonomy, especially in areas like health, environmental protection and labor standards. The journal raises key concerns about the overreach of WTO disciplines into areas traditionally reserved for national governance, suggesting that such intrusions may provoke resistance and weaken the institution’s credibility. However a gap in his analysis is the limited attention to how this regulatory tension plays out in Economic relations among states. This study fills that gap by linking legal constraints discussed in the journal to their practical impact on inter-state economic dynamics. The journal is valuable to this project as it highlights the WTO’s internal constraints and the political resistance it faces.

J. M. Finger in the WTO and Global Governance,¹³ critiques the assumption that the WTO operates as a neutral platform for global trade management. The book emphasizes that while the WTO is presented as a tool for global governance, it frequently serves the strategic interests of dominant economies rather than promoting equitable development. A central theme of this book is the imbalance in rule-making and enforcement where developing countries are often pressured to liberalize without receiving meaningful reciprocal benefits. However, a key gap in this book is that it focuses more on governance critique than on the concrete economic consequences for inter-state relations such as how

developing states adjust their trade strategies, alliances or regional policies in response to WTO constraints. This project addresses that gap by examining the economic relationships between states under the WTO, looking at how governance imbalances influence trade flows, cooperation and policy alignment. The usefulness of the journal to the study is that it lays a critical foundation on the politics behind WTO structures and helps contextualize how governance shapes economic power dynamics among states.

In summary, the literature review collectively offers critical examination of the WTO's role in the global trading system. While the organization has been instrumental in facilitating international trade, it faces increasing challenges from both internal and external factors, including geopolitical tensions, the rise of regionalism, protectionist policies and the digital transformation of the economy.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Background to the study

This chapter as introductory to the main objectives of the study explains basic idea of the study. The chapter is also divided into aims and objectives of the study. The

chapter is also divided into aims, and objectives of the I, scope of the study, methodology of the study, literature review and chapter outline.

Chapter Two: Origin and Charter of the WTO

This chapter explores the historical background of the WTO, chapter of the WTO, Transition from GATT to WTO, objectives and principles of the WTO, organizational structure, and core functions and agreements.

Chapter Three: Impact of WTO membership on Economic Relations among states

This objective will examine how developing countries benefit from or face challenges within the WTO framework, particularly regarding trade agreements, market access and economic growth and also their role in dispute management and enforcement, with the use of selected case studies bilateral / multilateral trade relations.

Chapter Four: challenges and criticisms of the WTO

This will involve examining the challenges and criticisms of the WTO which includes power asymmetries and institutional bias, protectionism and non-compliance, development concerns and global inequality and legitimacy and reform debates.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter is a summary and conclusion of the various findings from chapter one to four

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CHAPTER TWO

ORIGIN AND CHARTER OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION (WTO)

Introduction

The World Trade Organization (WTO) plays a central role in managing global trade by establishing a framework for the rules and regulations that govern international commerce. It functions as the primary international body responsible for overseeing and regulating trade between nations. Its mission is to facilitate the smooth functioning of the global trading system, ensuring that trade flows as predictably and freely as possible. The WTO's formation, policies and functions are closely linked to the historical evolution of global trade agreements and the growing need for countries to cooperate economically.¹

The concept of international trade regulation dates back to the early 20th century when the world began recognizing the need for coordinated policies that could manage the increasing interconnected global markets. Global trade by its very nature, requires cooperation between nations to ensure stability, fairness and predictability, which is essential for fostering economic growth and development. This desire for collaboration eventually culminated in the creation of the WTO.

Historical background

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a central institution in the global trading system but its roots extend far beyond its formal establishment in 1995. It emerged from decades of effort to build a multilateral trading system that promotes open, predictable

and rule-based trade among nations. Its historical background is deeply linked to the post-world II economic order and the earlier General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).²

In the aftermath of World War II, major world powers recognized that international Economic cooperation was essential to prevent future conflicts. As part of the Bretton woods conference in 1944, there was an effort to create three key international institutions: the international monetary fund (IMF), the World Bank and an international trade organization. While the IMF and World Bank were established successfully, negotiations for the international Trade Organization (ITO) faltered due to opposition, particularly from the United States Congress.³

In place of the ITO, 23 countries signed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947 as a temporary measure to reduce tariffs and encourage trade Liberalization. GATT functioned without a formal institutional structure but effectively governed global trade for nearly five decades. It operates through rounds of trade negotiations, the most significant of which was the Uruguay Round (1986-1994).⁴ This round expanded trade rules beyond goods to include services (GATS) and intellectual property (TPIPS), recognizing the growing complexity of global commerce.⁵

The Uruguay Round revealed both the strengths and limitations of GATT. While it successfully reduced tariffs and expanded the scope of trade, it also exposed the weaknesses of a provisional system with no real legal force or enforcement mechanism.

These gaps led to the creation of the World Trade Organization, which was formally established on January 1, 1995, through the Marrakesh Agreement.⁶ The WTO was designed as a permanent institution with a defined legal personality, binding dispute settlement procedures and broader jurisdiction across goods, services and intellectual property.⁷ The WTO's creation marked a major shift in the global trade architecture. Unlike GATT, the WTO included a Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) that could enforce rulings through authorized trade sanctions. It also gave developing countries more structured participation, although disparities in bargaining power still persisted. Over time, the WTO's membership expanded with over 160 countries now participating, including large economies like china (joined in 2001) and Russia (2012).⁸

Despite these advances, the WTO has faced growing challenges, particularly with the rise of Protectionism, trade disputes among major economies and criticisms that it favors richer countries. Some scholars argue that while the WTO has helped liberalize trade, it has done so unevenly, benefiting advanced economies more than developing ones.⁹

Nevertheless, the historical evolution of the WTO reflects a continued international efforts to manage global economic relations through legal frameworks and institutional cooperation. From the failed ITO to the practical mechanisms of GATT and eventually the more robust WTO system, the journey reveals the enduring importance of multilateralism in global trade governance.¹⁰

Charter of the WTO

The charter of the WTO refers to the legal and institutional framework established primarily by the Marrakesh Agreement of 1994, which created the WTO as a successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).¹¹ Unlike a single constitutional document, the WTO charter is made up of a core agreement and several annexes, each forming integral parts of the legal obligations that bind all members. The Marrakesh Agreement defines the structure, objectives and scope of the WTO's authority. It establishes the ministerial conference as the highest decision-making body, supported by the General council and various specialized councils and committees. These institutions are charged with overseeing the implementation of WTO agreements, settling disputes and facilitating ongoing negotiations.¹² The Agreement grants the WTO international legal personality, allowing it to function as a formal global institution with rights and obligations.¹³

A key element of the charter is its single undertaking principle- members must accept all parts of the agreement as a package. This contrasts with earlier trade arrangements that allowed selective participation. As a result, the WTO ensures that rules are applied uniformly, strengthening the coherence of the multilateral trade system.¹⁴

The charter also includes specific commitments in three major areas: trade in goods (through GATT 1994), trade in services – GATS), and intellectual property rights (through the Agreement on Trade- Related Aspects of intellectual property Rights – TRIPS).¹⁵ Each agreement is legally binding and subject to dispute resolution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the charter reflects the principle of non-discrimination, embodied in the Most- Favoured Nation (MFN) and National Treatment Clauses. These ensure that all the WTO members receive equal treatment in market access and regulatory practice.¹⁶ The WTO also incorporates a Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), which provides a structured process for resolving conflicts through panels and an Appellate Body.¹⁷ Importantly, the charter recognizes the needs of developing and least- developed countries, offering special and differential treatment, capacity- building, and extended transition periods.¹⁸ These provisions underscore the organization’s commitment to inclusive participation in global trade.

In essence, the charter the WTO is a unique and comprehensive legal architecture that governs how trade relations among states are conducted in the 21st century. It binds members to a multilateral system rooted in law, transparency and cooperation.

Objectives and principles of the WTO. The World Trade Organization (WTO) stands as a pillar of the global trading system created to ensure stability, predictability and fairness in international Economic relations. Central to the WTO’s operation are its objectives and principles which form the foundation of its functions, agreements and dispute settlement

processes. These guiding tenets not only influence trade policies of member countries but also reflect the organization's role in shaping global economic governance.

The primary objective of the WTO is to promote free and fair trade among nations by reducing barriers such as tariffs, quotas and subsidies. This goal is achieved through the negotiation of binding agreements and the enforcement of established rules. The WTO also claims to increase living standards, ensure full employment and foster sustainable development. These broader economic and social goals underscore that trade is not an end in itself, but a means to improve human welfare globally.¹⁹ Moreover, the WTO emphasizes the need to give special attention to developing and least- developed countries by integrating them more effectively into the global trading system through technical assistance and capacity building.

Another major objective of the WTO is to provide a platform for trade negotiations. It does so through structured ministerial conferences, rounds of multilateral trade negotiations and ongoing dialogue among members. Through these negotiations, the WTO not only facilitates market access but also addresses new issues such as digital trade, services and intellectual property rights. These functions reinforces the organization's dynamic nature and its responsiveness to evolving global economic trends. Furthermore, the WTO seeks to settle trade disputes fairly and efficiently through its Dispute Settlement Body, ensuring that members adhere to agreed-upon rules. The objectives here is to prevent trade conflicts from escalating into political or economic Crisis, thereby supporting a rules-based order.²⁰

Transparency is another vital principle. The WTO obligates members to publish their trade regulations and notify the WTO and other members of changes in policy. This allows for greater predictability in trade relations and discourages hidden protectionist measures. Additionally, reciprocity is embedded in the negotiation process, where members are expected to offer concessions in exchange for similar treatment from others. While reciprocity strengthens mutual benefit, it is balanced by the principle of special and different treatment which recognizes the limited capacity of developing countries to liberalize their markets at the same pace as developed countries.²¹

The principle of sustainable development has also gained prominence. Although not explicitly outlined in the original GATT provisions, it is now recognized in the preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement. This principle aligns trade liberalization with environmental protection and social development, acknowledging the complex interplay between commerce and global public goods. The WTO's objectives and principles collectively aim to build a fair, inclusive and transparent international trade regime. While its goals reflect classical economic liberalism such as reducing trade barriers and promoting competition, they are tempered by social considerations, development concerns and the recognition of state sovereignty. As global challenges evolve, including digital transformation, climate change and geopolitical tensions, the WTO's objective and principles remain a crucial reference point for navigating the future of international Economic relations.

Core functions and agreements of the WTO

The WTO's primary aim is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. This is achieved through its core functions and its comprehensive body of binding trade agreements.

A central function of the WTO is to serve as a forum for trade negotiations. It provides a structured platform where member countries negotiate terms of trade and update existing agreements. These negotiations address tariffs, market access, subsidies and new trade issues such as e-commerce or environmental standards. The multilateral nature of these discussions helps to ensure that the rules reflect a balance of global interests rather than those of just the most powerful economies.²² The WTO is also responsible for administering and implementing trade agreements. Among the most significant are the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which governs trade in goods; the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), covering international services like finance and telecommunications; and the Agreement on Trade- Related Aspects of intellectual property Rights (TRIPS), which sets minimum standards for intellectual property protection. These agreements form the legal core of the WTO and are binding on all member states.²³

Another vital function of the WTO is the dispute settlement system. Through its Dispute Settlement Body, the WTO provides a legal process for resolving trade disputes between member states. This system includes consultation, panel hearing and appellate

review, offering a peaceful and rule-based alternative to trade wars or unilateral retaliation. The effectiveness of this mechanism has made the WTO one of the most developed international legal systems in terms of compliance and enforcement.²⁴

Additionally, the WTO carries out trade policy monitoring through its Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TRPM). This function enhances transparency by requiring members to regularly report and explain their trade policies. These reviews allow other countries to assess whether trade practices are fair and consistent with WTO obligations.

Finally, the WTO offers technical assistance and capacity- building programs, especially for developing and least- developed countries. This includes training on legal matters, negotiation skills and institutional development to help these countries better integrate into the global trading system.

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CHAPTER THREE

IMPACT OF WTO MEMBERSHIP ON ECONOMIC RELATIONS AMONG STATES

Introduction

The World Trade Organization (WTO) serves as the central institution governing international trade relations. Its primary aim is to promote free and fair trade through a set of binding rules and dispute resolution mechanisms. WTO membership significantly influences how states interact economically—shaping policies, agreements, and global trade dynamics. This chapter explores the key areas in which the WTO affects economic relations among its member states, focusing on trade liberalization, the varied impact on developed and developing countries, its dispute resolution function, and real-world case studies that illustrate how WTO principles play out in international trade practice.

Trade Liberalization and Economic Integration

Trade liberalization is a cornerstone of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) mission. It involves the removal or reduction of trade barriers such as tariffs, import

quotas, and export restraints, which historically limited the free flow of goods and services across borders. The WTO facilitates this process by establishing binding rules and commitments that encourage transparency, predictability, and fairness in international trade. One of its most profound contributions has been the promotion of economic integration through multilateral and regional agreements that align member states toward open-market principles.

At the heart of WTO-led liberalization efforts is the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which predates the WTO but was incorporated into its legal framework in 1995. GATT sets the foundation for tariff reductions by committing members to negotiate lower duties and abolish discriminatory trade practices. Over successive negotiating rounds most notably the Uruguay Round average tariffs on industrial goods were drastically cut, encouraging greater market access and cross-border investment.¹

The WTO also extends liberalization beyond goods. Through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), the organization has promoted the opening up of service sectors such as finance, telecommunications, and transport. GATS encourages members to schedule commitments that gradually liberalize their domestic service industries, thus facilitating greater foreign participation and integration.² Additionally, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) fosters a harmonized legal framework for protecting patents, trademarks, and copyrights, ensuring that intellectual property is not used as a hidden trade barrier.³

WTO membership often leads to deeper regional and multilateral economic integration. As countries adjust their trade policies to comply with WTO norms, they become more aligned with global standards, making it easier to enter into Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) and customs unions. Examples include the European Union, African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area. These arrangements enhance intra-regional trade flows, encourage investment, and promote economic convergence.⁴ The WTO recognizes such agreements under specific conditions, provided they do not violate the core principles of non-discrimination and transparency.

Despite the benefits, liberalization under WTO rules has also drawn criticism, especially from developing countries. While tariff reductions promote global competition and efficiency, they may also expose fragile domestic industries to market pressures they are ill-equipped to withstand. Furthermore, developed countries are often better positioned to take advantage of liberalized regimes due to their advanced production capacities and trade infrastructure.⁵ Nevertheless, the WTO continues to provide technical assistance and capacity-building programs to help developing nations adapt and benefit from the global trading system.

The WTO plays a pivotal role in promoting trade liberalization and economic integration. Through agreements like GATT, GATS, and TRIPS, it has facilitated the removal of trade barriers and laid the groundwork for deeper cooperation among states.

While challenges persist, especially in achieving equitable outcomes, WTO-led liberalization remains central to fostering global economic interdependence and growth.

Effects on Developing vs Developed countries. The impact of WTO membership on economic relations reveals a significant divide between developed and developing countries. While the WTO aims to establish an equitable and rules-based trading system, the benefits have not been uniformly distributed. Developed countries often reap greater rewards due to their established economic strength, broader market access, and robust legal infrastructure, whereas developing countries frequently struggle with compliance, negotiation leverage, and institutional capacity.

Developed countries, with their advanced industries and financial systems, benefit immensely from the WTO's market liberalization. Their producers gain access to global markets with reduced tariffs and fewer barriers, thereby boosting exports and enhancing global value chain participation. The WTO's legal frameworks, especially those under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), provide strong legal protections for investments and exports, which developed countries are better equipped to utilize. For instance, the U.S. and EU have frequently succeeded in WTO disputes by leveraging their deep legal expertise and resources, ensuring enforcement of favorable trade rulings.⁶

In contrast, developing countries often face considerable challenges. Compliance with WTO rules—such as those under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures—demands substantial regulatory reforms, financial investment, and institutional adaptation, which

many low-income economies cannot afford. Moreover, their bargaining power in multilateral negotiations is typically weaker due to limited diplomatic capacity and economic leverage. As noted by the World Bank, “developing nations face disproportionately higher implementation costs in meeting WTO standards”.⁷

Despite these challenges, WTO membership has brought certain benefits to developing countries. Through its technical assistance programs, the WTO offers capacity- building support to help them navigate complex trade rules and participate in negotiations. For instance, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) has provided trade-related aid to least developed countries (LDCs), focusing on institutional strengthening and policy reform. Access to the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) has also given developing countries a legal mechanism to challenge unfair practices, as seen in the landmark case brought by Brazil against U.S. cotton subsidies.⁸

Another critical area of support is through special and differential treatment (SDT), which grants developing countries longer implementation periods and more flexible commitments. While criticized for being insufficient in addressing systemic imbalances, SDT has given some countries breathing space to adjust to global competition. Moreover, WTO initiatives such as Aid for Trade have been instrumental in integrating developing economies into global markets by supporting infrastructure and export readiness programs.⁹

However, persistent inequalities remain. Developed nations continue to maintain agricultural subsidies and non-tariff barriers that hinder market entry for products from the Global South. According to WTO data, over 60% of developing country exports face tariff escalation when processed goods are sold to developed markets, limiting their industrialization potential.¹⁰ These structural issues reveal that while WTO membership can offer growth opportunities, developing countries must still navigate systemic challenges to fully benefit from the multilateral trading system.

The Role in Dispute Resolution and Enforcement

One of the central pillars of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is its Dispute Settlement System (DSS), designed to ensure that trade flows smoothly, predictably, and freely. The enforcement of WTO rules through a structured dispute resolution mechanism is crucial in maintaining legal certainty and resolving conflicts peacefully among member states. This system, governed by the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), gives members a legal avenue to challenge violations and seek redress for trade grievances.

The DSS operates under a quasi-judicial framework, beginning with consultations between parties, followed by a panel processing possible appeals to the Appellate Body, and finally compliance monitoring. Unlike many other international regimes, the WTO's DSS has teeth—it authorizes retaliation if the losing party fails to comply, thus giving the system credibility and enforcement strength.¹¹ The process is time-bound, structured, and legally binding, which has encouraged over 600 cases to be brought before the WTO since its inception.



WTO Dispute Settlement Appellate Body Members

Several landmark cases illustrate the significance of the DSS. One of the most cited is the US–Gasoline case (1996), where Venezuela and Brazil challenged U.S. environmental regulations that discriminated against imported gasoline. The Appellate Body ruled against the U.S., emphasizing the importance of national treatment and the objectivity of trade rules.¹² Another prominent case is EC–Bananas III, here the U.S.

contested the European Union's import regime favoring former colonies that highlighted the tension between trade liberalization and historical economic ties.

The DSS promotes legal certainty by applying consistent interpretations of WTO agreements, helping members understand the scope of their rights and obligations. It also fosters peaceful dispute resolution, replacing unilateral retaliatory measures with a multilateral legal process, which reduces tensions and potential trade wars. As Hoekman and Mavroidis argue, the ability to rely on rule-based outcomes enhances the legitimacy of the WTO and encourages small countries to participate in the system despite power asymmetries.¹³

However, the system is not without criticism. Delays in rulings and appeals have raised concerns about efficiency. A major setback occurred when the Appellate Body became paralyzed in 2019 due to the U.S. blocking new appointments, undermining the system's ability to enforce rulings. There are also claims of bias, with some developing countries arguing that wealthier nations dominate the system due to their superior legal capacity and resources. Furthermore, the system sometimes prioritizes legal technicalities over broader development concerns, limiting its responsiveness to the unique challenges faced by poorer nations.¹⁴

Despite its flaws, the WTO's dispute mechanism remains one of the most advanced in international law. Its emphasis on reasoned decisions, transparency, and enforceability offers a model of institutionalized dispute resolution. Reform efforts, such as restoring the Appellate Body and ensuring greater inclusivity for developing members,

are essential for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of the DSS. Ultimately, the WTO's enforcement system underpins the stability of global trade by promoting peaceful negotiation over power politics and maintaining trust in international economic relations.¹⁵

The influence of the World Trade Organization (WTO) extends beyond general multilateralism into the specific realm of bilateral and regional trade relationships. WTO principles—such as non-discrimination, transparency, most-favored-nation (MFN), and national treatment—shape how countries approach trade negotiations, structure agreements, and resolve disputes. This influence is evident in various trade relationships and cooperative efforts among nations, including the U.S.–China trade tensions, the Nigeria–EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), and the Brazil–India collaboration in WTO negotiations.

The U.S.–China trade relationship has evolved into one of the most complex and consequential in global commerce. Both are WTO members, and their interactions have been heavily shaped by WTO rules. Since China's accession to the WTO in 2001, it has been required to adhere to international norms on tariffs, subsidies, and intellectual property rights. However, persistent concerns over state subsidies, market access restrictions, and technology transfer have led to numerous disputes. The U.S. has frequently turned to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism to challenge practices it views as unfair or inconsistent with WTO obligations. For instance, the U.S. filed cases regarding Chinese export restrictions on raw materials and intellectual property

enforcement, with WTO panels often ruling in favor of the U.S.¹⁶ Despite heightened trade tensions and tariff impositions outside the WTO framework (especially during 2018–2020), both countries continue to engage with WTO mechanisms as part of their broader economic strategy.

Nigeria’s negotiations with the European Union (EU) under the Economic Partnership Agreement framework also highlight the WTO’s regulatory impact. While the EPA is a regional trade agreement between the EU and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), it must still comply with Article XXIV of GATT, which allows such agreements provided they cover substantially all trade and do not raise barriers to non-members. Nigeria has been reluctant to ratify the EPA, citing fears of deindustrialization, loss of tariff revenues, and the unequal capacity between its domestic industries and European exporters. WTO principles—especially the MFN clause—add complexity to such agreements, as preferences granted to one partner may need to be extended to others unless they fall under an approved regional framework. Nigeria’s delay in ratifying the agreement is a response not only to national interests but also to the pressures of WTO-compatible trade liberalization.¹⁷

Brazil and India have emerged as leading voices among developing countries within the WTO, particularly through their role in the G20 coalition. Both nations have collaborated on various issues including agricultural subsidies, trade facilitation and TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) flexibilities for public

health. Their cooperation is rooted in a shared interest in reforming trade rules to be more favorable to developing economies. During the Doha Development Round, Brazil and India jointly opposed proposals that they believed would disproportionately benefit developed countries, such as limiting their use of subsidies while imposing strict market access obligations on the Global South. Their influence has helped bring attention to the development dimension of WTO negotiations and reinforced the organization's principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries.¹⁸

These case studies illustrate the WTO's pervasive influence on both bilateral and multilateral trade arrangements. Whether managing tensions between major powers, shaping the design of regional trade agreements, or enabling collective bargaining among developing nations, the WTO provides a legal and institutional framework that guides how nations engage in the global economy. The enforcement of WTO principles ensures that trade liberalization occurs in a rules-based manner, while its negotiation platforms allow for diverse voices to influence outcomes.

Conclusion

WTO membership has significantly shaped economic relations among states by promoting trade liberalization, reducing tariff barriers, and providing a rules-based system for resolving trade disputes. It has enhanced transparency, encouraged multilateral cooperation, and integrated developing countries into the global economy. However, while many countries have benefited from increased market access and investment flows, disparities remain in how gains are distributed, with developing nations often facing

structural challenges. Overall, the WTO continues to serve as a key institution in facilitating stable and predictable international economic relations.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS OF WTO

Since its establishment in 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has played a pivotal role in regulating international trade and promoting economic cooperation among states. However, its structure, policies, and outcomes have been the subject of extensive criticism from governments, scholars, and civil society. Critics argue that while the WTO has facilitated trade liberalization, it has also exacerbated global inequalities and reinforced the dominance of powerful economies at the expense of developing nations. Concerns over power asymmetries, institutional bias, non-compliance, protectionist policies, and development imbalances have raised questions about the fairness and effectiveness of the organization. Furthermore, internal gridlocks—such as the paralysis of the Appellate Body—and widespread calls for reform have underscored the growing legitimacy crisis facing the WTO. This chapter explores these challenges in depth, offering a critical examination of the institutional shortcomings and systemic issues that hinder the WTO's ability to equitably govern global trade.

One of the most persistent criticisms of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is the existence of power asymmetries that result in institutional bias. Although the WTO was founded on the principle of equal participation by all member states, the reality reflects a hierarchy in which developed and economically powerful countries exert disproportionate influence on negotiations, agenda-setting, and dispute outcomes. This imbalance significantly affects the ability of developing and least developed countries (LDCs) to protect and advance their trade interests. Powerful countries such as the United States, the European Union, and other members of the Global North dominate WTO negotiations through better financial and human resources, legal expertise, and strategic alliances. These countries are often able to push their trade priorities by influencing the formation of negotiating coalitions and shaping draft agreements. The decision-making process in the WTO, although theoretically consensus-based, often takes place through informal meetings (commonly referred to as "Green Room" negotiations) where only a select group of influential countries are present. This method excludes smaller and less influential states from meaningful participation, relegating them to the role of passive observers rather than active decision-makers.¹

The limited influence of developing countries is further exacerbated by the technical complexity of WTO agreements. Many LDCs lack the legal capacity and diplomatic resources needed to engage fully in trade negotiations and dispute settlement processes. As a result, they are often forced to accept pre-determined terms or align with larger economies that may not prioritize their interests. For instance, during the Uruguay

Round, which led to the formation of the WTO, many developing countries were pressured into accepting rules on intellectual property (TRIPS) and services (GATS) without fully understanding the long-term implications.²

Moreover, developed countries have repeatedly shaped WTO rules to protect their own economic interests. A prominent example is the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), which was structured in a way that allowed rich countries to maintain domestic subsidies under categories like the “Green Box,” while restricting the policy space available to poorer nations.³ This perpetuated an uneven playing field where farmers in developing countries were unable to compete fairly with heavily subsidized producers from the Global North.

Similarly, intellectual property rules under the TRIPS agreement have been criticized for favoring multinational corporations at the expense of access to affordable medicines in poorer countries.⁴

The dominance of the developed world is also evident in the dispute settlement system, where the costs of legal representation and prolonged litigation are barriers to justice for weaker economies. Although the system is formally open to all members, in practice, it is the wealthier states that have been able to use it effectively and repeatedly, while smaller economies are deterred by the financial and institutional burdens.⁵

The WTO’s structure and processes reveal significant power asymmetries and institutional biases. While the organization was designed to facilitate fair and equal trade

relations, the disproportionate influence of powerful countries has led to systemic imbalances that undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of the multilateral trading system.

Despite the World Trade Organization's (WTO) central mission to promote trade liberalization and reduce barriers, the resurgence of trade protectionism in recent years poses a significant challenge to its authority and credibility. Protectionism involves government actions and policies that restrict international trade, often with the intent to protect domestic industries from foreign competition. These measures frequently take the form of tariffs, import quotas, subsidies, and other non-tariff barriers, often in direct conflict with WTO agreements. The 2008 global financial crisis marked a turning point, after which many countries began adopting inward-looking policies to shelter domestic economies. This trend intensified with the outbreak of the U.S.-China trade war in 2018, where both countries imposed retaliatory tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of goods, clearly violating the spirit—if not the letter—of WTO rules. Although the WTO permits exceptions under certain safeguard or anti-dumping measures, the scale and unilateral nature of these actions revealed weaknesses in WTO enforcement mechanisms.⁶

More so, countries have increasingly used subsidies, especially in sectors like agriculture and manufacturing, to prop up their domestic industries. These actions have led to disputes from developing countries who argue that such subsidies distort market

competition and place their economies at a disadvantage. For example, the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has long been criticized for providing significant subsidies to European farmers, creating unequal trading conditions with countries from the Global South.⁷ Non-compliance is another persistent problem, where member states either ignore WTO rulings or delay implementing recommended changes. The WTO's dispute settlement system (DSS), though often cited as one of its most effective features, has faced criticisms due to lengthy resolution times and inadequate enforcement mechanisms. Some powerful nations, such as the United States, have at times refused to comply with Appellate Body rulings or have blocked the appointment of new judges, effectively paralyzing the system.⁸

The WTO has developed several tools to manage such violations, including consultations, panels, and retaliation rights. However, the effectiveness of these tools is inconsistent, largely dependent on the political will of member states and the economic leverage they hold. Smaller and developing countries often find it challenging to pursue cases due to legal costs and diplomatic pressures. Moreover, even when successful, they may lack the economic power to enforce retaliatory measures, rendering the compliance system asymmetrical.⁹

To address these challenges, ongoing reform discussions have suggested strengthening monitoring mechanisms, making dispute resolution more accessible to weaker economies, and modernizing rules to address new forms of protectionism such as digital trade restrictions and environmental standards. Without such reforms, the

credibility and relevance of the WTO may continue to erode, especially in an era of growing geopolitical tensions and economic nationalism.¹⁰ One of the most persistent criticisms of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is its inability to address the entrenched inequalities between developed and developing countries in the global trading system. Although the WTO claims to operate on the principles of fairness and equal treatment, in practice, the institutional and structural biases of the system tend to favor wealthy nations with advanced economies and established legal frameworks.¹¹

Many of the WTO's trade liberalization policies, such as the reduction of tariffs and elimination of subsidies, have disproportionately benefited developed countries. These countries already possess competitive industries, global market access, and strong negotiating leverage. On the other hand, developing countries often struggle with weak production capacity, poor infrastructure, and reliance on a limited range of export goods. Implementing WTO rules, especially those related to intellectual property (TRIPS) and services (GATS), can impose high compliance costs, creating barriers to participation in global trade for less economically developed nations.¹² For example, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) has faced criticism for allowing continued domestic subsidies in developed countries while restricting similar support in developing ones. This dynamic has led to market distortions that undermine agricultural competitiveness in the Global South, worsening rural poverty and food insecurity.¹³ Despite ongoing negotiations under the Doha Development Agenda—originally launched in 2001 to address these

imbalances—progress has been minimal, largely due to resistance from developed country blocs such as the EU and the US.

To address such disparities, the WTO introduced Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions, which offer developing countries longer implementation periods, technical assistance, and greater flexibility in meeting trade obligations. However, critics argue that SDT measures are often non-binding, lack enforcement mechanisms, and fail to produce significant developmental outcomes.¹⁴ Furthermore, the classification of countries as “developing” remains controversial, with no clear criteria and disagreements over eligibility. Despite these shortcomings, the WTO has undertaken efforts to integrate development priorities through capacity-building programs, aid-for-trade initiatives, and dispute settlement access support. Some developing countries have successfully used the WTO’s legal mechanisms to challenge unfair practices by more powerful states, showing that with the right support, the system can be used to their benefit.¹⁵ However, these cases remain exceptions rather than the norm, and for many poorer members, the cost and complexity of litigation remain significant deterrents.

The persistence of global inequality under WTO governance suggests that trade liberalization alone cannot serve as a tool for equitable development. Without deeper reforms that include enforceable development provisions, enhanced market access, and stronger representation for the Global South in WTO decision-making, the system risks further entrenching inequalities it was intended to alleviate.¹⁶ The legitimacy of the World

Trade Organization (WTO) has come under increasing scrutiny, both from within member states and from civil society actors across the globe. While the WTO was established to promote fair and rules-based international trade, many have questioned whether its institutional structure, decision-making processes, and enforcement mechanisms adequately reflect the principles of democratic governance and transparency.¹⁷

One of the core criticisms relates to the democratic deficit inherent in WTO operations. Although the organization operates on a consensus basis, in practice, major decisions are often made in exclusive, informal gatherings such as “Green Room” meetings. These are usually dominated by economically powerful countries like the United States, the European Union, and other developed economies. Developing countries and least-developed nations are often excluded or brought into negotiations only after key issues have been resolved, reducing their influence and ownership of outcomes.¹⁸ Furthermore, the complex legal and technical nature of WTO texts often places low- capacity nations at a disadvantage during negotiations. Transparency concerns also permeate WTO operations. Despite efforts to improve public access to documents and meeting proceedings, key deliberations—particularly in dispute settlements and high-level negotiations—remain opaque. This has led to growing demands for the WTO to adopt clearer, more participatory processes that reflect the global public interest, not merely the preferences of dominant states or multinational corporations.¹⁹

A major flashpoint in the debate over WTO reform has been the *Appellate Body deadlock. Since 2019, the WTO's Appellate Body has been paralyzed due to the United States blocking the appointment of new judges, citing concerns over judicial overreach and procedural flaws. As a result, the dispute settlement system—the crown jewel of the WTO—has lost its final appeal mechanism, severely undermining the organization’s legal authority and ability to enforce compliance.²⁰ While several reform proposals have been advanced, including limiting judges’ terms and increasing transparency in rulings, political consensus has remained elusive. Beyond institutional and procedural issues, civil society protests* have played a significant role in challenging the WTO's legitimacy. The 1999 “Battle of Seattle” protests brought global attention to the perceived social and environmental costs of free trade, with activists accusing the WTO of prioritizing corporate interests over workers’ rights, ecological protection, and public welfare. These protests have continued in various forms, often coinciding with WTO ministerial meetings, and underscore the disconnect between trade policy and broader developmental or human rights objectives.²¹

In conclusion, the legitimacy crisis facing the WTO stems from both structural inequalities and a failure to evolve in response to contemporary global realities. While the organization has made some efforts to improve inclusivity and transparency, real reform will require confronting the imbalances of power within its framework, restoring the

functionality of dispute settlement, and embedding development and equity at the core of its mission.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the World Trade Organization (WTO) has had a profound and multidimensional impact on international economic relations among states. Since its inception in 1995, the WTO has served as a global forum for negotiating trade agreements, settling disputes, and promoting a stable and rules-based trading environment. It replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and expanded the scope of international trade governance to include services, intellectual property, and more comprehensive trade regulations. Its core mission has been to promote

free, fair, and predictable trade across borders, which in turn enhances global economic integration.

However, the benefits of WTO membership have not been evenly distributed. A key finding of this study is the persistent disparity between developed and developing countries in terms of trade outcomes. Developed countries, with their advanced infrastructure, robust legal institutions, and strong negotiating capacities, often reap greater benefits from WTO participation. They are better able to use the dispute settlement system, navigate complex agreements, and influence negotiations. Conversely, developing countries face significant constraints. Limited technical capacity, lack of resources, and compliance costs undermine their ability to effectively participate in WTO activities. Even though WTO offers technical assistance and provisions like Special and Differential Treatment (SDT), these measures are often insufficient in levelling the playing field.

Nonetheless, WTO membership does provide developing countries with certain opportunities. It offers access to a global market under predictable rules and enhances their bargaining position by grouping them with like-minded nations. Many developing countries have successfully used the WTO platform to raise their concerns, contest unfair practices, and engage in multilateral trade diplomacy. However, the structural imbalances within the institution often limit the real influence these countries have on decision-making processes. The research has demonstrated that the WTO facilitates trade

liberalization by encouraging the reduction of tariffs, the elimination of quotas, and the removal of other trade barriers that traditionally hindered the smooth flow of goods and services. Through multilateral negotiations and binding agreements, the WTO has contributed to the dramatic expansion of global trade volumes. In particular, agreements like GATT, GATS, and TRIPS have created legal disciplines that govern the behavior of member states in trade in goods, services, and intellectual property rights.

These agreements promote transparency, non-discrimination, and market access, which are essential principles in today's interconnected global economy. Furthermore, the study explored the WTO's role in economic integration through regional and bilateral agreements. Although the WTO provides the multilateral umbrella, it recognizes the proliferation of regional trade agreements (RTAs), which are often designed in accordance with WTO rules. These arrangements allow states to deepen economic ties while maintaining consistency with global obligations. In this context, the WTO has helped harmonize national trade policies and fostered convergence in regulatory practices among nations.

The Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) of the WTO has been one of its most influential and lauded components. It provides a legal pathway for resolving conflicts over trade rules and has adjudicated hundreds of cases involving a wide range of issues. The system promotes legal certainty, discourages unilateral retaliatory measures, and strengthens the rule of law in international trade. High-profile disputes, such as those

between the United States and China, or the EU and Latin American banana exporters, highlight the DSM's reach and influence. Nevertheless, the mechanism has faced serious challenges, particularly the paralysis of its Appellate Body since 2019 due to the U.S. blocking appointments. This has undermined the enforceability of rulings and raised concerns about the future of trade governance under the WTO.

In addition to institutional challenges, the WTO has also been subject to widespread criticism. Many observers and civil society actors accuse the organization of institutional bias, excessive influence by developed countries, lack of transparency, and inadequate attention to development issues. The resurgence of protectionism, particularly following global events like the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, has exposed weaknesses in the WTO's ability to prevent members from resorting to nationalistic trade measures. Moreover, the rise of bilateralism and trade wars has tested the WTO's centrality in the international trade system. This study also examined real-world case studies that reflect how WTO principles operate in practice. In the case of US-China trade relations, the WTO has served as both a negotiating table and a legal battlefield, revealing the complex interplay between compliance, sovereignty, and power politics.

The Nigeria-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) highlights the asymmetry in negotiating power between African and European states and underscores debates around fair trade, development, and reciprocity. The Brazil-India collaboration in

WTO negotiations demonstrates how emerging economies can forge coalitions to protect shared interests and influence the global agenda.

In conclusion, the WTO has undeniably played a central role in shaping the landscape of international economic relations. Its rules, agreements, and institutions have provided a framework that promotes stability, predictability, and cooperation in global trade. While it has succeeded in facilitating trade liberalization and integration, it has fallen short in fully addressing issues of equity, inclusiveness, and representation. The structural inequalities between developed and developing nations, the weakening of the dispute resolution system, and the growing skepticism about the organization's effectiveness have all contributed to calls for comprehensive reform.

For the WTO to remain relevant in the evolving global order, it must prioritize greater inclusivity, reform its governance structure, and revive its dispute settlement body. It must also enhance its role in addressing new global challenges such as digital trade, climate change, and sustainable development. Only by adapting to these changes and correcting its internal imbalances can the WTO fulfil its original vision of a fair, transparent, and equitable international trading system that serves all its members—rich and poor alike.

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