

SAI MODEL UNITED NATIONS

BACKGROUND GUIDE

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

WTO

AGENDA:

Strengthening and Reforming Multilateral Trade Mechanisms to Prevent Trade Wars and Promote a Stable, Rules-Based Global Trading System

Section 1: Committee Overview

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only international body that deals with the rules of trade between nations. Founded on 1 January 1995 as the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the WTO provides the legal and institutional framework within which member governments negotiate and implement trade agreements, settle trade disputes, and review each other's trade policies.

1.1 Mandate

- Facilitate the negotiation of multilateral trade agreements that reduce barriers to trade in goods, services, and intellectual property.
- Administer and monitor the implementation of existing trade agreements by its 164 member governments.
- Provide a formal dispute settlement mechanism (DSM) through which members can challenge trade policies they believe violate WTO rules.
- Conduct regular Trade Policy Reviews (TPR) to promote transparency in national trade policies.
- Provide a forum for cooperation with other international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank on issues related to global economic governance.

1.2 Core Principles

- **Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN):** A trade privilege granted to one member must be extended to all WTO members equally. No country may be discriminated against in trade matters.
- **National Treatment:** Imported goods, once inside a country's border, must be treated no less favourably than domestically produced equivalents.
- **Reciprocity:** Trade liberalization must be mutually beneficial; concessions given must be matched.
- **Transparency:** Members are obligated to publish trade regulations and notify the WTO of changes.
- **Special and Differential Treatment (SDT):** Developing and least-developed countries (LDCs) receive longer implementation periods and certain exemptions to support their integration into world trade.

1.3 Powers & Decision-Making

The WTO operates on a consensus-based model, meaning that all 164 member governments must agree for decisions to pass. While this reinforces legitimacy and inclusivity, it has often been criticized for producing gridlock, especially on contentious issues. Key bodies include:

- **Ministerial Conference:** The highest decision-making authority, meeting at least every two years.
- **General Council:** Conducts day-to-day business between Ministerial Conferences.
- **Dispute Settlement Body (DSB):** Oversees the dispute resolution process.
- **Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB):** Conducts periodic examinations of members' trade policies.

1.4 Limitations

- The WTO cannot force compliance: it can only authorize retaliatory measures (countermeasures) against non-compliant members.
- The consensus requirement makes it very difficult to pass sweeping new agreements, as demonstrated by the stalled Doha Development Agenda.
- The Appellate Body, the WTO's highest court for trade disputes, has been non-functional since December 2019 due to the United States blocking the appointment of new judges, a structural crisis at the heart of the institution.
- The WTO has limited tools to address new-age issues such as digital trade, e-commerce, environmental subsidies, and state capitalism.
- Developing countries frequently argue that the organization's rules disproportionately benefit wealthy, industrialized nations.

Section 2: Agenda Overview

The agenda for this committee, Strengthening and Reforming Multilateral Trade Mechanisms to Prevent Trade Wars and Promote a Stable, Rules-Based Global Trading System, sits at the very center of today's most urgent geopolitical and economic debates.

In 2025, the world is witnessing what several economists and trade analysts have described as the most significant stress test the multilateral trading system has faced since the WTO's founding. The reemergence of aggressive unilateral tariff policies, including sweeping "reciprocal tariffs" announced

by the United States in early 2025 affecting imports from dozens of countries, combined with a dysfunctional WTO dispute settlement system, has prompted a wide cross-section of the international community to call for urgent and comprehensive reform.

This agenda is not merely procedural. It asks delegates to grapple with fundamental questions: Can a rules-based system survive when its most powerful member chooses to operate outside it? How can the WTO adapt its architecture to handle state capitalism, digital trade, and climate-linked trade policy? And critically, what should reform actually look like, given the vastly different interests of developed, developing, and least-developed countries?

The stakes are high. A fragmented global trading system risks creating economic blocs, raising costs for consumers worldwide, harming supply chains that billions of people depend on, and undermining the cooperative norms that have underpinned post-war prosperity.

Section 3: Historical Background

3.1 From GATT to WTO A Brief History

The multilateral trading system traces its origins to the aftermath of World War II. Policymakers of that era concluded that the trade protectionism of the 1930s—most famously the US Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, which triggered retaliatory tariffs worldwide and deepened the Great Depression—had contributed directly to economic despair and political extremism. The solution was cooperation.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed in 1947 by 23 nations and came into force in 1948. Though originally intended as a temporary measure pending the creation of a formal International Trade Organization (which never materialized), GATT served for nearly five decades as the backbone of international trade law. Through eight successive rounds of negotiations, it progressively reduced tariffs and expanded the scope of trade rules.

The landmark Uruguay Round (1986–1994) transformed global trade governance. Involving 123 countries, it dramatically expanded trade rules to include services (GATS) and intellectual property (TRIPS), and most significantly, created the World Trade Organization, which replaced GATT as an institution on 1 January 1995. The WTO came with a binding dispute settlement system, a major upgrade that gave trade law real teeth for the first time.

3.2 Key Timeline

Year	Key Development
1930	US Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act triggers global retaliatory tariffs; deepens Great Depression.
1947	GATT signed by 23 countries; first multilateral framework for reducing trade barriers.
1948–1993	Eight GATT rounds progressively reduce tariffs and expand trade rules (Geneva, Annecy, Torquay, Kennedy, Tokyo, Uruguay, etc.).
1986–1994	Uruguay Round negotiations, the most comprehensive trade round in history, produces the Marrakesh Agreement.
1995	WTO officially established on 1 January. Binding Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) created.
2001	Doha Development Agenda (DDA) launched in Qatar aims to place development at the center of trade negotiations.
2003	Cancún Ministerial Conference collapses; North-South divide over agriculture stalls DDA.
2008	Global financial crisis reshapes trade patterns; a new wave of protectionism begins to emerge.
2013	WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) first multilateral agreement in WTO history concluded at Bali.
2016–2019	US begins blocking Appellate Body appointments under both Obama and Trump administrations.
2018–2019	US-China trade war erupts; US imposes tariffs on \$250 billion of Chinese goods; China retaliates.
Dec 2019	WTO Appellate Body ceases to function; only 1 of 7 judges remains; appeals go into legal void.
2020	COVID-19 pandemic disrupts global supply chains; export restrictions on medical goods multiply.
2022	WTO 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) historic Fisheries Subsidies Agreement reached; formal WTO reform agenda launched.
2024	13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi reiterates reform commitment; Appellate Body restoration deadline missed.
2025	US imposes sweeping "reciprocal tariffs" on global partners; China and others file WTO disputes; reform urgency intensifies.

Mar 2026

14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) scheduled for Yaoundé, Cameroon reform roadmap expected.

Section 4: Key Concepts & Terminology

Understanding the debate requires familiarity with the following terms. Delegates are strongly encouraged to be comfortable with these before the committee begins.

Multilateral Trade System (MTS)

The framework of international agreements and institutions anchored by the WTO through which countries collectively govern cross-border trade. Distinguished from bilateral or regional arrangements.

Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN)

The cornerstone WTO principle requires that any trade advantage a country grants to one member must be granted to all. Exceptions include Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and preferential treatment for developing countries.

Trade War

A situation where countries impose escalating retaliatory tariffs and trade barriers against each other, often harming all parties involved. Generally considered a Nash equilibrium trap where no party benefits from escalation, but none has a unilateral incentive to de-escalate.

Appellate Body (AB)

The WTO's seven-member standing appellate tribunal that reviews panel decisions in trade disputes. Since December 2019, it has been non-functional due to the US blocking new appointments, creating a major legitimacy crisis.

Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM)

The WTO's formal process for resolving trade disputes. Involves consultations, panel proceedings, and appeals. Currently crippled by the Appellate Body crisis, as losing parties can appeal into a legal void.

Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA)

An alternative appeal mechanism created in 2020 by a coalition of WTO members (including the EU, China, and others) to bypass the defunct Appellate Body. Parties who join the MPIA agree to use arbitration instead of the Appellate Body for their disputes.

Doha Development Agenda (DDA)

The WTO's ninth and most recent round of multilateral trade negotiations, launched in 2001. It was intended to put development at the heart of trade talks, but remains formally unfinished due to persistent deadlocks between developed and developing nations.

Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)

The WTO's first fully multilateral agreement, concluded in 2013 and in force since 2017. It aims to simplify and harmonize customs procedures globally, cutting red tape and reducing trade costs particularly for developing countries.

Special and Differential Treatment (SDT)

Provisions within WTO agreements allowing developing and least-developed countries more time and flexibility to implement commitments. Contentious because there is no formal definition of 'developing country' members self-declare their status.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)

Trade restrictions other than tariffs including quotas, licensing requirements, sanitary standards, technical regulations, and local content rules that can effectively limit market access.

Subsidy & Countervailing Measures (SCM)

WTO rules on government subsidies to industries. Countervailing duties can be imposed against subsidized imports. A major flashpoint in US-EU-China disputes over state-owned enterprise support and industrial policy.

National Security Exception (Article XXI)

A WTO treaty provision allowing members to take trade measures they consider necessary for their national security. Increasingly invoked by major powers to justify unilateral trade restrictions, a practice that critics argue fundamentally undermines the rules-based system.

Plurilateral Agreements

Trade agreements within the WTO system that apply only to willing member signatories, rather than all members. Increasingly seen as a workaround for consensus-based gridlock. Examples include the ongoing e-commerce negotiations.

Digital Trade / E-Commerce

Trade in digitally delivered goods and services. The WTO has been negotiating a plurilateral e-commerce agreement since 2019, but comprehensive multilateral rules for digital trade remain absent, a major gap given the size of the digital economy.

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

A trade policy tool (e.g., the EU's CBAM) that imposes tariffs on carbon-intensive imports to prevent 'carbon leakage.' Its compatibility with WTO non-discrimination rules is a hotly debated question.

Reciprocal Tariffs

A term used by the Trump administration in 2025 to describe unilateral tariffs imposed on trading partners, ostensibly to balance trade deficits. Widely contested as inconsistent with MFN obligations under GATT.

Section 5: Major Stakeholders & Country Positions

Delegates must understand that positions at the WTO are rarely monolithic. Countries form shifting coalitions depending on the specific issue of agriculture, industrial goods, services, or dispute settlement. The following represents a general framing of major actors and their broad interests.

5.1 United States

- Has historically been the primary architect and defender of the rules-based trading system, but has increasingly pursued unilateral trade actions under both Democratic and Republican administrations.
- Remains the most consequential actor in the current crisis, its blocking of Appellate Body appointments since 2016 (across multiple administrations) is the single greatest structural challenge facing the WTO today.
- The second Trump administration (2025) has imposed sweeping "reciprocal tariffs" on dozens of countries, invoking national security and trade deficit justifications that most WTO members and legal experts consider inconsistent with WTO obligations.
- Has significant grievances about the WTO's perceived inability to address China's state capitalism model, forced technology transfers, and subsidies to state-owned enterprises.
- Has historically opposed the self-declared 'developing country' status of large emerging economies like China and India, arguing it gives them unfair exemptions.

5.2 China

- The world's largest goods trader and second-largest economy. Has a complex and somewhat paradoxical position – it simultaneously benefits from and is a target of the rules-based system.
- Has been the most frequent target of US trade actions and has responded both with WTO dispute filings and retaliatory tariffs.
- Supports the multilateral system in principle and has championed its own "Stability, Development, and Reform" (SDR) proposal for WTO reform.
- Defends its right to Special and Differential Treatment as a developing country, a position contested by the US, EU, and others.
- Has joined the MPIA as an alternative to the defunct Appellate Body.
- Western members argue that China's state capitalism model – including massive subsidies to state-owned enterprises – is incompatible with WTO rules and creates an uneven playing field.

5.3 European Union

- One of the most consistent and vocal defenders of the multilateral trading system. Has published detailed WTO reform proposals covering dispute settlement, subsidies, transparency, and a new development approach.
- Championed the MPIA as a bridge solution for the Appellate Body crisis and has engaged constructively across all WTO reform tracks.
- Has its own tensions with WTO rules – notably the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), whose WTO compatibility is disputed.
- Regrets but has condemned the 2025 US unilateral tariff increases, which specifically target EU exports.
- Advocates for moving toward annual Ministerial Conferences rather than the current biennial cycle to improve political accountability.

5.4 India

- A major developing economy with a strong voice in WTO negotiations. Has historically been a coalition builder – part of both the G20 (agricultural negotiating group) and other developing country coalitions.

- Prioritizes food security and the right of developing countries to maintain agricultural subsidies for smallholder farmers, a central point of contention with developed nations.
- Was instrumental in blocking a 2014 deal on trade facilitation implementation over agricultural stockpiling concerns, though a compromise was eventually reached.
- Supports SDT provisions and is skeptical of moves to restrict developing country flexibilities.
- Has growing trade tensions with both the US (steel tariffs, digital services taxes) and China (trade deficit concerns, FDI restrictions).

5.5 Africa (African Union & LDC Group)

- African nations collectively represent a large voting bloc but have historically struggled to punch their weight in negotiations due to capacity constraints.
- The upcoming MC14 in Yaoundé, Cameroon (March 2026) is historically significant the first WTO Ministerial Conference held in Africa.
- Key priorities: duty-free and quota-free market access for LDC exports; Aid for Trade financing; improved technical assistance and capacity building; fair agricultural rules; and a reformed DSM that is genuinely accessible to smaller economies.
- Support SDT provisions strongly and advocate for development to be mainstreamed across all WTO reform tracks.

5.6 Brazil & Latin America

- Brazil has been outspoken in condemning the 2025 wave of US unilateral tariffs as an 'unprecedented attack' on the multilateral trading system.
- Agricultural exporters like Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay have historically led calls for reduction of rich-country farm subsidies.
- Supports WTO reform but insists that reform must not erode developing-country flexibilities.

5.7 Japan, Canada & Australia

- Close US allies that have nonetheless been critical of unilateral US tariffs, particularly steel and aluminum levies.
- Japan and Canada have been active in dispute settlement proceedings against the US and are supporters of the MPIA.
- Australia's trade tensions with China (wine, barley, and beef tariffs) provide a live case study of how bilateral political tensions manifest in trade policy.
- All three support a reformed, functional multilateral system and have contributed to WTO reform proposals.

Section 6: Case Studies & Real-World Examples

Case Study 1: The US–China Trade War (2018–Present)

Perhaps the most consequential trade conflict of the 21st century, the US-China trade war began in earnest in 2018 when the Trump administration imposed tariffs on approximately \$250 billion of Chinese goods, citing unfair trade practices and intellectual property theft under Section 301 of the US Trade Act. China retaliated with tariffs on US agricultural products and other goods.

The dispute exposed a critical structural flaw: the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism could not effectively adjudicate it. The US had already begun blocking Appellate Body appointments, meaning that any panel ruling against the US could simply be appealed into a legal void. A WTO panel found in 2020 that the US tariffs were inconsistent with GATT rules but the US immediately appealed, ensuring no resolution. By 2025, with the US imposing tariffs of over 100% on Chinese goods, China filed new WTO disputes (DS633, DS638), but the structural paralysis of the DSM means enforceable outcomes remain unlikely in the near term.

This case illustrates how a single powerful member's non-participation in the dispute settlement system can render it ineffective and how trade conflicts, once escalated, prove extremely difficult to de-escalate without functioning legal mechanisms.

Case Study 2: The WTO Appellate Body Crisis

The Appellate Body (AB) was designed as the crown jewel of the WTO dispute settlement system, a standing, impartial, seven-member appellate court. Its collapse is arguably the most serious institutional crisis in WTO history.

The US began raising concerns about the AB's jurisprudence as early as 2011, arguing that it was overstepping its mandate, creating binding precedent where none was intended, and allowing countries to use the appeals process strategically. These are legitimate governance concerns. However, instead of proposing formal reforms, the US simply stopped approving new appointments, a strategy that reduced the AB to zero functioning members by December 2019.

The consequence is stark: any losing party in a WTO panel proceeding can now 'appeal into the void,' effectively blocking the adoption of any ruling. A coalition of WTO members created the MPIA (Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement) in 2020 as a stopgap but the US has not joined, limiting its effectiveness. As of 2025, members are still working on a path forward on dispute settlement reform, with a deadline for resolution set for MC13 (2024) having already passed.

Case Study 3: The Fisheries Subsidies Agreement (2022)

In a rare moment of multilateral success, WTO members concluded the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies at MC12 in Geneva in June 2022. This was the first WTO agreement in nearly a decade to achieve full multilateral consensus, and the first ever to focus explicitly on environmental sustainability.

The agreement prohibits subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and restricts subsidies to fishing in overfished stocks. While critics point out that key provisions on overcapacity subsidies were left for future negotiation, the agreement is widely seen as proof that the multilateral system can still deliver when political will exists.

MC14 in Yaoundé is expected to address the remaining portions of the fisheries subsidies agreement, making it a live test case for 2026 negotiations.

Case Study 4: US-China Trade War The Steel & Aluminum Tariffs

In 2018, the US imposed 25% tariffs on steel and 10% on aluminum imports from virtually all countries, invoking Article XXI (national security exception). This action affected not just China but close allies the EU, Canada, Japan, South Korea, and others.

Multiple WTO disputes were filed. Panel reports found that the US tariffs were not justified under Article XXI (as the US itself was not facing an emergency in international relations with the affected countries), but the US appealed all rulings into the legal void. This case established a dangerous precedent: that the national security exception can be used to justify almost any trade restriction, effectively gutting the WTO's enforcement capacity.

Case Study 5: India's Public Food Stockholding Program

Under WTO rules, domestic support for agriculture is limited. But India argues that its public food stockholding program – used to purchase grain from farmers at minimum support prices and distribute it to the poor – exceeds these limits due to outdated price benchmarks used to calculate subsidies.

India has consistently pushed for a permanent solution allowing developing countries to maintain food security programs without WTO challenge. An interim 'peace clause' was agreed at Bali in 2013, but a permanent solution has not yet been achieved. This ongoing dispute sits at the intersection of development, food security, and trade rules – and exemplifies the North-South tensions that have stalled the Doha Round.

Section 7: Current Situation (As of 2025–2026)

The current moment is genuinely turbulent. Several concurrent developments are reshaping the landscape of international trade governance:

7.1 The 2025 Tariff Wave

- The Trump administration's 2025 tariff announcements, described by some as a declaration of a global trade war, imposed sweeping "reciprocal tariffs" on imports from dozens of countries. These tariffs, partly paused for some countries but maintained at very high levels for China (over 100%), have prompted WTO consultations and dispute filings from multiple members including China (DS633, DS638).
- WTO members initiated an average of 32.3 trade remedy investigations per month in the period leading up to this – just below the 2024 peak of 37.3 per month – indicating a broader global trend toward protectionism.
- Brazil publicly called the situation an 'unprecedented attack' on the multilateral trading system at the WTO General Council.

7.2 The Reform Agenda

- At MC12 in 2022, members formally agreed for the first time to undertake a comprehensive review of all WTO functions. This reform agenda has three tracks identified by the reform facilitator: governance, fairness (level playing field), and 'issues of our time' (digital trade, environment, etc.).

- WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has called WTO reform 'somewhat existential' for the organization, noting 'unmistakable momentum' in early 2025 consultations but acknowledging significant divergence between member positions.
- The MC13 deadline for Appellate Body reform has passed. Members are now working toward MC14 in Yaoundé (March 2026) as the next milestone.

7.3 The MPIA A Workaround in Place

- The Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement, now joined by approximately 50+ WTO members (as of early 2025), provides an operational alternative to the defunct AB for disputes between its members.
- Notably, the US has not joined the MPIA, limiting its scope as a comprehensive solution.

7.4 Industrial Policy & Subsidy Concerns

- The US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and the EU's European Green Deal have introduced large-scale industrial subsidies for clean energy and EVs programs that trading partners allege are inconsistent with WTO subsidy rules.
- This has created a paradox: countries that have historically championed WTO rules against subsidies are now themselves implementing policies of questionable WTO compatibility eroding the moral authority of multilateral trade law.

7.5 Upcoming MC14 in Yaoundé

- The 14th WTO Ministerial Conference is scheduled for Yaoundé, Cameroon in March 2026 the first MC held on the African continent.
- Key expected deliverables include: a comprehensive reform roadmap, progress on fisheries subsidies, and advances on e-commerce and digital trade rules.
- The European Parliament has called for a clear reform roadmap at MC14 and agreement on comprehensive modernization at MC15.

Section 8: Key Issues & Areas of Debate

The following are the central contested questions that define this agenda. Delegates should expect debate on all of these and recognize that there are no easy, universally accepted answers.

Issue 1: Restoring the Dispute Settlement System

- Should the Appellate Body be restored in its current form, reformed, or replaced entirely?
- Can the MPIA serve as a long-term alternative, or is a universal mechanism required?
- How should the WTO handle the reality that its largest member refuses to participate in the appeals process?
- Should there be mandatory timelines for dispute resolution? What about accessibility for smaller, developing-country members who lack WTO legal capacity?

Issue 2: Unilateral Tariffs & National Security

- Article XXI (national security exception) is being invoked by major powers with increasing frequency. Should the WTO define clearer limits on what constitutes a legitimate national security justification for trade restrictions?
- How should the international community respond when a WTO member imposes tariffs that panels find WTO-inconsistent but the member appeals them into the void?
- Is there a meaningful distinction between "protectionism" and legitimate industrial policy / national security?

Issue 3: Developing Countries & Special and Differential Treatment

- Should the WTO formally define what qualifies a country as 'developing'? Should large emerging economies like China and India retain SDT rights?
- How can the WTO reform agenda be designed so it doesn't disproportionately burden developing and least-developed countries?
- What additional support in the form of Aid for Trade, technical assistance, and capacity building should the WTO provide to help smaller economies fully participate?

Issue 4: The Rules Gap Digital Trade, E-Commerce & the New Economy

- The WTO's current rulebook was designed for an economy of physical goods. How should the WTO regulate cross-border data flows, digital services, and e-commerce?
- The Joint Initiative on E-Commerce has been negotiating a plurilateral deal since 2019. Can it be finalized? Should it be multilateralized?

- How should intellectual property rules evolve to handle AI, software, and digital content?

Issue 5: Trade & Climate The Carbon Border Adjustment Debate

- The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) which imposes charges on carbon-intensive imports raises fundamental questions about the intersection of trade and climate policy.
- Is CBAM consistent with WTO non-discrimination principles? Should the WTO create a formal 'carve-out' for legitimate environmental trade measures?
- Developing countries argue that climate-linked trade measures effectively create new forms of protectionism and disadvantage their less technologically advanced export sectors.

Issue 6: Agricultural Subsidies & Food Security

- Rich countries particularly the US and EU provide massive agricultural subsidies that developing-country farmers cannot compete with. How should these be disciplined?
- India and other developing nations need flexibility to run food security programs. How can WTO rules accommodate this without being exploited for pure protectionism?
- The Doha Round's agricultural agenda remains incomplete. Should the WTO recommit to it, declare it closed, or launch a new framework?

Issue 7: Institutional Reform Governance & Effectiveness

- Should the WTO move from biennial to annual Ministerial Conferences?
- Should the consensus model be modified? Could qualified majority voting work for certain categories of decisions?
- How can the WTO's monitoring and notification function be strengthened to improve transparency?

Section 9: Guiding Questions for Delegates

These questions are designed to guide your research and sharpen your arguments. They do not have single correct answers; they are the live debates you will be navigating in committee.

On Institutional Reform

- What specific reforms to the Appellate Body or dispute settlement system would your country support? What would be your red lines?
- Does your country believe the consensus model is still fit for purpose, or should certain decisions be made by qualified majority? How might this affect your country's influence?
- How would your country balance the desire for WTO reform with the risk that a weakened or re-architected WTO could be captured by powerful states?

On Trade Wars & Unilateralism

- When, if ever, is it legitimate for a WTO member to impose unilateral tariffs outside the WTO framework? What criteria should determine legitimacy?
- How should the WTO respond to a member that consistently violates its commitments but blocks the enforcement mechanism? Are there tools short of suspension that could create accountability?
- Can a rules-based system function if its most powerful member chooses to act outside it? If not, what are the alternatives?

On Development & Equity

- How should the WTO balance the legitimate need for SDT provisions with concerns that they are being exploited by advanced emerging economies?
- Your country's capacity to participate in WTO dispute settlement: is it adequate? What reforms would make the DSM more accessible to smaller, developing members?
- Should trade liberalization be a prerequisite for WTO membership benefits, or should the WTO recognize that different countries are at different stages of development?

On New Frontiers

- How should the WTO address the intersection of trade and climate policy, particularly measures like CBAM that use trade as an environmental enforcement tool?

- Should e-commerce rules be multilateral (applying to all 164 members) or plurilateral (applying only to willing signatories)? What are the equity implications of each approach?
- How should the WTO handle industrial policy subsidies like the US IRA or EU Green Deal that are ostensibly for environmental purposes but have significant trade distortion effects?

Section 10: Further Research Resources

The following resources are carefully selected for credibility, accessibility, and relevance. They range from the WTO's own official materials to independent academic and policy analyses. Delegates of all experience levels are encouraged to start with the official WTO resources and then move to analytical pieces.

10.1 Official WTO Sources

1. WTO Official Website <https://www.wto.org>

The primary source for all WTO agreements, dispute cases, news, and official documents. Essential first stop for any WTO delegate.

2. WTO Understanding the WTO
https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/understanding_e.htm

WTO's own accessible primer on its history, principles, and structure. Ideal for beginner delegates.

3. WTO Dispute Settlement Cases https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_e.htm

Full database of all WTO dispute settlement cases, including live cases DS633 and DS638 (US-China 2025 tariff disputes).

4. WTO Reform MC13 Briefing Notes
https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc13_e/briefing_notes_e/reform_e.htm

Official WTO briefing on the scope and status of WTO reform discussions as of MC13 (2024).

5. WTO Trade Monitoring Report 2025
https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news25_e/trdev_02dec25_225_e.htm

Latest WTO monitoring report on global trade developments, tariff trends, and trade remedy statistics.

10.2 Think Tanks & Policy Research

6. CSIS WTO Panel Report on Chinese Tariffs

[https://www.csis.org/analysis/wto-panel-report-chinese-tariffs-consequences-broken-appellate-bod](https://www.csis.org/analysis/wto-panel-report-chinese-tariffs-consequences-broken-appellate-body)

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Excellent analytical piece from the Center for Strategic and International Studies on the Appellate Body crisis and its real-world consequences.

7. Brookings Institution WTO & Trade Policy

<https://www.brookings.edu/topic/world-trade-organization/>

Wide-ranging analysis of WTO-related trade policy issues from one of the world's leading think tanks.

8. Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) Trade Research

<https://www.piie.com/research/wto-and-trade-policy>

The PIIE is one of the leading academic institutions on international trade. Highly recommended for delegates wanting deeper economic analysis.

9. Global Policy Institute (GPPI) WTO Reform Report

https://gppi.net/assets/ENSURED_Report_D3.1_Public_Final.pdf

Detailed academic report on the state of WTO reform as of early 2025, including perspectives from member-state interviews.

10. Atlas Institute Trade Wars and the WTO (2025)

<https://atlasinstitute.org/trade-wars-and-the-wto-navigating-trumps-2025-tariffs/>

Accessible and timely analysis of the 2025 tariff wave and its implications for WTO legitimacy.

10.3 Academic Journals & Articles

11. Oxford International Affairs: Unravelling of the Trade Legal Order (2025)

<https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/101/3/1103/8100243>

Peer-reviewed academic article (May 2025) on enforcement, defection, and the crisis of the WTO dispute settlement system. Highly analytical.

12. Oxford Journal How Rising Protectionism Has Tested the WTO

<https://www.oxjournal.org/how-has-rising-protectionism-tested-the-wtos-ability-to-resolve-tariff-disputes/>

Scholarly analysis of how the US-China dispute has exposed structural weaknesses in the WTO dispute settlement framework.

10.4 European Parliament & EU Resources

13. European Parliament WTO Reform Legislative Train

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/carriage/wto-reform/report>

The EU's detailed legislative position on WTO reform useful for understanding the positions of one of the WTO's most active reform advocates.

14. European Parliament MC14 Resolution (2026)

<https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/document-summary?id=1892160>

The European Parliament's 2026 resolution on multilateral negotiations ahead of MC14 in Yaoundé the most current EU policy statement on WTO reform.

10.5 News & Ongoing Coverage

15. Financial Times Trade Coverage <https://www.ft.com/trade>

Premium financial journalism on global trade developments. Among the best for breaking developments in trade policy.

16. Reuters Trade Wars <https://www.reuters.com/business/trade-war/>

Real-time news coverage of trade war developments, tariff announcements, and WTO disputes.

17. Britannica Money US-China Trade War

<https://www.britannica.com/money/US-China-trade-war>

Comprehensive, fact-checked overview of the US-China trade conflict excellent for background reading.

A Final Note to Delegates

The issues before this committee are not abstract. Real workers, farmers, exporters, and consumers around the world are affected by the decisions and the indecisions made in multilateral trade negotiations. The WTO, for all its imperfections, remains the only institution with the mandate and the architecture to provide a rules-based alternative to a world governed purely by the power of the largest economies.

Your task as delegates is not to solve decades-old problems in a single session. It is to think seriously, argue rigorously, and negotiate in good faith modeling the kind of cooperative, principled diplomacy that the world's trading system desperately needs more of right now.

Good luck, and good debating.