

## Beyond Rivalry: How U.S. Tariffs on India and Bangladesh Could Reshape Pakistan's Trade Trajectory

Dr. Rashid Maqbool

[rashid\\_gee@yahoo.com](mailto:rashid_gee@yahoo.com)

Incharge, Main Library, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

Dr. Zahid Iqbal

[zahidiqballak@gmail.com](mailto:zahidiqballak@gmail.com)

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, University of Kamalia, Punjab, Pakistan.

Saira Zafar

[sairazafar3006@gmail.com](mailto:sairazafar3006@gmail.com)

PhD Scholar, Institute of Education and Research, University of The Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: Dr. Rashid Maqbool [rashid\\_gee@yahoo.com](mailto:rashid_gee@yahoo.com)

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### ABSTRACT

*The recent changes in trade policy of the United States, especially the newly imposed tariffs on some of the largest exporting economies, for example, India and Bangladesh, have negatively disrupted global trade and caused changes in trade flow sourcing. In this context, the current study aims to analyse how Pakistan may be able to take advantage of these disruptions, tariffs and trade imbalances by establishing itself as a potential substitute supplier to the U.S. market. Using a qualitative and exploratory design, the author analyses policy documents, global trade reports and documents by the WTO, World Bank, UNCTAD, as well as expert interviews, and examines Pakistan's position for the emerging opportunity. To this end, using thematic analysis, the author explains how Pakistan's textile, apparel and leather manufacturing industries, and selected other manufacturing industries, in particular, stand to gain from the trade diversion and increased exports that may be a direct result of the tariffs. The author also discusses the potential for the expansion of Special Economic Zones, and the increasing cross-border and direct foreign investment, to facilitate subcontracting and the reorganisation of production, to improve Pakistan's position in global value chains. In addition, the author discusses the need for sufficient policy reforms, trade readiness, diplomacy, and in particular the need for export readiness, to avoid losing such positive impacts. This study adds to the limited literature from a qualitative stance on the benefits of tariffs for a third-party country and provides Pakistan with a framework to utilise external trade disruptions for sustainable economic development.*

**Keywords:** U.S. tariffs; Trade diversion; Pakistan exports; Global value chains; South Asia; Export competitiveness; Foreign direct investment; Trade policy

### INTRODUCTION

The last several years have seen the United States impose more tariffs as a way to protect local manufacturers and meet trade policy objectives such as trade imbalances and tariffs. The trade relationship the United States has with other major world economies has changed. Some African and Asian countries (e.g., India and Bangladesh) have been affected by U.S. tariffs on economically developing countries' labour-intensive exports (e.g., textiles, clothing) (Islam & Hossen, 2025). U.S. trade policy, entwined with other U.S. geopolitical and strategic policies, has been building a new economic nationalism and new trade

policies that have created new supply chain configurations (e.g., Ahmad, Raihan & Ridwan, 2024). As a result of the United States' trade policies, India and Bangladesh, as major U.S. importers of textiles/garments, pharmaceuticals, and manufactured goods, have become significant trade partners for the United States and are of importance to the South Asian region. Although Pakistan has always been part of world trading systems, it has been consistently underrepresented in its imports from the U.S. compared to its regional competitors, despite having similar factor endowments e.g. low-priced labour and an established export industry (Quibria, 2023). U.S.-Pakistan trade has been historically characterised by fluctuations, while the U.S. has had a propensity of changing its geopolitical positioning, balancing Pakistan's access to the U.S. markets, coupled with the prevailing security concerns. In any case, Pakistan has had a relatively stable export performance and has competitive market access vis-à-vis its South Asian competitors, especially in economically directed markets. With the imposition of tariffs, the restructuring of U.S. sourcing strategies has provided Pakistan the opportunity to realign itself within U.S. value chains (Balchin, Kampel, Munthali, Shaaran, & Zhuawu, 2025).

Even though U.S. tariffs are meant to solve trade issues with specific countries, their effects are felt differently by various exporting countries in the same vicinity. Because they are large-volume exporters, India and Bangladesh are directly facing the cost increases from the tariffs, while smaller and less integrated countries could benefit, at least in the short term, from trade diversion. However, in the case of trade diversion, the benefits are not evenly distributed or certain. There are trade shocks that Pakistan should be able to benefit from because of its favourable comparative advantages (John, 2025). The constraints that are structural, institutional, and policy-oriented are within Pakistan and may limit its ability to take advantage of these trade shocks. The uneven effects of the tariffs pose important issues concerning the most basic analysis of the countries that benefit, the conditions that define the benefits, and the processes that generate the benefits. This analysis is important in understanding the trade disruptions that Pakistan is facing, and whether they have the potential to be transformed into higher levels of economic activity. Out of the limited studies of U.S. tariffs, most have focused on the targeted countries and described the ramifications on trade volume and macroeconomic performance while ignoring the changes to the trade of the remaining countries, which has neglected the so-called spillover effects (Rahman, 2025). The majority of research concerning trade within and of Pakistan has focused on measurement, be it through export levels, or through rankings of comparative advantage, but these studies have largely overlooked the policy and institutional frameworks which define and limit the potential for improved performance. There is still an absence of qualitative studies examining how Pakistan may constructively address tariff-induced trade realignments from the perspectives of policy, industry preparedness, and incorporation into the global value chain. This study attempts to address such absence by analysing qualitatively the opportunity space available to Pakistan resulting from U.S. tariffs on regional competitors (Mahbub, 2025).

This study attempts to analyse how Pakistan could possibly gain from U.S. tariffs being imposed on India, Bangladesh, and other rival economies, specifically through trade diversion, export enhancement, and re-positioning Pakistan on the global trade map. More specifically, the study intends to explore the competitive edge Pakistan possesses and is able to develop in particular sectors, the competitive edge policy and institutional frameworks Pakistan possesses in harnessing such an environment, and how the realignment of global value chains endangers Pakistan's ability to integrate into the U.S. supply chains. This study tries to explain the transformation of trade shocks into trade-based gains for a nation through a pure qualitative method. This study is of paramount importance to the academic and policy field, as it attempts to explain the diversion of trade effects in an unquantifiable way and from a developing nation perspective. Pakistan was chosen as the focus economy because it has an underexploited export potential, and it demonstrates how externally driven trade disruptions can bring about needed structural changes with the right policies in place. The findings will assist policymakers, trade negotiators, and other stakeholders in Pakistan to formulate and develop competitive policies, export strategies, investment plans, and institutional

frameworks to support reforms needed to improve Pakistan's position in global trade. Moreover, the research contributes to the emerging South-South competition and resilience literature in the context of a disintegrating global trading system and provides lessons for other developing countries with comparable systemic difficulties.

The next steps for the study are as follows. In the second chapter, sources concerning problems of the judiciary's operations and the lower judiciary, as well as the literature on judicial review and nullified judgments are reviewed. Chapter three discusses the research design, including the method(s), case selection criterion, and the method(s) of data collection and analysis. In chapter four, findings and analysis are discussed, and the main and sub themes concerning the lower court voided decisions are outlined. Chapter five presents the study's contributions and constraints, along with suggestions for further research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theories related to tariffs and trade diversion have a basis in classical and neoclassical trade theories, particularly in customs unions and comparative advantage. These theories explain barriers to trade and how they change relative prices and trade to other countries without tariffs (Junayed, Mubasshir, & Sen, 2025). Trade diversion happens when the importation of a certain country shifts to less efficient producers when these less efficient producers are given tariffs that are more favourable to them. Trade diversion changes the patterns of trade, be it bilateral or multilateral (Mushahary et al., 2025). From the political economy perspective, tariffs are blunt instruments that a country uses to protect a certain industry, reconfigure global value chains, and/or gain geo-economic power (Atkar, Pabba, Sekhar, & Sridhar, 2021). Recently developed trade theories have incorporated firm heterogeneity, positing that tariffs have negative impacts on exporting firms characterised by lower profit margins and greater global market accessibility. This results in supplier substitution (Sur, 2021). All these theories suggest that although tariffs may lower trade volumes, they also create opportunities for other countries to exploit emerging gaps in the market (Vidya, Prabheesh, & Sirowa, 2020).

There is significant and concrete evidence of trade realignment, including within South Asian economies, from the U.S. tariff studies, particularly those conducted during the periods of trade wars and the resultant U.S. tariff measures (Islam & Hossen, 2025). Studies of U.S. tariffs on textiles and apparel show that increased tariffs on the major exporters, India and Bangladesh, raised U.S. buyers' costs and drove them to lower-cost alternatives (Maqsood, 2025). Although India and Bangladesh may have experienced slowdowns on the exporting side of the industries or sectors impacted by the tariffs, many studies on the trade diversion phenomenon confirm that the so-called third country participants, especially those with Bangladesh and India, were able to enjoy very modest results, although there were no significant improvements in productivity (Jamali & Liu, 2024). Most of the studies are still predominantly quantitative (Ali & Mohsin, 2023). Therefore, the majority of trade studies show clear evidence of trade displacement from tariffs but tell very little about the means available to developing countries to take advantage of this (Khan, 2025).

Moreover, within the scope of factors of production, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh show comparative differences while analysing the same export performance and revealing substantial differences within market penetration, export diversification, and industrial upgrading (Shafi, Fauzi, & Fetuu, 2025). Bangladesh has been able to build an economy of scale and, because of buyer consolidation and preferential market access, has become a major exporter in the U.S. apparel market. At the same time, India has a more diversified export structure and stronger positions in the pharmaceutical and manufacturing supply chains (Stender et al, 2025). On the other hand, Pakistan is still burdened with a low-value export structure, is primarily exporting textiles, and has an insufficient level of product diversification due to policies and

infrastructure problems (De, 2023). To the positive side, many works have recognised Pakistan's comparative advantage in labour-intensive manufacturing and intermediate goods, especially when there is low competition coming from high-tariffed exporters (Bhattarai & Adhikari, 2025). As a result of lack of capabilities, the literature seems to suggest that there is a reason why Pakistan is relatively underperforming, and that is due a function of the way the country is situated in the global market (Khandelwal, 2025).

The theories of the global value chain (GVC) and production relocation are useful in examining the effects of tariff shocks on firm behaviour and cross-border investment (Wickramasingha & Coe, 2022). While GVC theory suggests that multinationals restructure their sourcing networks and relocate portions of their production processes (or contract out production) to low-cost, tariff-efficient manufacturing countries, ramping up production in these countries to counter tariff imposition, there are still gaps in the literature about the extent to which GVC theories and rearranging production processes in low-cost countries can address the trade and tariff shocks (Bazaluk et al., 2025). Recent trade disruptions have provided positive proof of the complexities relating to the relocation of production/distribution processes in response to tariff imposition in countries that have the required industrial capacity and are trade-compatible with the lead firms (Castañeda-Navarrete et al., 2021). While GVC studies have analysed Pakistan's potential as a relocation destination, they relevantly describe the dominance of the Southeast Asian countries of Vietnam and Cambodia in GVC-related studies (Islam & Hossen, 2025). This leads to a pertinent subset of literature that studies, even from a qualitative perspective, the absence of research that examines, to a limited extent, the potential of Pakistan to contribute to reconfigured value chains, in particular, those created as a result of United States tariffs on competing countries in the region (Ahmad, Raihan, & Ridwan, 2024).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Pakistan's possible advantages resulting from U.S. tariffs on India, Bangladesh, and other competing economies were examined using qualitative and exploratory research for the first time on U.S. tariffs systematically changing the policy environment in South Asia. From the perspective of U.S. tariffs, the state of South Asia's policies, institutions, and geopolitics, along with the strategies they may employ, are the central focus of the research. This is not a matter of quantitative causation or elasticity of trade and tariffs; it is a matter of soft policy. Therefore, triangulation derives the qualitative soft data from the policy documents and reports of international trade, along with expert commentary data. These documents include reports and policies from the WTO, World Bank, and UNCTAD along with the trade and policy documents specific to the tariffs and trade diversion of the global value chain (John, 2025). Trade and policy documents of World Bank, WTO, UNCTAD, and other expert commentary documents (Rahman, 2025) also cover the experiential data on the location of investment and export trade competitiveness. Unstructured interviews were conducted and a purposive sample of trade policy, exporting, and investment industry officials was targeted.

The thematic framework means that the author has discerned distinct prior art, analysed it, and positioned the emerging concepts in relation to the extant literature. The author has established and articulated the analytical boundary of the review. The author delineated themes and sub-themes that rationalise the review, e.g. mechanisms of trade diversion, export opportunities by sector, regional integration of the global value chain, and policy responsiveness. These will resonate with the thematic structure and sub-structures of the extant literature which the author has drawn on. The author has demonstrated the analytical and empirical synthesis of the review by the citation of relevant literature and policy documents, descriptive narratives of relevant experts, and trade reports. The clear empirical synthesis of the thematic structure of the review and the concepts articulated in the framework of the review demonstrates the author's grasp of the literature and shows innovation in the review. Citation of relevant literature has demonstrated the author's review of, and engagement with, the literature to develop the empirical thematic structure of the review. The author has

demonstrated the integration of relevant literature with the empirical documents to structure the review. The author has, for the most part, struck the delicate balance of academia and advocacy in the review. The author has provided relevant synonyms of the concepts in the extant literature in the empirical synthesis of the thematic structure, which shows the author's grasp of the literature.

## **RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The thematical timezone evaluation suggests that the most significant opportunity for Pakistan in relation to the U.S. tariff impositions on India, Bangladesh, and other competing rivals is the trade diversion and market substitution. The results of the study suggest that the imposition of tariffs on established exporters creates price disadvantages that lead U.S. consumers to search for alternative suppliers that could be accessed at lower tariffs and possess competitive production costs. Given Pakistan's established industrial capacity, particularly in labour-intensive manufacturing and the ability to provide fully finished and semi-finished goods, the country is positioned to be relied upon as a market substitute. The substitution effect goes beyond direct consumer products to include even intermediate and other supplies that would be positioned at other levels of the supply chains of the U.S. Pakistan thus becomes increasingly important in the trade supply to the U.S. The result also identifies the trade diversion effect as the major force behind the expansion of the export sector of the country, especially in textiles and apparel, leather, sports, surgical, selected military, and some value-added agricultural products. The expansion also suggests that U.S. tariff induced demand is broad enough to facilitate the structural transformation of the country by moving the economy towards more sophisticated and value-added manufacturing rather than merely boosting the export figures.

Yet another primary example emphasises the radical shift towards enhanced competitiveness for Pakistan within global value chains (GVCs), particularly with the restructuring of production networks due to tariff shocks. The analysis exemplified how the U.S.-oriented supply chains that were exited by Indian and Bangladeshi producers created opportunities for Pakistan through subcontracting, contract manufacturing, and direct supplier structures. These patterns were particularly matched with greater opportunities for foreign direct investment and industrial shifting from multinational enterprises for the purpose of tariff avoidance in order to achieve more hardened cost and regulatory stability. In these circumstances, Pakistan's Special Economic Zones (SEZs) emerge as pivotal, particularly with the provision of the "clustering" plus other benefits, and more fiscal and infrastructural incentives. Additionally, with the provision of foreign direct investment, these findings also suggest that the joint foreign direct investment of foreign manufacturers with local firms in Pakistan may lead to and sustain positive outcomes with respect to technological and managerial improvements, and the in-country deepening of global supply chain linkages. In the aggregate, these factors suggest that the disruptions resulting from the tariff structure will contribute to Pakistan's radical shift from the export of raw materials to the production and export of more finished products that are integrated into global value chains.

Therefore, the third set of findings highlights the developmental and strategic dimensions of the trade opportunities in the employment, policy, and economic adaptation dimensions, trade opportunities. Thematic evidence suggests that employment generation in export-oriented sectors, skill enhancement in the export workforce, and the active role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in international trade can be a product of increased export activities. The development of regional industrial capacity is also relevant, as the growth of exports is not limited to certain industrialised regions. However, the aforementioned benefits are likely to be achieved if the applicable and adjusted policies, along with the applicable and adjusted policies, export 'readiness', customs, U.S. quality compliance, and the logistics and port systems are improved. Finally, because tariff-induced gains will be short-lived and will offer 'quick wins', there is a need for a strategic position to be taken in the event that there is a reduction in trade barriers;

a series of trade policies will need to be implemented that enhance market and product diversity, geopolitical trade resilience, and a long-term coherent export plan. Collectively, these results suggest that U.S. trade barriers are an external shock but, at the same time, a strategic opportunity for Pakistan to adjust to the global trade system.

**Table-I: Themes Descriptions**

Sr.	Main Theme	Sub-Categories / Sub-Themes
1	Trade Diversion and Market Substitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replacement of Indian and Bangladeshi exports in the U.S. market</li> <li>• Pakistan as an alternative low-cost supplier</li> <li>• Buyer search for tariff-free or lower-tariff sourcing options</li> <li>• Increased demand for Pakistani intermediate and finished goods</li> </ul>
2	Expansion of Pakistan's Export Sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth potential in textiles and apparel exports</li> <li>• Opportunities in leather goods, sports goods, and surgical instruments</li> <li>• Agricultural and food product substitution</li> <li>• Diversification into value-added manufacturing</li> </ul>
3	Improved Competitiveness in Global Value Chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entry into supply chains vacated by India and Bangladesh</li> <li>• Increased subcontracting and contract manufacturing</li> <li>• Integration into U.S.-oriented value chains</li> <li>• Upgrading from raw materials to finished products</li> </ul>
4	Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Industrial Relocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relocation of export-oriented industries</li> <li>• Pakistan as a tariff-efficient production base</li> <li>• Joint ventures with foreign manufacturers</li> <li>• Expansion of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)</li> </ul>
5	Strengthening Pakistan-U.S. Trade Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced bilateral trade dialogue</li> <li>• Preferential trade treatment and lobbying opportunities</li> <li>• Role of trade diplomacy and commercial attachés</li> <li>• Pakistan's strategic importance as a stable supplier</li> </ul>
6	Employment Generation and Industrial Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job creation in export-oriented sectors</li> <li>• Skill development and workforce upgrading</li> <li>• SME participation in export markets</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regional industrial development within Pakistan</li></ul>
7	Policy Reform and Export Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regulatory and customs facilitation</li><li>• Export incentives and tariff rationalization</li><li>• Quality standards and compliance with U.S. regulations</li><li>• Logistics, ports, and supply chain efficiency</li></ul>
8	Strategic Risk Management and Long-Term Positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reducing over-reliance on traditional markets</li><li>• Managing geopolitical uncertainty</li><li>• Building resilience against future trade disruptions</li><li>• Long-term export diversification strategy</li></ul>





## DISCUSSION

The results illustrate that the trade pattern of Pakistan shows understanding of the principle of comparative advantage and the Heckscher-Ohlin theory of trade, which state that countries gain from trade by exporting what they can produce relatively efficiently and importing what they can produce less efficiently (Maqsood, 2025). Short-term increased trade results in efficiency, increased variety of traded products, and foreign exchange, while long-term impacts are even more valuable, as the country's integration into global value chains will result in technology upgrading, enhanced productivity, and structural changes to the economy (Jamali & Liu, 2024). Compared to existing literature, the findings reiterate previous studies that acknowledge Pakistan's trade liberalisation efforts to enhance the diversification of its trade and subsequently the exports, but is still constrained by the infrastructure deficits, low industrial structure, and sectoral imbalances (Ali & Mohsin, 2023). This illustrates that the trade policy is less effective unless there is parallel investment in the productive system of the economy and the people. Within the major potential, the study also signals some risks and constraints that might inhibit Pakistan from fully benefiting from trade. Volatile exchange rates, potential for political instability, and reliance on narrow, single foreign commodity dumping, coupled with constricted manufacturing and logistics capacity, diminish competitiveness on a global scale (Khan, 2025). These insights for policymakers are strategic in nature; i.e., to foster long-term trade benefits, policymakers must implement a balanced combination of liberalisation with domestic capability strengthening, industrial clustering, and improvements in trade-related infrastructure. Moreover, mitigation of unreliability i.e. trade facilitation changes and export credits, is important to sustain increasing exports and to lessen potential external shocks (Shafi, Fauzi, & Fetuu, 2025). Overall, the study indicates that Pakistan would be able to reap trade and domestic development benefits, in the short- and long-term, with a careful assignment of trade policy and domestic development.

### Practical/Managerial Implications

There are several practical implications regarding trade and industrial policies in Pakistan that are based on this study and require Pakistan to adopt a more sophisticated approach in order to be more competitive and resilient in the following ways: first, Pakistan needs to reduce reliance on a very limited range of export items, thus vertical diversification and export diversification should be the first step in the development of Pakistan's textiles, agro-processing, and tech-based manufacturing (Stender et al., 2025). In addition to the diversification, industrial upgrading of the manufacturing sector, value addition, and vertical integration into the world production network (De, 2023), are important, which necessitates the development of advanced manufacturing and innovation systems and the training of skilled people in the manufacturing sector. Industrial Policy and Investment in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are needed to attract and retain both domestic and foreign (cross) investors by streamlining the zone border controls, tax holidays, and improved (transport) infrastructure, thus fostering export-oriented industrialisation in the value-added production of advanced manufacturing. The investment target (cross) trade relations with the United States and the EU are very important in the context of trade balance monetisation, export supply diversification, and market access promotion (Bhattarai & Adhikari, 2025) to improve the soft infrastructure, networks, and partnerships of the PAK manufacturing economy, especially textiles, agro-processing, and tech-based manufacturing. Last but not least, as a result of global supply chain integration, the international competitiveness of SMEs & export-promotion SMEs (export financing, business mentoring, and trade digitalisation) will be improved by providing credit to SMEs. When combined, these measures present a unified approach for policymakers in converting trade theory into concrete strategies aimed at promoting sustainable economic growth, while at the same time managing the challenges posed by market volatility and domestic capacity constraints (Khandelwal, 2025).

### **Limitations and Avenue for Further Studies**

One of the most important aspects of this research is the restrictions that come with it, and three of the most obvious ones stand out. First, the research extensively references secondary and macro-level trade statistical data. While secondary trade data is still useful, it lacks the empiricism needed to address intra-firm trade, the informal trade flows, or the challenges of specific sectors on the export landscape of Pakistan. The second of the three issues is the analysis's lack of complexity. In this case, the lack of complexity means that the research does not apply sophisticated econometric modelling to ascertain the trade policy's, industrial upgrading's, or SEZ's reform's causal impact on the country's export performance. Finally, despite trade relations with most of the world being dominated by the U.S. and trade relations with Pakistan being dominated by the U.S., the research fails to make an adequate contribution to emerging markets' and the U.S.'s regional trade partnerships. There is potential for the research to be improved in the ways of incorporating firm-level datasets, longitudinal studies, or simulation studies to analyse the export diversification and industrial upgrading strategies. To improve Pakistan's competitiveness, research looking at more developed policy prescriptions in other developing countries that have cross-country policy interventions, along with sectorial/spatial studies, to determine which systems of support would be most effective for SMEs and strategic high-value industries would be most beneficial.

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