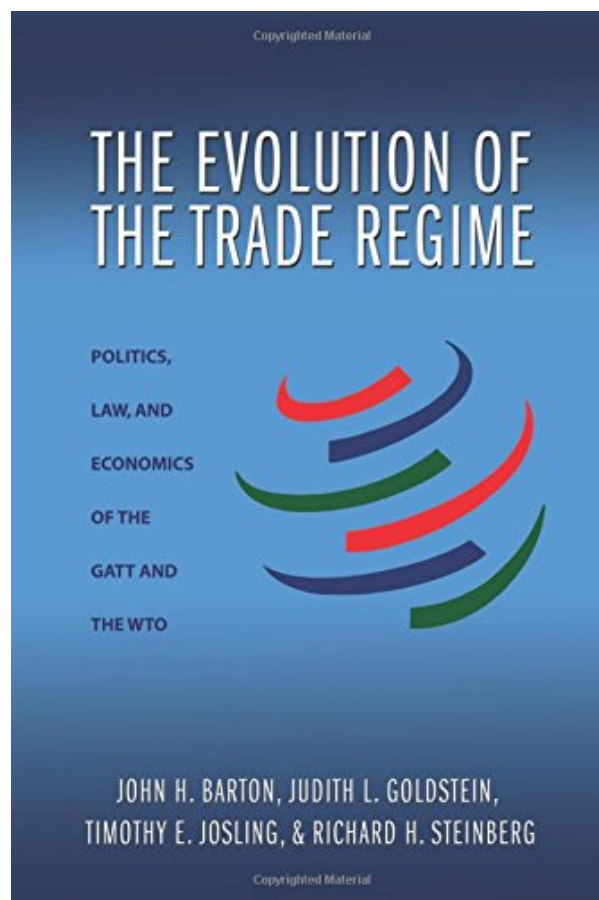


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POLITICS, LAW, AND ECONOMICS OF THE
GATT AND THE WTO BY JOHN H. BARTON,
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The Evolution of the Trade Regime offers a comprehensive political-economic history of the development of the world's multilateral trade institutions, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its successor, the World Trade Organization (WTO). While other books confine themselves to describing contemporary GATT/WTO legal rules or analyzing their economic logic, this is the first to explain the logic and development behind these rules.

The book begins by examining the institutions' rules, principles, practices, and norms from their genesis in the early postwar period to the present. It evaluates the extent to which changes in these institutional attributes have helped maintain or rebuild domestic constituencies for open markets.

The book considers these questions by looking at the political, legal, and economic foundations of the trade regime from many angles. The authors conclude that throughout most of GATT/WTO history, power politics fundamentally shaped the creation and evolution of the GATT/WTO system. Yet in recent years, many aspects of the trade regime have failed to keep pace with shifts in underlying material interests and ideas, and the challenges presented by expanding membership and preferential trade agreements.

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4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Sober and reasonably balanced (a bit more than 4 stars)

By A. J. Sutter

This book offers a reasonably balanced discussion of the WTO, especially from an historical, political point of view. The workings of the WTO are very much based on power politics, notwithstanding its ostensible one member, one vote constitution. Some of the topics I was impatient to hear discussed during the first three-fourths or so of the book, such as environmental issues, point of view of developing countries, "democracy deficit," etc., are dealt with in Chapters 6 and 7, so some patience is helpful.

I'd have certainly given this closer to 5 stars but for a couple of points: First, the analysis tends at times to be a bit too orthodox, and written from a US point of view. The underlying economics of free trade aren't questioned enough, and the "generativity" of the WTO dispute resolution mechanism -- its judicial lawmaking -- is underestimated. To be fair, one reason for that assessment may be that the book went to

press before the 2006 panel decision on genetically modified organisms. Second, and more important in this context, it's a challenge to stay awake while reading this book. The analysis is usually written at a high level of abstraction. The literary style is quite leaden, with a real written-by-committee feeling. (The rather dense typography may exacerbate this impression.) The book could have used a more forcefully-stated point of view (notwithstanding the conclusions stated in the final chapter), or at least more piquant details and anecdotes from time to time. Although it covers a narrower topic and is itself quite dry and academic in literary style, Trish Kelly's "The Impact of the WTO" nonetheless manages to be a fun read by comparison. That's a very oblique compliment, to say the least. And although it does not go into the depth of the book under review, Amrita Narlikar's "Very Short Introduction" to the WTO from Oxford U Press is a much more vivid way to learn about the history and key issues, including WTO politics, if you're new to the subject.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent study

By S Robinson

This is a careful and thorough description of the evolution of the GATT/WTO system. It is aimed at readers who want to understand how the rules-based world trading system has evolved in the postwar period, and the roles of institutions and law in that process. It is less entertaining to read than the Paul Blustein book, *Misadventures of the Most Favored Nations: Clashing Egos, Inflated Ambitions, and the Great Shambles of the World Trade System*, but the two books are worth reading together.

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