



Trade Protection in the Age of COVID-19

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My analysis of trade in personal protective equipment, COVID-19, and trade policy

- **March 13:** [Trump's trade policy is hampering the US fight against COVID-19](#)
- **March 19:** [EU limits on medical gear exports put poor countries and Europeans at risk](#)
- **March 26:** [COVID-19: China's exports of medical supplies provide a ray of hope](#)
- **April 9:** [COVID-19: Trump's curbs on exports of medical gear put Americans and others at risk](#)
- **April 15:** [How the G20 can strengthen access to vital medical supplies in the fight against COVID-19](#)
- **Forthcoming:** [COVID-19: Demand spikes, export restrictions, and quality concerns imperil poor country access to medical supplies](#) (VoxEU eBook chapter)

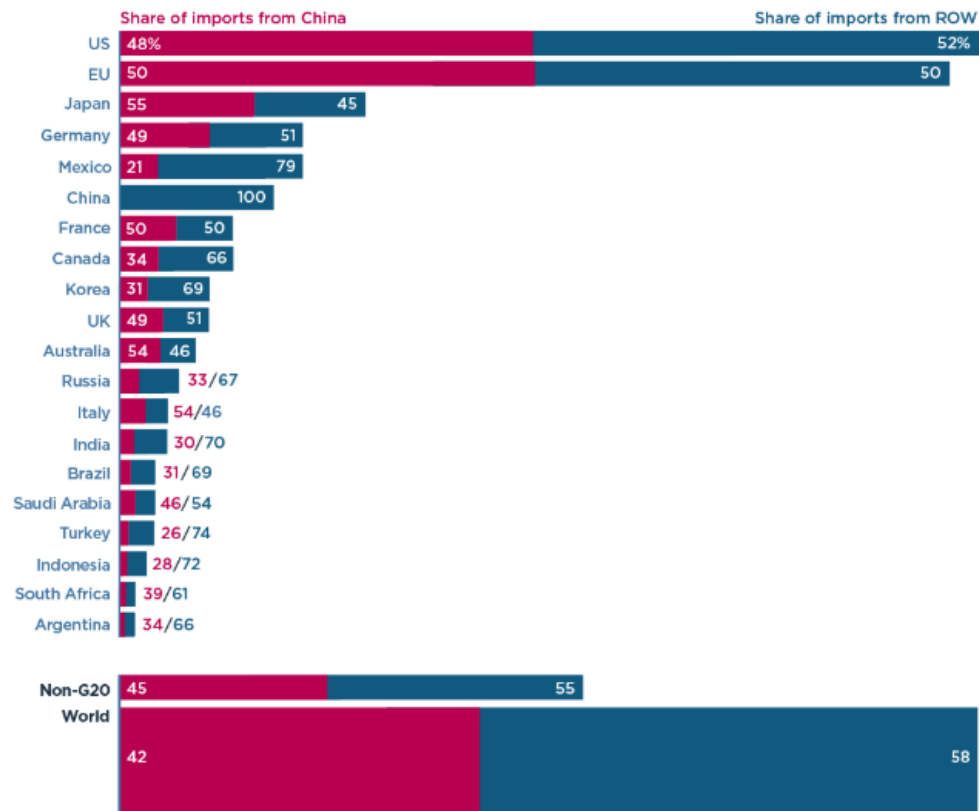
China is a major global source for PPE

Figure 1

Much of the world's imports of personal protective equipment come from China

Personal protective equipment (PPE) Imports by product, source, and importer, 2018

By G20 importer



By product



ROW = rest of world; EU = European Union; US = United States

Note: ROW data for EU are extra-EU imports only. Length of bar represents G20 member's share of world PPE imports.

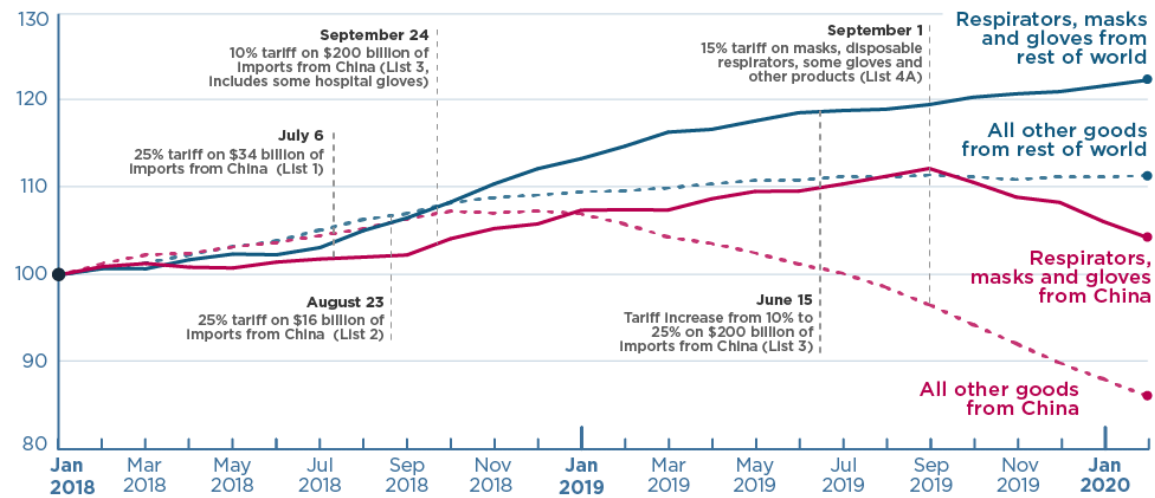
Source: Constructed by the author from 6-digit Harmonized System import data, available from UN Comtrade accessed via World Integrated Trade Solution, matched to personal protective equipment definitions from Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402 of 14 March 2020 making the exportation of certain products subject to the production of an export authorization, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 0771, 15 March 2020.

Trump's trade war hampered the US fight against COVID-19

Figure 4

US imports of masks, respirators, and gloves from China fell when Trump's Section 301 tariffs went into effect in 2019

US imports, index (100 = January 2018)



Note: US monthly import data, not seasonally adjusted, 12-month trailing average. A "List" refers to the group of products subject to the Trump administration's tariffs imposed under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974.

Source: Constructed by the author with US import data from US Census Bureau. For product definitions, see Appendix Table.

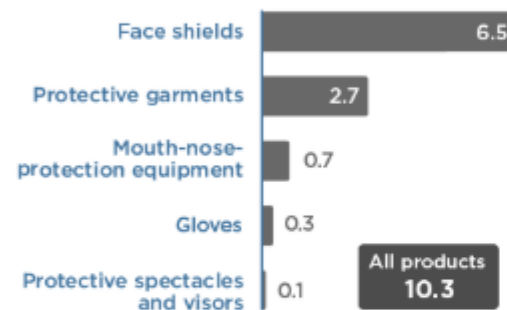
EU limits on medical gear exports put many countries at risk

Figure 2

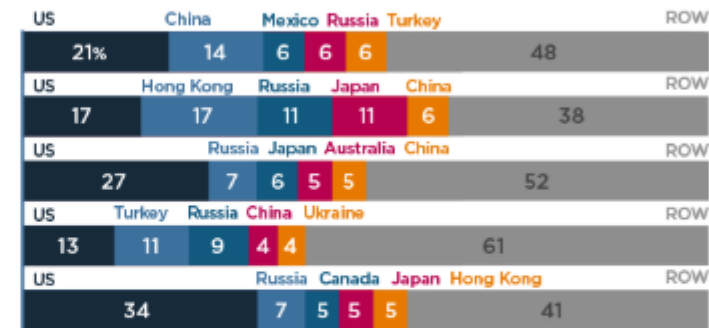
EU export restrictions put a lot of medical goods trade with many countries at risk

EU medical exports subject to export controls

a. Total value in 2019, billions USD



b. Percent of exports by destination in 2019



EU = European Union; ROW = rest of world

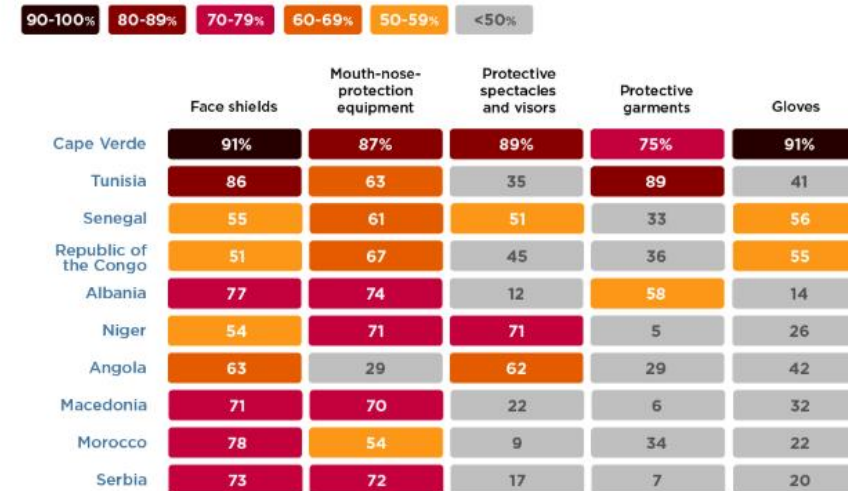
Note: Extra-EU exports only. Numbers may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Constructed by the author with EU export data at the 8-digit Combined Nomenclature level from Eurostat. For product definitions, see Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402 of 14 March 2020 making the exportation of certain products subject to the production of an export authorization, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 0771, 15 March 2020.

EU limits on medical gear exports put poor countries at risk

EU limits on medical exports leave many poor countries vulnerable to COVID-19

Percent of total imports sourced from EU by product



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EU = European Union

Note: Average share of a country's total imports of each product sourced from the EU over 2016-2018.

Source: Constructed by the author with country-specific import data at 6-digit Harmonized System level from UN Comtrade accessed via World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS). For product definitions, see Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402 of 14 March 2020 making the exportation of certain products subject to the production of an export authorization, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 0771, 15 March 2020.

Trump's export restrictions on medical gear could be self-defeating: **Retaliation**

The United States **exports less than it imports** of most medical gear needed to fight COVID-19

US exports and imports in 2019 by product, billions USD

Medical exports restricted under the Defense Production Act



US exports and imports in 2019 by product, billions USD

Other personal protective equipment



US limits on medical gear exports put poor countries at risk

b. Percent of total imports sourced from US, by product subject to US export restriction

	Respirators and surgical masks	Air-purifying respirators	Hospital gloves
Jamaica	73	93	56
Palau	64	55	44
Belize	61	68	33
Dominican Republic	54	75	28
St. Lucia	67	NA	58
Guatemala	23	77	18
El Salvador	28	78	10
Costa Rica	40	55	18



EU = European Union; NA = not available

Note: Average share of a country's total imports of each product sourced from the US or EU over 2016-2018.

Source: Constructed by the author with country-specific import data at 6-digit Harmonized System level from UN Comtrade accessed via World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS). See Bown (2020b,d).

China's exports of medical supplies provide a ray of hope

China's exports of protective medical equipment fell less than its exports of all other products

China's export growth in January and February 2020 relative to January and February 2019, by product and trading partner



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EU = European Union; US = United States

Note: All other products are exports of all products, not only other medical products.

Source: Constructed by the author with 6-digit export data from Chinese customs matched to personal protective equipment definitions from Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2020/402 of 14 March 2020 making the exportation of certain products subject to the production of an export authorization, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 0771, 15 March 2020.

Other issues: endogenous adjustments in regulatory environment, product quality

The New York Times

China Pushes to Churn Out Coronavirus Gear, Yet Struggles to Police It

Factories sprang up or retooled to make equipment. But complaints in Spain over Chinese-made tests highlight the difficulties of regulating quality.



By Alexandra Stevenson and Tiffany May

March 27, 2020

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

China Tightens Customs Checks for Medical Equipment Exports

Masks, ventilators and other equipment needed in coronavirus containment to be scrutinized by customs after complaints from some European countries

By [Liza Lin](#)

April 10, 2020 7:48 am ET



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4/24/2020

How the **G20** can strengthen access to vital medical supplies in the fight against COVID-19

1. **Production**

- Incentivize additional supply
- Adjust regulations

2. **Trade**

- Coordinate reversal of export restrictions
- Look out for vulnerable poor countries

3. **Transparency**

- New reporting system for production capacity, output, domestic demand, stockpiles, exports, and imports
- Commercial transactions