# Businesses face uncertain future amid rising global populism and shifting trade landscapes



The dynamics of globalisation are at a critical juncture, influenced significantly by the populist tides sweeping across the globe, particularly embodied by former President Donald Trump. In an era once heralded by JM Keynes, who vividly described a world of seamless trade and development from his Bloomsbury haven, the current landscape reflects a stark divergence from that optimistic vision. The nostalgia for global interconnectedness contrasts sharply with the realities of rising nationalism and economic self-interest, raising profound questions about the future of commerce and international relations.

Keynes, in his time, observed the ease with which a Londoner could access products from around the globe. Today, the ability to simply order goods has become complicated by geopolitical strife and economic isolationism. Recent events, notably Brexit and the pandemic's repercussions, have further complicated this landscape, highlighting the fragility of global supply chains. As the article notes, the unintended consequences of populist policies have yielded a return to protectionism, evidenced by Trump's trade tariffs and barriers aimed at isolating economies.

More than just a policy shift, these changes represent a fundamental challenge to the principles of globalisation that have driven economic growth and reduced poverty in many developing nations. For instance, countries like China have benefitted enormously from the open trade norms established over previous decades, while the disillusionment felt by certain working-class populations in advanced economies has led to a response characterised by a retreat into insular policies. Such dynamics suggest that while global poverty may be alleviated, the same cannot be said for segments of the workforce in wealthier nations, as they grapple with stagnating wages and job losses attributed to foreign competition.

Critically, as Trump and his administration sought to dismantle the frameworks that support international trade, business sectors are left in a maze of uncertainty. Those in the UK, for instance, are navigating the consequences of trade agreements that offer limited advantages while bolstering US influence at the expense of established global trade norms. Recent analyses indicate that the latest UK-US trade agreement, while touted as a victory, merely highlights the concessions made and the geopolitical recalibrations necessitated by the UK's exit from the EU.

This evolving scenario calls for a reckoning within corporate spaces. Businesses must confront the ideological divides exacerbating the current environment while striving to maintain their commitments to social responsibility. With escalating tensions and polarisation influencing public sentiment, many firms ponder whether the time for silence in the face of populist narratives has passed. The dismissed notions of 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' now present real dilemmas for organisational culture; losing the confidence of staff threatens both morale and brand integrity.

As discussions become ever more urgent, industry leaders are exploring pathways that resist the polarisation of extreme political ideologies while seeking a grounded approach that balances commercial goals with social accountability. This sentiment resonates across various sectors affected by Trump's policies, from pharmaceuticals grappling with price reductions to automobile manufacturers under the weight of shifting tariffs. The fallout from these initiatives may ripple through sectors already strained by decreased consumer confidence and market volatility.

Surprisingly, as the clamour against Trump's populism grows, business acquiescence remains a poignant reality. Uneasy partnerships between corporations and government may appear advantageous in the short term, yet such alliances could risk long-term viability as the population increasingly sceptical of systemic corruption demands accountability. The landscape demands a new approach—one characterised by transparency and engagement with contemporary global issues without becoming enmeshed in the extremes of the political spectrum.

In the wake of populism's rise and the substantial restructuring of international relations, the future of globalisation hangs in the balance. Businesses must now navigate this territory with care, weighing both their social responsibilities and the unpredictable nature of today's political climate. Without thoughtful reflection and strategic action, they risk being swept away in the tide of anti-global sentiment, much like the era defined by the disintegration of ancient democracies that echoed with uncertainty and conflict.

The path forward for business is not merely to survive but to engage authentically with the complexities of modern governance and societal needs. In doing so, they can reclaim a vital role in shaping the dialogue around globalisation—one that acknowledges its flaws while reaffirming its enduring potential to connect societies and economies across borders.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
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## Bibliography

1. <https://bylinetimes.com/2025/05/12/as-trump-wrecks-the-global-order-big-business-must-decide-which-side-its-on/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/26e457b3-d749-4d6a-8097-b06bbed29d88> - This article discusses the recent US-UK trade agreement, highlighting its limited substantive gains and symbolic nature. It details the reduction of UK car tariffs and increased access for US agricultural exports, while noting the deal's non-binding provisions. Critics argue that the UK has conceded to heightened US tariffs, potentially undermining global trade norms. The piece also explores concerns about the UK's weakened global standing post-Brexit and the geopolitical implications of the agreement, particularly in relation to Europe and China.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/past-peak-uncertainty-or-eye-of-storm-mike-dolan-2025-05-12/> - This article examines the ongoing uncertainty in financial markets regarding the long-term impact of recent trade disruptions. It highlights statements from Federal Reserve officials emphasizing deep uncertainty in the economic outlook. The piece notes that while markets initially feared severe consequences following the U.S. imposing tariffs, recent developments suggest a possible retreat from the most severe measures due to market and business pressure. It also discusses the inconsistencies between soft sentiment data and hard economic indicators, contributing to the prevailing uncertainty.
4. <https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-am-f9210690-2e83-11f0-9bc4-db9f798ab73f> - This newsletter covers President Trump's Middle East trip aimed at securing up to $1 trillion in deals and investments from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE. It details the pledges from these countries, including significant investments and collaborations in AI and tech. The piece also mentions Trump's plan to announce an executive order to lower U.S. drug prices by implementing a 'Most Favored Nation' pricing policy, targeting savings up to 80% by aligning Medicare prices with the lowest globally.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/european-pharma-stocks-follow-asia-peers-down-trump-moves-cut-prices-2025-05-12/> - This article reports on the sharp decline in global pharmaceutical stocks following President Trump's announcement to reduce prescription drug prices by 30%-80%, aligning them with costs in other developed nations. It details the impact on major American and European drugmakers, as well as companies in India, Japan, and Australia. Analysts suggest that the move could affect EU-U.S. trade discussions, as the U.S. may favor foreign price caps over tariffs to reduce patient costs.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/f489a247-b17a-489f-9432-3138c15113be> - This article reports on two Bank of England policymakers, Clare Lombardelli and Megan Greene, cautioning against hastily implementing further interest rate cuts following a recent quarter-point reduction to 4.25%. Despite pressures from U.S. President Donald Trump's trade policies, they emphasized the need to see stronger, sustained declines in inflationary indicators before taking additional action. The piece also discusses the divisions within the Monetary Policy Committee and the complex trade environment influenced by global economic uncertainties.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/eu-analysing-us-uk-trade-deal-impact-eu-global-trade-2025-05-12/> - This article details the European Commission's evaluation of the recently established trade agreement between the United States and the United Kingdom. It discusses the reduced tariffs on automobiles and steel, as well as increased mutual access to agricultural markets. European Economic Commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis emphasized that the EU is assessing the agreement for any possible repercussions on its interests. The piece also covers the EU's ongoing trade negotiations with the U.S. and potential retaliatory measures in response to the deal.