

# What's Next for the WTO?

The campaign to select the next head of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is officially underway. [Eight candidates](#) are vying to replace departing Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and lead the organization.

While reforms are needed in a number of areas, the U.S. [business community relies daily](#) on the WTO and its rulebook. After World War II, multilateral negotiations under the WTO and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, slashed trade barriers, unleashing economic growth and poverty reduction worldwide.

A few members of Congress [introduced resolutions](#) this year calling for the U.S. to withdraw from the WTO, but congressional leaders in both parties squashed the moves – with good reason. Exiting the WTO would liberate foreign governments to raise tariffs on U.S. exports and discriminate against U.S. firms. It would also, as Senate Finance Chairman Chuck Grassley put it, “leave a vacuum for China to fill and diminish America’s position of strength.”

Still, pressure for reform is mounting. As the now 164-member WTO has grown, reaching new agreements within the consensus-based body has grown increasingly difficult. Businesses today are pushing for “plurilateral” agreements in which a coalition of the ambitious can press ahead without being held back by others.

Perhaps the [biggest challenge](#) for the WTO comes from China’s model of state capitalism and its dependence on industrial subsidies and measures that violate the spirit if not the letter of WTO rules. The Trump administration has already begun to forge agreements with the EU and Japan that would establish new rules on subsidies. Unfortunately, U.S. tariffs imposed on steel and threatened on cars have chilled trade ties. It’s hard to forge a new consensus with allies while simultaneously labeling their exports a national security threat.

—Myron Brilliant, Executive Vice President and Head of International Affairs, U.S. Chamber of Commerce