Globalization and Political Structure*

Gino Gancia, Giacomo A. M. Ponzetto and Jaume Ventura

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Abstract

The first wave of globalization (1830-1914) was accompanied by a decline in the number of countries from 125 to 54. The second wave of globalization (1950-present) has led instead to an increase in the number of countries to a record high of more than 190. This paper develops a theoretical framework to study the interaction between globalization and political structure. We show that political structure adapts to expanding trade opportunities in a non-monotonic way. Borders hamper trade. In its early stages, the political response to globalization consists of removing borders by increasing country size. In its later stages, however, the political response to globalization is to remove the cost of borders by creating international economic unions, and this leads to a reduction in country size.

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*CREI, Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Barcelona GSE. E-mail: ggancia@crei.cat, gponzetto@crei.cat, jventura@crei.cat. We thank Marta Santamaria and Jagdish Tripathy for excellent research assistance. We are grateful for helpful comments by conference and seminar participants at the Barcelona GSE Summer Forum, Bocconi University, Cambridge University, CEPR ERWIT, CREI, EIEF, Humboldt University, LUISS, NBER Summer Institute, Norwegian Business School, NYU, Paris School of Economics, Queens College, SED Annual Meeting, Transpyrenean Macro Workshop, University of Edinburgh, University of Nottingham Ningbo and University of Zurich. We acknowledge financial support from the European Research Council (grant GOPG 240989), the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (grants RYC-2013-13838, ECO2014-54430-P and ECO2014-59805-P), the Generalitat de Catalunya (grant 2014 SGR 830) and the Institut d’Estudis Autonòmics.
1 Introduction

In 1820, the world was made up of 125 countries and long-distance trade was very modest—less than 5% of world output. Over the following century, international trade grew more than four-fold while the number of countries fell to merely 54. The interwar period witnessed a reversal of these trends: trade collapsed and the number of sovereign states rose to 76 by 1949. Until then, political and economic integration had proceeded together. But the end of World War II marked the beginning of a new era. After 1950 trade between nations has flourished to levels never seen before. But this time the process of economic integration has been accompanied by different changes in the world political structure. On the one hand, the number of countries has risen to a record high of more than 190, so that more trade is now accompanied by political fragmentation. On the other hand, there has been a proliferation and growth of international treaties and unions aimed especially at fostering economic integration, such as the World Trade Organization and the European Union.

These trends are illustrated graphically in Figure 1, which shows the historical evolution of the number of sovereign states in the world, average exports as a share of GDP and the number of members of the GATT/WTO. The data on the number of states was obtained from Butcher and Griffiths (2013).\textsuperscript{1} However, counting the number of sovereign countries in the past poses some challenges, especially in remote and underdeveloped areas.\textsuperscript{2} Hence, in Figure 2 we plot an alternative measure of political concentration: the average land size of “internationally recognized” countries and of thirteen major empires since 1830, from the Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive. Both figures tell a remarkably similar story. During the first wave of globalization in the nineteenth century there was a phase of political concentration in which countries and empires expanded their territories. But this trend reversed in the second wave of globalization after World War II, which saw the collapse of large empires and a steady fall in average country size, together with an expansion in trade agreements.

Why did the first wave of globalization lead to political concentration? Why did the second wave of globalization lead instead to political fragmentation? To answer these questions, this paper develops a theoretical framework to study the interaction between globalization and political structure. We view globalization as a process by which markets expand and the

\textsuperscript{1} See Appendix A.1 for more details about the data.

\textsuperscript{2} Most importantly, the commonly used “International System” (Singer and Small 1966), including countries with international recognition, grossly underestimates the number of independent political entities in the nineteenth-century developing world.
potential gains from trade grow. There is wide consensus that globalization started around
the mid nineteenth century and that it was fueled by major technological advancements, sus-
tained economic growth and the adoption of market-promoting policies (Hugot 2015; Pascali
2014). A key premise behind our work is that borders hamper trade and globalization makes
borders more costly. Thus, political structure needs to adapt to expanding trade opportuni-
ties by removing borders or reducing their cost. Our theory shows that this process entails
a non-monotonic evolution of country size, consistent with the evidence in Figures 1 and 2.
In its early stages, the political response to globalization consists of removing borders by
increasing the size of countries. In its later stages, instead, the political response to global-
ization is to remove the cost of borders by creating international economic unions, and this
leads to a reduction in the size of countries.

We consider a symmetric world with a continuum of basic geographical units or localities,
each containing people that share common preferences. Goods can be transported at a
negligible cost within localities, but at a positive cost across localities. Governments perform
two tasks in this world. First, they provide the economic regulation necessary for markets to
work, such as contract enforcement and protection of property rights. Second, they provide
their residents with public services such as education and welfare programs. We ask how
governments are organized geographically to perform these tasks and, in particular, how this
organization changes as the cost of transporting goods across localities declines.

We make two standard assumptions about the effects of governments. The first is the
presence of border effects. Localities that have different governments providing economic
regulation can only trade a limited range of goods, while localities that share a single gov-
ernment can trade all goods. The second assumption is preference heterogeneity over public
services. Yet, localities that share a single government providing public services are forced
to receive a single undifferentiated basket.

We assume that local preferences differ with respect to public services but not economic
regulation. This assumption reflects the notion that market-enabling economic regulation
aims primarily at increasing efficiency. This goal is widely shared by people with different
distributive preferences (Coase 1960; Posner [1973] 2014). Accordingly, government func-
tions such as contract enforcement, monetary policy, or the policing of anti-competitive
practices are often entrusted to apolitical technocrats. On the contrary, public services are
a focus of political tension because people have different views on how children should be

Figure 2: Size of countries (left axis) and empires (right axis). Thousand squared miles, see
the appendix for details on data.
educated, on the proper size and scope of the welfare system, and so on. Such preferences vary systematically across localities because they reflect their distinctive history and culture.

If there were no costs of government, the optimal political structure for this world would be a two-level governance structure. The first level would be a continuum of country governments, one for each locality, providing each of them with its preferred public services. The second level would be a world government or economic union that regulates markets and eliminates all border effects. Unfortunately, there are costs of government and this political structure is too expensive.

We make two standard assumptions about the costs of government. The first is that they are subject to economies of scale. There are some costs of setting up and running a government that are fixed or independent of the number of localities sharing this government. The second assumption is that costs of government are also subject to economies of scope. Coordinating different levels of government is costly and, as a result, the two-level governance structure is more expensive than a single-level structure in which country governments provide both public services and market regulations.

Economies of scale and scope affect the optimal political structure. Economies of scale make it more desirable to have a discrete number of country governments rather than a continuum of them. Localities are willing to accept public services that are less than ideally tailored to their preferences in order to save some costs of government. Economies of scope, if large enough, make it more desirable to have a single-level governance structure than a two-level one. Localities may also be willing to accept higher trade costs in order to save some costs of government.

Thus, the organization of the state is determined by the interplay of four forces: preference heterogeneity, the border effect, economies of scale and economies of scope. We then ask how a reduction in transport costs across localities affects the organization of government. Reduced transport costs raise the gains from trade and strengthen the incentive to remove borders. This economic primitive generates a non-monotonic effect on political structure.

At early stages of globalization, the gains from trade are small and the benefit of creating an economic union does not justify the loss of economies of scope. Thus, a single-level governance structure is optimal. As globalization proceeds, localities remove borders by increasing the size of countries. The number of countries declines and the mismatch between

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3 Although these forces are standard in the theoretical literature, the reader might still wonder whether our focus on them is justified empirically. We discuss the relevant empirical evidence in Section 2.4, after the role of each of these forces in our analysis has been clarified.
each locality’s ideal and actual provision of public services grows. Eventually, this mismatch is large enough to justify a move to a two-level governance structure. The world political structure shifts from a few large country governments to many small country governments within a world economic union. The two-level structure is more expensive, but it is nonetheless desirable because it facilitates trade and improves preference-matching in the provision of public services. Our result of a shift from a single-level to a two-level architecture of government is consistent with the seemingly opposite reactions of the world political structure to the first and second waves of globalization.

A key aspect of any theory of political structure is a view of how localities interact. In Section 2 we assume that localities are sovereign and bargain efficiently. Such a view of political interactions can be described as the rule of diplomacy. We show that this rule leads to the welfare-maximizing political structure for the world. Thus, in the early stages of globalization, country size grows and there is no economic union. At the later stages of globalization, a world economic union is formed and country size shrinks.

But diplomacy is hardly the only form of interaction in the real world. In Section 3 we allow a set of core localities to wage war and build empires. In equilibrium, the world is partitioned into a set of empires ruled by war and conquest, and a free world ruled by diplomacy. We find that our main result also applies to this setting. In the early stages of globalization, country size grows and there is no economic union. At later stages of globalization, a world economic union is formed and country size shrinks. In both of these extreme stages, core localities choose not to build empires and instead join the free world. Diplomacy rules. Our new result is that there is an intermediate stage of globalization in which core localities build large empires that grow rapidly in size. These empires eventually collapse as the world enters the third and final stage of globalization. The world economic union makes them obsolete.

The results in sections 2 and 3 are obtained in a setup that imposes a symmetric geography. But the real world is not symmetric, and geography plays an important role in determining the geographic structure of governments. In Section 4, we break the symmetry of the baseline model and assume that localities in the core are near each other, while localities in the periphery are far from the core and from each other. This extension is useful because it helps us understand why the process of union formation tends to be gradual and often starts at the regional level.

The picture that arises from our stylized model is rich and suggestive, and it improves our understanding of the determinants of political structure. To show this, in Section 5 we use
our analytical results to interpret a variety of specific historical experiences. We conclude in Section 6 by reviewing some of the limitations of our theory and avenues for further research. In the rest of this introduction, we offer a brief review of related literature.

Our theory builds upon Alesina and Spolaore’s (1997) seminal work on the equilibrium determination of the number and size of countries. Their rich theory of country formation hinges on the trade-off between economies of scale and preference heterogeneity. Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg (2000, 2005) add to the theory the trade-reducing effect of international borders. They show that when borders become less of an impediment to trade, the optimal political structure reacts by creating more borders. This approach can explain the increase in the number of countries during the second wave of globalization, if globalization is taken to be a weakening of the border effect. However, these papers take the decline in the border effect as exogenously given. Thus, they cannot explain why the first wave of globalization was accompanied instead by a decline in the number of countries. Moreover, they assume throughout that economies of scope are prohibitive, so that the state must always be organized in a single level of government. Thus, they cannot explain the proliferation and growth of economic unions during the second wave of globalization.

We extend this earlier work in two key ways. Our first and most important novelty lies in recognizing that economies of scope are limited. This innovation enriches the analysis by realistically expanding the set of political structures that may emerge in equilibrium. Our second extension is to study a more primitive technological driver of globalization: the gradual decline of transportation costs. This change in focus enables us to show that the progress of globalization makes borders costlier rather than cheaper, and creates incentives to remove them rather than to create them. The decline in the border effect emphasized by Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg (2000, 2005) is in fact endogenous to the development of political structure in response to expanding trade opportunities. Not only does our novel theory microfound the driving force behind their model. More important, we show that the transition from single-level to multi-level governance is crucial to explain why globalization led to a decline in the number of countries during the nineteenth century, but then to its increase during the twentieth.

The observed reversal in the link between globalization and country size remained an open puzzle so far. Some papers have investigated other aspects of the interaction between economic and political integration, such as the effects of trade on preferences and income distribution. Casella (2001) and Casella and Feinstein (2002) study how preferences for public goods can endogenously become more heterogeneous as market size expands and
enables greater specialization. Bolton and Roland (1997) focus on income distribution and find that heterogeneous countries may break up if their barriers to external trade decline. Both these forces help explain why economic integration has been accompanied by political fragmentation since World War II, but they cannot account for the opposite pattern during the previous century.

More broadly, our research is related to the economic analysis of federalism and of the geographic structure of government. Our model embeds the key trade-off that lies at the heart of the classic theory of fiscal federalism (Oates 1972). Centralization reaps economies of scale and benefits from policy coordination, but it imposes a uniform policy on localities with different preferences. Political-economy frictions micro-found these countervailing forces with remarkable generality (Lockwood 2002; Besley and Coate 2003; Harstad 2007; Boffa, Piolatto and Ponzetto 2016). Multiple local governments fail to coordinate efficiently even if they can bargain with one another. A single central government fails to match policies to local preferences even if it can differentiate policy across regions—in fact endogenous policy differentiation may prove more harmful than uniformity. Such models of political centralization and decentralization have been applied most often to the architecture of government at the sub-national level (Lockwood 2006; Treisman 2007). However, the same insights apply to the study of international unions (Marks and Hooghe 2004; Alesina, Angeloni and Etro 2005; Alesina, Angeloni and Schuknecht 2005; Ruta 2005).

Prior work has overwhelmingly focused on the optimal size and composition of an exogenously given number of government tiers. Surprisingly, the literature has devoted much less attention to the choice between a single-level and a multi-level governance structure, which our analysis focuses on. Alesina and Spolaore (2003) present the fundamental trade-off between economies of scope and the benefits of assigning different policy decisions to jurisdictions of different size. Boffa, Piolatto and Ponzetto (2016) micro-found economies of scope in political accountability and show that a federal structure is optimal only when there is wide geographic variation in voter information. Our analysis advances this line of research by studying how the incentives for multi-level governance change over time as globalization increases.

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4 Specifically, Chapter 2 discusses arbitrarily overlapping jurisdictions and Chapter 9 a system constrained to form a pyramidal hierarchy. However, most of the book focuses on the case of prohibitive economies of scope, as in Alesina and Spolaore (1997).
In this section, we develop a stylized model of the world that contains the basic ingredients of our theory: geography, markets and preferences. The model mixes these ingredients imposing a high degree of symmetry. This allows us to derive our basic results on the effects of globalization on political structure quickly and intuitively.

The concept of locality is a key primitive in our theory. We model the world as a set of places within which there are neither geographical nor cultural distances, and we label them localities. Thus, localities consist of a group of people sharing common preferences and inhabiting a particular territory. This approach, which is common in the literature, simplifies the study of how peoples with different preferences interact and organize themselves into political entities. But it is silent about how these different preferences arose in the first place and how they evolve over time. It also abstracts from domestic conflict.

The concept of globalization is another important primitive in our theory. Geographical distances introduce trade costs across localities. In particular, we use the usual assumption of iceberg trade costs across localities. We interpret globalization as exogenous technological change that gradually removes these trade costs.

2.1 Basic Setup

We consider a world with a continuum of atomistic localities, \( l \in [0, 1] \). Each locality contains a positive measure of identical individuals. Let \( W_l \) be the welfare of the representative individual of locality \( l \). For short, we refer to this individual as “locality \( l \).” Then, the welfare of locality \( l \) is determined as follows:

\[
W_l = W^M_l + W^G_l, \tag{1}
\]

where \( W^M_l \) is the utility derived from the consumption of market goods, and \( W^G_l \) is the utility derived from public services.

Governments provide public services and regulate markets, and this affects both of these utilities. A political structure for this world consists of two partitions of the set of localities \([0, 1]\) into governments: a public-service partition \( P \) with typical element \( P_n \in P \); and an economic-regulation partition \( R \) with typical element \( R_n \in R \). We assume a pyramidal hierarchy of governments. This means that, if the partitions \( P \) and \( R \) do not coincide, the
finer partition must be a refinement of the coarser one.\footnote{This assumption simplifies the presentation, but it is not needed until Section 4. The equilibria in Sections 2 and 3 have this property even if we do not impose it.}

If \( P = R \), we say that the world has a single-level governance structure, and we refer to the common elements of \( P \) and \( R \) as a countries. Each of these countries provides public services and market regulations to its constituent localities.

If \( P \neq R \), we say that the world has a two-level governance structure. Since it will become clear shortly that \( P \) is always a refinement of \( R \), we refer to the (smaller) elements of \( P \) as countries, and the (larger) elements of \( R \) as economic unions. Countries provide public services to their constituent localities, while economic unions regulate the markets of their constituent countries.

Our goal is to construct a model of the partitions \( P \) and \( R \), that is, of how localities organize themselves into countries and how countries organize themselves into economic unions. To do this, we need to make assumptions about preferences, technology and the costs of government and determine how welfare \( W_l \) depends on political structure \((P,R)\).

\subsection{2.1.1 Markets and Trade}

There is a continuum of industries producing goods, \( i \in [0,1] \). Let \( c_l(i) \) be the consumption of goods of industry \( i \) by locality \( l \). The utility function takes the following form:

\[
W^M_l = \int_0^1 \ln c_l(i) \, di. \tag{2}
\]

The choice of a symmetric logarithmic or Cobb-Douglas utility function ensures that all localities spend the same share of their income on each industry.

The production of consumption goods requires differentiated input varieties, \( m \in [0,1] \). Define \( c_l(m,i) \) as the amount of inputs of the variety \( m \) used by locality \( l \) in the production of goods in industry \( i \). Then, we have that:

\[
c_l(i) = \exp \left\{ \int_0^1 \ln c_l(m,i) \, dm \right\}. \tag{3}
\]

This production function is symmetric across and within industries. Since we use again the convenient Cobb-Douglas formulation, each locality spends the same fraction of its income on all varieties of all industries.

To introduce gains from specialization and trade, we use a simple symmetric version of
the Ricardian model. Each locality is endowed with one unit of labor in each industry. This unit can produce one unit of the variety with the same index as the locality, i.e. $m = l$; or $e^{-\eta}$ units of any other variety, i.e. $m \neq l$. Since $\eta > 0$, each locality has a technological advantage in its “own” variety. The parameter $\eta$ measures the extent to which technologies differ across localities and, therefore, the potential gains from specialization and trade.

There are technological barriers to trade. In particular, we assume uniform iceberg transportation costs across localities so that only a fraction $e^{-\tau} < 1$ of the goods shipped from $l$ to $m \neq l$ arrives to destination. To focus on the most interesting case in which trade costs are not prohibitive and to ensure positive gains from trade, we assume that $\eta > \tau > 0$. Our measure of globalization is the wedge $\gamma \equiv \eta - \tau$, which captures the potential gains from trade and increases as improvements in transportation technology reduce physical trade costs $\tau$. Globalization can thus range from $\gamma = 0$ when trade costs are prohibitive ($\tau = \eta$) to a maximum of $\gamma = \eta$ when trade costs are nil ($\tau = 0$).

Policy-induced barriers to trade or border effects arise when different governments regulate markets. In particular, we assume that exchanging goods in a fraction $\beta \in (0, 1)$ of industries requires legal enforcement of contracts. In these industries, varieties cannot be traded between localities that have different governments $R_m$ and $R_m'$ regulating their markets. The reason is that foreigners correctly anticipate that domestic courts will discriminate against them ex post. In the remaining set of industries, $1 - \beta$, contracts are self-enforcing and hence varieties can be traded without restrictions. This formulation captures a simple and yet realistic microfoundation for the well-known finding that borders obstruct trade.\footnote{There are other microfoundations, of course. For instance, tariffs and non-tariff barriers are also policies that discriminate against foreigners and limit the range of goods that can be traded.}

A market equilibrium is a set of prices and quantities such that individuals maximize utility and markets clear. Appendix A.2 shows that there exists a unique market equilibrium. Traded industries specialize in each locality’s input variety, export essentially all of their production and import the remaining input varieties. Thus, consumption in traded industries is $c_l(m, i) = e^{-\tau}$. Nontraded industries are forced to produce locally all input varieties. Thus, consumption in nontraded industries is $c_l(m, i) = e^{-\eta}$. This implies the following utility from consuming market goods:

$$W^M_l = -\eta + \gamma \left( 1 - \beta + \beta \int_0^1 I_{l=m} dm \right),$$

where $I_{l=m}$ is an indicator variable which takes value 1 if localities $l$ and $m$ belong to the
same $R_n$, and zero otherwise. Equation (4) shows the impact of border effects. A decline in transportation costs raises the gains from trade $\gamma$ in every industry. However, border effects prevent a locality from reaping the gains from trade in a mass $\beta$ of industries that require contract enforcement. As a consequence, the value of removing each border effect is proportional to $\beta\gamma$, where $\gamma$ measures the potential gains from trade in any single industry and $\beta$ the mass of industries subject to border effects. This result is intuitive and plays an important role in our analysis.

2.1.2 Governments

We now introduce three assumptions about governments. The first is preference heterogeneity. Public services come in differentiated varieties, $x \in [0, 1]$. In particular, public services for locality $l$ consist of a density function $g_l(x)$ defined over these varieties, with $g_l(x) \geq 0$ and $\int_0^1 g_l(x) \, dx = 1$. Each locality has a different ideal variety of public services. We define and order the basic varieties such that the ideal one for locality $l$ is $x = l$. The value of public services for locality $l$ depends positively on how dense $g_l$ is at $x = l$ and, in particular, it is given by $-\delta / g_l(l)$. Each country $P_n$ provides a uniform bundle that contains equal amounts of the ideal varieties of its constituent localities. Thus, locality $l$ receives the following bundle of public services:

$$g_l(x) = \begin{cases} 
\frac{1}{\int_0^1 I_{I_{l=m}} \, dm} & \text{if } I_{I_{l=x}} = 1 \\
0 & \text{if } I_{I_{l=x}} = 0
\end{cases},$$

(5)

where $I_{I_{l=m}}$ is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if if localities $l$ and $m$ belong to the same $P_n$, and zero otherwise.\footnote{It is not difficult to derive Equation (5) as a result: it is welfare-maximizing for the government given that localities have convex preferences.}

The second assumption is that there are economies of scale in the provision of public services. Building and maintaining a government reduces the value or utility of public services by a total or fixed amount $\phi > 0$, and this cost is equally shared among the constituent localities.

The third and final assumption is that there are economies of scope across government functions. Membership of an economic union reduces the value or utility of public services by an amount $\kappa > 0$. This captures the costs of oversight and coordination between the country and the economic union.
These assumptions imply the following utility from public services:

\[
W_l^G = -\delta \int_0^1 P_{l=m} dm - \frac{\phi}{\int_0^1 P_{l=m} dm} - \kappa I_U^l,
\]  

where \(\delta > 0\) and \(I_U^l\) is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if locality \(l\) is a member of an economic union \(R_n \neq P_n\), and zero otherwise. The first term in Equation (6) says that the value of public services for locality \(l\) declines with the size of the country. The reason is that, as more localities join the country, the public services provided become farther away from the ideal of each member locality. The parameter \(\delta\) measures the importance of this preference mismatch. The second term in Equation (6) says that each locality’s share of the fixed cost of government declines with the size of the country. The parameter \(\phi\) measures the magnitude of these economies of scale. The third term of Equation (6) says that being member of an economic union is costly. The parameter \(\kappa\) measures the magnitude of these economies of scope.

Combining Equations (1), (4), and (6), we obtain:

\[
W_l = -\eta + \gamma (1 - \beta + \beta \int_0^1 I_{l=m} P dm) - \delta \int_0^1 P_{l=m} dm - \frac{\phi}{\int_0^1 P_{l=m} dm} - \kappa I_U^l,
\]  

Equation (7) shows how political structure determines welfare and reveals the key trade-off that underlies our theory. A desirable political structure should facilitate trade, accommodate preference heterogeneity and take advantage of economies of scale and scope. But these goals cannot be achieved simultaneously and something must give.\(^8\)

### 2.2 Equilibrium Political Structure

To determine the equilibrium political structure \((P, R)\), we must make assumptions about how governments are chosen. A natural benchmark is that bargaining among localities is efficient and delivers Pareto efficient outcomes. In this case, the equilibrium political structure is obtained by solving the following maximization problem:

\[
(P, R) = \arg \max \int_0^1 \omega_l W_l dl,
\]  

\(^8\)Equation (7) includes all the features of Oates’s (1972) classic Decentralization Theorem: in the absence of cost savings from the centralized provision of public services \((\phi = 0)\) and of interjurisdictional externalities \((\beta \gamma = 0)\), welfare is at least as high if each locality can choose its own public services than if any uniform bundle is imposed across all of them.
where \( \{ \omega_l \}_{l \in [0,1]} \) is a set of Pareto weights such that \( \int_0^1 \omega_l dl = 1 \). Given the symmetry of this world, it seems reasonable to focus on the case in which the bargaining process treats all localities in the same way, i.e. \( \omega_l = 1 \) for all \( l \in [0,1] \). Sometimes this political structure is referred to as the utilitarian welfare optimum since it maximizes average world welfare. We view it as the description of a world in which all localities are free to choose their own political structure.

There are a couple of preliminary results that simplify the analysis of problem (8). The first is that \( P \) and \( R \) contain equal-sized elements. Let \( S \) and \( U \) be the sizes of each element \( P_n \in P \) and \( R_n \in R \) respectively. The second result is the confirmation that, indeed, \( P \) is a refinement of \( R \). If it is ever worth paying the costs of having a two-level governance structure, this is because localities desire a lower-level government that provides public services adapted to their specific preferences, and a higher-level government that reduces border effects and facilitates trade. Then, we can write \( W_l \) as a function of \( S \) and \( U \) as follows:

\[
W_l = W^F(S, U) = -\eta + \gamma (1 - \beta + \beta U) - \delta S - \frac{\phi}{S} - \kappa I^U,
\]

(9)

where \( I^U \) is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if \( S \neq U \), and zero otherwise.

In fact, the equilibrium political structure that arises from the maximization problem (8) is such that either \( P = R \) or \( P \neq R = \{ [0,1] \} \). In the first case, the world is organized in a single-level governance structure with a set of countries that provide public services and regulate markets. In the second case, the world is organized in a two-level governance structure with countries providing public services and a world economic union regulating markets.

We now find the equilibrium political structure in three steps. First, we compute the welfare \( W^F(S^*, S^*) \) generated by the single-level governance structure, where \( S^*_1 \) is the optimal country size without a world union. This political structure takes full advantage of economies of scope, and country size trades off preference heterogeneity against both economies of scale
and facilitating trade:

\[ S_1^* = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta - \beta \gamma}}. \]  

(10)

The size of countries in the absence of unions is increasing with economies of scale (\( \phi \)) and the importance of trade (\( \beta \gamma \)), and it is decreasing with preference heterogeneity (\( \delta \)).

Second, we compute the welfare \( W^F (S_2^*, 1) \) generated by a world with an economic union, where \( S_2^* \) is the optimal country size with a world union. This political structure gives up economies of scope in order to remove border effects and facilitate trade. Country size trades off preference heterogeneity and economies of scale:

\[ S_2^* = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta}}. \]  

(11)

The size of countries with a world union is increasing with economies of scale (\( \phi \)) and it is decreasing with preference heterogeneity (\( \delta \)). Country size is always smaller with a world union than without it. The reason is that the union removes one of the incentives for country size, namely, facilitating trade.

The third step is to determine the equilibrium political structure. If \( W^F (S_1^*, S_1^*) > W^F (S_2^*, 1) \), the world is partitioned into countries of size \( S_1^* \). If instead \( W^F (S_1^*, S_1^*) < W^F (S_2^*, 1) \), the world is partitioned into countries of size \( S_2^* \) that belong to a world economic union. Naturally, in the knife-edge case in which \( W^F (S_1^*, S_1^*) = W^F (S_2^*, 1) \), both solutions are equilibrium political structures. A little bit of algebra shows that the world union is preferred if and only if:

\[ \kappa + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} < \beta \gamma + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma)}. \]  

(12)

That is, the world union is preferred for high values of \( \beta, \gamma \) and \( \delta \); and low values of \( \phi \) and \( \kappa \). A world union is more useful if the border effect and the gains from trade are large and there is substantial preference heterogeneity. A world union is less useful if economies of scale and scope are sizable.

2.3 Globalization and Political Structure

With these results at hand, we can now return to Figures 1 and 2 in the introduction and ask again: Why did the first wave of globalization reduce the number of countries but not

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\( ^{11} \)Equation (10) assumes that \( \delta > \phi + \beta \eta \), so that there is enough preference heterogeneity to ensure that countries are always smaller than the whole world.
generate economic unions? Why did the second wave of globalization increase the number of countries and lead to the creation of economic unions? To answer these questions, we interpret globalization as a process by which $\gamma$ grows from 0 to $\eta$, and we study how political structure changes as this process unfolds.

Figure 3: Globalization and Welfare. The figure shows how equilibrium welfare changes with globalization ($\gamma$). The black line is maximum welfare without a union ($W^F(S^*_1, S^*_1)$), the green line with the world union ($W^F(S^*_2, 1)$).

Figure 3 plots $W^F(S^*_1, S^*_1)$ and $W^F(S^*_2, 1)$ as a function of $\gamma$. Equilibrium welfare is given by the upper envelope, and it is depicted as a solid line. The shape of Figure 3 does not depend on parameter values. The world political structure shifts from the single-level to the two-level governance as globalization crosses a threshold value $\gamma_U$, such that $W^F(S^*_2, 1) < W^F(S^*_1, S^*_1)$ if $\gamma < \gamma_U$, and $W^F(S^*_2, 1) > W^F(S^*_1, S^*_1)$ if $\gamma > \gamma_U$.\footnote{We know this because $\frac{\partial}{\partial \gamma} [W^F(S^*_2, 1) - W^F(S^*_1, S^*_1)] / \partial \gamma = \beta (1 - S^*_1) > 0$. Thus, the $W^F(S^*_2, 1)$ schedule always crosses the $W^F(S^*_1, S^*_1)$ schedule from below.}

This threshold is interior, i.e. $\gamma_U \in (0, \eta)$, if and only if economies of scope are positive but bounded:

$$0 < \kappa < \beta \eta + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \eta)} - 2\sqrt{\phi \delta};$$

then it is implicitly defined by $\beta \gamma_U + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma_U)} = \kappa + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta}$. If economies of scope
Figure 4: Globalization, Countries and Unions. The figure shows how the world political structure changes with globalization ($\tau$). The black line is the size of each country, the green line is the world union.

are nil, the smallest gain from trade leads to the formation of a world union ($\kappa = 0$ implies $\gamma_U = 0$). If economies of scope are prohibitive, the world union is never an equilibrium ($\kappa > \beta \eta + 2\sqrt{\phi} (\delta - \beta \eta) - 2\sqrt{\phi} \delta$ implies $\gamma_U > \eta$). The comparative statics of this threshold follow directly from our analysis of Equation (12). The larger the border effect ($\beta$) and preference heterogeneity ($\delta$), the smaller $\gamma_U$. The larger economies of scale ($\phi$) and scope ($\kappa$), the larger $\gamma_U$.

Figure 4 shows how political structure changes with globalization by plotting the equilibrium size of countries and unions as a function of $\gamma$. At low levels of globalization ($\gamma < \gamma_U$), it is too expensive to create a world union, and increases in $\gamma$ lead to an increase in country size. The cost of reaping additional gains from trade is a growing preference mismatch. Eventually, the preference mismatch has grown so large that it becomes cost-effective to create a world union. At high levels of globalization ($\gamma > \gamma_U$), the cost of reaping additional gains from trade is the loss of economies of scope. The creation of a world union allows countries to revert to a smaller size and reduce the preference mismatch. Further increases
in $\gamma$ have no effect on political structure.

It is instructive to compare our result to the finding by Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg (2000) that globalization always reduces country size. Their analysis differs from ours in two crucial ways. First, they assume prohibitive economies of scope so that the world always has single-level governance. Second, they model globalization as an exogenous reduction in the border effect. Thus, globalization always reduces country size, and their model cannot explain why globalization led to smaller countries in the twentieth century but not in the nineteenth century. We show, however, that an exogenous decline in transportation costs increases the border effect in the nineteenth century, and then leads to the endogenous removal of border effects in the twentieth century. This is how we explain the reversal in the link between globalization and country size.\(^{13}\)

2.4 Discussion

Our results follow from assumptions that are commonly made in the literature. We now briefly discuss the data in support of these assumptions. We organize the discussion around two types of assumptions and evidence, those related to trade costs and the border effect, and those related to the cost of governments. We review each of them in turn.

The starting point of our analysis is the idea that improvements in transportation technology are a major driver of globalization, which we model as a fall in trade costs between localities. This view is uncontroversial: there is overwhelming evidence that the secular rise in trade volumes was made possible by better transportation technologies. For instance, some of the major drivers of the first wave of globalization are the adoption of the steamship (Pascali 2015), the telegraph (Steinwender 2015) and the spread of railroads (Donaldson 2016). Likewise, the main drivers of the second wave of globalization include the use of containerization in ocean shipping (Levinson 2008), the development of jet aircraft engines (Hummels 2007) and more recently the ICT revolution. All these innovations promoted trade both between and within countries.

We also assume that borders obstruct trade. The large negative effect of political borders on trade volumes is well know at least since the work of McCallum (1995), who showed that, controlling for distance and income, trade between two Canadian provinces is 20 times larger.

\(^{13}\)Could it be technological progress? Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg (2000) show that technological progress increases the gains from trade and the incentives to create large countries. Once again, the difficulty lies in the reversal of the link between technological progress and country size. Their model cannot explain why technological progress led to larger countries in the nineteenth century but not in the twentieth century.
than trade between a Canadian province and a U.S. state. While the exact magnitude of the border effect is still subject to debate, all existing studies coincide in finding large effects. For instance, in a recent survey of the voluminous empirical literature on gravity equations, Head and Mayer (2014) report that countries are typically found to trade 5 to 7 times more with themselves than with any other country.

There is equally strong evidence that sharing economic regulations and signing economic agreements promote trade and reduce the border effect. For instance, Head and Mayer (2014) also report that sharing a common currency or being part of a free trade area are associated on average with a doubling of the volume of trade; similarly, Helpman et al. (2008) find that having a similar legal system increases the bilateral volume of trade by more than 60 percent. Using a simple model, Anderson and van Wincoop (2004) attempt a rough decomposition of the border effect. They argue that the compounded cost of borders is equivalent to an ad valorem tax of 44 percent, which can be broken down into an 8 percent of policy related barriers (including non-tariff barriers), 7 percent language barriers, 14 percent currency barriers, 6 percent information cost barriers, and 3 percent security barriers.

Our modeling assumption that technological barriers reduce trade along the intensive margin while policy-induced barriers affect the extensive margin is also grounded in empirical evidence. There is a wide consensus that transportation costs affect significantly the intensive margin of trade; on the other hand, Helpman et al. (2008) and Dutt et al. (2013) find that free trade agreements and WTO membership predominantly reduce the fixed costs of trade and hence affect the extensive margin.

Turning next to the costs of government, our model follows the standard assumptions that underpin the literature on federalism and the architecture of government since Oates (1972). Having separate local governments enables better preference matching, but sharing a common government enables beneficial policy coordination and reaps economies of scale. While these assumptions originated as simple observations of real-world patterns, models of political economy have provided them with rigorous micro-foundations. Majority rule makes centralization costly when localities have different preferences (Lockwood 2002; Besley and Coate 2003). Frictions in bargaining between political leaders (Harstad 2007) and in their agency relationship to their constituents (Boffa, Piolatto and Ponzetto 2016) explain both why multiple local government cannot fully coordinate their policies and why a single central government cannot fully tailor public services to local preferences. Accordingly, Strumpf and Oberholzer-Gee (2002) find empirically that U.S. states with more heterogeneous preferences are more likely to decentralize policy-making.
Our assumption of economies of scope in government is equally classic (Musgrave 1971; Dahl and Tufte 1973; Alesina and Spolaore 2003). Marks and Hooghe (2004, p. 18) “emphasize the costs of decomposing authority” as a paramount concern in the analysis of multi-level governance, especially in the international arena with its prevalence of intersecting task-specific jurisdictions. Empirical evidence shows that multiplying administrative tiers reduces their efficiency, and is particularly associated with lower labor productivity and excess government employment (Le Galès and John 1997; Andrews and Boyne 2009). This cost is particularly pronounced for special-purpose governments in charge of a single task (Berry 2009). These efficiency losses reflect both the costs of administrative duplication and economies of scope in political accountability. Boffa, Piolatto and Ponzetto (2016) show theoretically that dividing policy-making responsibilities across multiple levels of government increases overall rent extraction by government officials. Fan, Lin and Treisman (2009) report that across countries corruption increases with the number of administrative tiers: as they rise from two to six, the probability of a firm reporting that it is never expected to pay bribes falls by 32 percentage points.\footnote{Admittedly, the evidence about the importance of economies of scope has been gathered mostly at the sub-national level. Casual observation suggests, however, that economies of scope also apply at the supra-national level. A notorious example is the European Central Bank, which is aimed at reducing the border effect by eliminating currency barriers. Its creation does not seem to have reduced the size or costs of national central banks, but instead it seems to have just added to these costs.}

3 War and Conquest

Our baseline model considers a world in which every locality can choose its own government freely. Then, the equilibrium political structure is the outcome of efficient bargaining among equals. This constitutes a useful theoretical benchmark and an ideal state of affairs. But it hardly reflects historical experience. Alongside diplomacy, war and conquest (or the threat of it) have played a crucial role in shaping real-world political structure. Thus, we want to know whether the possibility of war and conquest affects the relationship between globalization and political structure. And if it does, we also want to know how and why this happens.

We now consider an alternative rule to determine political structure. In particular, we assume that the world contains a set of core localities that are able to conquer other localities and form empires. As a result, the world is partitioned into a set of empires ruled by war and conquest, and a free world ruled by diplomacy. We explain how this all works next.
### 3.1 Empire-building

Suppose now that the world is divided into core and periphery. The core contains a measure $\pi$ of localities with a superior military technology that can be used to conquer other localities and form empires. The periphery contains the remaining localities that do not have this military technology. We assign low indices to core localities: $C = [0, \pi]$. We keep all assumptions regarding preferences, technology and the costs of government. Thus, the model of the previous section applies as $\pi \to 0$.

Empires are an alternative form of government that provides public services and regulates the markets of all its member localities. The latter are divided into the metropolis and the colonies. The metropolis contains core localities that unite to conquer periphery localities that then become colonies. Empires provide in identical amounts the ideal public services of localities in their metropolises. If locality $l$ belongs to a metropolis, it receives the following bundle of public services:

$$g_l(x) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{\int_0^1 I_{l=m}^M dm} & \text{if } I_{l=m}^M = 1 \\ 0 & \text{if } I_{l=m}^M = 0 \end{cases}, \quad (14)$$

where $I_{l=m}^M$ is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if localities $l$ and $m$ belong to the same metropolis and zero otherwise. Note that empires do not provide the ideal public services of their colonies.

To build an empire of size $E$, core localities build a metropolis, and then wage war to conquer the colonies. A colonial war is successful if and only if the size of the metropolis $M$ is large enough relative to that of the colonies:

$$M \geq \mu E. \quad (15)$$

The parameter $\mu \in (0, 1)$ provides the smallest size of a successful metropolis. To simplify matters, we assume throughout that $\pi < \mu$. This means that the combined size of all empires is always smaller than the world, and empires do not need to fight each other for colonies.

From the perspective of the metropolis, the upside of building an empire is that it facilitates trade and generates economies of scale with minimal preference mismatch. The downside is that waging war and holding the empire together reduces the utility that the metropolis derives from public services by an amount $\omega > 0$. This cost captures the diversion of government resources from providing public services in the metropolis to waging colonial
wars. Thus, the welfare of a member of the metropolis is given by:

\[ W_l = -\eta + \gamma \left( 1 - \beta + \beta \int_0^1 I_{l=m}^E dm \right) - \delta \int_0^1 I_{l=m}^M dm - \frac{\phi}{\int_0^1 I_{l=m}^E dm} - \omega, \]  

where \( I_{l=m}^E \) is an indicator variable that takes value 1 if localities \( l \) and \( m \) belong to the same empire and zero otherwise.

From the perspective of the colonies, being part of an empire is a tragedy. Since Equation (14) implies that the welfare of colonies is \( W_l = -\infty \), no locality becomes a colony willingly.

3.2 Equilibrium Political Structure

In an asymmetric world that features war and imperial conquest, equilibrium political structure need no longer be globally efficient, because core localities can impose their will on other localities through aggression. However, we still assume that political structure is jointly efficient for the core. That is, we allow core localities to cooperate with each other on the creation of their respective empires.\(^{15}\) Formally, equilibrium political structure is now determined in two stages:

1. Core localities choose cooperatively whether to wage war and build empires. Localities in the periphery might become their colonies or remain free.

2. Localities that do not belong to an empire choose their political structure through efficient bargaining, as in our baseline model.

The world’s equilibrium political structure now consists of a set of empires that have a combined size \( 1 - F \); plus two partitions \((P, R)\) of the free world which itself has a combined size \( F \). We solve for this equilibrium political structure in two steps. First, we determine the political structure of the free world \((P, R)\) for a given size \( F \). Second, we determine the number and size of empires and therefore the size of the free world \( F \).

3.2.1 The Free World

The analysis of the free world is essentially the same as in the previous section. The only difference is that now the combined size of the free world is \( F \) rather than 1. Efficient

\(^{15}\) Historically, great powers have in fact cooperated and agreed on explicit partitions of the world, from the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 to the Berlin Conference in 1884.
bargaining ensures that free localities choose the optimal political structure. Equation (9) still applies and, as a result, there are two cases to consider: $S = U$ and $S < U = F$. The optimal country sizes in these cases are still given by Equations (10) and (11), respectively.\footnote{We now assume that $\delta > \phi F^{-2} + \beta \eta$ to ensure that countries are always smaller than the free world.}

The union of the free world is preferred now if and only if:

$$\kappa + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} \leq \beta F \gamma + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma)},$$

Condition (17) generalizes Condition (12) for the case of a free world of size $F$. The main difference is that empires reduce the size of the free world, and this reduces the welfare associated with an economic union of free localities. This union still costs $\kappa$ to each member. But it is now less efficient at removing border effects, $\beta F$ instead of $\beta$.

### 3.2.2 Empires

Core localities must first decide whether to wage war to build an empire or to forego war and enter the free world. We start the analysis with two observations. The first is that the equilibrium political structure features symmetric empires. Let $E$ be the size of each of them. The second observation is that constraint (15) is always binding. From the perspective of the metropolis, there is no reason not to add additional colonies. This lowers the cost of government and facilitates trade without creating any preference mismatch (for the metropolis) in the provision of public services.

These two observations imply that the welfare of a core locality that builds an empire is given by:

$$W_t = W^E (E) = -\eta + \gamma (1 - \beta + \beta E) - \delta \mu E - \frac{\phi}{E} - \omega.$$  

Note that this welfare does not depend on what other core localities do. This follows from our assumption that $\pi < \mu$, which ensures that core localities can find their desired measure of colonies without having to fight each other. The size of the empire trades off preference heterogeneity against both economies of scale and facilitating trade:

$$E^* = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta \mu - \beta \gamma}},$$

where $E^*$ is the optimal empire size (for the the core localities).\footnote{Equation (19) assumes that $\delta \mu > \phi + \beta \eta$, so that there is enough preference heterogeneity to ensure that...}
Comparing Equation (19) to Equations (10) and (11), it is immediate to see that empires are larger than peaceful countries. The reason is that the metropolis does not internalize the cost of the preference mismatch imposed on the colonies: hence, $\delta \mu$ appears instead of $\delta$ in the denominator. The equilibrium size of empires is increasing with economies of scale ($\phi$) and the importance of trade ($\beta \gamma$), and it is decreasing with preference heterogeneity ($\delta$). These comparative statics are the same as for countries. Also, we now have the additional result that the smaller the size of the metropolis relative to that of the colonies ($\mu$), the larger the empire.

When are empires formed? If core localities wage war and build empires, their welfare is $W^E(E^*)$. If core localities instead agree to refrain from waging war and choose to form countries and unions by efficient bargaining, their welfare is $\max \{W^F(S_1^*, S_1^*), W^F(S_2^*, 1)\}$. If $W^E(E^*) < \max \{W^F(S_1^*, S_1^*), W^F(S_2^*, 1)\}$, there are no empires, diplomacy rules and the size of the free world is $F = 1$. If instead $W^E(E^*) > \max \{W^F(S_1^*, S_1^*), W^F(S_2^*, 1)\}$, there are $\pi / (\mu E^*)$ empires of size $E^*$, and the size of the free world is reduced to $F = 1 - \pi / \mu$.\textsuperscript{18}

Some algebra shows that empires are built if:

$$\omega + \beta \gamma + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta \mu - \beta \gamma)} \leq \min \left\{ \beta \gamma + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma)}, \kappa + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} \right\}. \quad (20)$$

Not surprisingly, empires are built in equilibrium if the military technology is good enough, i.e., the cost of waging war ($\omega$) is low and the metropolis ($\mu$) small relative to the empire.

To sum up, the introduction of war and conquest substantially enriches the set of possible equilibrium structures. Condition (20) determines whether empires are built or not, and thus the size of the free world. Then, Condition (17) determines whether the free world is organized in a single-level governance structure or a two-level one. One interpretation of the model in the previous section is that the set of core localities with superior military technology is very small: i.e. $\pi \to 0$. Another interpretation is that the military technology is not good enough, i.e., $\omega$ and $\mu$ are large and Condition (20) fails. In both cases, the whole world is free and diplomacy rules.

\textsuperscript{18}We see here the role played by the assumption that core localities cooperate. If core localities choose empires noncooperatively, there might be equilibria in which empires are formed when $\max \{W^F(S_1^*, S_1^*), W^F(S_2^*, 1)\} > W^E(E^*) > \max \{W^F(S_1^*, S_1^*), W^F(S_2^*, 1 - \pi / \mu)\}$. If core localities expect other core localities to build empires, it is best response for them to build an empire themselves. And, once this happens, there is no incentive to deviate. This equilibrium is a coordination failure since it lowers the welfare of all the localities in the world. One can also construct equilibria with mixed strategies in which some core localities build empires and others do not. These complications are fascinating and worth considering in future research. But we ignore them here to simplify the analysis.
3.3 Globalization and Political Structure

Let us now return to the question of how globalization affects political structure that motivates our analysis. To do this, we consider again a sequence of equilibria indexed by $\gamma$, and explore how political structure changes as $\gamma$ grows from 0 to $\eta$. Recall that, in the baseline model of the previous section, there is a threshold value $\gamma_U$ such that the world political structure will consist of a single-level governance at early stages of globalization ($\gamma < \gamma_U$), and then shifts to the two-level governance at later stages ($\gamma > \gamma_U$). How does the introduction of war and conquest affect this result?

The first new result is that there is an age of empires if and only if the following condition holds:

$$\omega < 2\sqrt{\phi} \left( \sqrt{\delta - \beta \gamma_U} - \sqrt{\delta \mu - \beta \gamma_U} \right). \quad (21)$$

Otherwise, empires are never built and the effects of globalization are those of the previous model. The second result is that, if there is an age of empires, it must start when the world has a single-level governance structure. The third result is that, if the age of empires comes to an end, it must give way to a world with a two-level governance structure.

Figure 5 provides intuition for these results by plotting $W^F (S^*_1, S^*_1)$, $W^F (S^*_2, 1)$ and $W^E (E^*)$ as a function of $\gamma$. The welfare of core localities is the upper envelope and it is depicted as a solid line. There are two threshold values $\gamma_L$ and $\gamma_H$ that define three stages of globalization with different political structures: (i) if $\gamma < \gamma_L$, then $W^F (S^*_1, S^*_1) > W^E (E^*) > W^F (S^*_2, 1)$; (ii) if $\gamma_L < \gamma < \gamma_H$, then $W^E (E^*) > \max \{ W^F (S^*_1, S^*_1), W^F (S^*_2, 1) \}$ and; (iii) if $\gamma > \gamma_H$, then $W^F (S^*_2, 1) > W^E (E^*) > W^F (S^*_1, S^*_1)$.\(^{19}\)

Figure 5 shows the case in which $\gamma_L$ and $\gamma_H$ are interior, i.e., $0 < \gamma_L < \gamma_H < \eta$. This need not be so generically. A necessary and sufficient condition for $\gamma_L > 0$ is that:

$$\omega + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta \mu} > 2\sqrt{\phi}$$. \(\quad (22)\)

This condition implies that core localities do not wish to conquer colonies merely to compel them to defray the fixed cost of government. The motivation for imperial expansion lies instead in the desire to gain access to colonial markets without having to compromise the

\(^{19}\)We know this because $\partial [W^F (S^*_1, S^*_1) - W^E (E^*)] / \partial \gamma = \beta (1 - E^*) > 0$ and $\partial [W^E (E^*) - W^F (S^*_2, 1)] / \partial \gamma = \beta (E^* - S^*_1) > 0$. That is, the $W^F (S^*_1, S^*_1)$ schedule always crosses the $W^E (E^*)$ schedule from below, and the $W^E (E^*)$ schedule always crosses the $W^E (S^*_1, S^*_1)$ schedule from below. Thus, when Condition (21) holds, $\gamma_L = \max \{ \gamma_L', 0 \} < \gamma_U$ where $\gamma_L'$ is implicitly defined by $\omega + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta \mu - \beta \gamma_L')} = 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma_U)}$; moreover, $\gamma_H \in (\gamma_U, \eta)$ is implicitly defined by $\omega + \beta \gamma_U + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta \mu - \beta \gamma_U)} = \kappa + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta}$ if $\kappa < \omega + \beta \eta + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta \mu - \beta \eta)} - 2\sqrt{\phi \delta}$ (which implies $\gamma_U < \eta$), while $\gamma_H \geq \eta$ if $\kappa \geq \omega + \beta \eta + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta \mu - \beta \eta)} - 2\sqrt{\phi \delta}$. \(\quad \)
preferences of the metropolis over public services. As a consequence, core localities choose to forego warfare in autarky, when market access is worthless.

Also, a necessary and sufficient condition for $\gamma_H < \eta$ is that:

$$\omega + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta \mu - \beta \eta)} > \kappa - \beta \eta + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta}. \quad (23)$$

This condition implies that even though empires limit the preference mismatch in the metropolis, there is a level of globalization at which this mismatch has grown large enough to justify a move to the two-level governance structure. Paradoxically, the cause of imperial collapse at a late stage of globalization is exactly the same as the cause for the rise of empires at an early stage, namely, the desire to remove border effects and reap the gains from trade. It is just that, at some point, it becomes more cost-efficient to replace conquered colonies with free partners in an economic union.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\)To simplify the analysis, we have ruled out by assumption the possibility that empires form economic unions. Yet, under mild assumptions, this can be obtained as a result. For example, suppose that core localities can impose their preferred political structure, including economic unions, onto the rest of the
Figure 6: Countries, Empires and Unions. The figure shows how the world political structure changes with globalization ($\gamma$). The black line is the size of peaceful countries, the red line is the size of empires, the green line is the world union.

Figure 6 depicts this three-stage evolution of the world political structure by plotting the equilibrium size of empires, free countries, and unions. At low levels of globalization ($\gamma < \gamma_L$), the world contains only free countries. There are no empires or unions. As globalization proceeds, the size of countries grows and so does the preference mismatch. When globalization crosses the first threshold ($\gamma_L < \gamma < \gamma_H$), the preference mismatch has grown too large and core localities prefer to build empires. The latter allow the metropolises to impose their ideal public services on their colonies. Thus, empires facilitate trade and generate economies of scale at the cost of an unbounded preference mismatch in the colonies. Empires are larger than countries and keep growing as globalization proceeds. Eventually, globalization crosses the second threshold ($\gamma > \gamma_H$). At this point, preference mismatch has grown too large even within empires. Empires collapse and countries revert to a smaller size.

world. Then, under the condition $\omega > 2\sqrt{\phi}(1 - \sqrt{\mu})$, it is easy to show that core localities would strictly prefer diplomacy than war both in autarky and when the world union is in place. Hence, economic unions will be peaceful.
A world union is created. After this, there are no further changes in political structure.\footnote{Figure 6 depicts the case in which, during the age of empires, the free world always adopts a single-level governance structure and the shift to the two-level governance structure coincides with the collapse of empires. This need not be. If the size of the free world is large enough, an economic union of free countries co-exists with empires.}

The analysis in this section has shown that war and conquest do not overturn our main result that globalization generates a shift in the world political structure from a single-level governance structure to a two-level one. On the contrary, considering war and conquest alongside diplomacy strengthens and enriches our theory of the link between globalization and political structure.

4 Geography

The world so far lies in an abstract space in which all localities are symmetric and equidistant. In reality, geography is much more complex. The world is made of continents and regions, and more proximate areas tend to be more integrated, both economically and politically. Geography has historically played an important role in determining political structure, and it seems reasonable to ask how it affects our results so far.

We assume now that, in addition to sharing a superior military technology, core localities are also near to each other in a geographical sense. Periphery localities are instead far away from the core and from each other. Besides the added realism, this simple extension helps us rationalize why the shift from the single-level to the two-level governance structure tends to be gradual and may start at the regional level.

4.1 Asymmetric Transport Costs

Iceberg transportation costs for core-periphery and periphery-periphery trade remain $\tau$, as before. Thus, the gains from this type of trade are still $\gamma$. But we assume now that iceberg transportation costs for core-core trade are $\tau - \rho$, with $\rho > 0$. This implies that the gains from this type of trade are now $\gamma + \rho$. The rest of assumptions are those of the previous section. Thus, the previous model applies as $\rho \to 0$.

The main implication of this generalization of our model is that the utility derived from the consumption of market goods now depends on whether the locality is located in the core.
or the periphery:

\[ W_{l}^{M} = -\eta + \gamma \left( 1 - \beta + \beta \int_{0}^{1} I_{l=m} R_{m} \right) + \rho I_{l \in C} \left[ (1 - \beta) \pi + \beta \int_{0}^{\pi} I_{l=m} R_{m} \right] , \quad \text{(24)} \]

where \( I_{l \in C} \) is an indicator variable that equals 1 if \( l \in C \) and zero otherwise. Notice that border effects are larger for core-core trade, \( \beta (\gamma + \rho) \), than for either core-periphery or periphery-periphery trade, \( \beta \gamma \). It follows immediately that, other things equal, core localities prefer sharing economic regulation with other core localities. Periphery localities, instead, are indifferent about which localities they share regulation with, and care only about their total number.

4.2 Equilibrium Political Structure

As in the previous section, the equilibrium political structure is determined in two stages. First, we find the political structure for the free world for a given \( F \). Second, we determine the number and size of empires. Appendix A.4 goes through these steps in detail. In the main text, we simplify the exposition by focusing exclusively on the case in which empires are not formed.

If the core decides to forego warfare and join the free world, we have that \( F = 1 \). The analysis differs however from that in Section 2 in two respects. The first is that the partitions \( P \) and \( R \) need no longer contain equal-sized elements. Since core localities prefer to join other core localities there are two distinct types of elements of \( P \): core countries (formed by core localities) with size \( S_{C} \), and periphery countries (formed by periphery localities) with size \( S_{P} \). If \( P \neq R \), there are, at most, two distinct types of elements of \( R \): core unions (formed by core countries) with size \( U_{C} \), and periphery unions (formed by periphery countries) with size \( U_{P} \). Thus, we can define the welfare of core and periphery localities as follows:

\[ W_{l} = W^{C} \left( S_{C}, U_{C} \right) \]

\[ = -\eta + (\gamma + \rho \pi) (1 - \beta) + (\gamma U_{C} + \rho \min \{ U_{C}, \pi \}) \beta - \delta S_{C} - \frac{\phi}{S_{C}} - \kappa I_{l \in C}^{U} \text{ if } l \in C \quad \text{(25)} \]

and

\[ W_{l} = W^{P} \left( S_{P}, U_{P} \right) = -\eta + \gamma (1 - \beta + \beta U_{P}) - \delta S_{P} - \frac{\phi}{S_{P}} - \kappa I_{l \notin C}^{U} \text{ if } l \notin C \quad \text{(26)} \]

where \( I_{l \in C}^{U} \) and \( I_{l \notin C}^{U} \) are indicator functions that take value 1 if \( S_{C} = U_{C} \) and \( S_{P} = U_{P} \), respectively, and zero otherwise. Efficient bargaining implies that the equilibrium political
structure maximizes:

\[ W (S_C, S_P, U_C, U_P) = \pi W^C (S_C, U_C) + (1 - \pi) W^P (S_P, U_P). \]  

(27)

The second, and most important, difference with the analysis of Section 2 is that now there are three possible cases to consider. The first is a single-level governance structure with only countries: \( U_C = S_C \) and \( U_P = S_P \). In the absence of economic unions, the optimal country size is now given by:

\[ S^*_{1C} = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta - \beta (\gamma + \rho)}} \] and \( S^*_{1P} = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta - \beta \gamma}}. \]  

(28)

The main difference with respect to Equation (10) is that core countries are larger. The reason, of course, is that their gains from trade are now larger.\(^{22}\)

The second political structure is a two-level governance with a world economic union. In this case, the size of all countries is still given by Equation (11), which we reproduce here for convenience:

\[ S^*_{2C} = S^*_{2P} = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta}}. \]  

(29)

There is now a third possible political structure with an economic union that includes only the core: \( U_C = \pi \) and \( U_P = S_P. \)^{23} That is, it is possible now that the world adopts a mixed political structure with two-level governance in the core and single-level governance in the periphery. In this case, country size is given as follows:

\[ S^*_{3C} = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta}} \] and \( S^*_{3P} = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta - \beta \gamma}}. \]  

(30)

In this political structure, core countries are smaller than periphery countries. The reason, which is familiar by now, is that the core union removes one incentive to increase country size, which is to facilitate trade.

Appendix A.4 shows that this mixed political structure is preferred and therefore the

\(^{22}\)Equation (28) assumes that \( \delta > \phi \pi^{-2} + \beta (\eta + \rho) \), so that there is enough preference heterogeneity to ensure that optimal country size is always smaller than the entire core.

\(^{23}\)Up to this point, the assumption of a pyramidal hierarchy of governments has eased the exposition, allowing us to refer to countries and unions from the outset, but it has not been binding. Here however, this assumption has bite. Once a core union exists, core localities prefer to form countries with periphery localities, since this facilitates additional trade. The assumption rules out this possibility. This does not seem too outlandish, though, as it can be interpreted as another form of economies of scope.
equilibrium one if the following condition holds:

$$\beta \gamma (1 + \pi) + 2 \sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma)} \kappa + 2 \sqrt{\phi \delta} < \beta (\gamma + \rho) \pi + 2 \sqrt{\phi [\delta - \beta (\gamma + \rho)]}. \quad (31)$$

The inequality on the left means that the core union is better than the world union, while the inequality on the right means that the core union is better than no union. As we show in Appendix A.4, a core union emerges as globalization proceeds provided that $\kappa$ is low enough relative to $\pi$ and $\rho$.24

4.3 Globalization and political structure

We now go back to the question of how globalization affects political structure, and we consider again a sequence of equilibria indexed by $\gamma$. As we saw in Section 2, there is threshold value $\gamma_U$ such that the world political structure will feature single-level governance at early stages of globalization ($\gamma < \gamma_U$), and then shift to two-level governance at later stages ($\gamma > \gamma_U$). The main novelty here is that, if $\pi$ and $\rho$ are high enough, there is an intermediate stage in which there is a core union.

Figure 7 depicts this three-stage evolution of the world political structure by plotting the equilibrium size of countries and unions. At low levels of globalization ($\gamma < \gamma_C$), the world contains only countries. As globalization proceeds, the size of countries grows and so does the preference mismatch. When globalization crosses the first threshold ($\gamma_C < \gamma < \gamma_U$), the preference mismatch has grown too large for core localities and it justifies giving up economies of scope. The preference mismatch in periphery localities is still small and it does not justify the loss of economies of scope. Thus, a core union becomes the cost-effective choice. Eventually, globalization crosses the second threshold ($\gamma > \gamma_U$). At this point, preference mismatch has grown too large even in the periphery. The core union is enlarged to include periphery countries and becomes a world union. After this, there are no further changes in political structure.

It is not difficult to see that this core-periphery model can be extended in fruitful ways. One possibility would be to assume that there are two, three or $N$ peripheries that are located progressively farther away. In this case, there would be a union that starts at the core and grows outwardly with globalization. When the first periphery joins the union, the size of its countries declines. When the second periphery joins the union, the size of its countries declines. When the second periphery joins the union, the size of its countries declines.

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24Formally, a core union is optimal for some $\gamma \in [0, \eta - \rho]$ if and only if $\kappa \leq \bar{\kappa}_C$, for a threshold $\bar{\kappa}_C > 0$ such that $\partial \bar{\kappa}_C / \partial \pi > 0$ and $\partial \bar{\kappa}_C / \partial \rho \geq 0$. 

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30
Figure 7: Globalization, Countries and Regional Unions. The figure shows how the world political structure changes with globalization ($\gamma$). The black line is the size of core countries, the broken line is the size of periphery countries, the blue line is the core union and the green line is the world union.

also declines. And so on. The union gradually advances outwardly, and it keeps breaking countries. The end point would be the same as before, but we would now have gradualism.

Another extension is to assume that the world has two core-periphery structures, which we can think of as continents or regions. As globalization proceeds, within each region there is a union that advances gradually, breaking countries. Across regions, however, there is no union. Eventually, globalization has gone so far that a world union becomes cost-effective, and the two regional unions merge. Once again, the world reaches the same end point, but now we have both gradualism and regionalism.

5 An Interpretation of Historical Experience

We conclude by using our analytical results to attempt a suggestive narrative of the political evolution of modern Europe (and the world). Since the late Middle Ages, European
sovereign states on average grew in size until the end of the nineteenth century, when this trend was dramatically reversed. For example, Kitamura and Lagerlöf (2016) show that borders declined monotonically from 1500 to 1900, and then started to increase. Our model is particularly appropriate to explain this evolution. Medieval Europe was fragmented into hundreds of small states at a time when trade was costly, insecure and limited to few commodities. The early modern period saw important changes in both the economic and the political organization of the continent. With the Commercial Revolution, trade began to flourish and the feudal system started to be replaced by a smaller number of countries of growing size. While in 1600 there were 112 sovereign states in Europe and the Near East, at the beginning of 1800 the number had fallen to 79.

The Industrial Revolution gave trade an even more prominent role and triggered major changes in socioeconomic conditions that ultimately made the rise of the nation state possible. Trade expansion was enabled by the introduction of canals, improved roads and railways. At the same time, the high degree of political fragmentation at the time of the Congress of Vienna (1815) was followed by the unification of Germany and Italy (1871) and
the further consolidation of other nation states. The economic rationale of building large internal markets was especially evident in the case of German unification, which started with the formation of a customs union (Zollverein). This process of political centralization culminated at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Europe was dominated by just 28 independent states.

Yet, the twentieth century marks a turning point. It saw the rise of international organizations both at the global level, such as the League of Nations, and at the regional level, such as the European Community. One of the key objectives of many of these supra-national organizations was precisely to promote free markets. Simultaneously, Europe entered a stage of political fragmentation, with the number of independent states growing to 58 in 2000. This pattern of an initial decline and subsequent increase in the number of countries is not confined to Europe only. For instance, the number of African countries fell from 36 in 1816 to 4 in 1914, to rise again to 51 in 2000. Similarly, in South-East Asia, these numbers changed from 37 to 4 and then 20 in the years 1816, 1914 and 2000, respectively.25 However, to better interpret the political evolutions in these regions, it is important to bring conflict into the picture.

Our model of war and conquest seems broadly consistent with the rise and fall of colonial empires. In our theory, empires are built to extract trade surplus from the colonies and disappear when the union is formed to foster free markets. According to historians and in line with this view, one of the key driving forces behind colonial expansion was the desire to secure trade and access to scarce resources in an era of revived commerce, but when mercantilist practices where common. Due to the scarcity of land and the desire to avoid powerful rivals, European great powers expanded by conquering territories overseas. The role of colonial powers in enforcing trade within the empire but not outside was very clear in the case of maritime commerce. On the one hand, large naval forces were built to control and protect trading routes; on the other hand, privateers were often authorized to capture merchant ships belonging to enemy nations. Despite some notable setbacks, colonialism continued to grow prior to World War I and finally collapsed after World War II. The sharp decline of empires started after the creation of international agreements aimed at promoting economic cooperation. This is no coincidence. In the words of Spruyt (2005) and Rosecrance (1986), empires dissolved, often peacefully, because the gains through commerce displaced gains through territorial acquisition.26 There is also evidence that international organizations

25The number of countries is taken from Butcher and Griffiths (2013).
26Bonfatti (2012) also attributes the fall of empires to the growing importance of trade between industrial
played a direct role in the process of decolonization. For example, in 1960 the UN General Assembly voted the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

Focusing on size, our model shares with Alesina and Spolaore (2003) the prediction that empires should be larger than democratic countries, a result which is confirmed by a quick look at Figure 2. Moreover, the model suggest that countries may form and grow for the desire to increase military might and build an empire or embark into colonial adventures. This is indeed one of the recognized reasons behind the unification of Germany. Interestingly, our theory also suggests that great powers switch to the union at higher levels of globalization than consensual countries.\(^{27}\) Consistently, Figure 2 shows that size started to fall earlier on for countries than for empires. Finally, the model predicts that conflict should initially increase with globalization and then fall drastically after the formation of unions. Data

\(^{27}\)Formally, the emergence of empires unambiguously retards the creation of the world union. Moreover, unions of free countries may emerge earlier, with empires joining later on.
on changes of borders from Correlates of War are supportive. The percentage of peaceful changes of borders fell from 70% in the period 1816-1900 to 62% in the years 1901-1950, and then rose to 89% in the period 1951-2008. Moreover, promoting peace by tightening economic integration was among the explicit goals of the European Union and the WTO.  

Our model can also be used to interpret the founding and growth of the United States. Improvements in transportation technology and the desire to create a large internal market were important factors in its westward expansion. The abundance of land made it possible to create one of the largest countries in the world, without the need to seek far away colonies. Despite its size, the United States avoided the phase of collapse and political fragmentation by choosing an institutional system with multiple levels of government. In this light, the experience of the United States follows the main pattern predicted by our theory: the creation and expansion of the federal government, which can be interpreted as a regional union, coincided with the fragmentation and loss of political power of individual states.

\[\text{28 See Martin, Mayer and Thoenig (2008) for a theoretical and empirical analysis of the relationship between trade and war.}\]
After the Declaration of Independence, the borders of the original thirteen states extended up to the Mississippi river, while the remaining land was occupied by French and Spanish colonies (later on part of Mexico) and by many tribes of native Americans living essentially in autarky. As the federal government acquired land and built roads westward, its territory was gradually fragmented into the fifty states. This process followed a common pattern. First, new land was annexed as large “territories;” subsequently this land was broken into new states. Federal expansion was followed not just by the creation of new states, but also by the break-up of existing ones. For example, Georgia, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Virginia all lost land to form new states. So did the former Republic of Texas (an independent country until 1846), which encompassed large parts of current Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico. This pattern is consistent with our core-periphery model, in which the outward expansion of the core union breaks up countries in the periphery.

Finally, our theory has been motivated by modern and contemporary political and economic events because our model of trade and globalization seems especially suited to study the period after the Industrial Revolution. Yet, some of its key implications seems consistent with ancient history as well. For instance, several historians stress the importance of trade and market size for the expansion of countries. According to Pirenne (1925, 1939), the Roman civilization was heavily dependent upon Mediterranean trade and it collapsed when trade ended with the Arab conquest. In his view, the cutting of major trade routes forced individual regions into self-sufficiency and this contributed to the consequent decline and fragmentation of Western civilization into the Middle Ages.

6 Conclusion

In this paper we have studied how the forces of globalization contribute to shape the world’s political structure. Our theory has shown that the expansion of trade opportunities can help explain two salient puzzling phenomena in recent history. First, the rise and subsequent fall in the size of countries observed during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Second, the seemingly contradictory trends towards more political integration across countries and more political fragmentation within countries in the second half of the twentieth century. Our theory is broadly consistent with a variety of historical episodes. Yet, there are several important factors that we have deliberately left aside. We now briefly mention three that

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29Similarly, Friedman (1977) argues that trade increases the value of land and hence promotes territorial expansion.
seem particularly promising for future research.

First, we have modeled economic unions as agreements aimed at facilitating trade. Although this approach is both simple and realistic, it does not do full justice to another important role of unions, namely, to solve cross-border externalities associated with domestic government activity (Alesina, Angeloni and Etro 2005). Since globalization is likely to exacerbate such policy externalities (Epifani and Gancia 2009; Broner and Ventura 2011), it increases the value of forming unions. However, in this case international agreements must be properly designed to eliminate any incentive for individual countries to free ride. More generally, in the presence of such externalities, studying the desirability of different rules or mechanisms to determine changes in political structure seems an important open question.

Second, we have focused on economic globalization as an expansion of trade opportunities. Yet, globalization is a more complex process that may also affect preferences. If cultural globalization lowers the preference for heterogeneity, it will also reduce the cost of removing borders. This may reinforce political integration, but may also lower the value of economic unions. The equilibrium political structure may then be the result of a race between economic and cultural globalization. In a similar vein, preferences may be affected by political choices. For example, historically governments have often taken actions aimed at homogenizing their populations (Alesina and Reich 2015).

Finally, our concept of locality abstracts from internal heterogeneity both in preferences and economic attributes. Yet, historical experience suggests that internal conflict has played a role in many processes of country formation and break-up (Bolton and Roland 1996, 1997). It would be interesting to see how globalization also affects political structure through its effect on domestic heterogeneity and conflict.

References


\[Maystre et al. (2014) show how trade integration can lead to cultural convergence. On the other hand, Casella (2001) and Casella and Feinstein (2002) show that preferences can endogenously become more heterogeneous as market size expands and enables greater specialization.\]


A Appendix

A.1 Data Sources

The trade share reported in Figure 1 is merchandise exports as percent of GDP in 1990 prices, from Maddison (1995, 2001). Maddison provides trade data for selected countries in the years 1820, 1870, 1913, 1929, 1950, 1973 and 1998. To avoid compositional effects, we report the value of merchandise export as a share of GDP for the set of countries with data for all the years (Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States). The trade share computed using the data for all available countries in every year is very similar to the one displayed in Figure 1.

The number of countries is reported for the same years. Data on the number of countries in the twentieth century is not very controversial. For the nineteenth century, however, some leading conventions grossly underestimate the number of countries. For example, the “International System” developed by Singer and Small (1966) and adopted in the Correlates of War project or in the Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive, only includes countries with international recognition. In particular, prior to 1920, the criteria to be recognized as an independent country were to have population greater than 500,000 and have had diplomatic missions at or above the rank of charge d’affaires with Britain and France. Clearly, this definition is too strict for our purposes, which require the identification of even relatively small political units living in economic and political autarky. We follow Butcher and Griffiths (2013) who recognize the problem and offer alternative sets of criteria to identify the number of countries between 1816 and 2011.

The number of WTO members is from the WTO’s website.

The size of countries and empires displayed in Figure 2 is from the Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive (CNTS). It provides data on contiguous territorial area in thousand square miles for all countries existing in a given year according to the International State System. In a few instances, missing data have been imputed cross-checking major territorial changes from other sources (China and Persia before 1860). Area of empire is provided for a consistent sample of 13 countries: Austria-Hungary (later Austria), Belgium, France, Germany (Prussia), Italy (Sardinia), Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Turkey (Ottoman Empire), United Kingdom, and United States. For these countries, empire area includes “overseas” territories (i.e., colonies). Data for the two modern wartime periods, 1914-1918 and 1940-1945 (1938-1954 for Empires) are missing.

European political maps where drawn using the online software GeaCron (http://www.
geacron.com). This software provides a geo-temporal database that can be used to draw geopolitical maps of any region in the world, in any given historical time period. The number of independent states in Europe and Near East reported in Section 5 is taken from Euratlas-Nüssli (http://www.euratlas.com).

A.2 Computing Equilibrium Consumptions

Locality $l$ maximizes

$$W_l^M = \int_0^1 \int_0^1 \ln c_l(m, i) \, dmdi$$

(A1)

subject to the following budget constraint:

$$\int_0^1 \int_0^1 p_l(m, i) [c_l(m, i) - q_l(m, i)] \, dmdi \leq 0,$$

(A2)

where $q_l(m, i)$ and $p_l(m, i)$ are the production and price of input $m$ of industry $i$ in locality $l$. The productions $q_l(m, i)$ must be consistent with available technology as described in the text. Since individuals are atomistic, they take prices as given in their maximization problems.

We claim now that equilibrium prices are given as follows:

$$p_l(m, i) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } l = m \\ e^n & \text{if } i \in [0, \beta] \text{ and } I_{l=m}^R = 0 \\ e^\tau & \text{if } i \in (\beta, 1] \text{ or } I_{l=m}^R = 1 \text{ but } l \neq m \end{cases}.$$  

(A3)

To prove this claim, normalize world income to unity ($Y = 1$). Note first that each locality has unit density of expenditure on each input in each industry. We next examine production. Consider first industries that require contract enforcement, $i \in [0, \beta]$. Locality $l$ employs unit density of labor to produce each non-traded input $m$ for which $I_{l=m}^R = 0$. Thus, output of each non-traded input has density $e^{-n}$, so the value of output has unit density given price $e^n$. The remaining mass $\int_0^1 I_{l=m}^R dmdi$ of industry-$i$ labor is employed to produce an identical mass of output. Unit density of it is sold domestically at a unit price. The remainder is shipped in identical amounts to other localities with $I_{l=m}^R = 1$, each of which receives a density $e^{-\tau}$ of imports, hence import value of unit density given price $e^\tau$. In industries that do not require contract enforcement, $i \in (\beta, 1]$, the whole unit mass of industry-$i$ labor is employed to produce the locality’s own input variety, which is sold in identical amounts to all other localities in the world. Thus, the value of sales in each locality of each input in
each industry has unit density, just like expenditure. This proves our claim.\footnote{It is straightforward to show that this equilibrium is unique. First, rule out variation in the prices of traded inputs since this would generate excess demand (supply) of cheap (expensive) varieties. Second, rule out that the relative prices of traded and nontraded varieties be above (below) \( \tau/\eta \) since this would lead to an excess demand (supply) of nontraded inputs.}

With these prices at hand, we can compute the equilibrium productions and consumptions described in the text.

A.3 Dealing with Integer Constraints

A world without unions consists of \( N^* \in \mathbb{N} \) countries. Country \( n \) consists of measure \( S_n > 0 \) of localities, such that \( \sum_{n=1}^{N^*} S_n = 1 \) and utilitarian social welfare is \( W = \sum_{n=1}^{N^*} S_n W^F (S_n, S_n) \).

The welfare function

\[
W^F (S_n, S_n) = -\eta + \gamma (1 - \beta + \beta S_n) - \delta S_n - \phi \frac{S_n}{N} \tag{A4}
\]

is concave in \( S_n \) and increasing at \( S_n = 0 \). Whenever \( \delta > \phi + \beta \gamma \) it has a unique maximum at \( S_n = S_1^* \).

Pareto efficiency then requires that either \( S_n \leq S_1^* \) for all \( n = 1, 2, \ldots, N \) or \( S_n \geq S_1^* \) for all \( n \). Otherwise some localities could leave a country with excessive size \( S_n > S_1^* \) and join another with insufficient size \( S_n < S_1^* \), raising the welfare of every locality in both countries.

Utilitarian welfare maximization requires all countries to have the same size. If there are two countries \( m \) and \( n \) such that \( S_m > S_n > S_1^* \), then transferring the marginal locality from \( m \) to \( n \) not only raises its welfare, but it also raises the welfare of \( S_m \) localities by more than it lowers the welfare of \( S_n < S_m \) localities. Likewise if \( S_m < S_n < S_1^* \).

Therefore, once integer constraints are taken into account, the utilitarian welfare optimum without unions is a partition of the world into a number

\[
N_1^* = \arg \max_{N \in \mathbb{N}} \left\{ -\eta + \gamma \left( 1 - \beta + \frac{\beta}{N} \right) - \frac{\delta}{N} - \frac{\phi N}{N} \right\} \tag{A5}
\]

of identical countries. The objective function \( W \) has strictly decreasing differences in \((N, \gamma)\) because for any \( \gamma_H > \gamma_L \) and and \( N_H > N_L \),

\[
W (N_H, \gamma_H) - W (N_H, \gamma_L) = \beta \frac{\gamma_H - \gamma_L}{N_H} < W (N_L, \gamma_H) - W (N_L, \gamma_L) = \beta \frac{\gamma_H - \gamma_L}{N_L}. \tag{A6}
\]

Thus, the welfare-maximizing number of countries \( N_1^* \) is decreasing in \( \gamma \) in the sense of...
monotone comparative statics. It is likewise decreasing in $\beta$, and increasing in $\delta$ and $\phi$.

By the same reasoning, the utilitarian welfare optimum with unions is a world union composed of a number

$$N_2^* = \arg\max_{N \in \mathbb{N}} \left\{ -\frac{\delta}{N} - \phi N \right\}$$

of identical countries.

## A.4 Equilibrium Conditions for the General Model

The general model used in this paper is discussed in Section 4 when we assume that $\pi \geq 0$ and $\rho \geq 0$. The model of war and conquest of Section 3 applies in the limit $\rho \to 0$, while the model of diplomacy in Section 2 applies in the limit $\pi \to 0$. In this Appendix, we discuss the different possible equilibria of the general model.

Assume first that empires are not built, and define $S_{1C}^*, S_{1P}^*, S_{2C}^*, S_{2P}^*, S_{3C}^*$ and $S_{3P}^*$ as in the main text. Then, there are three possible political structures: (1) a single-level governance structure with countries of size $S_{1C}^*$ and $S_{1P}^*$ and no economic unions; (2) a two-level governance structure with countries of size $S_{2C}^*$ and $S_{2P}^*$ and a world economic union; (3) a two-level governance structure for the core with countries of size $S_{3C}^*$ and a core economic union, and a single-level governance structure for the periphery with countries of size $S_{3P}^*$.

Let $W^1 \equiv W (S_{1C}^*, S_{1P}^*, S_{1C}^*, S_{1P}^*)$, $W^2 \equiv W (S_{2C}^*, S_{2P}^*, 1, 1)$ and $W^3 \equiv W (S_{3C}^*, S_{3P}^*, \pi, S_{3P}^*)$ be the world average welfare under these structures, respectively. Then, we have that:

$$W^1 = -\eta + (\gamma + \rho \pi^2) (1 - \beta) - 2 \left\{ \pi \sqrt{\phi [\delta - \beta (\gamma + \rho)]} + (1 - \pi) \sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma)} \right\}, \quad (A8)$$

$$W^2 = -\eta + (\gamma + \rho \pi^2) - 2 \sqrt{\phi \delta} - \kappa, \quad (A9)$$

and

$$W^3 = -\eta + (\gamma + \rho \pi^2) (1 - \beta) + (\gamma + \rho) \pi^2 \beta - 2 \left[ \pi \sqrt{\phi \delta} + (1 - \pi) \sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma)} \right] - \pi \kappa. \quad (A10)$$

The equilibrium political structure is the one that delivers the highest average welfare:

$$\arg\max W \begin{cases} (S_{1C}^*, S_{1P}^*, S_{1C}^*, S_{1P}^*) & \text{if } W^1 \geq \max \{W^2, W^3\} \\ (S_{2C}^*, S_{2P}^*, 1, 1) & \text{if } W^2 \geq \max \{W^1, W^3\} \\ (S_{3C}^*, S_{3P}^*, \pi, S_{3P}^*) & \text{if } W^3 \geq \max \{W^1, W^2\} \end{cases}, \quad (A11)$$

where $S_{1C}^*$, $S_{1P}^*$, $S_{2C}^*$, $S_{2P}^*$, $S_{3C}^*$ and $S_{3P}^*$ are as defined in the main text. Condition (31) in
the text is equivalent to $W^3 > \max\{W^1, W^2\}$.

The core union can follow but not precede single-level governance and precede but not follow the world union because

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial \gamma} (W^2 - W^3) = \beta [1 - \pi^2 - (1 - \pi) S^*_3 p] > 0$$

(A12)

and

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial \gamma} (W^3 - W^1) = \beta \pi (\pi - S^*_1 c) > 0.$$ (A13)

If

$$\kappa \leq \bar{\kappa}_0 \equiv \pi \left[ \beta \rho \pi - 2\sqrt{\phi} \left( \sqrt{\delta} - \sqrt{\delta - \beta \rho} \right) \right],$$

(A14)

then $\lim_{\gamma \to 0} W_1 \leq \lim_{\gamma \to 0} W_2 < \lim_{\gamma \to 0} W_3$. If instead $\kappa > \bar{\kappa}_0$, there is a threshold $\bar{\kappa} > 0$ such that $W^1 > W^2$ if and only if $\gamma < \tilde{\gamma}$. This threshold is implicitly defined by

$$\beta (\tilde{\gamma} + \rho \pi^2) + 2\sqrt{\phi} \left[ \pi \sqrt{\delta - \beta (\tilde{\gamma} + \rho)} + (1 - \pi) \sqrt{\delta - \beta \tilde{\gamma}} \right] = \kappa + 2\sqrt{\phi \delta}$$

(A15)

if

$$\bar{\kappa}_0 < \kappa < \bar{\kappa} \equiv \beta (\eta - \rho + \rho \pi^2) - 2\sqrt{\phi} \left[ \sqrt{\delta - \pi \sqrt{\delta - \beta \eta} - (1 - \pi) \sqrt{\delta - \beta (\eta - \rho)} \right];$$

(A16)

or else it equals $\tilde{\gamma} = \eta - \rho$ if $\kappa \geq \bar{\kappa}$.

Therefore, the core union emerges for some $\gamma \in [0, \eta - \rho]$ if $\kappa \leq \bar{\kappa}_0$ or if $\kappa > \bar{\kappa}_0$ and

$$\kappa < \beta (\tilde{\gamma} + \rho) \pi - 2\sqrt{\phi} \left[ \sqrt{\delta - \sqrt{\delta - \beta (\tilde{\gamma} + \rho)} \right].$$

(A17)

This last condition can be rewritten $\kappa < \bar{\kappa}_1$ for a threshold $\bar{\kappa}_1 > 0$ because the right-hand side rises less than one-to-one with $\kappa$:

$$\beta (\pi - S^*_1 c) \frac{\partial \tilde{\gamma}}{\partial \kappa} = \frac{\pi - S^*_1 c}{1 - \pi S^*_1 c - (1 - \pi) S^*_1 p} < 1 \text{ for } \kappa \in (\bar{\kappa}_0, \bar{\kappa}).$$

(A18)

The threshold satisfies $\bar{\kappa}_1 > \max\{\bar{\kappa}_0, 0\}$. Thus, the core union emerges if $\kappa < \bar{\kappa}_C = \max\{\bar{\kappa}_0, \bar{\kappa}_1\}$.

The core union is more likely to emerge if $\rho$ is higher: $\partial \bar{\kappa}_C / \partial \rho > 0$ because

$$\frac{\partial \bar{\kappa}_0}{\partial \rho} = \beta \pi \left( \pi - \lim_{\gamma \to 0} S^*_1 c \right) > 0,$$

(A19)
while \( \partial \bar{\kappa}_1 / \partial \rho = 0 \) for \( \kappa > \bar{\kappa} \), and by the implicit function theorem

\[
\frac{\partial \bar{\kappa}_1}{\partial \rho} = \frac{\beta (\pi - S^*_1C) (1 + \partial \tilde{\gamma} / \partial \rho)}{1 - \beta (\pi - S^*_1C) \partial \tilde{\gamma} / \partial \kappa} > 0 \text{ for } \kappa \in (\bar{\kappa}_0, \bar{\kappa})
\]  

(A20)

since

\[
1 + \frac{\partial \tilde{\gamma}}{\partial \rho} = \frac{(1 - \pi) (1 + S^*_1C - S^*_1P)}{1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P} > 0 \text{ for } \kappa \in (\bar{\kappa}_0, \bar{\kappa}).
\]

(A21)

The core union is more likely to emerge if \( \pi \) is higher: \( \partial \bar{\kappa}_C / \partial \pi > 0 \) because

\[
\frac{\partial \bar{\kappa}_0}{\partial \pi} = 2\beta \rho \pi > 0,
\]

(A22)

while

\[
\frac{\partial \bar{\kappa}_1}{\partial \pi} = \beta \eta > 0 \text{ for } \kappa > \bar{\kappa},
\]

(A23)

and by the implicit function theorem

\[
\frac{\partial \bar{\kappa}_1}{\partial \pi} = \frac{\beta [\tilde{\gamma} + \rho + (\pi - S^*_1C) \partial \tilde{\gamma} / \partial \pi]}{1 - \beta (\pi - S^*_1C) \partial \tilde{\gamma} / \partial \kappa} \text{ for } \kappa \in (\bar{\kappa}_0, \bar{\kappa}),
\]

(A24)

where, for \( \kappa \in (\bar{\kappa}_0, \bar{\kappa}) \),

\[
\tilde{\gamma} + \rho + (\pi - S^*_1C) \frac{\partial \tilde{\gamma}}{\partial \pi} = \tilde{\gamma} + \rho + 2(\pi - S^*_1C) \frac{\sqrt{\phi} \left[ \sqrt{\delta - \beta \tilde{\gamma} - \sqrt{\delta - \beta (\tilde{\gamma} + \rho)} \right]}{\beta [1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P]} \frac{\beta [1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P]}{1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P} > 0
\]

(A25)

since the last expression is monotone increasing in \( \phi \):

\[
\frac{\partial}{\partial \phi} \left[ \tilde{\gamma} - \frac{2\rho \pi (\pi - S^*_1C)}{1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P} \right] = \frac{\rho \pi (1 - \pi) [(1 + \pi) S^*_1C - \pi S^*_1P]}{\phi [1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P]^2} + \frac{\partial \tilde{\gamma}}{\partial \phi} > 0
\]

(A26)

given that

\[
\frac{\partial \tilde{\gamma}}{\partial \phi} = \frac{\sqrt{\delta - \pi \sqrt{\delta - \beta (\tilde{\gamma} + \rho)} - (1 - \pi) \sqrt{\delta - \beta \tilde{\gamma}}}}{\beta \sqrt{\phi} [1 - \pi S^*_1C - (1 - \pi) S^*_1P]} > 0;
\]

(A27)

and even in the limit as \( \phi \to 0 \),

\[
\lim_{\phi \to 0} \bar{\kappa}_1 = \beta \rho \pi (1 + \pi) \Rightarrow \lim_{\phi \to 0} \frac{\partial \bar{\kappa}_1}{\partial \pi} = \beta \rho (1 + 2\pi) > 0.
\]

(A28)

When \( \kappa < \bar{\kappa}_C \), the core union is optimal for \( \gamma \in [\gamma_C, \gamma_U] \). The lower threshold is
\[ \gamma_c = \max \{0, \gamma_c^*\}, \text{where } \gamma_c^* \text{ is implicitly defined by} \]
\[ \beta (\gamma_c^* + \rho) \pi + 2\sqrt{\phi [\delta - \beta (\gamma_c^* + \rho)]} = 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} + \kappa. \] (A29)

The upper threshold is \( \gamma_u = \eta - \rho \) if \( \kappa \geq \tilde{\kappa} \), or if
\[ \kappa < \tilde{\kappa} \text{ and } \beta (\eta - \rho) (1 + \pi) + 2\sqrt{\phi [\delta - \beta (\eta - \rho)]} < 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} + \kappa; \] (A30)
otherwise it is implicitly defined by
\[ \beta \gamma_u (1 + \pi) + 2\sqrt{\phi (\delta - \beta \gamma_u)} = 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} + \kappa. \] (A31)

If there are empires, the analysis is as essentially as it was in Section 3 with \( \rho = 0 \). The welfare of a core locality that builds an empire is given by:
\[ W_l = W^E (E) = -\eta + (\gamma + \rho \pi) (1 - \beta) + (\gamma + \rho \mu) \beta E - \delta \mu E - \frac{\phi}{E} - \omega, \] (A32)
but the optimal size of empires is larger because the gains from trade within the metropolis are larger:
\[ E^* = \sqrt{\frac{\phi}{\delta \mu - \beta (\gamma + \rho \mu)}}. \] (A33)

Thus, if core localities build empires their welfare is given by:
\[ W^E (E^*) = -\eta + (\gamma + \rho \pi) (1 - \beta) - 2\sqrt{\phi [\delta \mu - \beta (\gamma + \rho \mu)]} - \omega. \] (A34)

The free world contains a measure \( F < 1 - \pi \) of localities in the periphery. In this case, all the analysis in Section 3 applies and, in particular, Condition (17) still determines whether the free world has a single or two-level governance structure.

When are empires formed? In the absence of empires, the welfare of core localities is given by:
\[ W^F_{i \in C} = -\eta + (1 - \beta) (\gamma + \rho \pi) \]
\[ + \begin{cases} 
-2\sqrt{\phi [\delta - \beta (\gamma + \rho)]} & \text{if } W^1_i \geq \max \{W^2_i, W^3_i\} \\
\beta (\gamma + \rho \pi) - 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} - \kappa & \text{if } W^2_i \geq \max \{W^1_i, W^3_i\} \\
\beta (\gamma + \rho) \pi - 2\sqrt{\phi \delta} - \kappa & \text{if } W^3_i \geq \max \{W^1_i, W^2_i\} 
\end{cases} \] (A35)
If $W^E (E^*) < W^F_{i \in C}$, there are no empires, diplomacy rules and the size of the free world is $F = 1$. If instead $W^E (E^*) \geq W^F_{i \in C}$, there are $\pi/\mu E^*$ empires of size $E^*$, and the size of the free world is reduced to $F = 1 - \pi/\mu$. 