

The Political Economy of International Regulatory Cooperation[†]

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We examine international regulatory agreements that are negotiated under lobbying pressures from producer groups. The way in which lobbying influences the cooperative setting of regulatory policies, as well as the welfare impacts of international agreements, depend crucially on whether the interests of producers in different countries are aligned or in conflict. The former situation tends to occur for product standards, while the latter tends to occur for process standards. We find that, if producer lobbies are strong enough, agreements on product standards lead to excessive deregulation and decrease welfare, while agreements on process standards tighten regulations and enhance welfare. (JEL F13, F14, F15, L15, L51)

After decades of trade liberalization, tariffs have reached historically low levels, so there is limited scope for further tariff reductions. As a result, recent trade agreements largely revolve around non-tariff issues such as domestic regulations. For example, all the agreements signed by the United States since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) contain provisions on environmental and labor standards, and the same is true for most of the agreements signed by the EU, including the recent Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada.¹ Furthermore, many recent agreements have established regulatory cooperation councils that aim to coordinate national regulatory agencies on an ongoing basis.²

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¹See for example ustr.gov/issue-areas/environment/bilateral-and-regional-trade-agreements and ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/policy-making/sustainable-development.

²Some well-known regulatory cooperation councils are CETA’s Regulatory Cooperation Forum, the Canada-US Regulatory Cooperation Council and the US-Mexico High Level Regulatory Cooperation Council, and a similar council is part of the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the European Union and the United States.

International agreements whose scope extends to domestic policies are often referred to as “deep” agreements, in contrast with “shallow” agreements that focus only on border policies. Deep agreements have been very controversial, as evidenced for example by the massive protests against CETA and TTIP in Europe, which drew hundreds of thousands of people to the streets. While some opponents criticize any form of economic globalization, most object specifically to the deep integration elements. The overarching concern is that deep agreements may get hijacked by special interests. In particular, a common claim is that business groups exert disproportionate influence on regulatory cooperation bodies, thus undermining consumer safety and endangering the environment. A case in point was the public uproar against allowing the sale of chlorine-washed chicken in Europe, which had been banned earlier by the European Union. An example of this kind of criticism is the following statement by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy:

Regulatory cooperation activities most often take place behind closed doors, with a corporate-directed deregulatory agenda, and with minimal participation by civil society or stakeholders outside of the regulated industries (...) (www.iatp.org/new-nafta-grp)

These concerns are shared by some academic economists. For example, Rodrik (2018) argues informally that, while shallow integration is likely to enhance welfare because it empowers exporter lobbies and pits them against import-competing interests, deep integration may be bad for welfare because it empowers the “wrong” special interests.

Formal academic research in this area has focused primarily on the impact of special interests on shallow agreements, while it has paid little attention to the political economy of deep agreements. In this paper we take a step in this direction, with a particular focus on the question of how global welfare is impacted by international regulatory agreements when these are influenced by industrial lobbies.

The simple overarching idea underlying our theory can be described as follows. A key determinant of the welfare impact of politically pressured agreements is whether lobbies have more influence when policies are set unilaterally or when they are set by international negotiations; in the former case, international negotiations *dilute* the influence of lobbies, and agreements tend to increase welfare; in the latter case, international negotiations *intensify* the influence of lobbies, so agreements may decrease welfare.³ This depends critically on whether the interests of a country’s lobbies are aligned or in conflict with those of foreign countries’ lobbies: in the former case, international negotiations induce “co-lobbying”; in the latter, they induce “counter-lobbying.”

Whether international negotiations induce co-lobbying or counter-lobbying in turn depends crucially on the nature of the policy on the negotiating table. Our theory emphasizes a distinction between two types of regulations: *product* standards (defined as restrictions on the characteristics of products sold in the local market) and *process* standards (defined as restrictions on production processes that take place

³The statement above is based on the notion that lobbying tends to be detrimental for welfare. In our setting this is always true if lobbies are sufficiently powerful, but may not be true if the power of lobbies is moderate. We will come back to this point below (see footnote 41).

on domestic soil). If a country loosens its product standards (in a nondiscriminatory way), this benefits both domestic and foreign producers, so in this case there is co-lobbying. On the other hand, loosening process standards benefits domestic producers while hurting foreign producers, so in this case there is counter-lobbying. This intuition thus suggests that international cooperation is less benign when negotiations focus on product standards than when they focus on process standards.⁴

In reality both product standards and process standards play an important role in international regulatory cooperation. Product standards have been quite central in recent agreements such as the CETA agreement and the proposed TTIP agreement. It is noteworthy that some of the most well-known controversies regarding deep integration (including the famous case of chlorine-washed chicken) have revolved around product standards. Also process standards, such as environmental regulations for factories and safety standards for workers, have been an important issue area for many trade agreements in the last couple of decades, as mentioned at the outset.⁵

Interestingly, Young (2016, 2017) provides an anecdotal account of the CETA and TTIP negotiations that resonates with a key theme of our paper, namely the coordination of lobbies across borders in their efforts to influence the agreements. For example, Young documents that US and European business groups acted in a coordinated way both in supporting TTIP negotiations and in influencing the content of this agreement. He reports that “... rather than being rivals, American and European business interests are allies, adopting common positions on what they want the agreement to look like.” (Young 2016, p. 345). According to this account, conflict across business groups was observed only in the agricultural sector, where no transatlantic alliances were formed.⁶

We now describe in more detail the main steps of our analysis and our main results.

To focus sharply on issues of deep integration, we consider a setting where border measures are unavailable, and in particular, trade taxes are not available and standards cannot discriminate against imports. In a later section we will discuss how

⁴The reason we define product standards as restrictions on the characteristics of products sold in the local market is that we want to focus on policies that a government can directly and unilaterally enforce, and for product standards this is the case only if they are destination-specific, because government A cannot restrict characteristics of products that are sold in country B. Similarly, a government cannot directly restrict characteristics of a process that takes place in a different jurisdiction, and this is why we define process standards as restrictions that a government imposes on *local* production processes. Having said this, in reality there is a third category of standards that does not fit either of our notions of product standards or process standards, and in particular, country A may restrict the local sale of products that are produced with “undesirable” processes in country B. Examples of such standards are bans on the sale of clothes that are produced with child labor, or of tuna caught with dolphin-unsafe nets. These types of standards may be motivated by cross-border externalities (e.g., moral externalities in the case of child labor or dolphin-unsafe processes) and are often proposed as unilateral policies to address such externalities. Note, however, they are less efficient than process standards imposed at the origin, and it is perhaps for this reason that they have not been a major focus of regulatory agreements thus far.

⁵We note that not all labor standards can be included in our definition of process standards: for example, workplace safety standards do fall within our notion of process standards, but minimum wages do not.

⁶The transatlantic business alliances documented by Young and the fact that they strongly influenced TTIP negotiations are consistent both with the notions of “co-lobbying” and “counter-lobbying” as defined in our theory. These notions refer to whether the interests of domestic and foreign producers are aligned or in conflict with respect to a country’s standards. But regardless of whether these interests are aligned or in conflict, our theory suggests that there is scope for cooperation among lobbies across the borders, and that lobbies will support the agreement if they are powerful enough, because a key role of the agreement is to internalize the externalities exerted by a country’s standards on foreign producers.

results are affected if trade taxes are available but partially restricted, for example by a preexisting “shallow” agreement.

Our basic model assumes a continuum of perfectly competitive small countries. This allows us to put lobbying at the heart of international negotiations, as small countries have no ability to manipulate terms of trade, but we later extend the model to allow for large countries.⁷

We start by focusing on product standards. To provide a meaningful role for product standards, we allow consumption to generate a local negative externality. Products are vertically differentiated, with lower-quality products generating worse externalities (e.g., dirtier cars causing more pollution or more hazardous toys causing worse health-cost externalities).⁸ Governments can use product standards to address the consumption externality, but they do so under political pressure from producer lobbies.

We first examine the “positive” effects of international cooperation on product standards relative to the noncooperative equilibrium, and then we characterize its effects on global welfare. We find that international cooperation loosens product standards in all countries. The basic logic behind this result is that, if a group of countries loosen their product standards, this boosts demand in these countries and increases world prices, and this in turn generates two positive externalities on other countries: it reduces consumption and hence mitigates pollution (environmental externality), and it benefits producer lobbies (political externality).

At the normative level, we find that cooperation on product standards increases welfare if lobbying pressures are sufficiently weak, but decreases welfare if lobbies are powerful enough. The broad intuition for this result is that the interests of producers worldwide are aligned, because deregulation in any given group of country benefits producers in the whole world, so international cooperation strengthens the overall influence of lobbies on the choice of standards. This is the notion of “co-lobbying” mentioned above. If lobbies are not very powerful, the welfare motivations for regulatory cooperation dominate political considerations, and thus the agreement enhances welfare, but if lobbies are sufficiently powerful then international cooperation leads to excessive deregulation and damages welfare.

These results may seem pessimistic, but it should be kept in mind that our model abstracts from potentially important considerations, such as the presence of trans-boundary pollution externalities, that may increase the potential welfare gains from an agreement. But aside from the *sign* of the welfare change from the agreement, the more general prediction is that the influence of producer lobbies tends to decrease the welfare gain, or increase the welfare loss, from an agreement on product standards.

It should also be kept in mind that many real-world trade agreements, including the GATT/WTO, are concerned with preventing the use of regulatory policies

⁷The feature that lobbying, rather than terms-of-trade manipulation, is key to the purpose of an international agreement is present also in some domestic-commitment models of trade agreements, e.g., Maggi and Rodriguez-Clare (1998) and Mitra (2002). But these papers make very different points from the present paper, and they do not address deep agreements.

⁸In this paper we focus on vertical standards. An examination of horizontal standards, such as compatibility standards motivated by the presence of network externalities, would require a very different setup. We briefly discuss horizontal standards in the Conclusion.

as a way to discriminate against foreign producers. In principle, the long-standing “National Treatment” rule in the GATT/WTO does prohibit discriminatory product standards (as we assumed in our model), but in practice this is an unfinished job. Intuition suggests that, to the extent that an agreement tackles the issue of discrimination in standards, the influence of lobbies on the agreement is likely to be benign, because there should be counter-lobbying between import-competing producers, who benefit from discrimination against imports, and exporters, who are interested in removing any discrimination.

We next turn our attention to process standards. These include environmental standards imposed on factories and workplace safety standards. To introduce a role for process standards, we allow for local production externalities and suppose that production processes are vertically differentiated, with cheaper processes generating worse externalities. In analogy with the case of product standards, governments can use process standards to address production externalities, but they do so under pressure from producer lobbies.

Unlike the case of product standards, we find that international cooperation does not necessarily lead to deregulation. If lobbying pressures are weak an international agreement does loosen process standards, but if lobbying is strong then the agreement tightens regulations. The reason is that the two international externalities mentioned above—environmental and political—now work in opposite directions. If a group of countries loosen their process standards, this boosts supply in these countries and depresses world prices. At the environmental level this is beneficial for other countries, because it reduces production and mitigates pollution, but at the political level this damages them, because it decreases their producer surplus. If lobbying is strong enough, the negative political externality dominates, and hence the agreement tightens process standards.

The welfare impacts of international cooperation on process standards are strikingly different from the case of product standards. We find that an international agreement on process standards increases welfare if the power of lobbies is either sufficiently large or sufficiently small, and can decrease welfare only for an intermediate range of lobbying powers. Intuitively, a key ingredient of this result is that international negotiations induce counter-lobbying, because each lobby would like a loosening of its domestic regulations and a tightening of regulations in foreign countries. This counter-lobbying effect implies that international negotiations tend to dilute the overall impact of lobbies on policymaking. But note one subtle aspect of the above-mentioned result: in spite of the countervailing-lobbying effect, an agreement may decrease welfare for an intermediate range of lobbying powers, and this is guaranteed to happen if countries are not too asymmetric.

We then extend our analysis to the case of large countries. Two additional effects emerge in this setting. The first one is best illustrated by focusing on the case in which countries are symmetric. In our competitive setting, if countries are symmetric they do not trade, but an individual country’s choice of standards does affect world prices. In the case of product standards, this implies that the incidence of such standards falls not only on domestic consumers but also on domestic producers, so lobbying matters also in the noncooperative scenario. This contrasts with the small-country case, where the incidence of product standards falls only on consumers and thus lobbying does not matter in the noncooperative scenario. Nonetheless,

the basic logic of co-lobbying highlighted in the small-country model is still present, and our main results go through: in particular, the agreement loosens product standards, and it decreases welfare if lobbying is strong enough. Similarly, in the case of process standards, the incidence is shared between producers and consumers, but the basic logic of counter-lobbying is still present, and our main results still hold: in particular, the agreement tightens process standards and increases welfare if lobbying is strong enough.

The second additional effect emerges when countries are asymmetric and trade in equilibrium. Now countries have incentives to manipulate the terms of trade: in the noncooperative scenario, each country has an incentive to tighten product standards and loosen process standards (other things equal) in sectors where it imports, in order to push down world prices, and vice-versa in sectors where it exports. An international agreement now addresses three issues: environmental externalities, political externalities and terms-of-trade manipulation. The presence of the terms-of-trade motive can affect the direction in which the agreement changes standards, but when lobbying is strong enough political externalities dominate and our key results go through.

Our basic model abstracts from trade taxes and subsidies, but our main qualitative results continue to hold even if trade instruments are available, as long as they are (at least partially) restricted, for example by preexisting trade agreements. If governments were unrestricted in their ability to use trade instruments, on the other hand, there would be no role for an international regulatory agreement, and the only motive for international cooperation would be to address terms-of-trade manipulation by large countries. In light of this observation, our model suggests a new political economy rationale for international agreements: if governments face restrictions on the use of trade instruments, they are motivated to distort regulatory policies in order to transfer income to producer lobbies, and they can do so most effectively through international agreements.⁹ This motive for international agreements is quite distinct from the standard motive of preventing terms-of-trade manipulation, as it holds even in a world with many small countries.

Before plunging into the analysis, we discuss briefly the related literature.

The literature on the political economy of deep integration is very thin, and we are not aware of any model that examines the welfare impacts of politically pressured deep agreements. Nevertheless there are papers in the literature that have points of contact with our model of regulatory cooperation. For example, a recent paper by Grossman, McCalman, and Staiger (2021) considers the optimal design of international agreements in a setting where governments can choose product standards as well as trade and domestic taxes. The questions they address are very different from ours, however. Among other things, they focus on the tradeoff between harmonization and regulatory diversity in a setting of monopolistic competition and fixed costs of standards compliance, an issue that is not a focus of our paper.¹⁰

⁹The statement above implicitly assumes that governments face some restrictions also on domestic taxation instruments, since a tariff can be mimicked by a combination of a production subsidy and a consumption tax. Our model assumes away production subsidies, in line with most of the political economy literature on trade policy (see discussion in Section I).

¹⁰Other papers that examine international regulatory agreements from a purely economic perspective are Costinot (2008); Mei (2021); Parenti and Vannoorenberge (2021); and Campolmi, Fadinger, and Forlati (2022). See also Maggi and Ossa (2021) for a survey that discusses this literature in more detail.

Also related to our paper is the literature on the political economy of shallow agreements. The pioneering models in this literature are Grossman and Helpman (1995a) and Bagwell and Staiger (1999, 2001). It is worth noting that in these two models governments can use unrestricted trade instruments. Thus, as highlighted above, international agreements do not have a true political economy motive, but rather, their only role is to address terms-of-trade manipulation by large countries. On the other hand, there are several models within this broad family where export subsidies are restricted, and as a consequence, at the international negotiating table exporter interests are pitted against import-competing interests, or in our language, there is counter-lobbying between these interest groups. See for example Grossman and Helpman (1995b); Levy (1999); Ornelas (2005, 2008); Bagwell and Staiger (2011); Ludema and Mayda (2013); Nicita, Olarreaga, and Silva (2018); and Lazarevski (2020). This type of counter-lobbying is reminiscent of Rodrik (2018)'s argument mentioned at the outset, but we note that most of these papers do not examine the welfare impacts of politically pressured agreements.¹¹ In our working paper (Maggi and Ossa 2022) we examine this question through a model of shallow agreements that is similar in spirit to the models mentioned, except that we assume a continuum of small countries, in order to abstract from consideration of terms-of-trade manipulation and to sharpen the focus on lobbying. There we show that a trade agreement increases global welfare relative to the noncooperative equilibrium, provided it does not lead to large import subsidies.

Our paper proceeds as follows. Section I examines international agreements on product standards. Section II focuses on the case of process standards. Section III extends the model to the case of large countries. Section IV offers concluding comments. The online Appendix provides all the proofs that are not contained in the main text.

I. Product Standards

The welfare implications of international regulatory agreements depend crucially on whether the agreement focuses on product standards or on process standards. To put these contrasting implications in sharp relief, we examine two separate settings: one that focuses only on product standards and one that focuses only on process standards.

To focus sharply on issues of deep integration, we assume that governments cannot adopt border measures, and more specifically, trade taxes are not available and standards must be nondiscriminatory (i.e., satisfy “national treatment”). As we will argue later, our main qualitative results are not an artifact of setting all trade taxes equal to zero, and would survive in a setting where tariffs or export subsidies are available but partially restricted.

¹¹ Notable exceptions are Grossman and Helpman (1995b) and Ornelas (2005, 2008), who discuss whether politically viable regional trade agreements are likely to cause more trade diversion or creation, and thus whether they are likely to increase or reduce welfare.

In line with most political economy models of trade policy (e.g., Grossman and Helpman 1994), we assume away production subsidies.¹² In our basic model we also abstract from consumption taxes, but we will later extend the model to allow for this additional policy instrument.

We start by focusing on product standards, which are defined as restrictions on the characteristics of products sold in a given country. Examples include emissions standards for automobiles, safety standards for children's toys, or health standards for meat products. As mentioned in the introduction, product standards have played a key role in a number of recent international negotiations, and have been at the center of some of the most well-known controversies regarding deep agreements.

A. Setup

We consider a perfectly competitive world with a continuum of countries. Assuming that countries are small allows us to focus more sharply on the role of lobbying in the shaping of deep agreements. Here and throughout, we normalize the mass of countries to one. In Section III we will extend the model to allow for large countries.

There are $\mathcal{G} + 1$ goods which can be traded without cost. Good 0 is the numeraire. The numeraire good is produced one-for-one from labor. In each country there is positive production of the numeraire good in equilibrium, so the wage is equal to one everywhere. Good $g \in \mathcal{G}$ is produced from labor and a sector-specific input whose returns in country i we denote by π_{ig} . Hotelling's lemma implies that $y_{ig}(p_{ig}) = \pi'_{ig}(p_{ig})$, where y_{ig} is country i 's supply of good g .

Each non-numeraire good comes in a continuum of varieties, indexed by their "dirtiness" $e_g \in [0, \infty)$. For example, e_g may index the amount of emissions generated by a car. Cleaner goods are more costly: in country i , producers have to incur an abatement cost $\phi_{ig}(e_g)$ in terms of the numeraire good for each unit of variety e_g they produce. We assume $\phi_{ig}(e_g)$ is strictly positive for all e_g , decreasing and convex, with $\lim_{e_g \rightarrow \infty} \phi_{ig}(e_g) = 0$ and $\lim_{e_g \rightarrow 0} \phi_{ig}(e_g) = \infty$.¹³

Consuming a non-numeraire good generates a negative local externality, which is more severe if the good is dirtier (e_g is higher). For concreteness we will focus on environmental externalities, but alternative interpretations are possible, for example health-care externalities caused by the consumption of unsafe products. The consumption externality will provide a potential welfare rationale for product standards. Each consumer is atomistic and ignores the impact of its consumption choices on the externality. Furthermore we assume that varieties are indistinguishable in the eyes of consumers.

¹²If production subsidies were available, producer lobbies would focus their efforts on production subsidies, not on regulations, since the former are more efficient redistribution tools, thus it would be hard to explain the influence of lobbies on regulations, just as it would be hard to explain the influence of lobbies on trade policies.

¹³In our setting with constant returns, there is no cost of producing different varieties for different markets. In the Conclusion, we will discuss how results might change if there are fixed costs of adapting a product to a country's local standard.

In each country i there is a unit mass of citizens with the following quasi-linear preferences:

$$(1) \quad U_i = c_{i0} + \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} [u_{ig}(c_{ig}) - E_{ig}],$$

where c_{i0} denotes country i 's consumption of the numeraire good, c_{ig} denotes country i 's consumption of good g , the subutility function $u_{ig}(\cdot)$ satisfies the usual properties $u'_{ig}(\cdot) > 0$ and $u''_{ig}(\cdot) < 0$, and E_{ig} is the consumption externality that the consumer takes as exogenous and which we will specify shortly.

Letting p_{ig}^c denote the consumer price of good g in country i , utility maximization implies $p_{ig}^c = u'_{ig}(c_{ig})$, which can be inverted to yield the demand function $c_{ig} = d_{ig}(p_{ig}^c)$.

The indirect utility implied by the utility function above is $V_i = Y_i + \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} [S_{ig}(p_{ig}^c) - E_{ig}]$, where Y_i is income, and $S_{ig}(p_{ig}^c) \equiv u_{ig}(d_{ig}(p_{ig}^c)) - p_{ig} d_{ig}(p_{ig}^c)$ is consumer surplus.

As will become clear below, in each country i there will be a single variety of good g that is consumed in equilibrium, say variety e_{ig} . Assuming that consuming one unit of variety e_{ig} generates e_{ig} units of pollution, the total amount of pollution is then $e_{ig} d_{ig}(p_{ig}^c)$. In the case of cars, this would be the total amount of emissions from cars in country i . The disutility caused by a unit of pollution for the representative consumer in country i is assumed to be constant and denoted by a_{ig} , so the local externality associated with consumption of variety e_{ig} can be written as $E_{ig} = -a_{ig} e_{ig} d_{ig}(p_{ig}^c)$. The parameter a_{ig} can be interpreted as an environmental-preference parameter, capturing how strongly country i feels against pollution.

Each government i chooses emission standards $\{e_{ig}\}_{g \in \mathcal{G}}$ for products sold in its own market.¹⁴ These can be interpreted as emission *caps*, because in this setting a cap is always binding, due to the fact that producing cleaner products is more costly and varieties are indistinguishable in the eyes of consumers.

Note that a product standard is a second-best policy, because given the variety e_{ig} selected by the government, consumers do not internalize the consumption externality. One way to implement the first best is to combine a product standard with a consumption tax. At the end of this section we will argue that, if both instruments were available, our conclusions would get strengthened.

Since there are no trade costs, producer arbitrage ensures that producers get the same price net of abatement costs in any market where they sell. And since each individual country is small, its choice of standards cannot affect the net price received by its producers. Letting p_g denote the producer price net of abatement costs, the price faced by consumers in country i is therefore $p_{ig}^c = p_g + \phi_i(e_{ig})$. We will often refer to the net producer price p_g as the “world” price.¹⁵ Thus, if an individual country i tightens its standards, the associated cost falls entirely on its consumers.¹⁶

¹⁴ See footnote 4 for a discussion of our definition of product standards as “destination specific” restrictions.

¹⁵ This is the net price that producers of each country can get if they sell anywhere in the world, and also the price that consumers of a country would pay if that country imposed no standard at all ($e_{ig} = \infty$).

¹⁶ It is worth highlighting the role of the assumption that abatement costs are paid in terms of the outside good. This feature is convenient because it implies that a product standard acts like a consumer tax (except that it affects the pollution level directly and does not generate revenue). An alternative assumption would be that the abatement cost is paid in terms of some non-numeraire good (possibly the same good that the standard is applied to), but this would lead to a less tractable model, because e_{ig} would then directly affect profits, so we would not be able to

The feature that the incidence of product standards falls entirely on domestic consumers will make our results sharper, but it does not drive our main qualitative results. As we will show in Section III, if countries are large the incidence of product standards is shared between consumers and producers, but our key results continue to hold.

We can now write an expression for welfare. Total income in country i consists of labor income, which is equal to one, and producer surplus $\sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \pi_{ig}$, thus aggregate indirect utility can be written as $V_i = 1 + \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} (\pi_{ig} + S_{ig} - a_{ig} e_{ig} d_{ig})$. We can abstract from the first term in V_i and define country i 's welfare as

$$(2) \quad W_i = \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} W_{ig} = \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \left[\pi_{ig}(p_g) + S_{ig}(p_g + \phi_i(e_{ig})) - a_{ig} e_{ig} d_{ig}(p_g + \phi_i(e_{ig})) \right].$$

Governments are subject to lobbying pressures, so their objective function does not coincide with welfare. In the same spirit as Baldwin (1987) and Grossman and Helpman (1994, 1995a), we assume that lobbies represent the groups of specific-factor owners, and we capture the influence that lobbies have on the government by assuming that government i attaches extra weights $\gamma_{ig} \geq 0$ to the producer surplus in the various sectors.¹⁷ Thus government i maximizes

$$(3) \quad \Omega_i = W_i + \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \gamma_{ig} \pi_{ig}.$$

A remark is in order on the difference between our “positive” government objective (3) and our “normative” criterion (2). We have adopted a utilitarian definition of welfare (just as in the Grossman-Helpman model) because it is the simplest and most natural one in this transferable-utility environment, but we have in mind a broader interpretation: if we assigned different Pareto weights to different groups in our welfare criterion, our government objective would reflect these welfare weights plus the “bias” γ_{ig} introduced by lobbying. What really matters for our results is that producer groups get more weight in the government objective than in the welfare criterion.

B. Noncooperative Product Standards

In the noncooperative scenario, each government unilaterally chooses product standards to maximize Ω_i , taking world prices and other countries' standards as given. Since each country is small relative to the rest of the world, it takes world

apply a simple arbitrage logic to link the prices of different varieties in different markets and use a notion of “world price” to connect such prices. In other words, with our specification, if two countries choose two different standards, we can still think of the two varieties as the same good with different local prices. This convenient feature would be lost if abatement costs were paid in terms of some other good.

¹⁷ Viewed from the lens of the Grossman-Helpman model, γ_{ig} depends on whether sector g is politically organized, on government i 's welfare-mindedness, and on the share of country i 's population that is represented by some lobby.

prices as given. This problem is separable across goods, so we can focus on a single good g . Thus each government i solves

$$\max_{e_{ig}} \Omega_{ig} = (1 + \gamma_{ig})\pi_{ig}(p_g) + S_{ig}(p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig})) - a_{ig} e_{ig} d_{ig}(p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig})).$$

To rely on a first-order approach we assume that the optimal unilateral standards are nonprohibitive. This is guaranteed as long as the externality parameters a_{ig} are not too large.¹⁸ Straightforward algebra reveals that the first-order condition implies

$$(4) \quad e_{ig} = \frac{1}{\sigma_{ig}} \left(\frac{1}{a_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\phi'_{ig}} \right) \quad \text{for all } i,$$

where $\sigma_{ig} \equiv -d'_{ig}/d_{ig} > 0$ denotes the demand semi-elasticity.

The market clearing condition can be written as

$$(5) \quad \int_i y_{ig}(p_g) = \int_i d_{ig}(p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig})).$$

The noncooperative equilibrium product standards and world price for good g solve equations (4) and (5). We assume that such solution exists and is unique, and denote it $(\{e_{ig}^N\}, p_g^N)$.¹⁹

The formula for the noncooperative product standards in (4) is intuitive. A country's standard is tighter when the externality weight a_{ig} is higher, as one would expect. When demand is more elastic (higher σ_{ig}), the price increase caused by a tighter standard leads to a larger reduction in consumption and hence pollution, thus the optimal standard is tighter. And it is also intuitive that, if the marginal abatement cost is lower (so that ϕ'_{ig} has a smaller negative value), the optimal standard is tighter.

Also note that the strength of lobbies (γ_{ig}) does not affect the noncooperative product standards. The reason is that the incidence of product standards is entirely on domestic consumers, so this instrument cannot be used to help domestic producers. This feature, which depends on the small-country assumption, is extreme and makes our results sharp, but does not drive our qualitative results, as will become clear later.

C. Cooperative Product Standards

In the cooperative regime, governments set standards to maximize their joint payoff $\int_i \Omega_i$ taking into account the impact of product standards on world prices.²⁰

¹⁸ A prohibitive standard is one that chokes off consumption. Depending on whether the demand function has a choke price, the prohibitive level of the standard may be zero or positive. In either case, it is easy to see that the optimal level of e_{ig} must be nonprohibitive if $a_{ig} = 0$, and by continuity the same is true if a_{ig} is sufficiently small. Also note that $e_{ig} = \infty$ can never be optimal in our setting, as long as the a_{ig} parameters are strictly positive, because this implies an infinite cost of the externality.

¹⁹ As we show in online Appendix A, a simple sufficient (but not necessary) condition on the fundamentals that guarantees the existence and uniqueness of the noncooperative equilibrium is that the demand semi-elasticities σ_{ig} do not increase too much with the price.

²⁰ We are implicitly assuming that countries have access to international transfers (in terms of the numeraire good). Even though explicit cash transfers are rarely observed in the context of international negotiations, governments have many ways to compensate each other, so this assumption seems reasonable. At any rate, our main qualitative results do not rely on this assumption.

This problem is again separable across industries, thus cooperative product standards solve

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\{e_{ig}\}, p_g} \Omega_g &= \int_i [(1 + \gamma_{ig})\pi_{ig}(p_g) + S_{ig}(p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig})) - a_{ig}e_{ig}d_{ig}(p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig}))] \\ \text{subject to} \quad &\int_i y_{ig}(p_g) = \int_i d_{ig}(p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig})). \end{aligned}$$

As in the noncooperative scenario, we assume that the optimal standards are non-prohibitive (which again is ensured if the a_{ig} parameters are not too large), so we can rely on a standard Lagrangian approach. Letting λ_g denote the Lagrange multiplier, it is direct to verify that the cooperative standards and world price for good g satisfy the following conditions (we suppress the arguments of all functions for simplicity):

$$\begin{aligned} (6) \quad e_{ig} &= \frac{1}{\sigma_{ig}} \left(\frac{1}{a_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\phi'_{ig}} \right) + \frac{\lambda_g}{a_{ig}} \quad \text{for all } i, \\ \lambda_g &= \frac{\int_i (\gamma_{ig}y_{ig} + a_{ig}e_{ig}\sigma_{ig}d_{ig})}{\int_i (\varepsilon_{ig}y_{ig} + \sigma_{ig}d_{ig})} > 0, \\ \int_i y_{ig} &= \int_i d_{ig}, \end{aligned}$$

where $\varepsilon_{ig} \equiv y'_{ig}/y_{ig} > 0$ denotes the semi-elasticity of supply. We assume there exists a unique solution to the system of first order conditions above.²¹

The main difference between the noncooperative and cooperative product standards is the presence of the multiplier λ_g in equation (6). Note that $\lambda_g > 0$ even if $\gamma_{ig} = 0$, thus the agreement changes standards for both political and environmental reasons, a finding that we explore more thoroughly below. For now, just notice that all producers have a common interest in loosening product standards, since they all benefit from the resulting increase in the world price.

Also note that, since the demand semi-elasticities σ_{ig} in general depend on prices, and the agreement changes prices, we cannot immediately infer from equations (4)

²¹It is natural to ask whether there are restrictions on the fundamentals that ensure the uniqueness of a stationary point. Addressing this question from an analytical standpoint is hard, so we turned to a numerical approach to investigate the shape of the objective function in a two-country world. More specifically, letting $p_g(\mathbf{e}_g)$ denote the market-clearing world price as a function of the standards, the objective function can be written as $\Omega_g(\mathbf{e}_g, p_g(\mathbf{e}_g))$. For the abatement cost function we considered a constant-elasticity specification, and for the demand and supply functions we considered three alternative specifications: constant semi-elasticity, constant elasticity, and linear. In each case we explored the shape of $\Omega_g(\mathbf{e}_g, p_g(\mathbf{e}_g))$ for a large number of parameter configurations. Consistent with our assumptions, we focused on parameter values such that the optimal standards are nonprohibitive (i.e., where the a_{ig} parameters are not too large). For all parameter configurations we examined, we found the objective function to always have a unique interior maximum. A final observation is that, while the case of two countries is convenient because it allows for a visual inspection of the shape of the objective function, it seems reasonable to expect similar findings with a larger number of countries, because the cooperative objective function is the joint government payoff, and so its structure is similar regardless of the number of countries. This is clearly true, for example, if countries are symmetric, because in this case the joint payoff is the same regardless of the number of countries the world is divided into.

and (6) whether the agreement loosens or tightens standards.²² We investigate this question next.

D. What Does the Agreement Do?

We now examine how the agreement changes product standards relative to the noncooperative equilibrium. Here we take a heuristic approach, relegating the formal arguments to the online Appendix.

We start with a local argument. Let us consider the international externalities caused by a change in product standards starting from the noncooperative equilibrium. Suppose a positive measure of countries loosens their standards. It is easy to verify that this pushes up the world price by boosting demand. How does this affect the joint payoff of all governments? Differentiating the joint government payoff Ω_g with respect to the world price p_g and evaluating the expression at the noncooperative standards (4), we obtain

$$(7) \quad \left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} = \int_i (\gamma_{ig} \nu_{ig} + a_{ig} e_{ig}^N \sigma_{ig} d_{ig}) > 0.$$

The first term is positive and captures the beneficial effect of an increase in the world price for producers worldwide. The second term is also positive and is due to the fact that an increase in the world price reduces consumption and thereby mitigates the local environmental externality in all countries. Thus the aggregate international externality from loosening product standards is positive for two reasons, a political one and an environmental one. It is this externality that the international agreement internalizes, as reflected in formula (6).

Having argued that, when starting from the noncooperative equilibrium, the aggregate international externality from loosening product standards is positive, one can then show that the “best local agreement” entails increasing e_{ig} for all countries, where the best local agreement is defined as the local change in product standards that achieves the steepest rate of improvement in the objective starting from noncooperative standards. Intuitively, if we marginally loosen standards in a group of countries starting from noncooperative levels, this causes a first-order positive externality on the other countries (as we argued above), while the loss for the countries loosening their standards is second-order, because they were starting from unilaterally optimal levels, therefore the joint payoff Ω_g increases.

The next question is whether the local result above holds also globally. We can show that the globally optimal agreement loosens all product standards at least if one of the following sufficient conditions is satisfied: (i) demand semi-elasticities σ_{ig} do not vary too much with the price, or (ii) lobbying pressures are sufficiently strong, or (iii) countries are not too asymmetric. We emphasize that these are three alternative sufficient conditions, and none of them is necessary.²³

²²To simplify some of the proofs, we make the technical assumptions that the semi-elasticities σ_{ig} and ε_{ig} are bounded above and bounded away from zero.

²³To understand intuitively the role of these sufficient conditions, consider first condition (i). Comparing the formulas for the noncooperative and cooperative standards, (4) and (6), it can be seen that cooperation has a direct effect and an indirect effect on the standards levels. The direct effect is captured by the fact that the positive quantity

Here and throughout the paper, we consider proportional changes in all political parameters γ_{ig} , by letting $\gamma_{ig} = \gamma_g \cdot \nu_{ig}$ (with $\nu_{ig} > 0$ for all i, g) and varying the scaling factor γ_g . So when we say that lobbying pressures are sufficiently strong we mean that γ_g is sufficiently large.

The following proposition summarizes the positive effects of the equilibrium agreement. The proof of this and all subsequent propositions can be found in online Appendix B.

PROPOSITION 1: *The equilibrium agreement loosens all product standards, at least if demand semi-elasticities σ_{ig} do not vary too much with the price, or countries are not too asymmetric, or the strength of lobbying γ_g is sufficiently high.*

Our model thus yields a sharp result: international cooperation on product standards leads to deregulation. The intuition behind this result is that, if a group of countries loosen their product standards, the world price goes up because demand increases, and this in turn generates two externalities on other countries: it benefits producer lobbies (political externality) and it mitigates local pollution (environmental externality).

Note that, while in our setting the purpose of an international agreement is to deal with international externalities that travel through world prices, there is a fundamental difference between the motives behind an agreement in our model and in the standard terms-of-trade theory. In our model, the purpose of an agreement is not to prevent individual countries from manipulating world prices, because individual countries are small. Rather, the agreement is motivated by lobbying pressures and by environmental externalities. In Section III we will extend the model to the case of large countries, where terms-of-trade motivations for an agreement are also present.

E. Is It Good for Welfare?

Recall from the discussion that there are two motives for an agreement on product standards: a political reason and an environmental reason. Letting $\Delta_g \equiv W_g^A - W_g^N$ denote the (positive or negative) welfare change caused by the agreement relative to the noncooperative equilibrium, the political motive pushes Δ_g down, since lobbying pressures distort product standards in the cooperative scenario but not in the noncooperative scenario. The environmental motive, on the other hand, pushes Δ_g up: intuitively, if lobbying pressures were absent the agreement would be motivated just by welfare considerations, and hence Δ_g would be positive.

We illustrate the welfare implications of the agreement intuitively by focusing on the case in which countries are symmetric, and later we extend the result to the case

λ_g enters the latter formula but not the former. This pushes toward looser standards, which in turn pushes up the world price. This price change may have an indirect effect through σ_{ig} , but this is guaranteed not to outweigh the direct effect if σ_{ig} does not vary too much with the price. Next notice that, as γ_g becomes very large, so does λ_g , and this is an alternative way to guarantee that the indirect effect cannot undo the direct effect. Finally, if countries are symmetric, the cooperative problem becomes effectively one-dimensional (choosing a symmetric standard), and in this case the assumption that the cooperative objective is single-peaked is sufficient to ensure that the local result holds also globally.

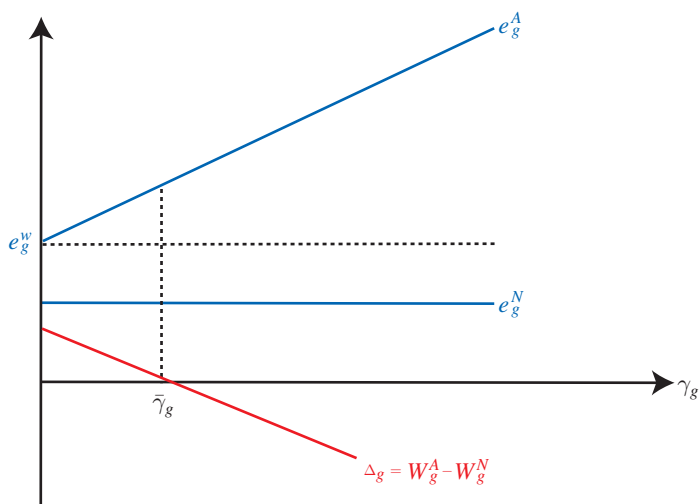


FIGURE 1. PRODUCT STANDARDS

of asymmetric countries. The key argument for the case of symmetric countries can be illustrated with the help of Figure 1.²⁴

This figure draws the noncooperative standards e_g^N and the cooperative standards e_g^A as functions of the political economy parameter γ_g . It also shows the welfare-maximizing standards e_g^W and the welfare gain from the agreement, $\Delta_g = W_g^A - W_g^N$.

First note that the noncooperative standards do not depend on γ_g and are tighter than the welfare-maximizing standards ($e_g^N < e_g^W$).²⁵ Intuitively, starting from the noncooperative equilibrium, loosening standards in a group of countries has a positive welfare externality on other countries, because it increases the world price and in turn mitigates the local consumption externalities in other countries. As a consequence, noncooperative standards are too tight from the welfare point of view.

The cooperative standards e_g^A coincide with e_g^W for $\gamma_g = 0$ and are increasing in γ_g . Intuitively, stronger lobbying pressures lead to looser cooperative standards because producers worldwide benefit from a rise in the world price.

The welfare gain from the agreement (Δ_g) is of course positive at $\gamma_g = 0$, but is decreasing in γ_g and it becomes negative as γ_g crosses a critical value $\bar{\gamma}_g$. Intuitively, as γ_g increases, cooperative standards get looser and looser, and at some point the implied welfare distortion exceeds the welfare distortion in the over-tight noncooperative standards.

The result illustrated above for the case of symmetric countries extends to the case of asymmetric countries, albeit in a slightly weaker version. As before, we vary all political parameters proportionally by a scaling factor γ_g . In general it is not

²⁴The key features of Figure 1 are proved in online Appendix B, within the proof of Proposition 2. In what follows we provide an intuitive explanation.

²⁵This is an immediate corollary of Proposition 1, since the welfare-maximizing standards coincide with the cooperative standards when $\gamma_g = 0$.

guaranteed that there is a unique value of γ_g for which $\Delta_g = 0$ as in Figure 1, but we can prove the following.

PROPOSITION 2: *Cooperation on product standards increases global welfare if γ_g is sufficiently low, and decreases global welfare if γ_g is sufficiently high.*

In our model international cooperation on product standards leads to deregulation. If lobbying pressures are weak, such deregulation is mild and actually increases welfare, because noncooperative standards are too tight from the welfare point of view, but if lobbying pressures are strong, the agreement leads to excessive deregulation and damages welfare.

A key mechanism that underlies the result of Proposition 2 is that international cooperation induces “co-lobbying” by producers across countries: loosening product standards in any group of countries is in the interest of all producers worldwide, since they all share a common interest in boosting the world price. Because of this feature, international cooperation intensifies the impact of lobbying on regulations relative to the noncooperative scenario. In our small-country setting, this mechanism is made sharper by the fact that lobbying has zero impact in the noncooperative scenario, but as we will see in Section III the same logic applies in a large-country setting where lobbying has an impact also in the noncooperative scenario.²⁶

F. Product Standards and Taxation Instruments

Our basic model abstracts from taxation instruments. In this section we discuss how results would change if trade and consumption taxes were available.

We start with a discussion of consumption taxes, which are a natural policy instrument to address consumption externalities. The first observation is that one way to implement the welfare optimum is to combine product standards with consumption taxes. To derive the optimal combination of product standards and consumption taxes, first note that such a combination must be equivalent to the Pigouvian emission-contingent tax schedule $t_{ig}(e_{ig}) = a_{ig}e_{ig}$; this is the tax that internalizes the consumption externality for a given variety e_{ig} . Given this tax schedule, consumers will buy only the variety with the lowest consumer price. Since the incidence of abatement costs falls on consumers, the consumer price in the presence of the Pigouvian emission-contingent tax is $p_g + \phi_{ig}(e_{ig}) + a_{ig}e_{ig}$. Thus the variety that consumers will buy is defined by the first order condition $\phi'_{ig}(e_{ig}) = -a_{ig}$. This is the first-best variety. Thus the first best can be implemented by the product standard $e_{ig}^{fb} = \phi'^{-1}(-a_{ig})$ and the corresponding Pigouvian consumption tax $t_{ig}^{fb} = a_{ig}e_{ig}^{fb}$.

A key point is that, since countries are small, this combination of product standard and consumption tax $(e_{ig}^{fb}, t_{ig}^{fb})$ maximizes not only global welfare, but also

²⁶The logic of co-lobbying can be further understood with the following thought experiment. Suppose that, rather than increasing all the political parameters γ_{ig} , we increase them only for a group of countries (say group A), while holding constant the parameters of the remaining countries (group B), and think about how this affects cooperative standards. It is easy to show that increasing the strength of lobbying in group A leads to looser cooperative standards not only for group A but also for group B, at least if the political parameters γ_{ig} in group A become large enough. As we will see in the next section, this effect will be reversed in the case of process standards, which is characterized by counter-lobbying: there, increasing the strength of lobbying in group A will tend to loosen cooperative standards in group A while tightening those in group B.

unilateral welfare. And given that lobbying is immaterial for unilateral policies, since product standards and consumption taxes cannot affect local producer surplus, these are the noncooperative equilibrium policies regardless of the lobbying parameters γ_{ig} . It is then an immediate corollary that the cooperative policies must decrease welfare relative to the noncooperative policies.²⁷

Thus the availability of consumption taxes makes the conclusion more pessimistic: international cooperation on product standards in this case is bad for welfare as long as there is any lobbying, and the welfare loss is worse if lobbying pressures are stronger. At the same time, however, it is important to keep in mind that our model abstracts from potentially important motives for international agreements, such as the presence of trans-boundary pollution externalities, which can change the sign of the welfare effect of the agreement (Δ_g). The result that is arguably more robust and we wish to emphasize is not about the sign of Δ_g , but rather, the prediction that Δ_g tends to decrease with γ_g : increasing the power of lobbies tends to decrease the welfare gains, or increase the welfare losses, from the agreement.

Thus far we have not considered the possibility of trade taxes, because our intention is to capture in a stylized way situations where trade taxes have been largely removed and the focus of international cooperation has shifted away from traditional trade policies. Nonetheless, it is important to understand how our results would be affected if trade taxes were available. In the interest of space, here we offer only a brief informal discussion of this extension. A more formal argument can be found in our working paper (Maggi and Ossa 2022).

Suppose that governments can use trade taxes and product standards. It is easy to show that, if trade taxes are unrestricted, in our small-country setting there is no scope for an international agreement, but as long as *some* import tariffs or export subsidies are constrained below their noncooperative levels, a motive for international cooperation emerges and our main qualitative results go through.²⁸

The basic logic underlying this point is the following. Recall from equation (7) and the discussion surrounding it that, in the absence of trade taxes, countries collectively loosen product standards in order to increase world prices. The reason is that an increase in world prices increases local prices, and starting from the noncooperative equilibrium this generates political and environmental benefits. However, this logic applies only if (at least some of the) countries are constrained in their unilateral ability to raise domestic prices, which is the case only if their trade taxes are constrained. Indeed, it is easy to verify that we continue to have $\left. \frac{d\Omega_g}{dp_g} \right|_{NE} > 0$ in

²⁷More specifically, it is direct to verify that the cooperative taxes and standards are respectively given by $t_{ig}^A = a_{ig} \phi'^{-1}(-a_{ig}) - \frac{\int_i \gamma_{ig} y_{ig}}{\int_i \varepsilon_{ig} y_{ig}}$ and $e_{ig}^A = \phi'^{-1}(-a_{ig})$. Note that lobbying distorts only the consumption taxes (downwards), not the standards. The reason is that, conditional on consumption taxes and product standards being the only available instruments, lowering the consumption tax while keeping the variety e_{ig} at the first-best level is the least distortionary way to increase the world price.

²⁸It is important to recall that we assumed away production subsidies, so the statement above rests also on the incompleteness of domestic instruments. If production subsidies and consumption taxes were freely available, there would be no motive for international agreements in our small-country setting, just as in the case where trade taxes are unrestricted.

a world with trade taxes, as long as some tariffs or export subsidies are constrained below their noncooperative levels.²⁹

One can think of several reasons, based on considerations outside the model, why countries may face restrictions on their tariffs and export subsidies at the time when they consider negotiating a “deep” agreement. First, export subsidies have been banned long ago by the GATT. Second, past agreements have imposed tariff caps that are costly to undo, and such caps may be below the ex-post politically optimal tariff levels, at least for some goods and countries.³⁰ And finally, there may be political costs associated with the use of subsidies in general, and therefore also of trade subsidies.

The next question is how the agreement will change policies if tariffs or export subsidies are constrained. Consider first the case in which export subsidies are restricted. In this case, in a given sector the agreement will lower tariffs in importing countries and loosen product standards in exporting countries. This is because the agreement aims to raise world prices, and since importing countries are unconstrained, the most efficient way for them to push up world prices is to reduce tariffs (by standard targeting-principle logic), while exporting countries contribute to the cause by loosening their standards.³¹ Similarly, if tariffs are constrained, the agreement loosens standards in importing countries and lower export subsidies in exporting countries. And if both export subsidies and tariffs are constrained, the agreement loosens standards in all countries.

At the normative level, the main result of our baseline model will continue to hold as long as tariffs or export subsidies are constrained. In particular, if lobbying is sufficiently strong the deregulation brought about by the agreement will be detrimental to global welfare.

As a final point, and in light of the discussion above, our model suggests a new political economy rationale for international agreements: if governments are restricted in their use of trade taxes (and production subsidies), they are motivated to distort domestic policies in order to transfer income to producer lobbies, and they can do so most effectively through international agreements. This motive for international agreements is quite separate from the standard motive of preventing terms-of-trade manipulation by large countries. In our baseline model with small countries and product standards, this point is made sharper by the fact that a country

²⁹The point above is valid also in the presence of large countries, but with two caveats. The first is that, if countries are large, there is always a classic terms-of-trade rationale for an international agreement, even if governments can use a complete set of policy instruments, but in this case the agreement will only focus on trade taxes, so there is still no scope for *regulatory* cooperation. The second caveat is that, with large countries, there is scope for regulatory cooperation as long as tariffs or export subsidies are constrained below their (unconstrained) cooperative levels. Note that, if trade taxes are unconstrained, in the small-country case the noncooperative and cooperative levels coincide, but if countries are large these levels are different, for the reason mentioned just above.

³⁰There are multiple possible reasons why preexisting tariff caps may be below the ex post politically optimal levels for some goods and countries. One possibility is that the political power of certain producer groups may have grown over time. Another possibility might be that the tariff caps are ex ante optimal, but below the ex post politically optimal levels, for example because they are motivated by domestic commitment reasons à la Maggi and Rodriguez-Clare (1998, 2007). And finally, many tariff agreements in reality take the form of free trade areas and customs unions which remove tariffs among member countries, and it is easy to imagine that zero tariffs may be below the ex post politically optimal tariff levels, in part because of the constraints imposed by GATT Article XXIV.

³¹We note that, if import subsidies are not feasible for political reasons and lobbying is sufficiently strong, cooperative tariffs will hit zero and the agreement will loosen standards in all countries.

cannot unilaterally affect domestic producer prices by changing its product standards, whereas countries can do so collectively. But as will become clear in the next two sections, this point holds also in settings where unilateral changes in standards do affect domestic producers, including settings where countries are large and where international cooperation focuses on process standards.³²

II. Process Standards

We now turn our attention to international agreements on process standards, which are defined as restrictions on production processes that take place on domestic soil. Examples include environmental regulations for factories and safety standards for workers. As discussed above, process standards of this kind have been an important focus of many deep agreements in recent history.

To provide a welfare rationale for process standards we allow for local production externalities. To make our points in the most transparent way, in this section we focus on a setting where process standards are the only policy instruments and production externalities are the only market failures.

A. Setup

We now assume that each good g is homogeneous but can be produced with a continuum of technologies $z_g \in [0, \infty)$, indexed by their “dirtiness.” Dirtier production processes are cheaper: producers in country i incur a per-unit abatement cost $\varphi_{ig}(z_g)$ in terms of the numeraire good if they use technology z_g . We assume, in analogy with the case of product standards, that $\varphi_{ig}(z_g)$ is strictly positive for all z_g , decreasing and convex, with $\lim_{z_g \rightarrow \infty} \varphi_{ig}(z_g) = 0$ and $\lim_{z_g \rightarrow 0} \varphi_{ig}(z_g) = \infty$.

From the point of view of an individual producer, aside from the abatement cost all technologies are identical.

Production generates a negative externality, which is worse for dirtier processes (higher z_g). For concreteness we will focus on pollution externalities as our running example. Since each producer is atomistic and hence does not take into account the pollution externality, the supply of good g in country i depends only on the local producer price p_{ig}^p , and will be denoted $y_{ig}(p_{ig}^p)$.

As will become clear, a single technology is used in equilibrium in each country i , say technology z_{ig} . Producing y_{ig} units with technology z_{ig} generates local pollution $z_{ig}y_{ig}$. This could be for example the amount of emissions from factories in country i . The disutility caused by a unit of pollution to the representative consumer of country i is constant and denoted by b_{ig} , so the local externality is given by $-b_{ig}z_{ig}y_{ig}(p_{ig}^p)$.

Each country i chooses emission standards $\{z_{ig}\}_{g \in \mathcal{G}}$ for production activity that takes place on domestic soil. These can be interpreted as emission caps, since caps

³²The discussion above emphasizes political economy considerations, but the point that restrictions on policy instruments can motivate international agreements is more general. Whether government policy is motivated by political economy considerations or by the correction of externalities, if governments face binding constraints on trade taxes there is scope for an international agreement even in a world of small countries. In this sense, the presence of restrictions on policy instruments can generate a role for international agreements that is distinct from the standard terms-of-trade motive.

are always binding; recall that adopting a cleaner technology is costly and does not directly benefit an individual producer.

Due to consumer arbitrage, the consumer price is the same across the world, and we denote it by p_g . This can be interpreted as the “world” price in this setting. The producer price net of abatement costs, on the other hand, is $p_{ig}^p = p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})$. Thus, if an individual country i tightens its process standards, the associated cost falls entirely on its producers. Note the contrast with the case of product standards, where the cost of tighter standards falls on consumers.

Government i 's objective can be written as

$$\Omega_i = \sum_{g \in \mathcal{G}} \left[(1 + \gamma_{ig}) \pi_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) + S_{ig}(p_g) - b_{ig} z_{ig} y_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) \right].$$

Note that, just as in the case of product standards, process standards are second-best policies, because given the process z_{ig} producers do not internalize the production externality.

B. Noncooperative Process Standards

In the noncooperative scenario, government i chooses the process standard in sector g according to

$$(8) \quad \max_{z_{ig}} \Omega_{ig} = (1 + \gamma_{ig}) \pi_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) + S_{ig}(p_g) - b_{ig} z_{ig} y_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})).$$

As in the previous section, we assume that the optimal unilateral standards are nonprohibitive. This assumption is satisfied as long as the b_{ig} parameters are not too large. It is easy to verify that the first-order conditions imply

$$(9) \quad z_{ig} = \frac{1}{\varepsilon_{ig}} \left(\frac{1 + \gamma_{ig}}{b_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\varphi'_{ig}} \right) \quad \text{for all } i.$$

The market clearing condition can be written as

$$(10) \quad \int_i y_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) = \int_i d_{ig}(p_g).$$

The noncooperative equilibrium process standards and world price for good g solve equations (9) and (10). We assume that the solution to this system of equations exists and is unique, and denote it $(\{z_{ig}^N\}, p_g^N)$.³³

A key difference between product and process standards can already be noted from (9): unlike the case of product standards, unilateral process standards *are* influenced by lobbies. The reason is that the process standard adopted by country i directly affects the local producer price, so to the extent that local producers have

³³ A sufficient (but not necessary) condition on the fundamentals that guarantees the existence and uniqueness of the noncooperative equilibrium is that the supply semi-elasticities ε_{ig} do not decrease too much with the price. This claim is proved in online Appendix A.

political power, they will push for looser standards.³⁴ Also note that, intuitively, a country’s standards are tighter when the externality weights are higher, when the marginal abatement cost is lower and when supply is more elastic.

C. Cooperative Process Standards

In the cooperative scenario, governments maximize their joint payoff taking into account the effect of process standards on world prices. Thus cooperative process standards in sector g solve

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\{z_{ig}\}, p_g} \Omega_g &= \int_i \left[(1 + \gamma_{ig}) \pi_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) + S_{ig}(p_g) - b_{ig} z_{ig} y_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) \right], \\ \text{subject to} \quad &\int_i y_{ig} (p_g - \varphi_{ig}(z_{ig})) = \int_i d_{ig}(p_g). \end{aligned}$$

As in the noncooperative scenario, we assume that the optimal standards are non-prohibitive, so that we can rely on a standard Lagrangian approach.³⁵ It is easy to check that the cooperative process standards and world price for good g satisfy the following conditions (omitting the arguments of the various functions for simplicity):

$$\begin{aligned} (11) \quad z_{ig} &= \frac{1}{\varepsilon_{ig}} \left(\frac{1 + \gamma_{ig}}{b_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\varphi'_{ig}} \right) - \frac{\lambda_g}{b_{ig}} \quad \text{for all } i, \\ \lambda_g &= \frac{\int_i y_{ig} (\gamma_{ig} - b_{ig} z_{ig} \varepsilon_{ig})}{\int_i \varepsilon_{ig} y_{ig} + \int_i \sigma_{ig} d_{ig}}, \\ \int_i y_{ig} &= \int_i d_{ig}, \end{aligned}$$

where λ_g denotes the Lagrange multiplier. We assume there exists a unique solution to the system of first order conditions above.³⁶

The key difference between noncooperative and cooperative process standards is the presence of the multiplier λ_g in equation (11). Note that λ_g is positive if

³⁴Note that, if we increase the local producers’ power γ_{ig} all else equal, z_{ig}^N gets looser, but if we increase producer powers in all countries at the same time, the world price will go down, and this may in turn affect the supply elasticity ε_{ig} . This will dampen or reinforce the impact on z_{ig}^N , depending on whether ε_{ig} increases or decreases with the price.

³⁵Relative to the case of product standards, where standards can be prohibitive only if the externality weights are large, here there is an additional possibility that may give rise to prohibitive process standards, namely the presence of large cross-country asymmetries, especially in the political parameters γ_{ig} . To see this, suppose lobbying is very strong in a group of countries (say group A) and very weak in another (say group B). Then cooperative standards may be prohibitive for group B, because tightening standards in this group of countries raises the world price, so it benefits producers in group A at the expense of group B. This is a manifestation of “counter-lobbying” in international negotiations, which we discuss further below. A sufficient condition that rules out prohibitive process standards is that the b_{ig} parameters are not too large and countries are not too asymmetric.

³⁶As in the case of product standards, we used numerical methods to investigate under what conditions the objective function has a unique interior maximum, focusing on a two-country world. We followed an analogous approach to the one described in footnote 21, and again we restricted our attention to parameter values such that the optimal standards are nonprohibitive. For all parameter configurations we examined, the objective function always had a unique interior maximum.

$\gamma_{ig} > b_{ig} z_{ig} \varepsilon_{ig}$ for all i . This suggests that the agreement will tighten standards if lobbying pressures are sufficiently strong, and loosen standards if lobbying pressures are sufficiently weak. Intuitively, the agreement changes process standards for both political and environmental reasons, as in the case of product standards, but these two forces now push in opposite directions: the political motive pushes for a tightening of standards, because this would increase the world price and hence benefit all producers, while the environmental motive pushes for a loosening of standards, because this would decrease the world price and hence reduce production and pollution.

The intuition offered just above, however, does not take into account the fact that the expression for λ_g depends on the optimal standards z_{ig} themselves (as well as the supply elasticities, which in general depend on prices). Thus we need to go a bit deeper with the analysis.

D. What Does the Agreement Do?

To examine how the agreement changes process standards, we start by considering the international externalities caused by a change in process standards when starting from the noncooperative equilibrium. If a positive measure of countries tightens their standards, this reduces supply and hence pushes up the world price, as one can easily verify. How does this affect the joint pay off of all governments? Differentiating the joint government payoff Ω_g with respect to p_g and evaluating at the noncooperative standards, we obtain

$$(12) \quad \left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} = \int_i (\gamma_{ig} y_{ig} - b_{ig} z_{ig}^N \varepsilon_{ig} y_{ig}).$$

The first term of (12) is positive and is due to the political externality exerted by the increase in the world price. The second term is negative and is due to the fact that a higher world price stimulates supply, thus increasing pollution worldwide. Intuitively, if lobbying pressures are sufficiently strong the net externality should be positive, thus the agreement should tighten standards relative to the noncooperative equilibrium, while if lobbying pressures are sufficiently weak, the net externality should be negative, so the agreement should loosen standards.

We can confirm this intuition in the following sense. Consider a proportional change in the political parameters, by letting $\gamma_{ig} = \gamma_g \nu_{ig}$ and varying the scaling factor γ_g (as in the previous section). First, it is obvious that if γ_g is small enough then $\left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} < 0$. Next note that, in the limit as $\gamma_g \rightarrow \infty$, the problem becomes equivalent to maximizing $\int_i \nu_{ig} \pi_{ig}$, and the derivative of this function with respect to p_g is clearly positive. It is then a small step to conclude, using a similar logic as in the previous section, that the best local agreement loosens all standards if γ_g is sufficiently small and tightens all standards if γ_g is sufficiently large.

If γ_g is large, we are able to show that the local result above holds globally, without need for any additional condition. If γ_g is small, we can show that the local result holds globally at least if the supply semi-elasticities ε_{ig} do not vary too much with

the price *or* countries are not too asymmetric (these are two alternative sufficient conditions, neither of which is necessary).³⁷ The following proposition summarizes:

PROPOSITION 3: (i) *The equilibrium agreement loosens all process standards for sufficiently small γ_g , at least if countries are not too asymmetric or the supply semi-elasticities ε_{ig} do not vary too much with the price;* (ii) *The equilibrium agreement tightens all process standards for sufficiently large γ_g .*

Thus the model predicts that international cooperation on process standards leads to deregulation if lobbying is weak, but tightens regulations if lobbying pressures are strong. One way to interpret this result is that, when lobbying is strong, the noncooperative equilibrium entails a “race to the bottom,” and the agreement acts to counter-balance this tendency. But note that what drives the cooperative tightening of standards is the influence of producer groups themselves.

It may also be interesting to note that, even though the nature of the international externalities exerted by process standards is quite different relative to the case of product standards examined in the previous section, if governments maximize welfare ($\gamma_g = 0$) then the agreement loosens standards in both cases. To understand this feature, note that (i) in the case of process standards the international externality from an increase in the world price is negative, as can be seen from (12), while in the case of product standards it is positive, as can be seen from (7); but (ii) the impact of tightening standards on the world price is also reversed: tightening process standards reduces local producer prices, hence reduces local supply and puts upward pressure on world prices, while tightening product standards raises local consumer prices, hence reduces local demand and puts downward pressure on world prices. Thus the sign of the overall international externality generated by a tightening of standards is the same in both cases.

We are now ready to address the question of how international cooperation on process standards affects global welfare.

E. *Is It Good for Welfare?*

We start by describing briefly our main result and its underlying logic. We will show that the equilibrium agreement increases welfare if γ_g is sufficiently small or sufficiently large, and may decrease welfare for intermediate values of γ_g . The starkest difference with respect to our earlier result for product standards is the fact that, when political pressures are strong (γ_g large), a deep agreement is bad for welfare in the case of product standards, while it is good for welfare in the case of process standards. The fundamental reason for this difference is that the interests of producers around the world are no longer aligned when it comes to process standards, since each producer lobby prefers weak regulations at home and strict regulations abroad. As a result, the agreement now brings about counter-lobbying, thereby diluting the overall effect of lobbying on process standards.

³⁷The intuition behind these sufficient conditions is similar to the corresponding conditions for the case of product standards: see footnote 23.

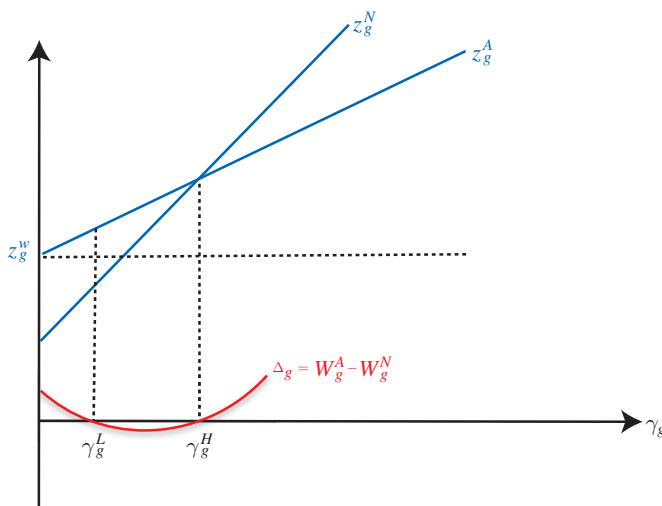


FIGURE 2. PROCESS STANDARDS

We now illustrate in more detail the logic behind our result. We start by focusing on the special case in which countries are symmetric and the semi-elasticities of supply and demand are constant, and then we extend the result to the more general case. We illustrate our arguments with the help of Figure 2.³⁸

This figure shows the noncooperative standards z_g^N , the cooperative standards z_g^A and the welfare maximizing standards z_g^W as functions of γ_g , as well as the welfare change from the agreement, $\Delta_g = W_g^A - W_g^N$.

Absent lobbying pressures ($\gamma_g = 0$), noncooperative process standards are too tight from the welfare point of view ($z_g^N < z_g^W$), since governments do not internalize the negative international externality caused by tightening standards. As γ_g increases, noncooperative standards become looser, since loosening standards unilaterally benefits local producers. The cooperative standards z_g^A coincide with the welfare-maximizing standards z_g^W when $\gamma_g = 0$ and are also increasing in γ_g .³⁹ However, the z_g^A schedule is flatter than the z_g^N schedule, since in the cooperative scenario governments internalize the negative political terms-of-trade externality from loosening standards, and such externality becomes stronger as γ_g increases. This captures the counter-lobbying intuition we mentioned earlier: looser domestic standards harm the interests of producers abroad, thus cooperation moderates the loosening of standards that is brought about by increases in lobbying pressures.⁴⁰

³⁸The key features of Figure 2 are proved in online Appendix B, within the proof of Proposition 4.

³⁹Recall that the equilibrium producer price given a symmetric standard z_g is $p_g - \varphi_g(z_g)$. It is easy to show that the marginal effect of a change in z_g on the world price p_g is less than $\varphi_g'(z_g)$ in absolute value, thus a symmetric loosening of standards benefits producers.

⁴⁰To further clarify the logic of counter-lobbying, consider the following thought experiment (analogously to the case of product standards, see footnote 26). Suppose we increase the strength of lobbying γ_{ig} for a group of countries (group A), while holding them constant for the remaining countries (group B). It is easy to show that this now loosens cooperative standards for group A but tightens them for group B, at least in the limit when the political parameters γ_{ig} in group A become very large.

The welfare change from the agreement (Δ_g) is of course positive at $\gamma_g = 0$, but more interestingly, it must be positive again for γ_g large enough. The latter statement follows from the fact that if γ_g is large enough then $z_g^N > z_g^A > z_g^W$, together with the assumption that welfare has a unique stationary point (given by z_g^W). Furthermore, Δ_g must be negative for an intermediate range of γ_g (in Figure 2 the interval between γ_g^L and γ_g^H), because the noncooperative standards coincide with the welfare-maximizing standards for a critical value of γ_g . Thus the welfare change from the agreement is nonmonotonic, being positive if lobbying pressures are low or high, but negative when lobbying pressures are intermediate.⁴¹

The result illustrated just above generalizes to the case of asymmetric countries and variable semi-elasticities, albeit in a slightly weaker version. The only change is that in general there may or may not be an intermediate range of γ_g for which the agreement decreases welfare. In order to state the more general result, we consider as usual a proportional change in all political parameters γ_{ig} , with γ_g denoting the scaling factor.

PROPOSITION 4: *Cooperation on process standards increases global welfare if γ_g is sufficiently low or sufficiently high, and may decrease global welfare for intermediate values of γ_g .*

As discussed above, the result that the equilibrium agreement increases global welfare when lobbying is strong enough contrasts sharply with the case of product standards, and the basic reason is that international negotiations bring about counter-lobbying between the domestic producers of a given country and the producers in the remaining countries.

It is worth emphasizing a subtle aspect of the result in Proposition 4: in spite of the counter-lobbying effect, the agreement may decrease welfare for an intermediate range of lobbying pressures (and as noted above, this intermediate range of γ_g is guaranteed to exist if countries are symmetric). The intuition is the following: if governments are welfare-maximizers ($\gamma_g = 0$), noncooperative standards are too tight, so a moderate amount of political pressures makes noncooperative standards more efficient, and there is a critical level of γ_g that makes them exactly efficient ($z_g^N = z_g^W$ in Figure 2). Clearly, then, for γ_g close to this critical level the agreement must be bad for welfare.

It is also interesting to compare the impact of the power of lobbies on the welfare change from the agreement (Δ_g) with the case of product standards. Recall that, in the case of product standards, increasing the power of lobbies reduces Δ_g (see Figure 1). Here the answer is different and more subtle, as Figure 2 suggests: increasing the power of lobbies initially worsens the welfare impact of the agreement, but this effect is reversed as the power of lobbies becomes large.⁴²

⁴¹Note that, while lobbying pressures are always detrimental for welfare if they are strong enough (both in the noncooperative and cooperative scenarios), a *moderate* amount of lobbying may increase welfare in the noncooperative scenario. This is clear from Figure 2: when $\gamma_g = 0$ noncooperative standards are too tight from the welfare point of view, thus a moderate amount of lobbying pushes them closer to their efficient levels. This provides an important qualification to the general intuition that international agreements tend to increase welfare if they dilute the influence of lobbies on policymaking. See also footnote 3.

⁴²The reader might wonder how our results on process standards would change if we allowed for production taxes (as a way to address more directly political and environmental concerns) or for trade taxes. First recall that if

A final observation concerns the link between the notion of counter-lobbying and the welfare impact of the agreement. In our setting the presence of counter-lobbying plays a key role for the result that the agreement improves welfare when lobbying is strong, but this link is not automatic and may not hold in other policy settings. With reference to Figure 2, the presence of counter-lobbying implies that the $z_g^A(\gamma_g)$ schedule increases more slowly than the $z_g^N(\gamma_g)$ schedule, but the $z_g^A(\gamma_g)$ schedule is still increasing, because a symmetric loosening of standards benefits all producers. In other words, increasing γ_g affects the noncooperative and cooperative standards in the same direction. It is this feature, in conjunction with counter-lobbying, that leads to the conclusion that the agreement increases welfare for γ_g large enough. But it is not hard to imagine settings characterized by counter-lobbying where γ_g has opposite effects on the noncooperative and cooperative policies, and if this is the case the agreement can decrease welfare when γ_g is large. Thus our results should be interpreted as applying to settings where lobbying pressures affect the noncooperative and cooperative policies in the same direction.

III. Large Countries

We now extend our analysis to the case of large countries. To this end, we replace our assumption that there is a continuum of small countries with the assumption that there are N large countries. Otherwise, we leave our setup unchanged.

The key implication of this modification is that *individual* countries now have market power in world markets and are thus able to manipulate world prices. As one would expect, this shows up in the formulas for noncooperative standards but leaves the formulas for cooperative standards essentially unchanged. Note that countries were able to *jointly* control world prices even in our baseline model, and indeed this was the reason they pursued international agreements.

In what follows, we summarize and discuss our results at an intuitive level, relegating the formal analysis to online Appendix C.

We begin with the case of product standards. Defining imports $m_{ig} \equiv d_{ig} - y_{ig}$ it is easy to show that the formulas for noncooperative and cooperative product standards become respectively

$$(13) \quad e_{ig}^N = \frac{1}{\sigma_{ig}} \left(\frac{1}{a_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\phi'_{ig}} \right) + \frac{\lambda_{ig}^N}{a_{ig}} \quad \text{for all } i,$$

$$\text{where } \lambda_{ig}^N = \frac{\gamma_{ig} y_{ig} + a_{ig} e_{ig}^N \sigma_{ig} d_{ig} - m_{ig}}{\sum_i (\varepsilon_{ig} y_{ig} + \sigma_{ig} d_{ig})},$$

production subsidies (i.e., negative production taxes) were available, lobbies would focus only on production subsidies, thus the model would have nothing to say about the impact of lobbying on regulations. It is for this reason that we assumed away production taxes/subsidies, following most of the political economy literature (see also footnote 12). And regarding the implications of trade taxes, the point we made in Section IF applies also here: if trade taxes were unrestricted there would be no scope for international agreements, but if import tariffs and/or export subsidies are constrained below their noncooperative levels, our main qualitative results will go through.

and

$$(14) \quad e_{ig}^A = \frac{1}{\sigma_{ig}} \left(\frac{1}{a_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\phi'_{ig}} \right) + \frac{\lambda_g^A}{a_{ig}} \quad \text{for all } i,$$

$$\text{where } \lambda_g^A = \frac{\sum_i (\gamma_{ig} y_{ig} + a_{ig} e_{ig}^A \sigma_{ig} d_{ig})}{\sum_i (\varepsilon_{ig} y_{ig} + \sigma_{ig} d_{ig})}.$$

The key difference relative to our baseline model is the Lagrange multiplier λ_{ig}^N in the formula for noncooperative standards (13). Note that the Lagrange multiplier λ_g^A in the formula for cooperative standards (14) is the sum of the noncooperative Lagrange multipliers, since $\sum_i m_{ig} = 0$, except that they are evaluated at different standards. This illustrates that individual countries now leverage their market power in a similar way as all countries do combined, with the key difference that individual countries only care about the effects of world price changes on their own economy.

It is instructive to begin the discussion by focusing on the special case of symmetric countries. In this case, there is no trade in equilibrium and thus no incentive to manipulate the terms of trade. This allows us to isolate a first new effect: since unilateral changes in standards now affect world prices, they now affect consumers *and* producers. Recall that in the baseline model, unilateral changes in product standards only affected consumers.

To understand the shared incidence of product standards, suppose a country unilaterally loosens its product standards. Just as in our baseline model, this reduces local consumer prices by reducing abatement costs. But now it also increases local (as well as foreign) producer prices, since the resulting boost to local consumption pushes up world prices. Hence, the incidence of a unilateral change in product standards is now shared between consumers and producers. In fact, if the world-price effect is strong, it is even possible that the incidence falls more on producers than on consumers. A key implication of this is that the strength of lobbies now does affect noncooperative product standards, as evidenced by the fact that the political parameter γ_{ig} now enters the corresponding formula through λ_{ig}^N . Recall that in the baseline model there was no lobbying in the noncooperative equilibrium, since the incidence of unilateral changes in product standards was entirely on consumers.

In spite of the new effect just highlighted, in this symmetric case the main qualitative results of our baseline model are preserved, regardless of the way in which the incidence of product standards is shared between consumers and producers. In particular, at the positive level, the equilibrium agreement still loosens all product standards. At the normative level, it is still true that the equilibrium agreement increases welfare if lobbying is sufficiently weak and decreases welfare if lobbying is strong enough.

To gain intuition, consider the following local argument, in analogy to our discussion in Section I. Suppose that, starting from the noncooperative equilibrium, country i slightly loosens its standard e_{ig} . This pushes up the world price, and the implied change in the joint payoff of the remaining countries (denoted Ω_g^{-i}) is easily shown to be

$$\left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g^{-i}}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} = (N-1)(\gamma_g y_g + a_g e_g^N \sigma_g d_g) > 0.$$

Thus, just as in our baseline model, if countries are symmetric the international externality from loosening a standard is positive because it is composed of a positive political externality and a positive environmental externality. In particular, the political externality is positive because loosening product standards in country i benefits not only producers in country i but also producers in the rest of the world, so the interests of all producer lobbies are aligned. As a consequence, the agreement leads to deregulation. Furthermore, at the normative level, it is intuitive that if γ_g is large enough that such deregulation is excessive and decreases welfare.

The case of symmetric large countries highlights that the main insights of our baseline model do not depend on the incidence of product standards, but rather on the feature that loosening product standards generates positive political and environmental externalities.⁴³

We now turn to the case in which countries are asymmetric and trade in equilibrium. This introduces a second new effect, namely that unilateral changes in standards affect the terms of trade. As a result, import-competing countries now have an incentive to tighten product standards, other things equal, in order to reduce the world price and thus improve their terms of trade at the expense of exporting countries. Conversely, exporting countries now have an incentive to loosen product standards, other things equal, in order to increase the world price and thus improve their terms of trade at the expense of import-competing countries. The key implication is that the international agreement now also addresses the issue of terms-of-trade manipulation, in addition to the political and environmental world-price externalities familiar from the analysis above.

A local argument again goes a long way in illustrating the implications of the terms-of-trade motive. As above, suppose country i loosens its standard (e_{ig}) starting from the noncooperative equilibrium. The increase in the world price caused by this change has the following impact on the joint payoff of the remaining countries:

$$\left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g^{-i}}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} = \sum_{j \neq i} (\gamma_{jg} y_{jg} + a_{jg} e_{jg}^N \sigma_{jg} d_{jg}) + m_{ig}.$$

The best local agreement loosens country i 's standard if and only if the expression above is positive. The sum on the right-hand side captures the political and environmental externalities familiar from the baseline model, which push toward a cooperative loosening of product standards. The term m_{ig} captures the terms-of-trade motive for the agreement: for importing countries, this reinforces the deregulation brought about by the agreement, while for exporting countries it reduces deregulation and may even overturn it, in which case the agreement tightens an exporting country's standards.

If lobbying forces are sufficiently strong, intuitively political motives swamp terms-of-trade motives. Indeed we can show that if the political parameters γ_{ig} are sufficiently large, the globally optimal agreement loosens all product standards and damages welfare, just as in the small-country model. Thus the results of our baseline

⁴³Note that the incidence of standards does matter for how lobbying affects noncooperative standards. For example, the feature that in the small-country model lobbying does not affect noncooperative product standards is due to the fact that the incidence of product standards falls entirely on consumers. But the direction in which the agreement changes standards relative to the noncooperative levels, as well as the associated welfare impact, does not.

model are robust to the presence of large countries if political economy forces are strong enough.

We now turn to the model of process standards. In this large country setting, the noncooperative and cooperative process standards can be expressed respectively as

$$(15) \quad z_{ig}^N = \frac{1}{\varepsilon_{ig}} \left(\frac{1 + \gamma_{ig}}{b_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\varphi'_{ig}} \right) - \frac{\lambda_{ig}^N}{b_{ig}} \quad \text{for all } i,$$

$$\text{where } \lambda_{ig}^N = \frac{y_{ig}(\gamma_{ig} - b_{ig}z_{ig}^N\varepsilon_{ig}) - m_{ig}}{\sum_j (\varepsilon_{jg}y_{jg} + \sigma_{jg}d_{jg})},$$

and

$$(16) \quad z_{ig}^A = \frac{1}{\varepsilon_{ig}} \left(\frac{1 + \gamma_{ig}}{b_{ig}} + \frac{1}{\varphi'_{ig}} \right) - \frac{\lambda_g^A}{b_{ig}} \quad \text{for all } i,$$

$$\text{where } \lambda_g^A = \frac{\sum_j y_{jg}(\gamma_{jg} - b_{jg}z_{jg}^A\varepsilon_{jg})}{\sum_j (\varepsilon_{jg}y_{jg} + \sigma_{jg}d_{jg})}.$$

Just as in the case of product standards, the key difference relative to our baseline model is the Lagrange multiplier in the formula for noncooperative standards, which captures the fact that individual countries now have market power in the world market.

First, note how an individual country’s influence on world prices changes the incidence of process standards. If country i tightens its standards, domestic producers lose from the increase in abatement costs, but the world price increases as a consequence of the supply reduction, and this means that the incidence of the standard is now shared between consumers and producers: the stronger the world-price effect is, the more the incidence is shifted onto consumers. Also note how this changes the impact of lobbies on unilateral standards. Recall that lobbies already cared about unilateral changes in process standards in the small-country setting, but now they care less strongly, because the impact of a unilateral change in process standards on producers is now mitigated by the world-price effect.

Following a similar logic as above, it is easy to see that in the benchmark case of symmetric countries, the qualitative results of our baseline model are preserved, in spite of the changed incidence of process standards: in particular, if lobbying is strong enough, the equilibrium agreement tightens process standards and increases welfare. Intuitively this is because the basic logic of counter-lobbying highlighted in the small-country model is still present.

We next focus on the case in which countries are asymmetric and trade in equilibrium. Suppose country i tightens its standard (z_{ig}) starting from the noncooperative equilibrium. This increases the world price and impacts the joint payoff of the remaining countries according to the following:

$$\left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g^{-i}}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} = \sum_{j \neq i} y_{jg}(\gamma_{jg} - b_{jg}z_{jg}^N\varepsilon_{jg}) + m_{ig}.$$

The best local agreement tightens country i 's process standard if and only if the expression above is positive. The sum on the right-hand side captures the political and environmental externalities, which push in opposite directions, just as in the small-country case, and the term m_{ig} captures the terms-of-trade motive for the agreement.

Focus first on the case in which lobbying pressures are weak, so the political parameters γ_{ig} are small. In this case, recall that without trade, the agreement would loosen all process standards. But if there is trade, for exporting countries the terms-of-trade effect pushes in the same direction (toward deregulation), while for importing countries it pushes in the opposite direction and may lead to a tightening of standards.

If the political pressure parameters γ_{ig} are large enough, intuitively the political externality dominates and hence $\left. \frac{\partial \Omega_g^{-i}}{\partial p_g} \right|_{NE} > 0$, thus the best local agreement tightens all process standards. We can show that, under a regularity condition, this local result holds also globally, and at the normative level the equilibrium agreement increases welfare, just as in our baseline model.⁴⁴

IV. Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the positive and normative effects of international regulatory agreements that are negotiated under lobbying pressures from producer groups. Our analysis suggests that these effects depend critically on whether the interests of producers in different countries are aligned or in conflict. The former situation tends to occur for product standards, while the latter tends to occur for process standards. We have shown that, if lobbying forces are strong enough, international cooperation on product standards leads to excessive deregulation and decreases welfare, while in the case of process standards it leads to tighter regulations and increases welfare.

To make our points more transparent we have considered two separate settings, one that focuses only on product standards and one that focuses only on process standards. In our working paper (Maggi and Ossa 2022), we consider an integrated model that allows for both types of regulations and for externalities, both on the consumption side and on the production side. In that extended setting, we find that most of our qualitative results hold with two qualifications. At the positive level, the equilibrium agreement changes product standards and process standards in opposite directions, and in particular, if the strength of lobbying is above a certain threshold then product standards are loosened and process standards are tightened, while the opposite is true if the strength of lobbying is below such threshold. And at the normative level, we find that when lobbying pressures are strong, the agreement decreases welfare if the relative importance of production externalities versus consumption

⁴⁴The restriction under which we can show that the local result holds globally is that γ_{ig} and ε_{ig} are not too dissimilar across countries. Note that the key difference between the formulas for the noncooperative and cooperative standards, (15) and (16), lies in the difference between λ_g^A and λ_{ig}^N . In online Appendix C we show that the restriction mentioned above ensures that $\lambda_g^A > \lambda_{ig}^N$ when the γ_{ig} parameters are sufficiently large.

externalities is small—since in this case product standards play a dominant role relative to process standards—while it increases welfare in the opposite case.

There are several further extensions of our model that would be interesting to explore in future research.

Our model assumes perfect competition. While a competitive model seems like a natural place to start for exploring the questions we are interested in, the presence of imperfect competition may affect some of our qualitative results and may open up further interesting questions. One such question concerns the role of firm heterogeneity and how this might affect the alignment of producer interests across borders. For example, in our competitive setting all producers in the world benefit from a relaxation of (nondiscriminatory) product standards in any given country, and this is true regardless of asymmetries in supply parameters, but this is no longer obvious in the presence of imperfect competition: in particular, it is conceivable that tightening a (nondiscriminatory) standard may increase the profits of more productive firms at the expense of less productive ones, even though it increases abatement costs for all firms. Whether or not this is the case is likely to depend on the specifics of the market structure and on the extent of cross-firm differences in abatement cost elasticities, and it would be interesting to investigate the conditions under which this would happen.

We have abstracted from fixed costs of compliance with product standards. Such fixed costs are undoubtedly relevant in reality and often mentioned as a rationale for harmonization of standards. How the presence of such fixed costs might change the welfare impact of regulatory agreements that are negotiated under lobbying pressures is an important question, but again, this would require a model with imperfect competition, which is outside the scope of this paper. Second, we have not considered horizontal standards. Note that the notions of co-lobbying and counter-lobbying, which are central in our model, are intrinsically vertical notions (do lobbies agree on tightening versus loosening standards), so they would not apply to a setting of horizontal standards, and hence one would have to entirely revisit the question of whether lobbying has a more distortionary effect on cooperative policies or on unilateral policies.

Another important question that we have not addressed in this paper is the role of global supply chains. Intuitively, in the presence of global supply chains, the welfare effects of regulatory cooperation would depend on where regulations hit along the supply chain. For example, consider vertical product standards. The interests of producer lobbies around the world are likely to be aligned when it comes to standards on final products, so regulatory cooperation will strengthen the impact of lobbies on regulations. But this would not necessarily be true for standards on intermediate products, because in this case the interests of upstream and downstream lobbies worldwide would be in conflict, so an agreement may dilute the overall influence of lobbies.

In the debate on the welfare effects of deep integration, the role of multinational enterprises is often mentioned as one of the reasons for concern. A natural question therefore is whether or not the multinational nature of production tends to worsen the welfare impacts of deep integration. Our perfect-competition setting cannot speak to the role of multinational firms, since there is no meaningful notion of firms in such a setting, so this is another desirable direction of extension of our model.

We have focused on global agreements, but it would be interesting to explore the welfare impacts of regional agreements when such agreements are negotiated under lobbying pressures. While there is a large literature that examines the welfare impacts of regional agreements of the “shallow” kind, including a few models where such agreements are negotiated under political pressure (e.g., Grossman and Helpman 1995b, and Ornelas 2005), the literature has paid little attention so far to the welfare impacts of regional regulatory cooperation.

Finally, it would be important to examine the welfare impacts of international cooperation in other salient areas of deep integration, such as foreign investment and intellectual property rights. The cleavages between special interests across country borders are clearly issue-area specific, but our conjecture is that the basic logic outlined above will continue to apply—namely, that international negotiations tend to enhance welfare if the interests of lobbies around the world are aligned, while they tend to reduce welfare if the interests of lobbies across borders are in conflict, at least if lobbies are sufficiently powerful.

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