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Americans Think Trump's Trade Policies Cost Too Much

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“We don’t win anymore!” Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump tells us. One of the main reasons, according to Trump, is due to free trade agreements.

At a rally in North Carolina he declared: “All this free trade, you know what, it is free trade for them, not for us. We’re losing our shirts.”

Trump has proposed imposing various taxes on foreign imports to the U.S. because he believes this will help facilitate bringing back jobs to the U.S.

Trump’s talk of unfair trade and his proposals to punish importers has resonated with many Americans. In fact, a recent CBS/New York Times survey finds 61 percent of Americans agree that “trade restrictions are necessary to protect domestic industries” whereas 29 percent say free trade should be allowed even if domestic industries are hurt by competition abroad.

Yet Americans may not be willing to foot the bill of goods’ higher prices that will result from Trump’s proposed trade restrictions. A recent AP/GfK poll finds that 67 percent of Americans would rather buy cheaper products made in another country rather than pay more for the same product made in the United States.

Thirty percent say they’d rather pay more to buy American-made products. That being said, 71 percent report that they’d like to buy American-made items, but that they are often too costly or difficult to find. Furthermore, only 9 percent say they hold firm to only buying American-made goods even if they cost more.

These poll results give some insight into Americans’ revealed preferences, or their actual consumer behavior. While Americans in theory like the idea of buying items made closer to home by their fellow citizens, their pocketbooks ultimately may prove more relevant to their behavior.

When it comes to free-trade agreements' impact on American jobs and wages, Americans are divided but tend not to be concerned. Fifty-four percent do *not* believe that free-trade agreements decrease wages for American workers, while 43 percent think these agreements do harm wages.

Similarly, 51 percent do *not* think that free-trade agreements cost American jobs, while 46 percent think they do.

Overall, Americans are quite divided over the general benefits of free trade, with a third who believe that free-trade agreements are good for the economy, 37 percent who say they don't make a difference and about a quarter who think these agreements harm the economy.

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