

# Can International Relations and Comparative Politics Be Policy Relevant? Theory and Methods for Incorporating Political Context

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*How might one bring international relations (IR) and comparative politics (CP) observations into the public policy (PP) literature's predominant intellectual framing of policy, in which the normal analytical unit is a specific policy sector or type of regulatory institution? This article offers a practical framework to incorporate IR and CP directly into PP analyses. We present theory and methods for composing carefully structured, multiyear, analytical policy sector histories, suitable for international and comparative PP analysis, particularly when the research goal implies policy sector comparisons across wide variations of geography, culture, income, or historical epoch. Concretely, we propose two models, called the Leader State Framework in the case of international policy and the Varieties of Political Regimes Approach for policy at the national level, which should help policy analysts utilize important observations related to our disciplines' understanding of the diverse host political systems within which policy sectors are embedded.*

**Keywords:** International Relations, Comparative Politics, Comparative Public Policy Analysis, Policy Analysts, Policy Studies, Policy Relevance, Political Context, Theory, Methods, Practical Framework, Policy Sector Comparisons, Multiyear Policy Sector Histories, Leader State Framework, Varieties of Political Regimes Approach, International Public Policy.

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*¿Cómo podrían incluirse las observaciones de las relaciones internacionales y la política comparada en la literatura sobre políticas públicas, dominada por un enfoque en el que la unidad de análisis más común es un área de políticas o una institución regulatoria específica? Este artículo ofrece un enfoque práctico para incorporar las relaciones internacionales y la política comparada directamente al proceso de análisis de las políticas públicas. Se presentan teorías y metodologías para la construcción de historias analíticas cuidadosamente estructuradas de sectores de políticas públicas, particularmente adecuadas cuando el objetivo es la comparación de políticas en distintas regiones geográficas, culturales, económicas o históricas. Específicamente, proponemos dos modelos, el Enfoque del Estado Líder (LSF, por sus siglas en inglés) en el caso de las políticas públicas internacionales y el Modelo de Variedad de Regímenes Políticos (VPR, por sus siglas en inglés) para las políticas a nivel nacional. Estos modelos contribuyen a que los analistas utilicen importantes observaciones de nuestras disciplinas académicas acerca de los distintos sistemas políticos en los que un sector de políticas públicas está situado.*

This article's purpose is to further debate about how comparative and international political science can be more relevant to the study of public policy (PP) in an increasingly globalized and multipolar world. Our response herein is *an* answer, not *the* answer, but is an approach that we believe to be both innovative and useful. The authors, scholars of international relations (IR) and comparative politics (CP), argue that our disciplines have a joint core, however, pluralist and "analytically eclectic" (Sil and Katzenstein 2010), whose application to PP governance may be summarized thus: for any given policy sector, power is mediated through institutions within a political context.<sup>1</sup> In a world

<sup>1</sup>We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this formulation.

where authority is still divided among sovereign states (Drezner 2007), most of the time the relevant political context is a national one; however, some problems may only be solved by international cooperation, and in those cases the relevant context should be international. These core arguments can account for the broad contours of “policy sector governance regimes,” which we define to mean “the set of formal and informal rules and institutions that govern a particular policy sector.” We couch our specific research question thus: “How might one bring IR and CP insights directly into the PP literature’s predominant intellectual framing of policy governance regimes, in which the normal analytical unit is a specific policy sector or type of regulatory institution?”<sup>2</sup>

We propose a research approach that focuses at the level of the policy sector (as in PP), yet which also requires that the researcher make the larger political environment for PP explicit (as in IR and CP). It facilitates the embrace of a wide variety of country cases, explicitly including emerging economies and historical cases, in a common analytical framework with contemporary advanced industrial countries. Our approach also enables the identification and comparison of the evolution of policy sector regulatory regimes and governance at two distinct levels of analysis: international (including regional) and national. In other words, this article offers methods, informed by core theoretical insights from IR and CP, which may be especially helpful for those confronting a basket of “apples and oranges”—along with “lettuce,” or even “steak”—that is, investigators who would compare PP choices and outcomes across wide differences of geography, culture, income levels, and/or historical eras. Concretely, we propose the writing of multiyear policy sector histories, each consciously located by the analyst within the larger political system in which it is embedded, and explicitly structured so as to be comparable with other policy sector histories across variations of either the policy sector or the encompassing political system. The approach should work for most policy sectors, from infrastructure promotion, to social welfare, to environmental protection, to public debt regulation.

The article contains five sections. The Basic Theory section presents initial theoretical propositions from IR and CP that we find most relevant to understanding policy sector outcomes, then explains how the units of analysis (“political-system-and-policy-sector” blocks) that we propose might be useful for research designs that go beyond comparing easily-compared cases. The Leader State Framework section addresses *international* policy regimes, describing our model, the leader state framework (LSF). The Varieties of Political Regimes Approach section focuses on *national policy* sector regulatory regimes, also proposing a model, the varieties of political regimes (VPR) approach. The Illustrative Research Designs section illustrates with concrete

<sup>2</sup>See May and Jochim (2013) for a discussion of the use of the policy regime perspective in PP studies.

examples the value added to the analysis of different types of national and international policy research problems by our approach. Brief conclusions reinforce the desirability of further cooperation among CP, IR, and PP scholars.

### Basic Theory

The dominant analytical unit in policy studies has been the policy sector or type of regulatory institution. Much fruitful comparison has been cross-sectoral, with scholars observing that variations of organizational characteristics generate different types of political interactions in diverse policy arenas (i.e., “policy subsystems”) within a single national polity, most often the United States.<sup>3</sup> Some PP comparisons are cross-national, but these almost always are limited to carefully matched, and very similar, countries. This well-accepted research design enables a scholar to investigate the consequences of cross-national variation in intra-policy-sector regulatory institutions, where one might compare, for example, the regulatory frameworks for electricity generation in France as compared with Germany, or in Jamaica as compared with Trinidad and Tobago (Levi-Faur 2006a, 2006b). In the real world of PP advice, however, findings from a limited universe of national backdrops later may become reified as universal “best practice,” as when, for lack of better options, a policy advisor at an international financial institution takes lessons on the optimal design of stock market regulation, gleaned from comparisons within Northern Europe, and applies them widely in Latin America or Southeast Asia.

Our goal in this article is to assist scholars to make explicit the broad political environment within which PP governance in any sector unfolds. We begin with the nature of power and authority in political systems—international and national. Recognizing that an important motivation for this approach is to expand the viable universe of mutually comparable PP cases, we have attempted a theoretically centrist approach to IR and CP. We believe that our models may be useful for scholars who have adopted a variety of theoretical perspectives.

At the international level, the focus of the academic study of IR, we self-identify as neoclassical realists (Kitchen 2010; Rose 1998) or “constructivist realists.”<sup>4</sup> We judge nation states to be the most important actors in the international system.<sup>5</sup> Systemic structure, defined by the interstate distribution of

<sup>3</sup>Classic studies include Clark and Wilson (1961) and Lowi (1972).

<sup>4</sup>Most attempts to synthesize the realist and constructivist paradigms come down more firmly in the constructivist camp and should be called “realist constructivists.” However, we place power first and ideas second, and thus consider the most accurate term to be “constructive realist,” as used by Lebow (2004). Our ideas also are in line with those of Beeson (2005), who argues that realist and constructivist (Gramscian) conceptualizations of hegemony can help us understand the role of powerful states.

<sup>5</sup>We reject the thesis that large transnational business firms have effectively escaped national control. They may, however, exert enormous influence on incumbent political leaders within their home state—and also in other states where they invest and trade.

capabilities in a system lacking a central authority, provides the most important incentives to state leaders making their foreign policy choices (Waltz 1979). However, the perceptions, beliefs, and ideologies held by (incumbent leaders of) states also matter (Finnemore 1996; Klotz 1999; Klotz and Lynch 2007; Ruggie 1982; Wendt 1992). Ideas in the international system, often promoted by nonstate actors, can create cooperation, but become most consequential when they are adopted by incumbent governments of major states. Moreover, shared “issue visions” (normative and prescriptive ideas about processes and goals in specific policy sectors; see Ruggie 1982; Wendt 1992)<sup>6</sup> can inspire even mutually suspicious rivals to conceive common benefits from multilateral cooperation.

At the national level, the focus of CP, our judgments about government, individual, and social group motivations makes us adherents of a “soft” rational choice framework. National leaders operate within national political systems, or “political regimes” (as contrasted to “policy regimes”), which consist of formal, as well as informal yet widely understood, rules and institutions prescribing how leaders are chosen and the country is to be governed.<sup>7</sup> These rules and institutions influence PP by structuring the incentives to which incumbent leaders respond. Moreover, all incumbents, including authoritarian dictators, have constituents, although the set of included social groups and individuals varies dramatically across political regime types. Individuals and groups support political leaders that these included constituents believe will pursue policies that improve their lives.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, when faced with an array of ideas about possible policy options, a rational national leader will tend to select the options most congenial to those social groups whose political support the leader needs to remain in office.<sup>9</sup> However, perceptions are subjective, and skillful policy entrepreneurs may be able to shift key groups’ understandings of their self-interest (Hall 1989).

<sup>6</sup>In the PP literature, issue visions are sometimes called “policy narratives” (Jones and McBeth 2010; Shanahan, McBeth, and Hathaway 2011).

<sup>7</sup>The idea of a “political regime” that is conceptually distinct from the “state” and that may be categorized into different “types” was first proposed by Plato. In a widely used (especially in Europe and Latin America) “dictionary of politics,” Levi (1976, 1362) proposes that political regimes should be understood as “the institutions that regulate conflict and the exercise of power, *and the values that animate them.*” Some recent scholarship on regimes and regime change (and some political science textbooks) emphasize institutions far more than “ideas:” however, we argue that the ideas dimension is essential for understanding the impact of “political regime” on PP. A given political regime often endures across a change in leadership or political parties, which would be a within-regime change of “administration,” as in the Obama administration.

<sup>8</sup>This also is a basic assumption of most formal political economy models, as in Alt and Chrystal (1983).

<sup>9</sup>We make no general assumptions about the substantive interests (e.g., class vs. economic sector or ethnic identity, or mass vs. elite) that predominate. Rather, we consider the characteristics of constituents in any given national political regime to be an empirical question.

**Table 1. Key Postulates and Hypotheses for Internationalizing Public Policy Studies**

<b>Leader State Framework</b> (for studies of global issue governance)	<b>Varieties of Political Regimes Approach</b> (for comparative policy studies)
<p data-bbox="151 388 256 411"><i>Postulates</i></p> <ol data-bbox="151 440 602 846" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="151 440 602 546">1. The global (or a regional) interstate system provides the environment that shapes the evolution of international policy sectors.</li> <li data-bbox="151 575 602 681">2. The preferences of large, capable states (“leader states”) influence international policy sector choices more than do those of other actors.</li> <li data-bbox="151 710 602 846">3. (Incumbent political leaders of) leader states inherit and incrementally modify overall visions of their “national interests,” which are influenced by their systemic position, but also by ideas.</li> </ol>	<p data-bbox="655 388 760 411"><i>Postulates</i></p> <ol data-bbox="655 440 1135 846" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="655 440 1135 527">1. A national political regime provides the environment that shapes the evolution of domestic policy sectors.</li> <li data-bbox="655 575 1135 681">2. Incumbent national political leaders either initiate or acquiesce in the majority of consequential new domestic policy sector choices.</li> <li data-bbox="655 710 1135 846">3. Incumbent political leaders inherit “national policy orientations,” which are incrementally modified by leaders’ need for support from constituents, as well as by ideas.</li> </ol>
<p data-bbox="151 871 266 894"><i>Hypothesis</i></p> <p data-bbox="151 923 602 1031">An international policy issue vision becomes influential through converging with the perceived “national interests” of a leader state or states.</p>	<p data-bbox="655 871 770 894"><i>Hypothesis</i></p> <p data-bbox="655 923 1135 1031">A policy sector issue vision becomes nationally influential through converging with the political incumbent(s)’ interpretation of the regime’s “national policy orientation.”</p>

National leaders navigate within inherited frameworks of ideas (backed by interests, reinforced by institutions), which they can modify incrementally.

Our neoclassical realist approach to international systems and our soft rational choice orientation regarding national political regimes lead us to two models, each of which rests on four statements about the relationship of political systems and policy sector governance, as summarized in Table 1. The LSF, on the table’s left, is for analysis of *international* policy sector regimes in global, regional, subregional, and quasiregional systems. What we wish to explain is international policy sector governance regimes, which consist of converging expectations of state and nonstate actors around a mix of formal rules and laws (promulgated although seldom enforced by international governmental organizations [IGOs]) and informal procedures and norms.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>In our view, all patterned interactions, including *informal* agreements to consult during crises, for example, serve to define an international regime (cf. Krasner 1982, 186). Thus, if senior policy makers in multiple countries jointly conceive of an international policy challenge, or of a global policy arena, then at least an embryonic international regime necessarily exists. We thus part company with scholars such as Dimitrov and others (2007), who set a high bar in terms of institutionalization and efficacy for the existence of an “international regime.” We also would disagree with the notion that the “regimes perspective is not an appropriate tool to analyze private governing arrangements” (Petridou 2014, S26).

The first LSF proposition is that the overall dynamics of the relevant interstate political system provide the environment for the evolution of international policy sectors. Second, we suggest that the preferences of large, capable states (“leader states”) influence international policy sector choices and outcomes more than do those of other actors. These “leader states” may not always prevail in imposing their preferred designs for multilateral policy governance, nor will they invariably have strong preferences. However, in policy issue arenas in which leader states do have strong preferences, it will be difficult if not impossible to create institutions and norms of multilateral cooperation that contravene leader state wishes. Moreover, where international cooperation implies substantial costs, then it will be difficult if not impossible to overcome problems of collective action without the active leadership of such key states. Third, incumbent political leaders’ perceptions of their state’s interests and goals (“foreign policy visions”) in the main derive from a country’s position in the systemic balance of capabilities, but also are subjective and shaped by perceptions, and thus should be investigated. This leads to a hypothesis about how sets of related policy sector ideas (“issue visions”) come to define the institutions of an international policy sector governance regime: an international policy issue vision becomes influential through converging with the perceived “foreign policy vision” of a leader state or states. Bluntly, good (or sometimes bad) ideas need a powerful state behind them to come to define significant institutions in a global governance regime.

An iconic example would be the global trade and finance regimes, both of which shifted markedly from the pre- to the post-WWII period (Gilpin 2001; Lake 1983). Following WWII, the United States was the greatest world power in terms of total capabilities, and one of two superpowers (based on military capabilities) by the 1950s. The two superpowers each competed to establish their spheres of influence. Within the Western sphere, the democratic and outward-looking United States had two enduring and overarching foreign policy priorities. First, it established a military security umbrella over much of the world (Western Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and large parts of East Asia and the Middle East) to contain Soviet (and later Chinese) Communism. Second, the United States promoted and funded the system of liberal international economic governance institutions known as the Bretton Woods system (or what Ikenberry [2012] refers to as Liberal Internationalism 2.0), to regulate the trade and financial issue arenas.

The VPR approach, shown on the table’s right, is for creating *national* policy sector histories, and rests on four parallel statements. Its name reflects our considerable debt to the varieties of capitalism (VOC) literature.<sup>11</sup> The VPR

<sup>11</sup>See Coates (2000, 2005), Freeman (1985), Hall and Soskice (2001), Huber (2002), and Schneider and Soskice (2009). The VOC literature focuses on cross-national differences among complexes of economic, social, and regulatory institutions, typically within a single world region (Western Europe, Latin America) or among countries at a similar level of industrialization (advanced industrial societies).

model proposes, first, that a country's overall national political system ("national political regime") powerfully influences the policy sector regulatory patterns embedded within it.<sup>12</sup> If the political system suddenly shifts, then the new incumbents inherit much of the prior regulatory framework (less so when the political transition has been extremely violent). However, subsequent regulatory innovations, in response to new policy sector challenges, reflect the power, priorities, institutional, and ideological configurations of the new national political regime (see Steinmo and Thelan 1992; Stinchcombe 1968, chapter III; Thelen 2003).<sup>13</sup> Second, authority matters (i.e., shapes public policy in all, or nearly all, policy sectors). Significant PP reforms will pass through the central government. Major national regulatory innovations, including those that appear largely private-sector driven, will not take root unless the state incumbent(s) either actively support them or passively acquiesce in them.

As is the case with international policy regimes, the VPR framework accepts the constructivist argument that ideas are necessary for leaders to advocate and implement policies in any given policy sector. Our third postulate is that a country's incumbent political leaders, at any given point in time, have inherited or elaborated an overarching "national policy orientation," often ultimately derived from religion or national founding myths, and encompassing political, economic, and social beliefs. The economic aspects of the dominant ideology may stress, for example, market efficiency—or conversely the need for state intervention to respond to market failures. The national policy orientation (ideology) is embodied in and reinforced by national regulatory institutions, yet also exists as an independent influence in its own right. This national policy orientation gradually is transformed by the incumbent political leader(s), who modify it over time in response to constituent demands ("interests") and new policy ideas. The model thus hypothesizes that an issue vision proposing reform in a specific policy sector becomes nationally influential through converging with the overall national ideology of an incumbent political regime and its current leader(s). In other words, new policy sector issue visions are most likely to take root if they can be packaged so as to appear consistent with the dominant national policy orientation.

These theoretical choices then shape the ways we construct our cases, nowhere more so than with respect to selecting the appropriate unit of analysis. In both our LSF (international) and VPR (national) models, a single "case" consists of a political-system-and-policy-sector block. The case's duration and geographic scope are defined by the larger political system that hosts the policy sector.

<sup>12</sup>We note that the term "political regime" is used in diverse ways by scholars, even in closely related fields. We adopt the usage common to CP, as explained further below.

<sup>13</sup>In the PP literature, see Prindle (2012), Baumgartner and Jones (1993), and True, Jones, and Baumgartner (2007).

For the LSF, the unit is the international system (or subsystem) during the lifetime of a particular structural configuration. A given international system ends and a successor system begins whenever the distribution of capabilities among states shifts significantly and/or states' alliance choices shift in a very consequential way, whether for reasons of international power-balancing or domestic political regime changes within major states. An international war or economic catastrophe such as the Great Depression may set off major political shifts worldwide, causing sharp political breaks in the global interstate system, in regional interstate systems, and sometimes even within countries. Not all systemic shifts, however, occur suddenly; in fact, most happen gradually, but are only recognized when a crisis makes the underlying shifts in relative capabilities apparent. A systemic shift occurs, for example, when a previously unipolar system (i.e., one dominated by a single highly capable state) becomes bipolar or multipolar (i.e., one or more additional states emerge as influential powers)—or vice versa, as when a formerly bipolar alliance system comes to be dominated by just one state. Regional and other subglobal systems are, of course, not independent of larger global systemic changes. Thus the end of the Cold War and breakup of the Soviet Union around 1990 ushered in a “unipolar moment” both globally and in the many regional systems in which the United States was involved (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth 2009). The contours of the successor global political system are not yet entirely clear, with scholars divided among those who consider the world today bipolar between the United States and European Union (Moravcsik 2010) or moving rapidly toward either future bipolarity with China or an uneven global multipolarity (Nadkarni and Noonan 2013; Zakaria 2012).<sup>14</sup> Frequently, although not always, shifts in the global international system also will provide the best beginning and ending points for the regional or subregional systems that are embedded within it.

For national polities modeled with the VPR, the basic unit of analysis is the national political system (“national political regime”), the larger environment for the policy sector of interest. Shifts between political regime types are defined to occur when the basic rules for gaining and exercising power within the national political system shift significantly. The Illustrative Research Designs section below provides further details for operationalizing the concept of national political regime.

A single case then is a policy history that covers the life of a single political system—whether international or national—typically over several decades. In practice, we suggest some limited pragmatic adjustments, such as a rule that a single case in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries should last from about 15

<sup>14</sup>Other IR scholars such as Risse-Kapan (1995) have preferred to emphasize the networked nature of contemporary global governance, downplaying the role of traditional states, yet also recognizing the larger political context of international policy sector governance.

to at most 50 years, while earlier cases may be longer. Any within-political-system breakpoints, if they become necessary to make a long-lived political system more wieldy as a single “case,” should correspond to important within-system shifts in political power.<sup>15</sup> The important point is that events in the host political system—rather than those within the policy sector of interest—define the duration of a case. We note that this decision implies that not all cases will be of equal length nor will even roughly contemporaneous cases necessarily share an endpoint.

Defining the policy sector is also challenging. The scope, goals, and other definitional parameters of both international and national policy sectors themselves are normally both ambiguous and contested. Is tobacco policy an economic issue or a health issue (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Givel 2006)? Is the sector to be defined broadly, as “health care”—or more narrowly, as “lung cancer policy”? As a rule of thumb, the more different any two or more political contexts to be compared are, the less feasible it will be to compare issue arenas as defined by specific institutions and the more appropriate it will be to compare issue arenas as defined by functional policy goals, arenas of activity, or “set[s] of problems” (May and Jochim 2013, 428). The researcher typically begins with the policy institution, activity, or goal that most interests her or him. Yet if the eventual plan is to compare multiple cases, the investigator may, over the course of the research, need to enlarge or subdivide the designated “policy sector” so that its scope makes sense in *each* of the planned cases. Consequently, the investigator may bound the policy sector differently from participants.

In other words, we are asking scholars to dedicate more time to broad contexts, scanning theoretically identified corners of the political environment of policy. Admittedly, this is what many good international researchers actually do: our intent is to codify and systematize actual—and effective—practice.

The article’s next two sections detail research protocols for the two models. We propose multiple steps to uncover the relationship between politics and policy, each of which can be time-consuming and conceptually challenging. The potential payoff comes if they stimulate researchers’ abilities to identify both the overall policy history “forest” and its most significant or unusual “trees,” whether these lie in the realm of institutions, power, or ideas.

### **The Leader State Framework**

The top row of Table 2 below shows the first eight steps of the LSF, all of which consist of preliminary conceptualization and information gathering. In

<sup>15</sup>For example, if one considers the United States to have had a single, continuous national political regime, then plausible breakpoints might include the presidencies of Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, F. D. Roosevelt, or L. B. Johnson.

practice, several steps may be carried out simultaneously, but it is helpful to imagine them separately. Step 9, not shown in the table, uses the raw material assembled in the first eight steps to build the structured policy sector history that will constitute a single case. The protocol is iterative, first asking the researcher to select the unit of analysis and assess the institutions, power, and ideas that shape the relevant international *political* system—and then requiring him or her to identify the unit of analysis, institutions, power, and ideas that structure interactions within the international *policy* issue arena. The lower row in Table 2 details the similar steps necessary for the VPR research protocol for studying domestic policy sector regimes.

Step 1 (political system unit of analysis) is to choose the scope of the international system (global, regional, subregional, or quasiregional) and the time period.<sup>16</sup> For subglobal international systems, the researcher may select period endpoints according to unique regional system parameters, but often selects them according to political or economic parameters that are important for the global political system.

Next, in step 2 (political intra-systemic institutions), the researcher constructs a simple “map” of the institutions of governance in the relevant interstate system, sketching major cross-border links between and among the states and other actors operative during the life of the case’s political system. The goal is to capture essential relationships as parsimoniously as possible. The LSF governance map should focus on major state-to-state links of cooperation, noting how they have evolved across a few key issue arenas (usually including security/political and economics/trade cooperation) during the time period. These links may be formal and legal, as with common membership in an international governmental institution, or informal but mutually understood, as with verbal promises to consult during times of crisis. Significant transnational (nonstate) social and economic links across national borders, including patterns of migration and trade flows, also may be important to trace. Finally, we note that inherited intra-systemic institutions may also include informal but enduring relationships of “aversion,” such as historic rivalries among countries.

The third step (political system power) is to describe the overall systemic distribution of capabilities (“balance of power”). This involves a brief visit to basic descriptive data measuring such material dimensions as population, economic size, military spending, and industrial value-added.<sup>17</sup> Comparative assessment of a few less easily measured national political variables, such as political stability, also could be included. Any state or states with relatively

<sup>16</sup>Quasiregional international systems refer to multilateral groupings that are not primarily or even plausibly geographic: such as Iberian and Ibero-American states, Islamic states, or the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries.

<sup>17</sup>See for example, Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey (1972).

**Table 2. Preliminary Steps in Case Construction: International (LSF) and Comparative (VPR) Policy Analysis**

Analysis of Political Environment		Analysis of Policy Sector						
	<i>Step 1. Unit of analysis (scope &amp; duration)</i>	<i>Step 2. Intra-systemic institutions</i>	<i>Step 3. Power</i>	<i>Step 4. Ideas</i>	<i>Step 5. Unit of analysis (scope)</i>	<i>Step 6. Regulatory institutions</i>	<i>Step 7. Power</i>	<i>Step 8. Ideas</i>
<b>LSF</b>	Historical epoch (or subperiod) in an international system	Formal & informal institutions of interstate cooperation	Interstate capability distribution	“Foreign policy vision” of leader states (& other states of interest)	Scope of included tasks; chronology	IGOs and transnational governance in sector	Policy sector capability distribution	Competing issue visions
<b>VPR</b>	National political regime (or subperiod)	Formal & informal institutions of national governance	National pattern of political authority & voice	“National policy orientation” of the regime	Scope of included tasks; chronology	Sectoral regulatory framework	Policy sector capability distribution	Competing issue visions

large overall capabilities (“power”) is/are in a position to exercise systemic leadership. These are the system’s “pole(s)” or potential “leader state(s).” Note that in some research projects it will be the international policy options for an intermediate or minor power that the researcher actually cares about. In that case, the relative capabilities of that minor power in this interstate system also need to be plotted.

For step 4 (political system ideas), we want to know how the national political leaders of “leader states” (and any other minor state of the researcher’s particular interest) perceive their principal foreign policy goals and options. This is the state’s “foreign policy vision,” roughly equivalent to what a previous generation of IR scholars labeled a nation’s “national interest,” or what is sometimes today termed “grand strategy” (Finnemore 1996; Morgenthau 1951; Nye 1999; Tonelson 1985). A state’s foreign policy expectations and preferences are strongly influenced by its relative position in the global and regional interstate distributions of capabilities, but also by its domestic conditions and unique history. For example, a state may be ideologically or territorially expansionist, or may buy into a vision of regional identity (such as “Latin America”). These aspects of its foreign policy ideas cannot merely be deduced from a country’s relative position in a regional or global interstate hierarchy (Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñan 2005; Simmons and Elkins 2004; Zhukov and Stewart 2013).

Steps 5-8 sketch the policy sector arena. Although we have separated out the steps for analytical clarity, they may be implemented in any order, or jointly. Step 5 (policy sector unit of analysis) requires the researcher to define the scope of the international policy sector, and then to immerse herself in its history. Step 6 (policy sector regulatory institutions) inquires into the state of multilateral regulatory “governance” within this policy sector issue arena, identifying institutions and processes. The goal of both steps, which may need to be repeated, is to sketch a rough, and messy but inclusive, chronology, answering questions such as the following. Has any influential national government led an effort to organize multilateral cooperation within this PP sector? How did prospective partner states react? Did IGOs initiate? What were/are the big debates? Who is on which side? Why? This first cut at understanding the policy sector history is necessarily inductive, and should be organized around about two to six seminal events. They will be a mix of state policy choices, perhaps transmitted via international law or formally constituted IGOs<sup>18</sup>; key decisions made by transnational actors providing *de facto* private governance (see Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999; Haufler 2001; Strange 1996)<sup>19</sup>; norms and customary

<sup>18</sup>On multilateral cooperation in formally institutionalized in IGOs, see Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal (2001).

<sup>19</sup>Network analysis can be especially useful for mapping transnational links that contribute to global governance. See Kahler (2009) and Oatley and others (2013).

procedures that structure patterned interactions (see Krasner 1982)<sup>20</sup>; and other critical occurrences (such as a natural disaster) that influenced policy evolution.

The goal of step 7 (policy sector power) is to construct an approximate capability distribution (“balance of power”) among both state and select non-state players *within the policy sector*. The investigator asks: Who are the key players in this issue arena? What is the rough distribution of power and resources among these players? Each leader-state’s national political executive necessarily appears as an important player. Occasionally, other central government ministries, or even representatives of subnational government, also operate as separate and influential policy sector players at the international level. States that are not leader states may have outsize capabilities in particular sectors. Nonstate and other transnational actors (sometimes based outside the international system of interest) may also be major actors within the international policy sector.<sup>21</sup> The researcher should *not* seek to be exhaustive or comprehensive, but rather to avoid missing an important actor.

Finally, in step 8 (policy sector ideas) we want to identify competing normative and prescriptive ideas about processes and goals for the PP issue arena. Political elites may have ideas about policy, but most issue visions come from individuals, groups, and organizations with special knowledge of the issue arena. At a minimum, an issue vision contains a statement about the goal of policy sector governance, and about the core value it “should” promote, which might be efficiency, sovereignty, justice, or equality. Typically competing issue visions also contain causal statements, which may be more or less explicit, and are of the form: “This value may be promoted by taking this action.” As a practical matter, and to make a policy sector history comprehensible and comparable, the researcher should summarize competing views into a maximum of four distinct policy issue visions—although very often two competing visions will suffice. The researcher may link key policy sector actors (as identified in the previous step) with their preferred issue visions.

To carry out the crucial ninth step, which is not shown in Table 2 yet is the final product of the investigation, the researcher looks to all of the information collected in the previous steps and constructs a narrative of the case. This case narrative is inevitably subjective, yet the exercise of having previously worked through the stepwise analysis of the unit of analysis, institutions, power, and ideas on two levels obliges the investigator to be systematic, and provides at least modest insurance against missing something crucial. The case write-up begins with a brief *overview of the host political*

<sup>20</sup>Different issue regimes may be overlapping (Alter and Meunier 2009). Participants should engage in “boundary scanning” (as in May and Jochim 2013) and “venue shopping.”

<sup>21</sup>These would include “epistemic communities” and transnational advocacy networks (Adler and Haas 1992; Cross 2013; Keck and Sikkink 1998).

*system*, as per the findings from steps 1 to 4. It then moves to its principal section, *an analytical policy sector narrative* of the case, drawing on steps 5 through 8, incorporating insights the researcher now has into key policy sector events, international governance institutions, the preferences and capabilities of key actors, and competing issue visions. There are three basic alternative structures for the policy narrative. The default design is a single narrative, organized chronologically. An alternate expository design is parallel narratives organized by each competing leader state or other state actor of particular research interest. A third possible structure for the narrative is by policy subfunction or issue vision: the latter may be especially useful when the investigator is motivated by a particular issue vision. Finally, each international political-system-and-policy-sector case also requires a *conclusion*. Here, the researcher reviews the entire case, commenting on the applicability of the basic LSF causal model (international issue visions become influential by converging with the foreign policy vision(s) of a leader state or states) and/or on other hypotheses s/he has developed.

### **The Varieties of Political Regimes Approach**

The first step (political system unit of analysis) of the VPR protocol (political system unit of analysis), shown in the bottom row of Table 2, asks the researcher to identify the national political regime (or politically determined subperiod or periods, if the national political regime itself is long lived or the researcher wishes to focus on an important within-regime transition, as when a long period of social democratic administrations gives way to an extended period of conservative administrations). Political histories of the country in question are key resources for the identification of regime endpoints, possibly complemented by quantitative datasets of political regimes.<sup>22</sup>

The researcher then has to characterize the national political regime (or subperiod thereof) as a broad “type,” as for example: absolute monarchy, oligarchy, military or party-based autocracy, or mass democracy. Scholars differ on which subtypes are important and how they should be defined, but there is a consensus that the key differences have to do with how political leaders are selected and what their powers are while in office. These defining rules of the game may be formally specified by law—or may be informal, yet widely recognized within the society. Defining rules consist of the answers to these questions: First, how does one become the senior political leader in this system? For example, is it through being born the eldest son of the monarch? Winning

<sup>22</sup>Quantitative measures of democracy include: Freedom House (see [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)), Polity IV (Marshall and Jagers 2007), and Democracy/Dictatorship (Alvarez *et al.* 1996; Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010). On autocratic regimes, see Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014). On “varieties of democracy” see Coppedge and others (2012).

an election? Staging a coup? Second, what governance powers does the leader exercise, and in particular, is the ruler above or subject to the formal laws of the land and oversight from other actors? The VPR model is compatible with most political regime typologies. The researcher may decide which typology to employ—and why. As with defining the scope of the policy sector (step number five), much depends on the heterogeneity of the set of countries the researcher wishes to compare.

In step 2 (political intra-systemic institutions), the researcher further characterizes the national political regime with a focus on those governing institutions explicitly relevant to understanding policy making and regulation. The level of detail will be determined by the researcher's implicit comparison with the other cases intended for study. Some researchers will focus on the policy consequences of variations in formal institutions, or on the ideological distance among major political parties or levels of government (Cox and McCubbins 2001; Haggard and McCubbins 2001; Tsebelis 1995). Work in the comparative public administration tradition, or in development administration, would highlight cross-national differences in the recruitment, training, compensation, political oversight, and societal context of the central government bureaucracy.<sup>23</sup> Others will be interested in the patterns of institutions and practices that shape economic and social policy making and outcomes, both within the government and in society.<sup>24</sup> As with this research protocol's previous step, the VPR framework leaves the level of detail and particular comparative questions about national political institutions to the investigator's choice.

Step 3 (political system power) inquires into the distribution of "political authority" (the right to participate in decision making about PP) and "political voice" (the right to express demands to decision makers) within this national political regime. Ultimately, we want to know *whose* opinions and demands incumbent senior political leaders generally should consider when making significant PP decisions, and what the rough balance of power among the set of politically relevant actors is.<sup>25</sup> Which social groups and individuals control political resources (votes, force, money, cultural legitimacy, information, etc.) that *de facto* are needed by the incumbent chief executive to retain office and control her/his political party or coalition?<sup>26</sup> The investigator should consider groups who share *formal* political decision-making authority with the chief executive, such as legislators or governors; those with formal political voice (voters); and those whose political voice may be *informal* yet potent, such as

<sup>23</sup>Chandler (2014). For development administration, see Leonard (1977), Price (1975), and Tendler (1977).

<sup>24</sup>In addition to the VOC works cited above, see Esping-Andersen (1990).

<sup>25</sup>A country chapter in a good CP textbook will provide this information.

<sup>26</sup>Wynia (1990) usefully conceptualizes alternative national political regime types in terms of the *de facto* power balance among different social groups, each of whom controls a different politically relevant capability.

political parties (in democracies), the military officer corps (in authoritarian regimes) or the owners of large businesses (in both). Foreign actors, including investors, also may be important players. The answers to this question also may be sought through posing the question's inverse: Which resident social groups in this national system *lack* political voice, and how and why? Sometimes the mechanisms of exclusion or dilution of political voice are overt, but more often they are covert and informal.

In step 4 (political system ideas), among the most difficult to implement, the researcher investigates the political regime's ideas and governing ideology. We posit that national leaders possess a broad domestic political-economic vision (or "national policy orientation"), shaped by the country's domestic conditions and unique history. The overall domestic policy vision, sometimes explicit but often implicit, summarizes the ways that leaders conceptualize the political and economic role of government, and particularly their notions of the common good, the founding myth of the regime, and the idealized role of the state in economic and social policy.<sup>27</sup> Important societal values may range from a belief in national religious or racial superiority, to promotion of divinely sanctioned social order, equality, anti-imperialism, secular government, and/or individual freedoms, whether political, economic, or religious.<sup>28</sup> The main themes in such visions shift only slowly during the life of a given political regime. In a competitive democracy, there will be variations between the main political parties or partisan coalitions, but a central tendency for the regime nonetheless may be identified. Often it is easiest to identify key themes, which is all that is required, by scanning comparatively (Italy vs. Germany, North Korea as compared with South Korea) and asking which ideological touchstones leaders regularly refer to, particularly to justify policy innovations.

With this background on the host political system, the investigator turns to the specific policy sector in steps 5 through 8. In step 5 (policy sector unit of analysis), the key task is specification of the boundaries of the policy sector, recognizing that its precise scope may be contested among policy players with different agendas. Most investigators will find it useful to begin their definitional efforts with policy functions or goals—not with specific institutions—and should treat this step as an intrinsically iterative task. The analyst then constructs a chronology of perhaps two to six significant events (including major policy debates, policy shifts, and issue arena crises) influencing outcomes in this issue arena throughout the lifetime of this national political regime. Step

<sup>27</sup>In some regimes, particularly totalitarian ones, the national policy vision may be a clearly delimited ideology, such as Bolshevism or Nazism, whereas others will have what Juan Linz (2000, 162) calls "mentalities," "ways of thinking and feeling, more emotional than rational," consisting of vague intellectual attitudes and national symbols and goals. Policy visions also encompass economic and social values, such as views on "government" or "the market."

<sup>28</sup>The World Values Survey is possibly helpful, although it concentrates on values held by the general public rather than by national leaders. See Inglehart and Carballo (1997).

6 (policy sector regulatory institutions) then asks how the policy sector is governed, both *de jure* and *de facto*. The researcher identifies the major official regulatory institutions within the policy sector, beginning with governmental regulatory agencies, but also including self-regulatory bodies constituted by private sector actors. Overlap and conflicting authority are common. In some cases, other actors, such as news media, may supplement formal regulation by acting as informal enforcers of social norms on policy sector actors.

In step 7 (policy sector power), the researcher identifies the balance of capabilities among key players, including but not limited to “advocacy coalitions” and “policy communities” in this issue arena, within this country and during this time period. The main responsible ministry or regulatory agency is one player. Other levels of government, including other national level ministries with different policy agendas as well as separately elected or appointed political leaders (legislatures, governors), also may be significant participants. Private sector individuals and institutions to be regulated, and their associations, also are likely key players, as are organizations of other stakeholders in the policy sector, such as labor unions, clients, local community political leaders, and frequently transnational actors. In sketching the rough distribution of power and resources among these policy sector players, and as with all of the steps in both our models, the investigator’s goal is *not* comprehensiveness but rather to achieve a reasonable, but rapid, scan, to avoid missing something important.<sup>29</sup> Then, in step 8 (policy sector ideas), one wants to identify the major contending policy sector issue visions in the national issue arena. It may be very useful first to look to the comparable international policy issue arena to identify the full range of influential contemporary issue visions, and then to identify the portion of this spectrum that appears in the domestic policy debate.

Finally, in the ninth and final step—not shown in Table 2, but the ultimate goal of the process the table describes—the researcher looks to all of the preliminary information collected in the previous steps and pens a narrative of the case. The result is an analytical policy sector history in three sections, covering the time period and geographic scope defined by the interstate political system within which the policy issue arena is embedded. The first portion of the completed case characterizes the country’s *national political regime*, including its duration and key institutions for selecting and then restraining political leaders; the overall national framework of policy-making and regulatory institutions; the distribution of capabilities among key politically relevant groups; and the national policy vision. The case then moves to a *historical policy sector narrative* of the issue arena. There are three possible structures for the historical policy narrative, and the choice among them depends on the researcher. The default design is a single narrative, organized chronologically. An alternate

<sup>29</sup>One significant difference across political regimes and countries will be the different policy sector actors that the empirical analysis reveals as influential in each case.

expository design is by policy subfunction. Very occasionally, the researcher may wish to prepare separate parallel narratives organized by major issue visions and the key actor(s) committed to each vision. To *conclude* the case, the researcher reviews the entire case, commenting on the applicability of the basic VPR causal model (policy sector issue visions become influential by converging with the incumbent leader's interpretation of the political regime's national policy orientation) and/or on other hypotheses s/he has developed.

### **Illustrative Research Designs**

What is the value added by explicitly embedding analysis of policy sector governance within its host political system as per our two proposed frameworks? We consider five types of research challenges that should arise with increasing frequency as PP researchers seek to bring more historical, non-Western, and developing country cases into the hitherto largely contemporary U.S. and European Union centered literature. In these examples, we do not run through each of the steps in our research protocols, nor do we employ our suggested format for final case write-ups. Instead, we proceed as follows. First, we look at each case strictly from within the policy sector. Second, we demonstrate that a richer explanation of policy sector governance outcomes may be obtained when the analyst also consciously embeds the policy narrative within its larger political context. We intentionally draw on previously published research that does not follow the letter of our models, yet incorporates the spirit of the analysis we champion. Table 3 summarizes the five types of PP studies that we expect to become more common: first, explaining cooperation outcomes in an international issue arena (for which we suggest the LSF approach); second, understanding the options available to a nonleader state in an international issue arena (also LSF); third, contrasting multilateral policy governance in different regional systems (LSF); fourth, mapping the connections, within a single country, between major national political changes through time and important shifts in policy sector governance (appropriate for the VPR model); and fifth, comparing differing national responses to a common policy challenge (also VPR). Each example highlights a policy governance puzzle that only becomes clear when we explicitly situate the policy sector within its host political system(s).

Our first sample design employs the notoriously difficult international policy arena of climate change governance, an arena characterized by strong incentives to both states and nonstate actors such as firms to pollute, to free ride on the pollution-mitigation efforts of others, and to deny the magnitude of the resulting problem until it may be too late to reverse ruinous global warming. Epistemic and activist communities have been working to raise issue awareness since the 1970s, and by 1988 had raised global consciousness such that two UN agencies jointly established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose reports served as the foundation for the United Nations

**Table 3. Common Designs for “Political-System-and-Policy-Sector” Analyses**

<b>Structure of Research Problem</b>	<b>Leader State Framework</b> (international policy arenas)	<b>Varieties of Political Regimes</b> (national policy arenas)
Variance in a single political system, over time	<i>Design 1:</i> Multilateral policy sector governance in the international political system Example: Global climate regime	<i>Design 4:</i> Policy sector governance across change in a national political system Example: Inflation stabilization in Brazil
Variance in a single political system over time—a useful special case	<i>Design 2:</i> Multilateral policy sector governance in the international system, focused on a nonleader state Example: Argentina in the global sovereign debt regime	
Variance across two or more political systems, over (geographic) space	<i>Design 3:</i> Multilateral governance of a single policy sector, comparing two or more regional international systems Example: Regional trade regimes in South Asia and Southeast Asia	<i>Design 5:</i> National governance of a single policy sector, comparing two or more countries Example: Welfare responses to the Great Depression in Sweden, the U.S., and the U.K.

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a nonbinding agreement signed by 166 countries following the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The UNFCCC is tasked with bringing together national representatives to discuss what ground rules might enable them to make mutual promises to reduce emissions of harmful greenhouse gases. Under its auspices, in 1997 the Kyoto Protocol, a formal treaty, committed industrialized countries (“Annex II,” in the treaty lingo) to specific cuts. Although 22 of 23 “Annex II” countries (plus the European Union) ratified or acceded to the treaty in subsequent years, the United States never has, partly due to objections on the part of its domestic constituents (who gained the support of newly elected President George W. Bush in 2001) that several of the largest overall emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> (developing countries), had adopted no binding commitments. Several other developed countries (Japan, Canada, Australia, and Russia) were late to ratify the Protocol, and Canada has since withdrawn. A global conference held in Copenhagen in December 2009 to negotiate a new binding agreement to reduce emissions further disbanded without any treaty being signed, and consequently was widely viewed as a fiasco. In the run-up to the next major international climate conference—to be held November-December 2015 in Paris—a prominent transnational actor entered the scene. On June 15, 2015, a news leak revealed that Pope Francis had prepared an encyclical pronouncing that climate change

could produce “unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with grave consequences for all of us” and urging the citizenry of the world, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to unite around this issue (Pullella 2015).

How can the LSF assist in analyzing policy governance within this international issue arena? Many of the most illuminating analyses of the climate change regime implicitly have adopted many of the steps we recommend, by focusing on leader states in the international system. Some analysts have found that smaller groups of big countries may be more effective than the widely inclusive negotiating forums embodied in the UNFCCC (Victor 2006). Other scholars have noted that several of these big countries are emerging powers, and have linked their growing prominence in the climate regime with movement toward multipolarity in the global system (Hochstetler 2012; Hurrell and Sengupta 2012; Viola, Franchini, and Lemos 2012). By specifically focusing on the importance of the interstate distribution of capabilities within the international system, these authors, either implicitly or directly, suggest that the Copenhagen “fiasco” may not have been the policy setback that many participants assumed that it was. An alternative interpretation is that, when U.S. President Barack Obama gate crashed a meeting of the BASIC countries (Brazil, India, China, and South Africa), he was pragmatically recognizing the new power realities. The U.S.-BASIC meeting was the precursor to the bilateral U.S.-China announcement of joint voluntary targets in 2014. Many climate specialists agree that a “climate club” (Widerberg and Stenson 2013) consisting of the two major global CO<sub>2</sub> emitters is good news for the entire world. On a more cautionary note, the LSF tells us that the Pope’s new encyclical will matter only if it becomes part of the foreign policy vision of key powers in the global system. To summarize, the LSF imposes the “candor” (Victor 2015) necessary for effective social science analysis of the governance regime for climate change.

Our second example brings out the special, yet important, case in which the investigator is most interested in the constraints and options relevant to a country that is *not* in a position to influence the rules of an international governance regime in which it participates. Here we apply the LSF to analysis of a nonleader state.<sup>30</sup> By analogy to the economic theory of oligopoly, this country is a price taker rather than a price maker. Consider the case of Argentina in the global sovereign debt regime.<sup>31</sup> An analysis strictly limited to the specific policy sector would focus on the interactions between Argentina and its foreign creditors within the larger international debt and rescheduling regime. Following its spectacular sovereign default in 1982, which precipitated the sudden end in 1983 of the harsh military regime that had governed the country since 1976,

<sup>30</sup>Another recent study explores the limited yet real options available to an intermediate power to influence global policy governance regimes. See Fraundorfer (2015) on Brazil’s role in the multilateral AIDS prevention, food security, and bioenergy regimes.

<sup>31</sup>This case draws on our own work in progress.

Argentina spent the remainder of the 1980s in painful and solitary negotiations with a small number of foreign banks and governments, who coordinated their strategies among themselves.

By the late 1980s, following years of low growth and eventual hyperinflation, the government's total foreign debt nonetheless had increased, resulting in yet another spectacular international default and the early resignation of President Raúl Alfonsín in 1989. His successor, President Carlos Menem, executed a dramatic policy U-turn, implementing a strict monetary policy framework that led to the return of large private capital inflows. In the 1990s, large institutional investors marketed the Argentine government's dollar-denominated Treasury bonds, which ended up in the portfolios of many small investors worldwide. When it again defaulted on its foreign debt in late 2001, the Argentine government initially possessed a structural negotiating advantage as compared with the earlier period: this time Argentina was a single, determined actor confronting a multitude of smaller creditors, and by 2005 unilaterally had imposed a drastic debt reduction ("haircut"), accepted by the majority of its creditors who judged themselves unlikely to get a better deal later. Thereafter, the structure of the negotiating game shifted: one or two institutional investors specialized in high-risk assets (so-called "vulture funds") bought up the remainder of the outstanding Argentine bonds from their owners at rock-bottom prices, and then took Argentina's government to court, suing for full repayment of the original face value of the debt, in the hopes that the threat of a costly and extended legal battle, during which time Argentina would be shut out of global private capital markets, would force the South American government to settle. By 2014, the ongoing suits and countersuits had reached the U.S. Supreme Court.

The puzzle is that, in the decade following its unilateral rescheduling, Argentina continued to grow. Its economy remained relatively unaffected by its pariah status with global investors, despite the largely unchanged rules of the international sovereign debt regime. An LSF analysis would suggest that the solution to this puzzle may be found in the larger global political system. During the 1970s and 1980s, the global system was bipolar; however, international private capital markets existed only in the Western part of the world, politically and economically dominated by the United States.<sup>32</sup> Yet the major international political phenomenon of the years since 2000 has been the very rapid rise of China, likely soon to rival the United States in several critical international power capabilities. China's rise has had two huge consequences, for which the case of Argentina functions as a proverbial canary in the mine, or leading indicator of change. First, the commodity boom that buoyed

<sup>32</sup>In an intriguing twist, after the death of Stalin the Soviet Union cautiously began to participate in Western capital markets—although *not* as a superpower, but rather as a low-rated sovereign borrower, similar to Argentina.

economies throughout South America in the early twenty-first century was driven by demand from China, and to lesser extent from India. Second, Chinese state banks and sovereign wealth funds have been extremely generous in dispensing credit to left-populist South American governments, especially Venezuela and Argentina, and in quantities that have single-handedly enabled these sovereign borrowers to escape from the direct (International Monetary Fund) and indirect (market) sanctions that otherwise would have been imposed on them (Associated Press 2015; Labaqui 2014). However, if the researcher's analysis remains exclusively focused on the institutions, norms, and rules of the existing global sovereign debt regime—which have not changed (yet)—then neither Argentina's recent experiences, nor the likely future evolution of the policy governance regime, can be understood.

Our third case illustrates a possible comparison of multilateral policy issue arena governance in two distinct, geographically defined, international regions: South Asia and Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War era. The analysis is extremely simple. Although both regions have constructed formal international organizations and processes for collective negotiation of trade and economic governance, the South Asia Free Trade Agreement, a project of the South Asian Agreement on Regional Cooperation which officially entered into force in 2006, has not provided an important boost to regional integration, while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has concluded multiple agreements among its members as well as with extraregional actors, recently even becoming a forum for discussing regional monetary and financial cooperation. The best explanation for this divergence lies not in intrinsically incompatible national trade profiles in one region as contrasted to the other. Nor, we would argue, in greater ideological commitment of South Asian as compared with Southeast Asian governments to trade protectionism. The best explanation lies rather in regional politics, including the mostly friendly bilateral political relations of Southeast Asian nations with one another (as well as their common interest in coordinating relations with their much larger neighbor, China), as contrasted to pervasive mutual hostility and distrust among many South Asian countries.<sup>33</sup> A similar politically grounded analysis would be helpful for understanding the relatively greater difficulties encountered in regional cooperation in contemporary South Asia as contrasted to Southeast Asia across a wide range of other international policy sectors, including in public health and the construction of cross-border infrastructure.

Our fourth and fifth types of brief case examples focus on domestic policy governance, and thus employ the VPR analytical framework. Armijo (2005) implicitly applied such an analysis to understand inflation stabilization in

<sup>33</sup>The contributors to a recent World Bank report also found themselves unable to analyze the relatively sparse results of South Asian regional economic cooperation without reference to the difficult larger political context. See Ahmed, Kelegama, and Gahni (2010).

Brazil. For many decades Brazil suffered from very high inflation, reaching several hundred percent annually. Political economists long had recognized that inflation was pushed forward by the serial demands of the representatives of different social groups and sectors—organized labor, import-competing industry, banks, export agriculture—each attempting to recover (or preempt) relative losses in purchasing power created by price hikes elsewhere in the economy. The policy challenge therefore was to halt the demands of all groups simultaneously. From the early 1980s, Brazilian governments implemented two orthodox and then six heterodox anti-inflation plans, each of which failed with increasing fireworks as various economic interests found creative channels for circumventing new administrative rules preventing price rises. The policy shift that finally worked, the Real Plan of 1994-95, did not differ greatly from several of its predecessors in its technical components, and thus at some level remains inexplicable.<sup>34</sup>

A VPR analysis suggests that the Real Plan succeeded principally because Finance Minister (and later President) Fernando Henrique Cardoso recognized the overwhelming importance for anti-inflation policy making of Brazil's mid-1980s national political shift from authoritarian rule to mass democracy. Brazil's military regime (1964-85) always depended on the tolerance and implicit support of many economic elites and much of the middle class, who were, not coincidentally, relatively well protected from the worst ravages of inflation by a pervasive system of inflation-indexation that by the early 1970s encompassed most wages, rents, contracts, and payments in the formal section of the economy. In contrast, the urban and rural poor, always politically excluded even under Brazil's previous period of democracy (1945-64), worked in the informal, unindexed sector, and suffered the most from inflation. Cardoso's innovation was procedural and political: he announced the stabilization plan far in advance, giving powerful formal sector economic interests time to react and complain, to preempt them from concluding that their only option would be to create channels for undermining the new administrative rules. Even more importantly, the masses of poor voters lacking any political voice were effectively enfranchised for the first time ever with the new constitution of 1988. Cardoso called upon their support to win the late 1994 presidential election and give him the political authority to maintain the stabilization plan and subsequent economic restructuring, an option that would have been impossible given the skewed patterns of political representation that characterized earlier Brazilian political regimes.

Our fifth and final case illustrates the uses of a proto-VPR approach for cross-national comparisons. Weir and Skocpol (1985) wish to explain differing

<sup>34</sup>Economists Amann and Baer (2000), for example, recognize the technical imperfections of Cardoso's Real Plan, which required multiple subsequent adjustments, and thus judge it largely a failure. Nonetheless it ended Brazil's hyperinflation. Our analysis is that Brazil's national political transition provided the decisive new factor.

national social welfare responses to a common problem: the Great Depression, which began with the 1929 stock market and banking crash in the United States but quickly spread to many countries worldwide through international trade and financial links. They analyze three country cases, all Western industrial democracies, which differed in the policies each implemented to deal with economic contraction and widespread unemployment. Sweden quickly adopted profound countercyclical policies, exemplified by a commitment to large public works projects to maintain employment and aggregate demand. In sharp contrast, the British policy response was weak and ineffective; despite expansion of unemployment insurance, growth stalled for nearly a decade. The U.S. reaction lay in between: although adopted only in the late 1930s, in contrast to the early 1930s policy response in Sweden, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" and public works policies had important positive macroeconomic effects on both the growth and employment rates. Unlike the case in Sweden, however, the majority of U.S. policy responses were temporary measures that the authors argue did not alter permanently the national balance of power in favor of labor, as contrasted to business, interests.

Weir and Skocpol (1985) attribute these differences to subtle and pre-existing institutional variations among different subtypes of the same broad type of national political system, in this case competitive mass democracy in a relatively industrialized Western economy. For example, they find that, by the early 1930s, Sweden already possessed a nationally organized employers' confederation that was willing to engage in national ("peak") bargaining directly with nationally organized unions, which allowed organized labor to achieve some of its most important demands (especially an institutionalized state commitment to full employment) (Weir and Skocpol 1985, 143-7). As a result, what later became known as countercyclical policy became part of the standard toolbox of Swedish economic governance. In contrast, Britain already had a small unemployment insurance system, the legacy of a reform implemented by a previous (Liberal) government in 1911. Since this was the policy instrument available, it was what the incumbent political leaders turned to, but it was much less efficacious than a state-run employment scheme, such as that eventually implemented in both Sweden and the United States. In the United States policy ideas mattered, but only when a receptive president had been elected. We note that this case also illustrates our point that our LSF and VPR approaches may require the researcher to define the scope of the policy sector (step 5, unit of analysis) in such a way that it makes sense across multiple political contexts: here an analysis focused narrowly on either unemployment insurance or on public works programs would not have allowed comparison of these three countries. Finally, framing these cases explicitly within their national political contexts sets up the PP problem so that the experiences of Sweden, the United States, and Britain later could be compared with national policy responses to the Great Depression in other hard-hit countries that were neither mass democracies nor relatively industrialized economies during that time period.

## Conclusions

As a bridge between IR and CP on one hand, and PP on the other, we have proposed a pair of theoretically motivated research protocols. The LSF for international PP analysis, and its national policy analysis twin, the VPR approach, together offer a viable, reasonably concrete program for conceptualizing important similarities—but also vast and critical differences—between and among, for example, the policy governance regimes for regional pandemic prevention in North America and West Africa, or stock market regulation in China, India, Germany, and the United Kingdom. For scholars, the joint framework offers a systematic way to approach a research question that transcends our disciplinary subfields: How does political context affect policy governance regimes? We do not claim that the construction of explicitly politically grounded, multiyear analytical policy case histories—the essence of our proposed models—is the only solution to all challenges of making political science more policy relevant or policy studies less centered on the experiences of a handful of wealthy, politically stable, liberal democracies. But we do suggest that it would be an improvement over the *status quo*.

Our larger goal has been to stimulate a much-needed interdisciplinary debate between scholars of political science and those of policy studies. For those whose research focuses on American politics, the more applied scholarly arenas of public administration, public law, and PP are relatively well integrated into the larger discussion (Wilson and Dilulio 2015). But the same cannot be said of the IR and CP fields. Modest self-reflection reveals that much of our IR and CP scholarship is not user-friendly, except toward close disciplinary colleagues (Anderson 2012; Lowenthal and Bertucci 2014; Walt 2011). Moreover, our observations of the world of contemporary PP studies in the United States and European Union suggest that the insights and approaches that we highlight—which draw from mainstream theories of IR and CP and propose updated methodological guidelines for old-fashioned political case-study analysis—do not at present form a reliable or highly valued component of the PP toolkit. As scholars of emerging economies ourselves, we note that global multipolarity approaches, and suggest that academics and policy practitioners more than ever need to be capable of traversing national contexts.

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