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**5 Myths About NAFTA**

Not so. Any changes would require a lengthy and complex renegotiation with [Canada](#) and Mexico. As Canada's prime minister, [Stephen Harper](#), has pointed out, "Of course, if any American government ever chose to make the mistake of opening [NAFTA], we would have some things we would want to talk about as well." Just the threat of pulling out of NAFTA would do some damage, too. Far from boosting America's international reputation -- something all presidential candidates agree is important -- it would fan fears that the United States is an unreliable ally and discourage foreign governments from committing to future agreements with Washington. The slim chance of concluding the [World Trade Organization's Doha](#) round of global trade talks would vanish. And if the next president wants, for instance, Mexico's help in dealing with immigration reform and Canada's hand in combating terrorism, then blaming America's friendly neighbors for its perceived woes is hardly the way to start.

4 *Making NAFTA's labor and environmental regulations stricter would benefit U.S. workers.*

Probably not. Clinton wants to make the treaty's labor and environmental provisions "far tougher and absolutely binding" and to require that all future trade agreements include similar language. The stated purpose is to raise labor and environmental standards around the world and to make it harder for companies to ship jobs to countries where workers have fewer protections than in the United States. But America's trading partners would probably see the move as covert protectionism -- since when have the Teamsters cared about Mexican wildlife? -- and may retaliate. Meanwhile, consumers would probably resent the increased cost of their imports.

In any case, tough social clauses could backfire on the United States. Canada's labor and environmental standards are generally higher than the United States', and Canadians could claim that lax American standards amount to unfair competition. Given that Canada and Mexico have joined global efforts to curb climate change, they might wish to restrict American imports if the United States continues to hold back. And Mexican workers arguably have stronger labor rights than Americans: Unlike the United States, Mexico has ratified most of the [International Labor Organization's](#) conventions on core labor standards, including those on freedom of association, collective bargaining and employment discrimination. If the United States bashes Mexican labor practices, what's to stop Mexico from objecting to American imports produced in non-unionized factories?

5 *Renegotiating NAFTA should be a priority for the new president.*

Absolutely not. With the housing market plunging, the financial system seizing up and the economy apparently shrinking, tinkering with a treaty that governs trade with two of Washington's trading partners is a costly distraction -- whatever your view of NAFTA. The next president will have much bigger things to worry about, such as stopping the economy from going into a tailspin; cushioning the blow for vulnerable Americans who lose their homes, their jobs and their health care in the downturn; and helping frame new regulations that protect the economy against future financial excesses without stifling the market. Compared to all that, changing NAFTA looks like small change.

[mail@philippegrain.com](mailto:mail@philippegrain.com)

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Philippe Legrain is a journalism fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the author of "Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them."

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