CHAPTER ONE

Bringing the Great Powers Back In

Globalization is responsible for a lot of bad international relations theory. The poor state of theorizing is not because economic globalization is irrelevant. The reduction of traditional barriers to exchange, such as tariffs and capital controls, has introduced a bevy of new conflicts over the residual impediments to global economic integration—the differences among domestic rules and regulatory standards. The affected issue areas include but are not limited to labor standards, environmental protection, financial supervision, consumer health and safety, competition policy, intellectual property rights, and Internet protocols. These differences matter: the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that these standards and regulations affect approximately $4 trillion in traded goods. At the start of the new millennium, these issues have been important enough to trigger an increase in the foreign affairs budgets for U.S. regulatory agencies even as the State Department’s budget declined.1

Regulatory issues are important in and of themselves. They matter in world politics because of the way they affect the distribution of resources as well. Fundamentally, however, international regulatory regimes strike a political chord because they symbolize a shift in the locus of politics. The title of this book is a play on Tip O’Neill’s well-known aphorism that “all politics is local.”2 In the current era, this statement is at least open to question. For many issues that comprise the daily substance of our lives—how to treat workers, how much to pollute, what can go into our food, what can be accessed on the Internet, how much medicine will cost—the politics have gone global.

The proliferation of new global issue areas has increased scholarly attention on how the global economy is regulated in an era of globalization. However, the theoretical debates on this topic leave much to be desired; Miles Kahler and David Lake recently concluded, “Contemporary scholarship . . . has

---


yielded only a partial, unsystematic, and ultimately inconclusive body of theorizing on the relationship between globalization and governance.  

Most strands of research on this topic share a common assumption—the decline of state autonomy relative to other factors and actors. Globalization undercuts state sovereignty, weakening a government’s ability to effectively regulate its domestic affairs. Global market forces are powerful enough to deprive governments of their autonomy and agency. As Thomas Friedman phrases it, globalization binds states into the “Golden Straitjacket,” forcing them to choose between “free market vanilla and North Korea.” Prominent pundits, policymakers, and scholars echo the assertion that globalization drastically reduces the state’s ability to govern. At the same time that state autonomy is in decline, other theorists argue that globalization empowers a web of nonstate actors, including multinational corporations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and transnational activist networks. Some theorists go so far as to assert that globalization requires a wholesale rejection of existing theoretical paradigms.

The trouble with this belief is the lack of variation in the independent variable and the presence of variation in the dependent variable. According to these narratives, globalization increases the number and power of factors and actors that inexorably promote policy convergence, forcing states into agreement on regulatory matters. The problem with this scenario is that there are a number of regulatory issue areas—data privacy, stem cell research, global warming, genetically modified foods—where regulatory convergence has been


limited at best. Structural theories lack the capacity to explain variation in coordination outcomes.

This book argues that the great powers—defined here as governments that oversee large internal markets—remain the primary actors writing the rules that regulate the global economy. The key variable affecting global regulatory outcomes is the distribution of interests among the great powers. A great power concert is a necessary and sufficient condition for effective global governance over any transnational issue. Without such a concert, government attempts at regulatory coordination will be incomplete, and nonstate attempts will prove to be a poor substitute.

A few complexities are contained within this simple argument. For example, when will the great powers agree to coordinate their regulatory standards? I argue that globalization increases the rewards for policy coordination, but has a negligible impact on the adjustment costs of coordination. Whether regulatory coordination takes place is a function of the adjustment costs actors face in altering their preexisting rules and regulations. When the adjustment costs are sufficiently high, not even globalization’s powerful dynamics can push states into cooperating.

Adjustment costs are a function of the ability of the affected domestic actors to use exit rather than voice in reacting to the impact of regulatory coordination. The more that domestic groups have invested in the status quo, the greater their costs of exit. Private actors with constrained exit options have a strong incentive to invest in assets specific to longstanding domestic legal and regulatory structures; these specific assets increase the economic and political costs of regulatory coordination. The less viable the exit option, the more that political voice is used, and the greater the political and economic adjustment costs. These costs will be high when the regulatory issue in question affects relatively immobile or mature sectors or markets—the regulation of land, labor, or consumer products. Ironically, the least globalized elements of great power polities exert the strongest effect on the likelihood of global regulatory coordination.

Smaller states and nonstate actors in the international system do not affect regulatory outcomes, but they do affect the processes through which coordination is attempted. The reason their effect on the process is irrelevant to the outcome is that global governance processes are substitutable. Powerful states can and will engage in forum-shopping within a complex of international regimes. They can and will use different policy tools to create those structures, depending on the constellation of state interests. Options include delegating regime management to nonstate actors; creating international regimes with

---


strong enforcement capabilities; generating competing regimes to protect material interests; and unilateral, extraterritorial measures to establish regional spheres of influence. The preferences and actions of other states and nonstate actors will constrain certain great power strategies, however.

While relative power remains the salient fact in determining regulatory outcomes at the systemic level, it is of little importance in determining great power preferences. The result is a “revisionist” theory that resembles Jeff Legro and Andrew Moravcsik’s “two-step” approach to international relations theory. The first step is identifying the domestic actors and institutions that explain the origin of state preferences. The second step is to take those preferences as given for international interactions, and to explain the bargaining outcomes as a function of the distribution of interests and capabilities. Domestic factors account for preference formation, but not the outcomes of international bargaining. That is how the theory will be developed here.

Why This Matters

The regulation of the global economy is intrinsically important. Markets rely on rules, customs, and institutions to function properly. Global markets need global rules and institutions to work efficiently. The presence or absence of these rules, and their content and enforcement, is the subject of this book. In a globalizing economy, what are the rules? Who makes them? How are they made?

The answers to these questions matter to policymakers and publics alike. Policymakers have to deal with an ever-increasing amount of regulatory questions. The number of national regulatory agencies has exploded during the current era of globalization. The street protests that started at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial meeting in Seattle in 1999 have spread to almost every significant meeting of a multilateral economic institution. They are a testament to the passions that globalization arouses. This should not be surprising. Some of the most contentious issues in world politics over the past decade—financial contagion, global warming, genetically modified foods, terrorist financing, sweatshop labor—are, at their core, regulatory disputes.


The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and their aftermath only increased the salience of these issues. The United States considers it vital to develop stringent global standards to block terrorist financing and monitor shipping containers. The possibility of bioterror attacks increases the demand for states to coordinate their environmental and food safety regulations. The use of the Internet by terrorist networks to communicate with one another has raised the question of how governments can effectively patrol cyberspace without choking off e-commerce. More generally, the U.S. response has highlighted the philosophical disagreements between Americans and Europeans over the proper modes of global governance. The 9/11 attacks did not reduce the questions raised by the globalization of national economies; they highlighted how the globalization of national security also generates demands for regulatory coordination.

Scholarly work in this area is necessary in part because the popular discourse on the subject has been dreadful. If it is true that public intellectuals earn more attention from being spectacularly wrong than from drawing an accurate, complex picture of the world, then “pop globalization” writers have certainly garnered attention. Consider Thomas Friedman’s aforementioned assertion that globalization acts as a Golden Straitjacket. This description is simple, pithy, and wrong. The persistent diversity of capitalist systems around the world contradicts Friedman’s claims about the binding constraints of free market capitalism. Surveys of financial traders undercut Friedman’s belief that an “Electronic Herd” runs roughshod over every facet of government intervention in the economy. Globalization does not even force firms in the same sector to compete in the same way. Friedman, like most other popular writers on this subject, offers a simple model of economic determinism—in which the interests of transnational capital dominate all other considerations—to explain how globalization works. This approach does not hold up to careful scrutiny. What is truly scary, however, is that Friedman is an oasis of clarity

14 Paul Davidson, “FBI Uneasy about Plan to Deregulate Fast Net,” USA Today, July 9, 2002, 3B.
compared with other popular explanations proffered about globalization and global governance.\(^{21}\)

This popular discourse has helped to fuel public anxieties about the future of globalization and global governance. In the United States, globalization prompts fierce domestic debates. Polling data reveals that U.S. citizens believe the integration of the United States with the rest of the world has greatly constrained U.S. policy autonomy, creating ambivalence about further international integration.\(^{22}\) In the European Union, globalization has been inexorably linked to Americanization, which has not endeared the concept to a majority of its citizens.\(^{23}\) The anxiety about globalization and global governance is even greater in the rest of the world, since other countries are far more dependent on the global economy than the United States. Global public opinion surveys demonstrate majority support in the developing world for capitalism—but want it to be accompanied by “strong government regulations.”\(^{24}\)

Just as the questions raised in this book matter greatly to public discourse, they also affect scholarly debates about the international political economy (IPE). Fifteen years ago, the study of IPE was essentially limited to explaining the variations in the global rules governing merchandise trade, exchange rates, and foreign direct investment (FDI).\(^{25}\) That was then. The latest era of globalization has raised a plethora of new issues to explain. Can existing IPE paradigms explain the variation of outcomes within and across these new issue areas—or are new paradigms needed?

This study also provides clues to the relationship between states and nonstate actors. The debate about the relevance of nonstate actors is not new,\(^{26}\) but the current era of globalization has intensified the arguments. Some scholars exaggerate the impotence of the state, interpreting a failure to perfectly regulate

---


\(^{26}\) See the discussion in the preface.
a sphere of social life as an example of a general retreat of the Westphalian system. However, statist have fallen into the same trap, gleefully pointing out the vast areas of world politics where nonstate actors have minimal influence. Both sides tend to generalize from their most favorable cases. The model presented here suggests that states, particularly the great powers, remain the primary actors, but that they will rely on nonstate actors for certain functional purposes. At the same time, nonstate actors can, on occasion, jump-start regulatory agendas to advance their issues—even if the final outcome does not accord with their preferences.

Beyond the study of global political economy, the topic of regulatory coordination raises theoretical questions about global governance that affect a wide variety of debates among international relations theorists. The questions asked in this book address arguments by globalization scholars that the changes wrought on world politics in the past twenty years require completely new theories of international relations.25 They affect debates in international relations and international law over the extent to which global governance structures can alter or constrain state behavior.26 At the deepest level, resolving how globalization affects governance wrestles with the fundamental question about whether anarchy is a constant or a variable.27 For some issue areas, effective global governance means the transfer of authority from the national to the supranational. At what point does global regulatory governance become so routine that the global economy ceases to be anarchical?

Defining Terms

In Leviathan, Thomas Hobbes argued that the key step in political science was the formulation of precise terms. That statement applies with a vengeance to the study of global economic regulation. A major reason for the contentious nature of debates about globalization and global governance is the disagreements over the precise meaning of terms. For example, the word “globalization” has been used so frequently to describe so many disparate phenomena that the term has been stripped of any concrete meaning.28 What one scholar finds important

25 See the works cited in footnote 7.
28 For a taxonomy of definitions, see David Held and Anthony McGrew, eds., The Global Transformations Reader (Oxford: Polity Press, 2000), part I.
about globalization another will dismiss as irrelevant. Susan Strange argued that a chief deficiency of international political economy was the use of imprecise language; “the worst of them all is ‘globalisation’—a term which can refer to anything from the Internet to a hamburger.” A dictionary of international relations agrees: “the term is imprecise and its use is often heavily laden with ideological baggage.” A different criticism is that the current jargon is merely old wine in new bottles. What is the difference, for example, between globalization and interdependence? How does the concept of global governance differ from international regimes? Before proceeding, clear definitions are needed.

I define globalization as the cluster of technological, economic, and political processes that drastically reduce the barriers to economic exchange across borders. This definition is narrower than the one used by a bevy of scholars focusing on the social and cultural dimensions of globalization—for good reasons. Broad definitions tend to commingle causes and effects. This book is specifically interested in the ability of actors to regulate economic and social life, and the impact that globalization has on regulatory efforts. At the same time, my definition is more inclusive than those who use deterrioralization as the primary organizational construct to characterize globalization. The latter definition treats the current moment as historically unique, and therefore has a post hoc flavor to it. My definition acknowledges that there have been previous eras of partial globalization. However, the current era of globalization encompasses most of the world’s nations and all of the great powers—including the United States.

Strange, Retreat of the State, xiii. This term has not gotten any clearer in the past decade. Kwame Anthony Appiah wisely characterized “globalization” as “a term that once referred to a marketing strategy, and then came to designate a macroeconomic thesis, and now can seem to encompass everything and nothing.” Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), xiii.


For an excellent primer on the nineteenth-century version of globalization in the Atlantic region, see Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson, Globalization and History (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

How is this definition of globalization distinct from the concept of interdependence? In the argot of international relations theory, the latter term describes a bilateral interstate relationship rather than a systemic effect. The United States and Canada are interdependent. Globalization, on the other hand, affects all of the actors in the system.
Regulatory coordination is defined as the codified adjustment of national standards in order to recognize or accommodate regulatory frameworks from other countries. Although there are many dimensions of economic regulation, this definition presumes that standards are the primary operationalization through which political authorities establish the global rules of the game. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines standards as, “[the] documented agreements containing technical specifications or other precise criteria to be used consistently as rules, guidelines, or definitions of characteristics, to ensure that materials, products, processes, and services are fit for their purpose.” Defining policy coordination via standards has the conceptual advantage of creating a single dimension to compare disparate regulatory preferences. Stringent regulatory standards require actors to invest in significant resources to ensure compliance; lax regulatory standards do not. Walter Mattli observes that, “work on standards by political scientists practically does not exist,” suggesting the extent to which the existing literature has missed the mark in assessing the regulation of the global economy.

Regulatory coordination does not automatically imply policy convergence, which is defined as the narrowing of gaps in national standards over time. For example, the mutual recognition of other national standards does not necessarily lead to greater policy convergence, but does lead to greater coordination. Furthermore, convergence can occur without conscious coordination, if structural factors affect all actors in an identical fashion. Regulatory coordination is also distinct from harmonization, which implies policy convergence to a single regulatory standard. That said, theories predicting policy convergence or even harmonization can ostensibly explain regulatory coordination as well.

Global governance is a more expansive term than policy coordination. Global governance refers not only to the codified adjustment of national rules and regulations; it encompasses the collection of authority relationships designated to monitor, enforce, and amend any transnational set of rules and regulations. Note that this definition can include a variety of arrangements, including “hard

---

39 One could argue that the stringency metric does not apply to purely technical standards to ensure the interoperability of goods and services across borders (such as the width of credit cards). While this is likely true in some cases, the discussion in part II shows that even technical standards may require more investment in compliance, with some candidate standards requiring more investment than others.
law" treaties, “soft law” declarations, private orders, and recommended codes of conduct. As defined, global governance has a more precise definition than the myriad definitions for international regime that are given in the literature. The latter term can include tacit norms or informal social practices; the terms used here imply the existence of codified rules. At the same time, the plurality of institutional arrangements contained within this definition contrasts with institutionalist theory, which tends to think of international regimes as single entities that dominate an issue space.

When can global governance be said to be effective? The definitions vary by the author. Some look at whether the regulatory regime affects the substantive issue in question. By this metric, for example, the Kyoto Protocol would be considered effective if it halts the current trend of global warming. Another school of thought examines whether the actors comply with the agreed-upon commitment. By this metric, the Kyoto Protocol would be effective if all of the participating actors adhere to their treaty commitments, even if the Kyoto Protocol does not ameliorate the problem of global warming. Yet another measure is whether deflections from global agreements are detected and punished—even if the deviations from existing rules persist. By this metric, the Kyoto Protocol would be considered effective if countries that generated greenhouse gas emissions above their agreed-upon limit were severely sanctioned for their transgressions.

A big problem with measuring effectiveness is that governments often make pledges to coordinate without actually doing so. Consider, for example, the panoply of United Nations environmental treaties and ongoing conferences. As Peter Haas points out:

> It is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of many of these conferences, in part because of weaknesses and gaps in our ability to monitor progress in achieving conference goals. The record is generally mixed, at best, in terms of achieving the targets and aspirations expressed in the action plans and declarations of the conferences. . . .

---


The goals are often ambiguous. State reporting about compliance is generally weak and incomplete, and few provisions for verification of state compliance are made at the conferences.47

Similarly, Kal Raustiala has demonstrated that because international regulatory regimes are nearly always administered through regulatory regimes at the national level, long-standing domestic institutions can act as an impediment to the implementation of new global regulations.48 Harmonization of forms does not necessarily translate into genuine policy coordination.

For this project, proper measure of effectiveness measures both the extent of actor compliance and the magnitude of the adjustments that actors are required to make to meet the agreed-upon regulatory standard.49 To use a numerical example, a global governance structure where states are only 50 percent compliant with an agreement to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 percent should be considered more effective than a regulatory regime that produces 100 percent compliance with an agreement to cut emissions by only 1 percent.50 Compliance matters, but so does the degree of difficulty.

The Literature

There is no shortage of explanations for how the world economy is regulated in an era of globalization. The scholarly literature on this subject can be divided along two conceptual dimensions, as table 1.1 shows. The first dimension is whether the theory posits that the driving force behind regulatory coordination is economic or ideational. The second dimension is whether actors retain agency in the face of a globalizing economy, or are tightly constrained by structural forces.

The first wave of scholarship—and virtually all of the popular literature on the subject—emphasized the primacy of structural forces over the agency of

49 This definition elides the question of whether the agreed policy coordination substantially addresses the social or economic externality in question.
50 I use this same logic in measuring the magnitude of concessions in response to economic sanctions. See Daniel W. Drezner, The Sanctions Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 4. For regulatory coordination, another dimension of effectiveness covers the scope of the agreement. To use the example of the Kyoto Protocol again, the failure of the United States or Australia to sign on downgrades the efficacy of the agreement, even if it achieves significant changes of behavior among the signatories.
Table 1.1
A Taxonomy of Globalization Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material pressures dominate</th>
<th>Ideational pressures dominate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent-Based Approaches</td>
<td>Structure-Based Approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream IPE- approaches</td>
<td>Global civil society (GCS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race-to-the-bottom</td>
<td>World polity paradigm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

actors. These approaches argue that states are at the mercy of systemic forces, be they material or ideational. With these approaches, coordination occurs because of structural effects that force policy convergence; all countries respond to transnational constraints in the same way. While these approaches are conceptually elegant, they share the twin flaws of dubious theoretical presumptions and meager empirical support.51

Structural models focusing on the material effects of trade and capital flows tend to posit a “race-to-the-bottom” outcome. According to this model, capital has become increasingly footloose, to the point where states could not limit its mobility even if they tried.52 In such a world, capital will seek the location where it can earn the highest rate of return. High rates of corporate taxation, strict labor laws, or rigorous environmental protection lower profit rates by raising the costs of production. Capital will therefore engage in regulatory arbitrage, moving to (or importing from) countries with the lowest regulatory standards. Nation-states eager to attract capital—and fearful of losing their tax base—lower their regulatory standards so as to raise the rate of return for corporate investment. The end result is a world where regulatory standards are at the lowest common denominator.

As David Vogel and Robert Kagan observe, “The political influence of the ‘race to the bottom’ imagery has been considerable.”53 While some scholarly advocates for this approach exist, its prominence is largely due to its long intellectual history and its recurrent popularity among the commentariat. Scholars in the social sciences have been fretting about races to the bottom

51 Drezner, “Globalization and Policy Convergence.”
since Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*.

Naomi Klein epitomizes the public intellectual cachet of this metaphor when she asserts: “[T]he incentives to lure investors are increasing and the wages and standards are being held hostage to the threat of departure. The upshot is that entire countries are being turned into industrial slums and low-wage ghettos, with no end in sight.” Implicitly or explicitly, this theory is at the root of most of the antiglobalization sentiment voiced in Seattle and elsewhere.

There are anecdotal examples that support the idea of a race to the bottom, but the bulk of the evidence strongly suggests that these assertions are flatly wrong. Official international governmental organization reports, statistical

---

54 “The proprietor of stock is a citizen of the world, and is not necessarily attached to any particular country. He would be apt to abandon the country in which he was . . . assessed to a burdensome tax, and would remove his stock to some other country where he could either carry on his business or enjoy his fortune more at his ease. By removing his stock he would put an end to all the industry which it had maintained in the country which he left” (Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, [New York: Modern Library, 1937], 800). On other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fears about globalization, see Samir Amin, “The Challenge of Globalization,” *Review of International Political Economy* 3 (Fall 1996): 216–59; Emma Rothschild, “Globalization and the Return of History,” *Foreign Policy* 115 (Summer 1999): 106–16.


inquiries, comparative analyses, and even studies of deviant cases fail to find any appreciable evidence that countries are systematically lowering their labor or environmental standards in order to attract multinational capital. There is no evidence that economic openness and regulatory laxness are correlated in any way. Reviewing the literature, Martin Tobey comes to the same conclusion: “The great bulk of foreign direct investment continues to go to


countries with high labour costs and strong regulatory regimes, not least on the environment.” Theoretically, the race to the bottom rests on shaky initial assumptions—and the predicted outcome is not robust to slight alterations in the model. Of the major explanations for global regulatory coordination, this is the easiest one to dismiss.

The world polity approach eschews the material aspects of globalization. According to this paradigm, regulatory coordination is not driven by capital mobility but by the spread of abstract concepts combined with the need for governments to conform to an ideal of the rationalized bureaucratic state. John Meyer—the leading voice of this paradigm—sums up the argument: “globalization means the expanded flow of instrumental culture around the world. Put simply, common models of social order become authoritative in many different social settings.” According to this paradigm, the spread of global scientific discourse, establishment of international treaty law, and creation of attendant international governmental organizations (IGOs) leads to institutional isomorphism. These ideational forces of globalization cause the spread of new norms calling for an “expansive structuration” of the state—

---

64 The “world polity” school of thought is also referred to as the ”world society” paradigm. In the interest of distinguishing this model from later discussions about global civil society, I will stick to the ”world polity” terminology.
the development of new rules and bureaucracies to regulate both society and economy. Inexorably, states harmonize their regulations at ever-increasing levels of government intervention.\(^{68}\)

This school of thought is somewhat vague on the processes through which convergence occurs, making falsification tests difficult.\(^{69}\) Nevertheless, scholars working within the world polity paradigm have generated statistical evidence for a variety of regulatory functions.\(^{70}\) There has undoubtedly been a secular increase in government commitment to labor standards, for example, which supports the structuration hypothesis.\(^{71}\) In particular, empirical studies argue that the growth of the United Nations system, the rationalization of scientific discourse, and the growth of national bureaucracies can explain the explosion of international environmental regulation over the past century.\(^{72}\)

The evidence for the world polity approach looks compelling but raises troubling methodological issues. It is an open question whether these results demonstrate correlation or causation. Empirically, measures of broad global participation are used to predict narrower forms of policy coordination.\(^{73}\)

---

\(^{68}\) As Meyer et al. conclude, “Holding constant the functional pressures of size, resources, and complexity, in recent decades nation-states . . . have clearly expanded inordinately across many different social domains. This is precisely the period during which world polity has been consolidated.” Meyer et al., “World Polity and the Nation-State,” 156.

\(^{69}\) Sidney Tarrow observes, “Meyer and his collaborators were more interested in mapping isomorphism than in understanding the mechanisms of diffusion—and in fact, in their work the diffusion process is more frequently inferred from the presence of similar structures than traced through the actions of particular actors.” Tarrow, “Transnational Politics: Contention and Institutions in International Politics,” Annual Review of Political Science 4 (2001): 5–6. Even adherents to this view acknowledge this; see David Strang and Patricia Ye Min Chang, “The International Labor Organization and the Welfare State,” International Organization 47 (Spring 1993): 237. See also Kate O’Neill, “Agency and Environmental Policy Change,” unpublished ms., University of California, Berkeley, CA, June 2000.


\(^{73}\) For example, it should not be shocking that the growth of scientific unions is used to predict the growth of environmental associations. Frank, “The Social Bases of Environmental Treaty Ratification,” 528.
David John Frank admits that the world polity paradigm’s testable hypotheses are “almost tautologous,” acknowledging that “it may be the case that one of the competing independent variables (such as economic development) underlies both country linkages to world society and number of environmental treaty ratifications.” Including intervening variables on the left-hand side of a regression model artificially reduces the significance levels of the collinear causal variables. This flaw is indicative of the tendency for world polity scholars, in their empirical work, to omit control variables for alternative explanations.

The world polity paradigm suffers from theoretical shortcomings as well. It tends to exaggerate the power of global culture at the expense of domestic rules and institutions. World polity scholars assume that states in the developing world will mimic more advanced economies because their own laws and institutions are amorphous and/or illegitimate enough to permit the constant re-creation of political institutions. This may be an accurate description of some developing countries, but not all. States in Latin America, South Asia, and the Pacific Rim have a sufficient history of self-governance to experience institutional path dependence, making regulatory change considerably more difficult. This argument also assumes global culture is free of contradictory impulses. As will be demonstrated in the chapter on genetically modified organisms, transnational regulatory coordination can generate both material and ideational conflicts among the great powers. If there is disagreement within the core nations of the global economy, it is hard to envision how common standards and practices will naturally diffuse to other countries.

Another category of theorists reject the emphasis on structural factors and emphasize the agency of nonstate actors in the international system. Ann Florini and P. J. Simmons assert that, “Transnational civil society is a piece—an increasingly important piece—of the larger problem of global gover-

---

74 Ibid, 533.

75 A related statistical flaw is that in many of these studies, one-tailed t-tests are used to determine significance. If two-tailed tests are used, many of the significant results drop below the 95 percent confidence threshold.

76 The Frank study only includes world population and carbon dioxide emissions as alternative explanatory variables; the Meyer study only includes population. Many of the variables consistent with alternative explanations of regulatory convergence—growth in global GDP, the rate of urbanization, the growth of international trade, the distribution of power, changes in communication technologies—are not included in either study. Given the admitted collinearity of these alternatives with the associational variables, the likelihood of omitted variable bias cannot be dismissed.


nance.” Scholarly work in this framework posit that the growth of non-
governmental organizations, epistemic communities, public policy net-
works, transnational social movements, and even private orders amounts
to the creation of a global civil society (GCS) that is too ideationally powerful
for states to ignore. As the dynamic density of GCS actors increases, so does
their effect on outcomes. Some writers go further, arguing that these groups
are now powerful enough to bypass the state entirely, leading to a “world
civic politics.”

Most of the empirical work on global civil society consists of efforts to
demonstrate existence rather than pervasiveness. Therefore, most of the case
studies take the form of “easy tests.” However, even looking at these cases,
there is reason to question the explanatory power of the GCS approach. For
element, scholars have argued that an epistemic community based in the
United Nations Environmental Program and elite research institutes was
responsible for persuading governments to agree to cooperate on the Montreal
Protocol on stratospheric ozone, the 1992 Rio biodiversity summit, and the

80 Peter I. Spiro, “New Global Communities: Nongovernmental Organizations in International
“Politics beyond the State: Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics,” World Politics 47
81 Peter Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,”
82 Wolfgang Reinicke, Global Public Policy: Governing without Government? (Washington, DC:
Brookings Institution Press, 1998); John Braithwaite and Peter Drahos, Global Business Regulation
83 Keck and Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders; Robert O’Brien, Anne Marie Goetz, Jan Aart
Scholte, and Marc Williams, Contesting Global Governance (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2000).
84 A. Claire Cutler, Virginia Haubler, and Tony Porter, eds., Private Authority and International
Affairs (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Rodney Bruce Hall and Thomas J.
Biersteker, eds., The Emergence of Private Authority in Global Governance (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2002).
85 Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink point out: “Networks operate best when they are dense,
with many actors, strong connections among groups in the network, and reliable information
flows.” Keck and Sikkink, Activists beyond Borders, 28.
86 Ronnie Lipschutz notes: “While the participants in the networks of global civil society inter-
act with states and governments over particular policy issues, the networks themselves extend
beyond levels of analysis and state borders, and are not constrained by the state system itself.”
Lipschutz, “Reconstructing World Politics,” 393. See also Wapner, “Politics beyond the State.”
87 One exception is Richard Price, “Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Tar-
gets Land Mines,” International Organization 52 (Summer 1998): 613–44, but see chapter 9 for a
further discussion of the land mine case.
international whaling regime.88 However, Lawrence Susskind argues that in general, epistemic communities have rarely played a role in environmental governance: “a review of most of the international treaties negotiated since the 1972 Stockholm conference shows that scientific evidence has played a surprisingly small role in issue definition, fact-finding, bargaining, and regime strengthening.”89 Both first-person and analytic accounts of international environmental negotiations also clash with the GCS narrative.90

Research into global civil society often blurs public activity with causal effect.91 For example, GCS activists assert that through mass protests, petitions, and posting treaty drafts on Web sites, they played a crucial role in the failure of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), an OECD initiative that stalled out in December 1998.92 The problem with this interpretation of events is that there is minimal evidence that they were the cause of the MAI’s downfall. The member states were far from reaching an agreement—the last draft version of the treaty had contained almost fifty pages of country-specific exemptions.93 The United States and European Union were deadlocked over the issues of extraterritorial sanctions, application of the most-favored nation principle, and cultural protectionism. Edward M. Graham concludes: “the ne-

gottations were indeed in very deep difficulty before the metaphorical torpedo was fired by the NGOs . . . this torpedo thus was more a coup de grâce than a fatal blow in its own right."

Many of the flaws in the GCS approach echo the problems with the first wave of research on transnational actors three decades ago.35 Michael Clarke noted that the first wave of transnationalism research, “certainly does not constitute a theory; it is rather a term which recognizes a phenomenon, or perhaps a trend in world politics, a phenomenon from which other concepts flow.”36 Similarly, the GCS scholarship to date has focused more on descriptive inference than causal inference37—and even the description often lacks conceptual clarity.38 The empirical confusion between the visibility of global civil society and their precise role in affecting the aforementioned cases highlights the need for causal inference and careful process tracing.

The final category of theories—mainstream IR paradigms—refers to the paradigms of international relations that have been dominant in the discourse. These approaches accept the primacy of material over ideational factors, and argue that the menu of choice for significant actors is not tightly constrained. They also assume that states are the primary actors in setting regulatory standards. The revisionist approach developed in this book comfortably fits into this family of theories.

There is a burgeoning literature that discusses how states determine the pattern of transnational regulation.39 While these approaches share many common assumptions, however, significant differences remain. Many liberal institutionalists and virtually all realists begin with the premise that the United

---

35 Graham, Fighting the Wrong Enemy, 16 and 40.
States remains a hegemonic actor in most facets of the global economy. For these theorists, policy coordination can be explained by a combination of American preferences and the extent of the externalities created by an absence of harmonization. Unless states face a prisoner’s dilemma with few cross-border spillovers, policy coordination is likely.

While the assumption of American hegemony works well in the security realm, it is far from clear whether such an assumption is accurate when thinking about the global political economy. As a share of the global economy, the United States had more power and fewer peer competitors in 1945 than at any point during the current era of globalization—yet no scholar would claim that global policy harmonization was stronger back then. This fact highlights another weakness of the hegemony assumption: the belief that military power, or even productive power, is sufficiently fungible to affect outcomes in the global political economy. Even in realms where American power currently appears preeminent, there are coding disputes. For example, Beth Simmons provides an explanation of harmonization in capital market regulation that relies on hegemonic state power. However, other scholars have challenged Simmons’s assumption on empirical grounds.

Another body of state-based theories, resting squarely within the institutionalist tradition, focuses on the bargaining problem between states and the relative strength and weakness of state-level and supranational regulatory networks. Regulatory coordination is more likely to take place when preexisting institutions are in place and possess the necessary monitoring and enforcement capabilities. The theoretical work in this area relies on game-theoretic mod-

---


101 See, in particular, Simmons, “The International Politics of Harmonization.”


103 Another flaw rests on how power is operationalized. While many scholars assume economic power rests on a country’s share of global production capabilities, the approach developed in the next few chapters demonstrates that the size of a country’s aggregate demand matters more than supply. At the macro level, the definition is unimportant, but at the sectoral level, the distinction frequently leads to contrasting predictions.

104 See the discussion in chapter 5.


els of interactions between states. The nature of the cooperation problem is more important than state power or preferences—because the question of interest to many international relations scholars is why states choose not to cooperate even if all parties can enhance their utility via cooperation. The empirical work of this research program also tends to focus on individual international governmental organizations and their relative success and failure.

There are theoretical and empirical shortcomings to this approach. Theoretically, an institutionalist approach ignores situations when noncooperation takes place because of preference divergence rather than bargaining failures or credible commitment problems. As Andrew Hurrell points out, “because a great deal of institutionalist writing has been concerned with the creation of institutions within the developed world, there has been a tendency to assume away the existence of fundamental differences in religion, social organization, culture, and moral outlook that may block or, at least, complicate cooperative action.”

Empirically, even institutionalists acknowledge flaws within the paradigm. A major problem is that this research suffers from a narrowness of vision. There is a tendency to focus on a single formal organization to the exclusion of other institutions with similar functions. This overlooks an important fact in understanding the processes of regulatory coordination—there is a remarkably thick institutional environment in the global political economy. The number of formal IGOs is sufficiently large that in thinking about global governance, one can talk about “regime complexes” rather than single organizations.

Where does the literature leave us? Most immediate is the need for more refined theories and better empirical work. If the structural approaches have less empirical support it is partially because their predictions are more precise and thus easier to falsify. Agent-based approaches to policy coordination must


107 For example, Robert Keohane ascribes the failure of the Kyoto Protocol to “bargaining problems,” when in fact the divergence of preferences is so wide that it is far from clear that, until the costs of global warming become more readily apparent, a bargaining core even exists. Keohane, Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World, 32.


111 Raustiala and Victor, “The Regime Complex for Plant Genetic Resources.”
be able to make falsifiable predictions. Empirically, there is a need to select tests that generate contrasting predictions from different theoretical approaches. To date, a common failure of the approaches reviewed in this chapter is the failure to consider alternative explanations in their empirical work. Single case studies with overdetermined explanations or statistical tests without control variables are insufficient for the accumulation of knowledge.

To be fair, the globalization process imposes formidable roadblocks to theory-building. One obvious challenge is the dizzying plethora of actors, factors, and venues that appear to demand explanation. Some existing paradigms may draw faulty causal inferences about global economic governance, but they are more accurate in their descriptive inferences of how globalization unleashes emergent actors and trends. The literature on global civil society is correct in asserting that globalization has increased the number of nonstate actors in world politics. The world polity approach is correct in pointing to the proliferation of intergovernmental organizations and agreements that dot the global stage. The race-to-the-bottom argument dramatically overpredicts its primary hypothesis, but provides some empirical leverage in highlighting the possibility of regulatory slack. The state-based approaches make more sensible assumptions, but can suffer from a narrowness of theoretical and empirical vision. These critiques, however, offer a useful guide for how to start theorizing about the regulation of globalization.

**The Methods**

This book will use a mixture of formal and expositional argumentation to develop the argument. Game theory can be a valuable tool to clarify the assumptions and the causal logic of a model. It will be used here to show the conditions under which governments will be amenable to policy coordination. The globalization phenomenon has a lot of working parts, however. In addition to states there are other categories of actors, including NGOs, IGOs, and multinational corporations. Throwing all of these actors into the game-theoretic grinder increases the complexity of a formal model to the point where the computational costs outweigh the explanatory benefits. When such circumstances present themselves, I will switch to a less formal method of theory development.

Statistical analysis is of little use in testing this model against competing explanations. Operationalizing a common measure of the dependent variable—effective regulatory coordination—across issue areas is extremely problematic. Examining formal international agreements is one way to measure policy coordination, but there is no observable and verifiable method for mea-

---

112 Murphy, *The Structure of Regulatory Competition*. 
suring effective implementation that travels across disparate issue areas. This matter because for certain distributions of state interests, my model will predict the development of sham standards—nominal policy coordination coupled with ineffective global governance. Furthermore, the model presented here develops a theory of coordination processes as well as outcomes. Given the dynamic nature of the coordination questions under study, the best approach to testing these theories is through the careful selection of case studies, followed by process-tracing and within-case analysis. Case studies can best test the process attributes of the various models of regulatory coordination.

It is commonly argued that the case study methods are inferior to statistical methods in demonstrating empirical validity. However, the proper selection of cases can substantially strengthen the positive empirical claims that can be made. To demonstrate that a great power concert is a necessary and sufficient condition for effective global regulatory governance, I examine the global governance of financial regulation and the Internet. Globalization theorists argue that the nation-state is at its weakest and the plethora of nonstate actors and structural constraints are at their strongest for these two issue areas. All of the ways in which globalization is hypothesized to weaken states occur in a more concentrated form on Internet-related issues. Therefore, in chapter 4, I look at the global governance of the Internet. International finance is commonly assumed to be the synecdoche of all of the ways in which economic globalization empowers markets and constrains states. In chapter 5, I examine the push toward global financial regulation in the wake of the Mexican and Asian financial crises. In chapter 6, I examine the case of genetically modified organisms—an issue area where the United States and European Union have diametrically opposing preferences. This case provides fertile ground to examine the theory of preference formation developed here—and also allows a comparison of the revisionist model against other state-centric models of global regulation. There are also issues for which nonstate actors are given pride of place in explaining shifts in global governance outcomes. In chapter 7, I examine the ongoing battle over intellectual property rights and the patenting of life-saving pharmaceuticals. For these cases, the revisionist model presented here can explain the variation in governance processes, governance outcomes, and the enforcement of rules better than any single competing alternative.

These case studies involve an intensive use of primary and secondary source material. I also rely on interviews with the relevant officials from key governments, IGOs, and NGOs that were involved in these issue areas. In analyzing


the global governance structures concerning both financial regulation and money laundering, I rely on an additional data source—my "field work" as an international economist at the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of International Banking and Securities Markets.

The Limitations

The revisionist model presented here can explain a lot about globalization and global governance, but there is a lot more that lies outside this book’s purview. No single book weighing less than ten pounds could explain all of the implications of globalization or the intricacies of global governance, which range from the end of the nation-state to the end of history. It should be stressed what this book does not cover: I do not attempt to explain the origins of the recent era of economic globalization or the origins of the international institutions that underlie this era. At this juncture, such a question is primarily of historical interest; this book assumes that regulations matter precisely because high tariffs, quotas, and capital controls are not considered to be viable policy options for most goods and services. The effect of globalization on macroeconomic policies or the size of the welfare state will also not be discussed. The global governance of security-related issues is not covered in the main text. The normative debates about global governance are also not a topic of discussion.

The empirical limitations need to be highlighted as well. The problem with studying global regulatory coordination is the limited number of data points. While there have been previous eras of globalization, states in those times were less concerned with ameliorating the domestic externalities of global capitalism. As a result, the few studies of regulatory coordination prior to 1945 have mainly highlighted the unwillingness in world politics to create effective forms of global governance. The cold war–era largely consisted of efforts


117 Both security issues and normative implications make cameo appearances in the concluding chapter.

118 For a discussion of other differences between the pre–World War I era and the more recent era of globalization, see Kahler and Lake, “Globalization and Governance,” 11–15.

119 Most pre-1945 studies of policy coordination focus on monetary policy. See Luca Einaudi, Money and Politics: European Monetary Unification and the International Gold Standard (New
to remove the overt barriers to the free flow of goods, services, and capital that were permitted under the Bretton Woods system of embedded liberalism.\textsuperscript{120} The cases developed in this book explain the recent past—roughly speaking, from 1980 onward.\textsuperscript{121} The small-n nature of the data means that any empirical support found in the cases must be labeled as preliminary; this approach will find or lose empirical support based on the future.

**The Rest of the Book**

Part I lays out the theory. It outlines the assumptions behind the revisionist model, works through the theory’s causal logic, and examines how it differs from existing work on the subject.

The next chapter develops a theory to explain the relative power and preferences of states. A simple game-theoretic model demonstrates the ways in which market size and adjustment costs influence coordination outcomes. Market size alters the distribution of payoffs by reducing the rewards of regulatory coordination for large market states and increasing the rewards for small market states. This gives the great powers a bargaining advantage and alters the perceptions of other actors so as to reinforce the likelihood of regulatory coordination at a great power’s status quo ante. On top of this, market size endows great powers with the option of economic coercion as a way of convincing other actors in the system to change their standards. However, the model also demonstrates that between large markets, power differentials are of minimal importance.

Moving from power to preferences, chapter 2 also develops a theory of national preferences over regulatory standards. Initial regulatory preferences are a function of myriad factors, including a country’s stage of economic development and its economic history. What really determines government attitudes toward international regulatory coordination, however, is the adjustment costs

---


it faces from altering its national standards. When public or private actors face barriers to exit in response to changes in the regulatory environment, governments will incur higher adjustment costs and are therefore more reluctant to change their regulatory standards. Adjustment costs are expected to be higher for regulatory arenas affecting relatively mature economic sectors or relatively immobile factors of production.

Chapter 3 builds on the insights from chapter 2 and develops a typology of regulatory processes. If there is a large bargaining core among the great powers, then the outcome will be one of coordinated standards. However, the divergence of preferences between the great powers and other actors in the system will strongly shape the process through which global governance structures are fashioned. A split between great powers and other states affects both the bargaining tactics and the bargaining forum. This chapter also considers the influence of various nonstate actors. Working through the outcomes of different constellations of state interests, I develop typologies of both NGOs and IGOs. For NGOs, the distinction between advocacy and service functions is a useful one. For IGOs, I rely on Michael Walzer’s typology of membership to categorize IGOs by their criteria for inclusion and exclusion. This leads to a tripartite world of IGOs: clubs, neighborhoods, and universes. The utility and influence of these nonstate actors is a direct function of the distribution of state interests.

Part II shifts from theory to examine international regulation as it is practiced. Chapter 4 examines the spectrum of Internet regulation. This case is a tough test of the revisionist model, because the Internet has been consistently cited as a metaphor for the declining importance of the nation-state. A closer look at this case reveals multiple issue areas within this broad category—copyright protection, content regulation, technical protocols, consumer privacy—that overlap with more traditional regulatory questions. The model generated here can therefore explain the distribution of outcomes. The most interesting case, however, is the evolution of technical protocols. This case best illustrates that states can still determine regulatory outcomes even if they play no formal role in the governance structure. This is demonstrated through a process-tracing of the emergence of the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) and the creation of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

Chapter 5 traces the creation of the financial codes and standards that were created in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. The globalization of finance and the concomitant rise in financial instability increased the demand for a new “international financial architecture.” Most of the scholarly and policy focus centered on the role of the international financial institutions

---

(IFIs)—the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. However, focusing strictly on the IFIs overlooks the ability of the economic great powers to substitute between different governance structures as a means of advancing their common preferences. Because financial regulation produced a cleavage of interests between the developed and developing states, the developed great powers relied on club organizations to create new modes of coordination. The aftermath of the Mexican and Asian financial crises led to the creation of new clubs, such as the Financial Stability Forum (FSF)—and the empowerment of pre-existing clubs, such as Bank of International Settlements. While the International Monetary Fund did play a role in the enforcement of these new standards, it was marginalized in the policy coordination process.

Chapter 6 examines the extent of regulatory coordination in the treatment of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The dynamic density of transnational activist networks is very strong on this environmental question—therefore, models of global civil society would predict stringent regulatory standards for GM products across the globe. In actuality, GMO regulations in most of the world oscillate between the American and European positions. The reason is that the GMO case affects actors with high barriers to regulatory exit—consumers and agricultural producers. These actors are far more likely to mobilize their resources to engage in political voice—raising the domestic costs of adjustment for governments. To date, global civil society has proven unsuccessful in translating its preferences on this issue to governments outside the European Union’s sphere of economic influence—but agricultural producers have been equally frustrated in altering European preferences.

This chapter also demonstrates the relative strength of the revisionist model vis-à-vis other state-based theories of regulatory coordination. Some state-based models tend to assume U.S. hegemony on regulatory matters because of its impressive production capabilities. Given its dominance in agricultural output, a hegemonic model would predict an outcome favoring the United States. Other governance models argue that the key variable is the relative strength and coherence of a government’s regulatory capacity. By this metric, many scholars would presume that the European Union would have an advantage. A California effect would also predict upwards harmonization to the European Union’s level of regulatory stringency. However, the approach developed here predicts what we actually see—a stalemate of rival standards between two great powers. Only the revisionist model generates the correct prediction.

Chapter 7 looks at a deviant case—the push by global civil society to modify the intellectual property rights regime. For the past decade, activists and nongovernmental organizations waged a sustained campaign to force the great powers to allow public health “flexibilities” in the enforcement of Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). These groups have claimed some notable successes, culminating in the 2001 Doha Declaration on the TRIPS
Agreement and Public Health. This apparent success challenges the revisionist approach developed here. This chapter critically examines the GCS narrative on TRIPS and public health, and finds two flaws: a neglect of alternative explanations for the policy change, and an overestimation of the magnitude of the policy shift. Over the long run, the ability of the great powers to shift regulatory fora gives them an advantage that global civil society cannot match. Upon further examination, this episode turns out to be a “semi-deviant” case.

Chapter 8 concludes with a discussion of the revisionist model’s implications. The model and evidence developed here refutes theoretical assertions that globalization requires the rejection of existing paradigms. Instead, globalization vastly expands the explanatory domain for IR theory, by constantly internationalizing heretofore domestic policy issues. With regard to public policy, the revisionist model provides important clues to nonstate actors about the conditions and strategies that will be successful in influencing global public policy. The normative disapproval of globalization that comes through in much of the literature is due in part to the belief that democratic sovereignty is being trampled by the onslaught of global corporate domination. There is no question that the great powers rule the global political economy, at times without input from other stakeholders in the system. However, globalization is not the guilty party here, and it is far from clear that there is any alternative to the status quo. Relative to the democratic ideal, the governance of today’s global political economy is flawed. Compared to the past, however, the current era offers some promise of hope.