How did the Republican and Democratic parties frame Trump-era tariffs, and to what extent did these narratives align with the economic concerns of agricultural stakeholders in California?

Ella Beard

Washington Intern, 2026



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About Ella

Ella Beard completed the Washington Internship in 2026 in the office of Jim Costa. Ella is now completing her double degree in Law and Political Science/International Relations. Connect with her on LinkedIn or via email at ellagbeard@outlook.com

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GOVT3002 Research Essay

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Word Count: 6,184

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Introduction

Tariffs are a tax on goods and services imported from other countries, by the federal government. This means that the price is often increased on a foreign product by the time it enters the country who has imposed a tariff[1]. They can be a very effective way of protecting a country's domestic product and encouraging people to buy local products before overseas ones by increasing the price tag on the latter. They are also frequently used as a tool for political and trade negotiations on an international stage and to raise government revenue, one of the biggest reasonings provided by President Trump when explaining why he has implemented such large tariffs on some of the United States' largest trading partners, and largest allies alike.

After interning for the office of Congressman Jim Costa (D-CA-21) and learning about the unique challenges of the 21st District and its surrounds, agriculture stuck out as a major priority for the Congressman himself in his duties, and for the people he represents. California exports the largest number of agricultural resources in the country[2], and the Central Valley of which Costa partially represents, is one of California's biggest growers. It supplies approximately 25% of the country's fruits and nuts, but comprises only 1% of US farmland[3], an impressive output to land ratio. What became a point of fascination, was Costa's place as one of the few Democratic representatives in the area, with the growth of commodities largely affected by the implementation of tariffs – something that Costa and the Democrats alike have clearly opposed.

Current research has documented the economic burden that tariffs have placed on the agricultural industry, but there is comparatively little research conducted on how competing political actors in the Democratic and Republican parties have framed their impact, and whether it aligns with the narratives of American farming advocates. This paper seeks to address that gap.

Methodology

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[1] Hahn, C. (2025). *Tariffs 101: What are they and how do they work?* [Online] Oxford Economics. Available at: https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/tariffs-101-what-are-they-and-how-do-they-work/ [Accessed 10 June 2026].

[2] *From Fields to Overseas Markets: Mapping U.S. State Agricultural Exports*. (2024, April 2). USDA Foreign Agricultural Service. [Online]. https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/mapping-us-state-agricultural-exports [Accessed 10 June 2026].

[3] Fruit Growers Supply (2023). *How the Central Valley Feeds the Nation*. [Online]. Available at: https://fruitgrowers.com/how-the-central-valley-feeds-the-nation/ [Accessed 10 June 2026].

This paper is a qualitative study of political discourse around tariffs and how they have been marketed to American farmers. The research aims to examine both Republican and Democratic discourse in one data set and then discourse from farmers and agricultural lobbies in the second. Are they similar, or starkly different? How does this play into voting patterns around elections?

My research is reliant upon text collection and discourse analysis. This involves analysis of press releases specifically from Californian Congresspeople across both sides of the aisle, media reports from independent sources and party aligned ones alike for comparative purposes, and speeches from the President for direct administration discourse. Costa, Valadao, Jeffries, Bacon, Fong, Kiley, and Trump have specifically been selected because they are either representatives from the Californian Central Valley, or because they offer interesting insight into the divergence of partisan representation. The second data set will see interviews and press releases from farmers and farming lobbyists as primary sources of information on attitudes and discourse from those on the ground; and outside of Washington DC decision-makers.

It is also primarily centred around the focal point of California, and where possible, the 21st Congressional District itself. Defining geographical limitations on the research is vital for keeping its purpose narrowed and on course. For this reason, a case study is being utilised, however evidence and statements that are relevant to the broader discussion on political discourse have sometimes been utilised where relevant, due to a lack of state specific sources.

A time frame is also being utilised to keep the paper narrowed. This paper seeks to engage specifically with Trump implemented tariffs, between 2016-2026 as this has so far, been the peak of the ignited trade war.

Using a theoretical framework is also something I have deemed important for the construction of this research essay. Framing theory, created by Robert Entman, has been selected due to its close relationship with comparative methods around discourse analysis and will allow for a more nuanced discussion on political communication by Democrats and Republicans, in addition to farming lobbyists. Entman describes framing as an act of "selection and salience;" the idea that some aspects of a reality can be selected and be made more prominent than others, in order to promote a particular problem, moral evaluation, or recommendation[4]. When comparing political discourse around tariffs, framing theory can also be used for deeper analysis of how the actor has altered the issue, what aspects of it they have selected as priority, and how they made this element more salient than others. The use of this framework will also aid in keeping the research on task, to steer it in the analytical direction it should follow.

Literature Review

Economic consequences of tariffs

Tree nut commodities were among some of the most impacted across the country, particularly during Trump's first term when the trade war with China began in 2018-2019. That tariff war

[4] Entman, R.M. (1993). *Framing: Toward Clarification of A Fractured Paradigm*. [Online] ResearchGate. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/209409849_Framing_Toward_Clarification_of_A_Fractured_Paradigm [Accessed 10/06/2026].

alone saw a 64% decrease[5] in exports to China across all commodities, a dramatic decline in trade, and a dramatic decline in profit for Californian farmers. Pistachio shipments to China alone fell by 84%, resulting in a decline of approximately $478 million, whilst almond exports fell by 77%, leaving behind a $228 million decrease in profits[6]. Australia has been the country filling this gap – about 76% of the world's almonds eaten across the globe come from California, with Australia as the second largest producer in the world[7].

The research conducted in this contextual area of the problem is adequate – there is a lot of data available that highlights the severity of the problem for American farmers, and when a certain commodity like almonds and pistachios are hit harder due to large export rates and the Chinese government's willingness to retaliate with tariffs of their own, the link to California can become clearer. They are the country's biggest producers, and the District one of California's; resulting in this part of the world being heavily affected by reciprocal tariffs. The study conducted by the University of California, Davis (UC Davis), is a good example of the literature here being timely, relevant, and even connected to the District. It identifies Fresno County as experiencing some of the largest estimated annual losses across the state, at $246 million in 2025[8]. As one of California's heavyweights in the agricultural sector, it's net losses were going to be considerably large. Yet the acknowledgement of the problem and availability of cost estimates is an important part of increasing visibility to the region.

Substantial amounts of literature around tariffs and their impact on the US economy exist currently, and due to the Trump administration's focus on implementing and expanding them across both of his terms, this material only continues to grow. It is also an important aspect of my research, as it relies on depth of understanding around tariffs, and whether they have been an effective policy tool beyond the agricultural sector. Although the broader US economy and the Californian agricultural sector are intrinsically linked through the latter's importance export wise, establishing this link remains crucial.

Agriculture Political Behaviour

There is interesting research around the adaptability of famers in the US, and how political ideology can influence decision-making. A 2024 study published in Oxford Academic found that counties with high support for Trump in the 2016 election were less likely to stop planting crops that were already experiencing, or predicted to experience heavy losses due to Chinese reciprocal tariffs. They continued to plant the crops, with a seeming willingness to accept lower profits and higher production costs. Alternatively, counties with low Trump support from the

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[5] DeBaise, R. (2026). *US-China Trade Conflict Harms California Agriculture* [Online]. University of California, Davis. Available at: https://caes.ucdavis.edu/news/us-china-trade-conflict-harms-california-agriculture [Accessed 12 June 2026].

[6] DeBaise, R. (2026). *US-China Trade Conflict Harms California Agriculture* [Online]. University of California, Davis. Available at: https://caes.ucdavis.edu/news/us-china-trade-conflict-harms-california-agriculture [Accessed 12 June 2026].

[7] Canon, G. (2025). *California's $59bn agriculture industry reels under Trump's wavering tariffs*. [Online] The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/11/trump-china-tariffs-california-farms. [Accessed 13 June 2026].

[8] DeBaise, R. (2026). *US-China Trade Conflict Harms California Agriculture* [Online]. University of California, Davis. Available at: https://caes.ucdavis.edu/news/us-china-trade-conflict-harms-california-agriculture [Accessed 12 June 2026].

same election significantly reduced their plantings of these crops, or even changed commodities altogether; even if the change was temporary, they were willing to take measures to better shield themselves from the economic damage of the trade war. This demonstrated a bigger argument for the authors' research – that political preference also factored into farmers' decisions, not just economic wellbeing and stability, and that partisanship affects the economy more widespread than previously acknowledged[9]. Although this research does not make direct links to California specifically, the findings are nation-wide and not isolated outside of the scope of the assignment. It relied on satellite imagery from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for objective evidence, rather than reliance on self-reported preferences from willing farmers. This makes the research more reliable and useful in considering how gradual change is amongst farmers, where is changing, and who feels the economic burden the most. And despite not being California specific, it is relevant to the discussion around farming lobbyists and where farmers are landing amongst this policy dilemma. This study points to an argument that farmers are not necessarily united in their dislike for tariffs, and may be split partisanly despite ultimate financial impacts.

One potential limitation of this study, however, is whether consideration was given to the actual crop adaptability for farmers – crops with higher acreage adaptability like corn or beans can shift planting types a lot easier than a dairy farmer, who is ultimately vulnerable to market shifts due to the permanency of their product[10]. Similar can be said for almond and pistachio growers in California, who manage crops that take on average, at least five years to produce after planting[11]. This creates a risky, and oftentimes costly pathway to replacement, and one that could take years to overturn any form of profit. Although, the overall argument can still remain, in that many farmers with adaptable commodities chose to weather the storm instead of taking measures to protect themselves financially. Balancing these two points is important, studying both the pattern and remaining aware of its limitations when assessing how important political ideology is in economic decisions.

One recent study set to examine both the welfare and economic impacts of different tariff scenarios, including US issued tariffs and Chinese retaliatory ones. Results demonstrated initial boosts to domestic markets thanks to a decrease in costs for locally made products, the core goal and principle of using tariffs as a policy tool. However, increases in production costs and a reduced global income due to international hesitancy and a desire to fill market gaps elsewhere have resulted in an offset of output gains over a longer-term trajectory. Countries when targeted with tariffs have an incentive to retaliate like China displayed, and when they do, consumption

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[9] Carcelli, S. and Park, K.H. (2024). Partisanship in the Trade War: Evidence from County-Level Crop Planting Data [Online]. Oxford Academic. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/isq/article/68/4/sqae141/7888757?login=false [Accessed 14 June 2026].

[10] Bass, S. (2025). *How Farm Tariffs are Impacting U.S. Ag Trade* [Online] AgAmerica. Available at: https://agamerica.com/blog/farm-tariffs/ [Accessed 4 July 2026].

[11] Ferguson, L., Polito, V. & Kallsen, C. (2005) *The pistachio tree: botany and physiology and factors that affect yield*. [Online]. Available at: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ucanr.edu/sites/default/files/2011-02/73683.pdf [Accessed 4 July 2026].

and output gains are offset, making welfare effects largely negative[12]. The study found success in a scenario where the US implemented tariffs on Chinese exports without retaliation, however the Chinese government has displayed little hesitancy to implement a trade tax of its own, which is largely uncontroversial and predictable from China's modern trade perspectives. In the study, Chinese welfare improves despite this, whilst US welfare drastically falls[13]. Importantly, it should be noted that increased production costs only exacerbate costs placed on the shoulders of primary producers. With heightened costs of materials like aluminium and steel, farming machinery has subsequently increased also, with combine sales falling by a considerable 46% in early 2025[14]. Tariffs have not only proven harmful for the American consumer but creates a considerable level of instability and unpredictability for farmers across the country.

Another aspect of this research is centred around farmers themselves, and how those working in the agricultural sector perceive the Trump era tariffs. Though it is not possible to overwhelmingly determine how farmers themselves feel, analysing the press releases of lobbyist groups and unions can aid in understanding where on this political spectrum they tend to fall, and why. Research on the opinions of primary producers is a large gap in this field of study, with most works focusing on economic impact over farmer sentiment.

One study completed in late 2019 examines farmer perceptions of the China trade war, but with a specific focus on the Midwest region of the United States. It surveyed 794 farmers across Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota, assessing their support for President Trump, and whether they believed tariffs would be ultimately beneficial for US trade and agriculture. The results demonstrated that despite the admission of adverse effects on farming income, 56% of respondents were either somewhat or strongly supportive of the implementation of tariffs on Chinese products, and only 30% strongly or somewhat opposed raising them even further[15]. Despite this, 81% did wish for normal trade relations to resume. One major finding of this research, although not centred around California, is that a "short term pain/long term gain[16]" sentiment seems to exist amongst many farmers participating in the survey. Although they could identify a drop in profit, their partisanship remained true. Over half of respondents believed that benefits would arise out of the trade disruption, demonstrating an optimistic attitude towards future long-term gains for the United States, at the recognition of personal loss. Its findings connect to other studies which have suggested political partisanship might be

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[12] Ernst, A., et al. (2026). *America first? The macroeconomic implications of punitive tariffs in a production network model*. International Tax and Public Finance. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10797-026-09955-7 [Accessed 2 July 2026].

[13] Ernst, A., et al. (2026). *America first? The macroeconomic implications of punitive tariffs in a production network model*. International Tax and Public Finance. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10797-026-09955-7 [Accessed 2 July 2026].

[14] Garvey, S. (2025). Trump tariffs mean fewer machinery purchases, higher costs for farmers. *The Western Producer*. [Online]. Available at: https://www.producer.com/crops/trump-tariffs-mean-fewer-machinery-purchases-higher-costs-for-farmers/?__cf_chl_f_tk=8y9tUZCJ3xJPK1xnEJ5uPq7K2eh2NbWwB8jCqX4a9Rk-1782995592-1.0.1.1-H1obbweXSlyJVtuXC4FnbY3Nz6PbHlGhzPmlzA6raKs [Accessed 2 July 2026].

[15] Qu, S., et al. (2019). *Midwest Crop Farmers' Perceptions of the U.S.- China Trade War*. Iowa State University, Center for Agricultural and Rural Development, pp 1-2. [Accessed 7 July 2026].

[16] Qu, S., et al. (2019). *Midwest Crop Farmers' Perceptions of the U.S.- China Trade War*. Iowa State University, Center for Agricultural and Rural Development, pp 1-2. [Accessed 7 July 2026].

stronger than previously suspected when economic policy is the focal point, with the desire to align with a voter's traditional party still the preference. Hesitancy to alter voting patterns is particularly understandable amongst rural farming communities, though this demonstrates major difficulty for the Democratic party in harnessing support over the contentious matter of tariffs. Despite income loss and hardship, farmers have seemingly remained steadfast in their support for the GOP – even if they do not approve of tariffs themselves, there exists a belief that it must be implemented to achieve long-term success and sustainability in trade.

This research, although conducted in 2019, is still dated in that the US has since seen a change of government with the Biden administration before the return of the Trump presidency. His second term has seen tariffs exacerbated again, extending beyond China and into reciprocal tariffs globally. Whether this would impact the results of a finding conducted in 2026 is difficult to predict but should be noted as a limitation of this research. It was not inclusive of California in its data pool and cannot be directly implemented as an evidential basis for states outside of its bounds. This demonstrates a need for further research conducted on the matter, as California sits as a state hurt considerably by tariffs as the United States' largest farming and export producer.

Political framing

The studies discussed above demonstrate a lack of success for tariffs in the long-term, despite the America First narrative backing its cause. It is protectionist in nature, and even if the measure hasn't lined the pockets of everyday Americans, there seems to exist a hope that it will, and that it will generate wealth for the American government broadly. This framing by the Republican party has undoubtedly been effective if support amongst farmers, the demographic impacted the most by the heavy tax, has continued to increase. It demonstrates how important the framing of a policy tool is in generating support and retaining it, and that despite farmers being adversely affected, their support for the current administration broadly speaking has not yet wavered. Economic priorities and the agriculture sector are inherently linked; one can cease to exist without the other. Research around this link is not often direct, but can be applied to establish the importance of discussing the implementation of tariffs as a current contention. Based on current findings, it appears overly optimistic to suggest that these import taxes will generate enough wealth in the United States economy to warrant the hardship of farmers in California, and across the country.

The highlighted studies however are centred across two themes – the economic consequences of tariffs, and how that influences political behaviour. What is not discussed in existing research is how the two major political parties frame the policy; and how this successfully or unsuccessfully matches the views of farming advocates.

The difference in the messaging and framing of tariffs differs vastly between Democrats and Republicans in recent years, but understanding if, and how that interplays with the lobbying groups representing farming interests is important. It is important as this framing impacts the economic wellbeing of America's primary producers. Understanding how tariffs have economically devasted farmers is essential in assessing the policy's success and understanding why farmers feel the way they do on the matter – and whether their votes reflect it.

My research seeks to connect two bodies of literature that are in most cases, studied separately. Research exists on the trade war China, and it exists in what the economic

consequences for the United States may be. However, my research aims to establish the link between political communication and agricultural policy, assessing whether narratives surrounding the policy instrument do indeed impact those most closely affected by it. It seeks not just to explain what has happened in the sphere of tariffs, but how it has been understood or justified by influential political actors, shifting the focus onto representation and giving farmers a considerable voice in the analysis beyond data points found in existing research. Placing a higher emphasis on primary sources like media releases and press statements help to achieve a balanced outlook on political communications and the role it plays in addressing farmer concerns. This research is then able to contribute towards work on democratic representation, political framing, California's agricultural industry and its challenges, the interaction between economic policy and agriculture, and importantly, whether messaging spread by elected representatives matched the messaging spread by the people living with its consequences.

Data Set One – Political Discourse

The GOP and Democratic parties have had two vastly different lines of messaging to the American public when it comes to Trump-era tariffs. The former has relied on similar methods of framing seen throughout its election campaigns – a focus on America First policy initiatives, that are rooted in nationalism and the idea of needing to steer the United States' priorities away from international obligations, and towards domestic economic prosperity. The latter, however, has taken a very critical approach to tariffs, highlighting the burden placed on farmers and legality issues surrounding the tariffs, which in turn, create strained relationships with allies and trading partners.

Democrat Discourse/Discussion

Problem identification

Democrats have been vocal about their dislike of Trump's sweeping tariffs across numerous industries, agriculture included.

US House Minority leader, Hakeem Jeffries, has been firm in his remarks relating to Trump reciprocal tariffs, calling them a "tax on the American people," stating that they are "reckless, so un-strategic, so lacking in any sophistication," and accuses Republicans of "intentionally tanking the economy[17]." This came in response to a dramatic increase in reciprocal tariffs that hit more than 180 countries, at varying levels of taxation. Since then, democrat discourse has largely remained the same, but functionally, their ability is restricted with Republicans controlling the House, Senate, and Presidency.

Democratic Californian representative Jim Costa, who represents one of the heaviest agricultural powerhouses in the country, has seen his constituents struggle with tariffs for years now over the Trump presidency, only hiking during the latest administration. As previously acknowledged, his district is home to a large amount of almond and pistachio growers, consistently now battling higher export costs and an increase of costs for production. This in combination with his role on the House Agriculture Committee has made him a vocal figure in

[17] Turan, I. (2025). *US House Minority leader slams Trump tariffs as 'reckless'*. [online] Anadolu. Available at: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/us-house-minority-leader-slams-trump-tariffs-as-reckless/3530995 [Accessed 12 June 2026].

opposing reciprocal tariffs and prioritising the deflating of market tensions and costs for those in the industry.

Proposed Solutions

Costa introduced a Bill in the current 119th Congress addressing the US implemented 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico, which he argues is a direct violation of the US-Canda-Mexico agreement, the USCMA[18]. The USCMA was introduced to replace the previous agreement in 2020, and is a free trade agreement that governs economic relations and development between the three North American countries. One core pillar of this arrangement is tariff-free access between all three countries for agricultural goods; and considering Trump's blanket trade tax, this included the agricultural sector. Whilst Costa's Bill faces committee considerations, he has been forthcoming about his disapproval of reciprocal tariffs and the harm they have caused farmers, dating back to Trump's first term as President. When the trade war with China first escalated in 2018, he issued a press release calling for the tensions to dissipate before they became economically devastating to Californian farmers and stressed the importance of bipartisanship on the issue; especially if Congress wanted to take back oversight with regards to trade[19]. He voiced the need to "abandon the current back and forth retaliation that will ultimately impact both urban and rural businesses in California and across the nation[20]." Costa's messaging was clear from the beginning of the trade war that agriculture was the industry facing the largest economic setbacks under the policy, and that action like his proposal was in the best interests of California, with blanket benefits country-wide.

Cause and Moral Judgement

In the aftermath of the 2026 supreme court ruling that Trump's tariffs created under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) were unlawful, Costa did not refrain from criticism, stating that "this ruling is a reminder that no one – not even the President – is above the law." The message was a clear and direct critique of the President, not only signalling disagreement with the policy problem, but highlighting its illegality as grounds for attack itself. This works to invoke a sense of justice amongst voters – not only have the tariffs financially harmed America's farmers, but the implementation itself is unlawful. For Costa, it extends beyond moral incorrectness.

His framing of the problem is also very clearly centred around economic hardship in his District, playing his role as a local representative and member of the agriculture committee. Rather than framing the issue as essential for economic competition globally, Democrats have largely

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[18] Costa, J. (2025). *H.Con.Res.25 - Expressing the sense of Congress that Trump administration tariffs on Mexico and Canada are in violation of the United States of America-Mexico-Canada Agreement.* [Online]. United States Congress. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-concurrent-resolution/25/text?__cf_chl_tk=kk1HDagB61jQVsGgRbIU3Gyzq8japawA..fn1s46S.E-1781424028-1.0.1.1-s5FaGevtDg5a1OhDIC83qhkh1k_ReQZqOE9aH4ggmxk [Accessed 13 June 2026].

[19] Congressman Jim Costa. (2018). *Costa on Tariffs Hurting the San Joaquin Valley*. [Online] Available at: https://costa.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/costa-tariffs-hurting-san-joaquin-valley [Accessed 14 June 2026].

[20] Congressman Jim Costa. (2018). *Costa on Tariffs Hurting the San Joaquin Valley*. [Online] Available at: https://costa.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/costa-tariffs-hurting-san-joaquin-valley [Accessed 14 June 2026].

framed it as a burdensome tax on the American people, and specifically, farmers and rural workers. This approach is rooted in targeting traditionally republican voter bases, appealing to blue collar Americans with a narrative that prioritises the immediate needs of families and workers.

In farming-dependent counties, which the USDA defines as areas where 25% or more of annual earnings are derived from farming[21], Trump's popularity has seemed to increase steadily, with 78% of the 44 dependent counties voting for him in the 2024 election[22]. Despite being slightly less than 2% in growth of support since 2020, it persists to demonstrate partisan loyalty amongst farmers that some researchers like Carcelli and Park[23] have argued is prevalent and impactful on economic decisions. This leaves political opportunity for the Democrats moving forward, particularly those like Costa whose District is closely located amongst some larger Republican voter bases. The question remains as to whether they can capitalise on this if success has been limited thus far based on this rise in Trump support, despite the trade war's impact already being widespread. Midterms will undoubtedly be the next test of this, for both the GOP and the Democrats, potentially signalling a desire for change amongst voters and farming communities.

Republican Discourse

Problem identification

David Valadao (R-CA-22), representing the 22nd District of California, comprising parts of the San Joaquin Valley and areas with heavy agricultural ties, has historically supported the implementation of tariffs; hailing a very different attitude to the aforementioned Jim Costa (D-CA-21), despite being Congressional District neighbours. The two represent a region with the same major commodity exports, and whilst Costa takes the approach of tariffs being detrimental to the farmers in his district, Valadao has seemingly done the opposite. In early 2026, he voted to protect the reciprocal tariffs in place and has stated that he views them as a "tool to get to a level playing field[24]." This attitude appears to stem from the belief that the United States has sacrificed personal gain by allowing foreign countries to profit from a generous international trade scheme[25].

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[21] US Department of Agriculture. (2025). *County Typology Codes - Descriptions and Maps | Economic Research Service*. [online] Available at: https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-typology-codes/descriptions-and-maps. [Accessed 14 June 26].

[22] Felder, B. (2024). *Trump support grew in America's top farming counties despite first-term trade war*. [online] Investigate Midwest. Available at: https://investigatemidwest.org/2024/11/13/trump-election-farming-counties-trade-war/. [Accessed 14 June 26].

[23] Carcelli, S. and Park, K.H. (2024). Partisanship in the Trade War: Evidence from County-Level Crop Planting Data [Online]. Oxford Academic. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/isq/article/68/4/sqae141/7888757?login=false [Accessed 14 June 2026].

[24] Fortinsky, S. (2025). *GOP rep says tariff power 'belongs in the Congress'*. [Online] The Hill. Available at: https://thehill.com/homenews/house/5234734-gop-rep-david-valadao-tariff-power-congress/ [Accessed 20 June 2026].

[25] Campostrini, V. (2025). *Trump's America and the Challenge to the Global Economic Order – Export Planning*. [Online] Available at:

Vince Fong, a Republican representative from the area also, representing California's 20th District, has held similar views to Valadao on the matter. In a 2025 interview Fong labelled tariffs as an opportunity to increase market access for farmers wanting to export produce to a wider variety of countries; though that goal is yet to materialise. In the same interview Fong circled on the perceived China problem, stating that they "steal our intellectual property, have human rights abuses, they manipulate their currency," using these listed reasons as the justification for increased China tariffs, and that they would "make sure we have a level playing field[26]." This closely resembled Valadao's sentiment, though the critique of China's trade policy was more evident.

Other republicans in the region though, have taken a stronger and somewhat unexpected stance based on the GOP's insistence of policy success. Kevin Kiley (R-CA-3) was one of three Republican representatives to vote against the surrender powers of tariffs to President Trump, alongside Representatives Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Victoria Spartz in Indianna. Despite not speaking out against the tariffs themselves, Kiley stated that he believed in Congressional authority and oversight, and saw the voluntary surrendering of powers as a "misuse of what rules are for," and that it was "bad for the representative process[27]," a cautious yet appropriate statement in acknowledgement of the role Congress in the United States.

Proposed Solutions

One of the most prominent Republican voices against Trump's sweeping global tariffs thus far has been that of Don Bacon, representing Nebraska's 2nd District. On the 9th of April 2026, Bacon introduced the Stop Global Tariffs Act, which seeks to both eliminate the tariffs and provide economic support retroactively to importers who paid larger fees to ship products into the United States for commercial sale. Bacon issued a press release on the matter, stating that "across-the-board tariffs like these raise costs for families and create unnecessary economic uncertainty," along with firm remarks regarding Congress' duty to regain its authority over trade policy – "not just with lawsuits, but with legislation[28]." Bacon's legislative proposal is not the first time the GOP member has spoken out against Trump's tariff policy, labelling the Supreme Court ruling in February 2026 as "common sense," and that he "felt vindicated" in the legal confirmation of the President's overstep[29].

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https://www.exportplanning.com/en/magazine/article/2025/02/12/trumps-america-and-the-challenge-to-the-global-economic-order/ [Accessed 8 July 2026].

[26] CMAC Fresno/Clovis. (2025). *The Maddy Report: A Conversation with Congressman Vince Fong - CMAC Fresno/Clovis*. [Online] Available at: https://cmac.tv/show/the-maddy-report-a-conversation-with-congressman-vince-fong/ [Accessed 5 July 2026].

[27] McCarthy, M. and Hill, M.L. (2025). *House again votes to surrender tariff powers to Trump - Live Updates - POLITICO*. [Online] POLITICO. Available at: https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2025/09/16/congress/house-again-votes-to-surrender-tariff-powers-to-trump-00566975

[28] U.S. Congressman Don Bacon. (2026). *Bacon, Panetta Introduce the Bipartisan Stop Global Tariffs Act*. [Online] Available at: https://bacon.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2886 [Accessed 2 July 2026].

[29] Hill, M.L. (2026). *'I feel vindicated': Anti-tariff Republicans cheer as Supreme Court checks Trump*. [Online] POLITICO. Available at: https://www.politico.com/news/2026/02/20/anti-tariff-republicans-cheer-supreme-court-decision-checking-trump-00790772 [Accessed 2 July 2026].

Most Republicans, however, have not called for the ceasing of tariff policy, and instead prioritised financial bailouts for farmers. This happened first in 2018, when the Trump administration unveiled a $12 billion scheme to financially compensate farmers due to trade tensions, which Agriculture Secretary at the time, Sonny Perdue, labelled a "short-term solution that will give President Trump and his administration time to work on long-term trade deals[30]." Despite being called short-term, a similar agreement was reached in late 2025, with another $12 billion expenditure to compensate growers losing out due to tariffs[31].

Cause and Moral Judgement

Bacon's framing of tariffs, along with representatives like Kiley and Massie have been different from the remainder of the Republican party. Massie labelled the Supreme Court ruling as obvious, speaking to the Constitutionally vested power of tax in the hands of the legislative branch rather than executive, commenting that "no contrived emergency can do that[32]." This breakaway sentiment bears resemblance to that of Costa's, and it demonstrates a deeper split amongst the Republican party than publicly demonstrated within the Democrats.

Within a similar timeframe, Speaker of the House Mike Johnson issued a statement via social media platform 'X' stating that tariffs had generated billions of dollars and created leverage for the US government in trade negotiations with countries that had been "taking advantage of American workers for decades[33]." Johnson's strategy in framing the legal hit that tariffs took was one of an "America First" rhetoric, highlighting financial gains and positioning the message toward the greater good of the country – one that arguably puts overall national gain ahead of individual farmer success. The emphasis on international trade agreements being detrimental to the US is not new in the Trump Administration's playbook, and it forms only part of an ongoing campaign to frame the current government as the party focused on prioritising America; therefore insinuating that past trade policy has been designed to prop-up international markets, not look after those home. The emphasis on domestic care when it comes to tariffs is perceivable to many voters as heroic; it invokes feelings of being left behind in previous administrations, but that new strategies would rectify this and bring justice to the everyday citizen facing higher cost of living pressures.

Discourse from the White House itself is also a factor of consideration in Republican communication on the matter. Recent publications speak to the issue of the United States running a trade deficit, stating that the deficit has grown by over 40 percent in the past 5 years alone[34]. Whilst it is true that the US is in a deficit, it has been in this deficit for approximately fifty

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[30] US to give farmers $12bn trade war bailout. (2018). [Online] 24 July. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44945112. [Accessed 8 July 2026].

[31] Debusmann, B. (2025). Trump unveils $12bn farm aid package amid global trade disputes. [Online] 8 Dec. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjrj58qed2wo. [Accessed 8 July 2026].

[32] Hill, M.L. (2026). *'I feel vindicated': Anti-tariff Republicans cheer as Supreme Court checks Trump*. [Online] POLITICO. Available at: https://www.politico.com/news/2026/02/20/anti-tariff-republicans-cheer-supreme-court-decision-checking-trump-00790772 [Accessed 2 July 2026].

[33] Johnson, M. (2026) [Online] X (formerly Twitter). Available at: https://x.com/SpeakerJohnson/status/2024892242930884617 [Accessed 2 July 2026].

[34] The White House. (2026). *Imposing a Temporary Import Surcharge to Address Fundamental International Payments Problems*. [Online] Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-

years, dating back to 1976[35]. Though the President blames this deficit on the modern international trading system, many contend that other factors play larger roles than his perception of the victimisation of America by trading partners. For example, Obstfeld contends that internal US factors can play a large role, specifically higher fiscal deficits federally leading to raised US trade deficits, regardless of higher import tariffs[36].

What remains though, is the messaging that has otherwise been largely strong throughout the Republican party – that China and other trading partners not only present an international risk, but that many states have been taking advantage of American generosity. The national debt and trade deficit talking points are alarmist; and yet, perhaps an effective way to combat the Democrats' people-first approach. It fosters a sense of justice, a desire to right the wrongs of policy past, and restore prosperity to the United States. Those tensions with China create an effective marketing campaign that goes hand in hand with the America First rhetoric around multiple areas of this Trump Presidency. The withdrawal from United Nations organisations offers a similar method of framing – that globalist agendas have been prioritised over the interests of the United States, and that taxpayers have been left to foot the bill[37]. Tariffs, to the Republican party, are a way to address this perceived inequity, and rally nationalist sentiment to bolster party and administration support.

Data Set Two – Agriculture Discourse/Discussion

Farming Lobbyist and Advocacy Groups

Problem identification

An important group to consider amongst this research are the voice and opinions of agricultural stakeholders themselves and comparing their views to that of America's major political parties. This forms a key part of the paper, in that it provides a direct voice to those most impacted by the policy tool and compares it to that of the decision makers.

In February 2026, the president and CEO of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, Duane Simpson, published a statement to speak out against the implementation of tariffs, warning that the strain it creates on growers is too much, during a time where profit is already at a low. He stated that "after substantial price increases over the past five years, tariffs on critical agricultural inputs have added to financial pressures," and requested the administration

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actions/2026/02/imposing-a-temporary-import-surcharge-to-address-fundamental-international-payments-problems/ [Accessed 4 July 2026].

[35] Ferreira, J. (2024). *US Trade Deficit Little-Changed in June*. [online] Tradingeconomics.com. Available at: https://tradingeconomics.com/united-states/balance-of-trade [Accessed 4 July 2026].

[36] Obstfeld, M. (2025). *The US Trade Deficit: Myths and Realities*. Brookings Papers on Economic Activity 2025, 139-194. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/eca.2025.a978548. [Accessed 4 July 2026].

[37] The White House. (2026). *Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Withdraws the United States from International Organizations that Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States*. [online] Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2026/01/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-withdraws-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/ [Accessed 5 July 2026].

consider exempting key agricultural inputs[38]. He spoke to the decision to lower tariffs on fertiliser products, suggesting that the President should continue to lower costs across the board, and focus on "restoring certainty in supply chains, and strengthening the competitiveness of U.S. agriculture in global markets[39]."

Some commodity specific lobbying and advocacy groups have pushed for an end to tariffs, and an end to the trade war. The American Pistachio Growers (APG) have released media on their focus toward ending tariffs and creating a more amicable trading agreement between the United States and China. They openly acknowledge the importance of China as a global trading partner and admit that "the lack of resolution of this issue could hurt both American growers and Chinese consumers alike[40]." Similarly, the Almond Alliance has acknowledged the impact tariffs have created on growers, stating that they will fight to keep markets open, protect market access, and ensure California almonds remain competitive across the world[41]. Though their words have been less deliberative, the messaging remains the same in recognising the financial detriment tariffs have had on their industry and calls for increased market access function as calls for an end to the trade war with China. It is likely that advocacy groups such as these have willingly called for an end to tariffs due to their positioning as some of the most severely impacted commodities across the United States, and particularly in California. This leaves them with a very specific and rounded interest in their priority goals, unlike larger lobbying firms that often manage a wide range of agricultural industries and interests.

Cause and Moral Evaluation

Public statements by advocates have often presented themselves in a push for exemptions and financial bailouts, over the elimination of tariffs entirely. Despite the more hesitant approach, it still signifies a common thread amongst farming lobbyists. The need to protect producers more during such volatile economic conditions should be a priority of the government when making decisions about the future of tariffs. Additionally, each approach identifies the same cause – the implementation of tariffs, and the stoking of the trade war.

Additionally, many growers have demonstrated support for bailouts as an interim solution. Speaking to the BBC during the appropriations period of 2025, farmers expressed gratitude for the financial aid but admitted it would not resolve continuing cost pressures and shrinkage in export options. One stated that "none of us really love it, but we're not in a position where we

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[38] Daly, C. (2026). *US agri co-ops apex responds to Trump tariffs and farm legislation*. [Online] Co-operative News. Available at: https://www.thenews.coop/us-agri-co-ops-apex-responds-to-tariffs-ruling-and-farm-legislation/ [Accessed 7 July 2026].

[39] Daly, C. (2026). *US agri co-ops apex responds to Trump tariffs and farm legislation*. [Online] Co-operative News. Available at: https://www.thenews.coop/us-agri-co-ops-apex-responds-to-tariffs-ruling-and-farm-legislation/ [Accessed 7 July 2026].

[40] American Quality Pistachios. (2016). *Government Relations | American Pistachio Growers*. [Online] Available at: https://americanpistachios.org/about-us/grower-resources/government-relations [Accessed 7 July 2026].

[41] Almond Alliance. (2026). *Instagram*. [Online] Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/dzn49fnhrlu/ [Accessed 7 July 2026].

can be turning it down," and expressed a desire to minimise the need for another bailout package by addressing the root cause of the issue[42].

Farmers have been placed in a challenging position amongst the two policy priorities of the major parties. Though most willing to speak publicly have contended that eliminating or decreasing tariffs and expanding export markets is of utmost importance, support for aid has been paramount too; in a financial time where accepting and supporting the measure is of necessity to combat overall loss.

Proposed Solutions

Some advocacy groups have not minced words about what they see as viable, long-term solutions to this problem. In 2018, the executive director of industry group Farmers for Free Trade, Brian Kuehl, said that farmers need clarity and the ability to plan ahead, an overtly difficult task during an unstable market; "as such, we urge the administration to take immediate action to stop the trade war and get back to opening new markets[43]."

Whether they have called for an end to tariffs, or called for trade exemptions and funding for affected growers, the same remains clear amongst a large portion of lobbying and advocacy groups in the US – increased tensions in the global trade market are unduly hurting farmers, and action needs to be taken by the administration to mitigate this loss.

Conclusion

Reaching a solidified solution to the problem of tariffs on California's agricultural industry, and how framing of the problem creates conflicting narratives is not one that has one, solidified answer. Instead, the research demonstrates a broader argument of representation. Whilst politicians from both the Republican and Democratic parties focused on political framing and messaging, agriculture advocacy groups highlighted practical problem-solving methods; despite them sometimes diverging on the best possible way forward, the intention of alleviating financial burdens on farmers remained as the priority. Politicians tended to focus on partisan messaging, whilst stakeholders spoke directly to market access and trade uncertainty. They were able to take a more nuanced approach in acknowledging the benefits of the GOP's attempt to ease financial pressure via government aid yet also lobby for policy changes in the administration.

Research also suggests that lobbying groups have not always taken overtly partisan positions on the matter. Instead, their press releases and media statements have remained nuanced and balanced, with many able to acknowledge a history of unfair trade with China specifically but still view the imposed tariffs as an acceptable and unfairly damaging imposition on Californian agriculture. Interestingly, this somewhat places them between the messaging from both major political parties, though the lack of growth in farmer support for the Democratic party presents an interesting find. Though there is almost consensus in the need for change to the current tariff system, commitment to the Republican party has not yet significantly wavered.

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[42] Debusmann, B. (2025). Trump unveils $12bn farm aid package amid global trade disputes. [Online] 8 Dec. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjrj58qed2wo. [Accessed 8 July 2026].

[43] US to give farmers $12bn trade war bailout. (2018). [Online] 24 July. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44945112 [Accessed 8 July 2026].

Ultimately, outside of official advocacy groups, the research finds that political messaging and framing has been effective in retaining farmer support. Despite overwhelming acknowledgement of tariffs and their financially challenging nature to growers, President Trump and the Republican Party's support amongst this demographic has not yet shown evidence of decreasing. Their focus on framing tariffs as patriotic, a long-term investment into the health of the broader American economy, and standing up to international competitors like China has been largely effective in garnering support, despite the overall dislike for the method. This demonstrates the importance of political messaging in policy effectiveness. If marketed well, the initiative can remain without substantial decline in party support, and suggests that political identity may trump immediate personal and professional interests.

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[1] Daly, C. (2026). *US agri co-ops apex responds to Trump tariffs and farm legislation*. [Online] Co-operative News. Available at: https://www.thenews.coop/us-agri-co-ops-apex-responds-to-tariffs-ruling-and-farm-legislation/

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