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Shawn POPE

Alwyn LIM

Singapore Management University, alwynlim@smu.edu.sg

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International Organizations as Mobilizing Structures: World CSR Associations and Their Disparate Impacts on Members' CSR Practices, 2000–2016

Shawn Pope, *Stanford University*

Alwyn Lim, *University of Southern California*

International organizations are key players in globalization, but not all international organizations influence global processes in the same ways. In this paper, we argue that differences in international organizations' mobilizing structures can shape the extent to which these organizations can positively impact the practices of their members. We present the first comparative and quantitative assessment of world corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations that comprise business participants that act collectively to address pressing social and environmental concerns. We conduct time-series panel regression analyses of a unique dataset of business participation in three core world CSR associations and test their effects on business adoption of three major CSR frameworks and business performance across six major CSR evaluation schemes. Our findings reveal that world CSR associations with participatory structures, compared to those with honorific or convocational structures, more consistently encourage member businesses to adopt CSR policies and to achieve highly evaluated CSR practices. We discuss these results in relation to sociological and world society perspectives on international organizations as well as implications for future research on global corporate responsibility.

Introduction

In the postwar era, international organizations have driven much of the worldwide structuring of globalization. In an interdependent but stateless world, international organizations facilitate the worldwide diffusion of organizational practices and promote perceived performance relative to those practices. Research from the world society perspective, for instance, emphasizes how international organizations act as the architects of global models, encouraging their cross-national diffusion and connecting global norms with domestic practice (Meyer 2010). The impact of international organizations in shaping national

Corresponding Author: Alwyn Lim, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, Hazel Stanley Hall 314, Los Angeles, CA 90089–1059. Email: alwynlim@usc.edu. Both authors contributed equally to this work.

policies has been considerable, especially in the fields of education, science, human rights, and the natural environment. Despite the central roles they play in these processes, international organizations themselves have not received much analytical research from the world society perspective. There is need, in particular, for more comparative research that addresses why some international organizations, and not others, are successful at diffusing global models and promoting perceived organizational performance.

In this paper, we argue that this diffusion and subsequent perceived performance is influenced by international organizations' mobilizing structures. Empirically, we focus on business participation in the world business associations that advance corporate social responsibility (CSR). We ask how these world CSR associations shape not only business engagement in CSR frameworks but also the perceived quality of CSR practices. Our study is the first that compares the three most prominent world CSR associations. In doing so, we distinguish three types of mobilizing structures exemplified by the world CSR associations: (i) *convocational* structures, where organizations convene highly visible gatherings of prominent global businesses, such as the World Economic Forum; (ii) *honorific* structures, where organizations elicit contributions from business participants to administer philanthropic projects, as in organizations like the International Business Leaders Forum; and (iii) *participatory* structures, which feature direct administration and participation by business members in sustainability issues, as with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. We propose that these structural distinctions have implications for the untested proposition that businesses will be "more likely to act in socially responsible ways" if they belong to associations, "but only if those associations are organized in ways that promote socially responsible behavior" (Campbell 2007, 960).

Our study contributes to research on international organizations and on the world society perspective in particular. Distinguishing between convocational, honorific, and participatory structures, we investigate the divergent and varied effects that international organizations have on their members' practices. Substantively, we contribute to the CSR literature the first comparative, quantitative assessment of the world CSR associations. As forums for private interests, these CSR associations occupy a prominent global nexus that has been previously neglected. Furthermore, given that world CSR associations have come under considerable scrutiny, our paper has empirical relevance for the criticism that these associations, in actuality, do not promote CSR practices as much as make token CSR commitments in exchange for regulatory relief and political access.

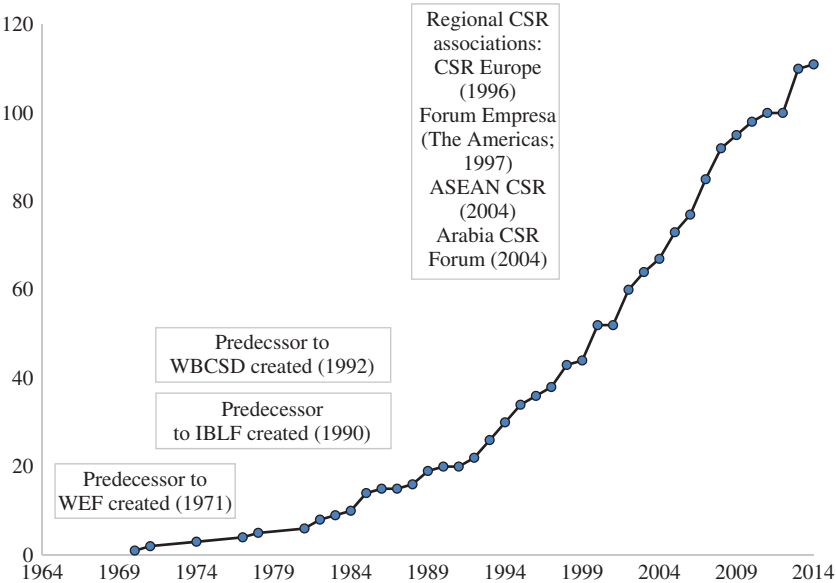
The World CSR Associations

While our paper focuses specifically on *world* CSR associations, we briefly situate them within the larger historical context in which CSR associations have proliferated in recent decades (Waddock and Graves 1997). Beginning in the early 1990s, the emergence of a loose regime of industry-specific, private

regulation initiatives (Bartley 2007) coincided with the rise of new business associations for corporations to engage more directly with CSR. New business associations were established at this historical moment because pre-existing institutions, featuring national rather than corporate representation, failed to either gain traction or engender meaningful social change (Kinderman 2015, 108). As a medley of non-profits, social movements, governments, and intergovernmental organizations began to engage more directly with corporations, hundreds of business associations arose that were structured around multi-stakeholder representation to centralize dialogue on issues of CSR concern.

CSR associations have been defined as “independent, non-profit membership organizations that are composed mainly or exclusively of for-profit businesses; that have a board of directors composed predominantly or only of business people; that are core-funded primarily or totally from business; and whose dedicated purpose is to promote responsible business practice” (Grayson and Nelson 2013, 3). Figure 1 displays the dramatic growth in national, regional, and world CSR associations with data from CSR guidebooks and academic surveys and the United Nations Global Compact’s online database of local CSR networks. The figure reveals that CSR association growth began in the 1970s, accelerated in the 1990s, and has continued strongly to the present day. Currently, an estimated 160 CSR associations operate across 110 countries and represent up to 5,000 corporations (Kinderman 2015, 110).

Figure 1. Countries with CSR associations



Note: Data come from Grayson and Nelson (2013), Kinderman (2015), the CSR associations listed as “Local Networks” on the Global Compact website, and the “Regional Partners” on the WBCSD website.

There are now three core CSR associations at the world level: the World Economic Forum (WEF), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), and International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF).¹ We note that these associations were among the first CSR associations (see Figure 1). They are world level because their memberships are not restricted to nations or regions (or industries, for that matter). They are CSR associations, not only because key observers categorize them as such, but also due to their own prominent self-identifications in terms of CSR: the IBLF presents itself as engaging “business in implementing responsible business practices,”² the WBCSD describes its activities as “galvanizing the global business community to create a sustainable future for business, society and the environment,”³ and the WEF notes that its institutional culture is founded on the view that “an organization is accountable to all parts of society.”⁴ These self-representations in terms of CSR are elaborated in association literature. A lengthy biography by the WBCSD⁵ underscores that CSR is core to the association’s identity, and the theme of WBCSD report is the view that CSR is both ethically necessary and financially beneficial.⁶ The IBLF, for its part, regularly publishes reports and video interviews with global business leaders that feature CSR and sustainability themes.⁷ Finally, for the WEF, media observers have noted that CSR issues are now a staple feature of the annual Davos megaconference.⁸

As global forums that aim to forge multi-stakeholder consensus on global issues, the world business associations appear to be benign. However, though representing themselves as socially minded forums, the world CSR associations have also been criticized as being “a cabal of wealthy elites in business and government that have been meeting for several decades to facilitate an agenda of integration of the global economy intended to benefit large transnational firms at the expense of consumer, the environment, the poor, and local or non-global culture” (Pigman 2007, 3). Among academic researchers, this criticism is echoed in the portrait of the WBCSD by Najam (1999), in the study of Business in the Community in the United Kingdom by Kinderman (2011), and also by critical non-profit groups such as Corpwatch (1997). We mention these perspectives on the world CSR associations to underscore that not all observers take at face value their self-identifications as CSR associations.

As brief introductions of the world CSR associations, the WEF functions primarily as the convener of a large (albeit exclusive) annual conference that gathers thousands of corporate executives, heads of state, academics, and activists in Davos, Switzerland, for discussions on sustainable development and geopolitical stability. The IBLF engages in philanthropic work that is funded by and communicated to its corporate and non-profit members. The WBCSD is organized as a standing council that is led by corporations, focused exclusively on the issue of sustainable development, and requires several meetings each year of its corporate-membered board. We note that WEF and WBCSD membership is by invitation while IBLF membership is voluntary. Our comparative analysis of these world CSR associations here and in the following sections draws upon mainstream news articles, annual association reports and commissioned research, event proceedings, archived websites, CSR guidebooks, and academic studies (Aras and Crowther 2010; Grayson 2007; Idowu, Capaldi, and Gupta 2013; Visser 2009; Visser et al. 2010).

The world CSR associations are very influential, which is evident in three ways. First are the large membership rosters and considerable financial resources of the world CSR associations. Each has more than 80 corporate members, slanted toward very large companies. For instance, the average annual revenue in 2014 of WBCSD members in this study is \$56 billion. In recent decades, the world CSR associations have undergone a dramatic growth in not only membership but also staff and revenue. From 1995 to 2014, for example, the WEF increased its revenue four-fold and its staff eight-fold, while the WBCSD doubled its staff and increased its membership by nearly 70 percent. These high levels of revenue, reach, and growth afford the world CSR associations with considerable wherewithal to impede or advance the global CSR movement.⁹

Second, the world CSR associations have considerable influence over national CSR associations. Indeed, many national CSR associations arose within nations, not due to indigenous efforts, but at the behest of the world CSR associations. The regional network of the WBCSD, for example, is a group of more than sixty organizations that the WBCSD maintains to address CSR concerns in differing cultural and economic contexts, including dozens of national councils that the WBCSD created *de novo*. Similarly, the IBLF has launched nationally oriented CSR associations in Indonesia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Serbia, while establishing satellite offices in Russia, China, India, and the United States. Finally, the WEF has convened regional conferences in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. This spread of the CSR association model has resulted in a network of closely affiliated CSR associations at the national, regional, and international levels.

Third, the world CSR associations are influential because they magnify their influence through inter-association collaborations. This takes the form of official partnerships, shared initiatives, joint statements, joint appearances at major conferences, and cross-memberships at the corporate level.¹⁰ This extensive collaboration affords the world CSR associations with the structural centrality in the global policy network with which to shape CSR ideas and practices.

Despite their considerable resources, influence on national CSR activity, and network centrality, the world CSR associations receive little academic attention. Entries in research databases such as Proquest and Ebscohost consist almost entirely of descriptive portraits (Grayson 2007). The academic literature amounts to two pieces on the WEF (Graz 2003; Pigman 2007) and two on the WBCSD (Najam 1999; Wyburd 1996). There are no entries on the IBLF. Only one monograph on the world CSR associations has been published in the past ten years, and there are no existing empirical or comparative assessments of the effectiveness of the associations (Lundberg 2004). In the following sections, we offer such an assessment, detailing in particular the role of the world CSR associations as mobilizing structures that can shape the CSR practices and performances of their members.

World CSR Associations as Mobilizing Structures

In the world society approach, international organizations are key mediators of globalization and underpin the world polity's networked structure (Boli and Thomas 1997). In addition to being forums for collective coordination or for

political access, international organizations are “scriptwriters” of global models that diffuse across countries to shape domestic practices (Meyer 2010). In domains such as human rights (Cole 2015) and the natural environment (Schofer and Hironaka 2005), but also for issues like trade and foreign investment (Hopewell 2015), international organizations articulate and sometimes enforce the institutional rules that govern cross-national activities in the absence of any higher world authority. The influence of international organizations is often diffuse and discursive and, in the present case, the world CSR associations have been considered to function as “knowledge institutions,” “global townhalls,” and forums “whose story is a story of the power of words, ideas and discourse” (Pigman 2007, 3). We submit that world CSR associations, which foster corporate-centric multi-stakeholder dialogue, are able to promote both engagement in the institutional models that constitute the global CSR movement and CSR performance as perceived by leading CSR rating agencies.

While international organizations have been shown to mediate globalization processes, they nevertheless vary in their structures, histories, geographic roots, issue areas, goals, sizes, and resource levels. They range from intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations to industry associations, sports associations, activist groups, and hobby organizations (Union of International Associations 2014). Differences in the types and structures of these international organizations are likely to have distinct ways of impacting global processes. Intergovernmental organizations, for instance, may structure global networks in regionally concentrated ways (Beckfield 2010) when compared with smaller nongovernmental organizations whose influence is more indirect and diffuse (Hironaka 2014). Organizations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (Chorev and Babb 2009) represent powerful governmental interests in the design of global policies, relying on member contributions and complex voting mechanisms and rule structures, while smaller nongovernmental organizations often struggle to survive as organizational entities. Cataloguing the full range of participatory models across international organizations is beyond the scope of the present paper, but we do submit that one crucial distinction among international organizations is their *mobilizing structure*. Further, we submit that some mobilizing structures may be more effective in diffusing global models as well as improving perceived performance in organizations that adopt those models.

The imagery of mobilizing structures is, of course, not new to scholars of social movements. In this literature, mobilizing structures are “collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 3), and scholars have more recently applied the concept to the study of CSR (King 2008). Mobilizing structures allow movement participants to air grievances, pool resources, and act collectively to address specific issues that may be more challenging to tackle individually. Given that international organizations occupy important nexus points in global processes, attention to differences in their mobilizing structures can help shed light on how they shape those global processes, while avoiding the assumption that all international organizations impact globalization in similar

ways. Differences in resources, modes of participation, and institution-building strategies can significantly influence how effective international organizations are in promoting their objectives (Babb 2007; Chorev 2005). We believe that this observation is an important corrective to the sociological literature on international organizations, especially in the world society approach, which makes important assumptions about the capacity of international organizations to facilitate globalization processes (Meyer et al. 1997) but does not further examine exactly how they do so.

Mindful of these observations, we highlight that world CSR associations act as mobilizing structures for their business participants to respond to growing concerns with businesses' social and environmental practices. Two organizational objectives are particularly salient here. First, the world CSR associations seek to increase their participants' CSR engagement. The world CSR associations act as institutional channels for the transmission of global norms and rules that rationalize business orientations to corporate responsibility. To the extent that world CSR associations are effective in this stated mission, they increase engagement among their participants in policies and frameworks that explicitly codify CSR principles and practices. These policies could consist of association-specific codes of conduct (Bartley 2007) or frameworks already codified by other international organizations like the United Nations (Lim and Tsutsui 2012). Engagement with these CSR concerns, however, does not necessarily imply CSR performance on key social and environmental parameters (Berliner and Prakash 2015). Second, therefore, world CSR associations aim to improve their members' substantive practices. Because organizational policies, disclosures, and initiative affiliations often diverge considerably from actual practices (Brunsson 2002), organizations act collectively to construct narratives that draw on understandings within their external cultural environment to legitimize the performance of their efforts (Meyer and Rowan 1977). To the extent that world CSR associations are effective in mobilizing businesses around progressive notions of environmental and social conduct, stakeholders and audiences are likely to perceive their members to be aligned with global expectations of corporate responsibility.

Convocational, Honorific, and Participatory Structures: Main Hypotheses

In our paper, we classify the three world CSR associations by their mobilizing structures, distinguishing three types: convocational, honorific, and participatory structures. Table 1 describes how we conceive these distinctions as mapping onto the world business associations and how these structures serve to integrate businesses into the CSR movement according to the concepts of ceremony (symbolic or discursive displays of commitment) and substance (actual practices that promote CSR objectives in tangible ways). Core to the notion of decoupling in institutional theory (Meyer and Rowan 1977), ceremony and substance align differentially in the world business associations, with the WEF emphasizing ceremony over substance, the honorific structure of the IBLF emphasizing substance (on the part of

Table 1. Summary of the Hypotheses

Mobilizing structure	Mobilizing structure			Corporate members	
	Locus of implementation	Ceremony	Substance	Issue engagement	Issue performance
Convocational	Practitioners & members	+	0	+	0
Honorific	Practitioners	0	+	0/+	0
Participatory	Members	+	+	+	+

Note: While participation in the honorific structure is itself evidence of issue engagement, this participation would not be expected to generate much additional issue engagement.

the forum itself) over ceremony, and the standing council of the WBCSD more closely aligning ceremony with substance. Table 1 presents our related expectations for CSR engagement and perceived CSR performance on the part of the forums’ members, which we discuss in more detail in the hypotheses below.

Convocational Mobilizing Structures

International organizations with convocational mobilizing structures channel the activities of their participants toward the public display of engagement with global issues and the articulation of policy responses. As a world CSR association, the World Economic Forum (WEF) is an example of such a mobilizing structure. It functions to convene a large, four-day annual conference in Davos, Switzerland, with major corporations, government figures, activist organizations, and even media and celebrities as participants. Founded in 1971 as the European Management Forum, the organization changed its name to World Economic Forum in 1987 as it broadened its scope to include issues of global concern such as sustainable development and the avoidance of international conflict. The annual conference of the WEF consists of dozens of sessions that highlight sustainability and geopolitical issues as well as the construction of positions, strategies, and responses from the international business community. The annual conference is a publicly visible forum that has generated widespread global media coverage as well as social movement protests (Della Porta et al. 2006). Core to the convocational activities of the WEF is the generation of narratives and practices that rationalize business approaches to corporate responsibility issues. As existing approaches among business participants may be inconsistent, ineffectual, or simply at odds with responsible corporate behavior, the convocational function of this mobilizing structure seeks to generate common ground among participants by encouraging them to engage in CSR initiatives and make changes to their CSR practices to signal to key audiences that they are expending some effort to tackle CSR issues (Lim and Tsutsui 2012). As such, we expect membership in convocational structures like the WEF to encourage CSR engagement in leading global CSR initiatives.

Convocational mobilizing structures may channel business participants toward CSR engagement, but these mobilizing structures may face scrutiny about whether the resulting engagement constitutes anything more than just symbolic efforts. The WEF, in particular, has been criticized for being, primarily and somewhat deceptively, a lobbyist organization (Pigman 2007). The typical WEF participant, meanwhile, has been caricatured as the “Davos Man,” a self-serving representative of the global business elite who is not beholden to national interests or loyalties (Huntington 2004). Unlike smaller conferences (Hardy and Maguire 2010), the WEF may fail to generate any significant “follow through” on members’ initial commitments (Seyfang 2003). Furthermore, member interaction in the WEF is highly circumscribed in the format of a four-day event. While this convocational association has generated effusive dialogue around pressing social and economic topics, its sheer size and its short duration limit the potential for the dialogue to become embedded in actual practices (Graz 2003, 332). These observations are consistent with institutional scholarship arguing that ceremonialism in organizations is often accompanied by a decoupling of policy and practice (Bromley and Powell 2012). Such criticisms of the WEF motivate our expectation that convocational mobilizing structures generate the decoupling of CSR adoption from the perceived quality of the related practices, emphasizing ceremony over substance. Thus, although convocational mobilizing structures like the WEF may encourage greater adoption of CSR policies, this will likely not result in an increase in the performance of those efforts as assessed by external audiences.

H1a: Business participants in convocational mobilizing structures are more likely to have higher CSR engagement, as compared with non-participants and participants in other structures.

H1b: Business participation in convocational mobilizing structures are not more likely to have CSR practices with higher perceived performance, as compared with non-participants and participants in other structures.

Honorific Mobilizing Structures

International organizations that utilize honorific mobilizing structures pool resources from their participants to promote organizational objectives. In the case of some world CSR associations, business participants generally do not directly participate in the related CSR activities other than through their financial contributions, often through membership dues or donations to the association. Participants in these CSR associations are “honored” for their financial contributions that are then administered by the organization itself toward CSR efforts. Such organizations were acknowledged by Putnam’s (2000) work on the evolution of civic engagement in America in which associations promoting direct membership interaction had given way to tertiary organizations where membership is an “honorific rhetorical device for fundraising” (Walker, McCarthy, and Baumgartner 2011, 1288).

The International Business Leaders Forum is a particularly salient example of an organization with an honorific mobilizing structure. The IBLF was founded by the Prince of Wales in 1990 with a broad developmental agenda, focusing on business standards, human capital, prosperity, the environment, and stakeholder partnerships.¹¹ The IBLF is known partly for fostering member interaction through annual meetings, but more so for being a hub of CSR-related activities and research funded by but not necessarily involving its business participants. Some IBLF activities resemble traditional non-profit work that is administered by the organization rather than its members, such as the Youth Career Initiative, which helps disadvantaged youth from developing countries gain professional skills in the hospitality industry in wealthy nations. Other IBLF activities relate to pressing geopolitical problems, such as the Business Standards initiative that seeks to reduce corruption in Russia and China. While many of these activities (such as the Partnering Initiative) seek to forge multi-stakeholder dialogue, the dialogue does not necessarily take place among IBLF members but among ad hoc groups of civil society, government, and business that are addressed generally to developmental problems in poorer nations. According to its financial statements, the primary source of IBLF income is corporate donations, for which membership is granted as an honorific device. Of these donations, less than 25 percent is used directly for developing partnerships among corporate members and civil society. Most revenue, rather, goes to paying staff, securing future donations, governing the organization, CSR education, charitable projects, and performing research and communication (see IBLF profile in [Grayson and Nelson 2013](#)). While such initiatives may have had broader developmental impacts, they do not necessarily have an internal impact on IBLF membership, given that the mobilizing structure does not feature extensive member interaction.

While the IBLF is able to communicate the impacts of its pro-social activities to its corporate members through annual reports, this communication is unlikely to generate much diffusion of CSR frameworks among those members. We submit that participants in associations with honorific mobilizing structures are not more likely to have higher CSR engagement due to their membership because the participation amounts to little more than a donation or membership dues. Furthermore, if the IBLF confers legitimacy on their members through this process, business participants will likely see the participation in subsequent CSR initiatives as unnecessary since their financial contributions will suffice as CSR efforts. In the absence of additional CSR engagement beyond financial contributions, external audiences may perceive these businesses' financial largesse in supporting CSR-related endeavors as "giving back" to the community, but not necessarily as promoting perceived CSR performance.

H2a: Business participants in honorific mobilizing structures are not more likely to have higher CSR engagement, as compared with non-participants and participants in other structures.

H2b: Business participants in honorific mobilizing structures are not more likely to have CSR practices with higher perceived performance, as compared with non-participants and participants in other structures.

Participatory Mobilizing Structures

In international organizations that comprise participatory mobilizing structures, participants have direct engagement with the activities of the organization, including crafting policies and administering their practice. Unlike the WEF or IBLF, which are administered primarily by practitioners, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development is organized as a standing corporate issue council where participants meet regularly. The WBCSD was created in 1992 in Geneva, Switzerland, from a merger of the World Industry Council for the Environment and the Business Council for Sustainable Development, and it is structured around issue-specific and corporate-led activities (WBCSD 2002). In terms of issue specificity, other world CSR associations like the WEF or IBLF often focus on activities beyond CSR issues. For instance, the WEF also makes recommendations on geopolitical issues while the IBLF's philanthropic contributions are more similar to traditional non-profit work. By contrast, the WBCSD has focused on sustainability issues since its inception. With its participatory structure, the WBCSD is the only world CSR association administered by its corporate members. Its leadership consists of an executive council of about fifteen CEOs of leading corporations that are elected by their peers to serve staggered terms and to set the agenda of the association. The executive council meets a minimum of three times per year, which is more frequent than the other world CSR associations. The WBCSD has also committed to limiting the size of its general membership to less than 200 companies to ensure that participant interaction is dense and meaningful.

Given this participatory structure, the WBCSD generates more direct attention to CSR issues among its members. Because the WBCSD creates more involved, CSR-specific, and dense engagement (Holliday, Schmidheiny, and Watts 2002), we expect that members' CSR engagement in leading international CSR initiatives will be more extensive. This is consistent with institutional perspectives on organizations that argue that dense interaction within organizational fields generates similarities in practices, mainly through mimetic or normative processes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Furthermore, although the WBCSD is a publicly visible organization (Najam 1999), its participatory mobilizing structure is less focused on convocational events or deploying contributions from its participants. External audiences, stakeholders, and social movement organizations have been shown to pay close attention to CSR organizations (King 2008; Rodriguez-Garavito 2005) and are adept at pointing out discrepancies between public pronouncements and actual practice. As such, by channeling more direct participation among its members toward CSR activities, we also expect that business participation in international organizations with participatory mobilizing structures will be viewed as having stronger CSR practices by external audiences.

H3a: Business participants in participatory mobilizing structures are more likely to have higher CSR engagement, as compared with non-participants and participants in other structures.

H3b: Business participants in participatory mobilizing structures are more likely to be perceived as having high-quality CSR performance, as compared with non-participants and participants in other structures.

Data and Methods

We test these hypotheses about the effect of participation in world CSR associations on CSR adoption and the perceived quality of those practices by assembling a unique dataset with large international corporations as the unit of analysis. The sample includes all companies that were members in any year since 1999 in any of the world business associations. To draw comparison cases (companies that were non-members in all years), we use the 2010 *Fortune* Global 500, a ranking of worldwide public and private companies by revenue. While this grouping of companies appears in much previous work, it has several limitations. One is that the Global 500 excludes many companies with large assets but small revenues (typically financial companies) (Carroll and Sapinski 2010, 512). A second limitation is that while all companies in the Global 500 are large, not all are highly international. Rather, many are nationally oriented, state-owned enterprises such as the China Post Group and the People's Insurance Company of China. Therefore, we supplemented the 2010 Global 500 with comparison companies that appeared in any annual list from 2000 to 2013 of the "100 Largest Transnational Companies," produced by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The list ranks the top hundred companies worldwide according to the average of each company's percent of overseas revenue, overseas employees, and overseas assets. The sample also includes any company appearing in any of these additional lists: Top 100 Transnationals from Developing Countries, Top 100 Financial Transnationals, and Top 10 Transnationals from Eastern Europe. Combining these samples with the association members and the Global 500 companies that are non-members yields a final sample of 1,713 companies (of which 1,006 are publicly traded companies with non-missing data for at least one year of analysis). Table 2 provides a summary of the names, sources, and descriptions of all variables used in the analysis.

Independent Variables: Membership in World CSR Associations

The three world business associations (WBCSD, IBLF, and WEF) that we analyze in this paper fit Grayson and Nelson's (2013, 3) definition and are each well recognized as CSR associations, with entries in nearly all major CSR guidebooks (Visser et al. 2010). Membership data from these associations permit time-series analysis given that each association has nearly or more than a hundred members and has been in operation for more than ten years. We coded membership in the world CSR associations as three separate binary variables, equal to 1 for "members" of the WBCSD, "principal partners," "council partners," or "global partners" of the IBLF, or "strategic partners" of the WEF. Where available, we obtained yearly membership rosters from the annual reports of the world CSR

Table 2. Measures in the Regression Analyses

Measure	Years available	Provider	Corporate members (2013)	Notes
WEF Membership	1999–2014	WEF	110	Lagged; “Strategic partners” on current and archived WEF websites or historical WEF annual reports, pamphlets, and other official materials.
WBCSD membership	1999–2014	WBCSD	182	Lagged; “Members” on current and archived WBCSD websites or on historical WBCSD annual reports, pamphlets, and other official materials.
IBLF membership	1999–2013	IBLF	97	Lagged; “principal,” “council,” or “global” partners on current and archived IBLF websites or historical IBLF annual reports, pamphlets, and other official materials.
CDP membership	2003–2013	Carbon Disclosure Project	2330	Equals 1 in years a company returns the CDP survey; 0 in years companies received, but did not return, the CDP survey; dropped from analysis for companies not sent the survey. Includes only public companies.
Global Compact membership	2000–2014	Office of the United Nations Global Compact	10,014	Coded for event history analysis. Equals 1 the year a company joins the GC (dropped from analysis thereafter); equals 0 in years a company has not yet joined the GC. Includes public and private companies.
GRI membership	1999–2014	Global Reporting Initiative	3,995	Equals 1 for companies that submit a GRI report in a given year. Includes public and private companies.

(Continued)

Table 2. continued

Measure	Years available	Provider	Corporate members (2013)	Notes
Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index	2008–2013	Carbon Disclosure Project	60	Equals 1 for honorees in a given year and 0 otherwise. Includes only public companies.
Global 100 Most Sustainable Cos.	2005–2013	<i>Corporate Knights</i> Magazine	100	Equals 1 for honorees in a given year and 0 otherwise. Includes only public companies.
Global Green Rankings	2011–2013	<i>Newsweek</i> Magazine & Corporate Knights Capital	500	The organization's rank on the list in a given year, reverse-coded to ease interpretation. Non-ranked companies are dropped from analysis. Includes only public companies.
FTSE4Good Index	2001–2013	FTSE Group & Ethical Investment Research Service	749	Equals 1 for companies included in the index in a given year. Only public companies are included in the relevant models. Problematic industries are dropped from analysis.
Dow Jones Sustainability Index	1999–2013	S&P Dow Jones Indices & Sustainable Asset Management	333	Equals 1 for companies included in the index in a given year. Only public companies are included in the relevant models. Problematic industries are dropped from the analysis.
KLD Ratings	1999–2014	MSCI Inc.	3,000	The count of CSR strengths and of CSR weaknesses across the major dimensions of employee relations, corporate governance, community, diversity, environment, human rights, products.

associations and otherwise from year-end websites compiled by an Internet digital archive. We are able to include membership in each association as a separate independent variable because world CSR association memberships have low correlation with one another.

Dependent Variables

We indicate *CSR engagement* as participation in three of the most prominent global CSR initiatives: the Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative, and Carbon Disclosure Project. The three global CSR initiatives are each pan-industry, have international participation, and have been in operation for ten years or more. They are among the largest CSR initiatives in the world by corporate membership, which in each case has increased in less than a decade from a handful to several thousand companies.¹² We test the effects of business participation in world CSR associations on these dependent variables in separate regression models.

The first global CSR initiative, the Carbon Disclosure Project (2003, based in the UK), is a consortium of more than 600 institutional investors managing more than \$78 trillion in assets. The initiative administers annual surveys directly to companies that request data on energy consumption, water use, and pollution emissions. Responses from companies in more than 70 countries are compiled and published in an online database for use by activists and climatologists (Winston 2010).

Based in Amsterdam and founded in 1999, the Global Reporting Initiative is a non-profit organization that promulgates guidelines by which companies report on their social and environmental practices. Now in their third iteration, with each version requiring more detailed disclosures, the guidelines cover such topics as how to report biodiversity impacts and how to measure materials consumption (Brown, de Jong, and Lessidrenska 2009). The initiative has over 6,000 participants from more than 60 countries. The UN Global Compact, the OECD, and ISO often promote Global Reporting Initiative guidelines as templates for corporate disclosure.

Administered by the United Nations and having more than 6,000 members from more than 130 countries, the Global Compact requires its members to report annually against a set of ten broad principles of corporate social responsibility (Kell and Levin 2003). Since its launch in 1999 by then-Secretary General Kofi Annan at the WEF, the initiative has developed into a large-scale, well-funded, and very international initiative. Principles of the initiative cover labor, corruption, human rights, and the natural environment. Often considered to be a platform primarily for increasing multi-stakeholder dialogue (Rasche 2009; Ruggie 2001), the Global Compact has attracted criticism in scholarly work that participation is mostly a ceremonial endeavor and does not necessarily lead to concrete changes in corporations' human rights and environmental practices (Berliner and Prakash 2015).

Our second set of dependent variables measure the *perceived performance of CSR practices* by business participants' external audiences. There are ongoing debates about the measurement of CSR practices and performance (Dahlsrud 2008;

Chatterji, Levine, and Toffel 2009; Wood 2010), especially at the global level, where CSR norms vary dramatically by nation (Chen and Bouvain 2008; Jamali and Neville 2011). Since this has resulted in the proliferation of very disparate CSR rankings, indices, and ratings at the international level (Scalet and Kelly 2009), we are careful to discuss our measures as perceived rather than actual CSR performance. We approached the problem of measuring CSR performance by gathering all international and publicly available CSR performance indicators from the population of the eighteen most credible CSR metrics, as reported in a recent survey of business, government, academia, and non-profit sectors across seventy countries (Globescan 2012). From this population, we selected six CSR evaluation schemes from the survey that are not industry specific and whose data is in the public domain (with the exception of the KLD ratings, which we obtained through our university libraries). We excluded from the list, for example, the Access to Medicine Index, which evaluates only pharmaceutical companies. Rather than using only one measure of perceived CSR performance as the dependent variable, we use a half dozen to bolster the robustness of our findings (cf. Chatterji et al. 2015). Four of the six indicators we employ are measures of corporations' general CSR performance and are multidimensional metrics so as not to bias their measures toward or against participation in any specific world CSR association. Our CSR performance measures include company listings on FTSE4Good and the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (two international socially responsible investment indices), the list of the Global 100 Most Sustainable Companies, the Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index, the rankings position in *Newsweek's* annual lists of World's Most Green Companies, and the count of CSR strengths and concerns by KLD analytics.¹³

Control Variables

Many studies theorize a relationship between CSR engagement/performance and firm size (e.g., Stanwick and Stanwick 1998; Udayasankar 2008). We measure firm size as annual revenues in year-end US dollars, logging the variable to reduce its skewness (source of revenues in order of preference: Capital IQ, Thomson Reuters, Compustat, and *Fortune* Global 500 lists). In the models with dependent variables that are non-stationary, such as CSR indices (e.g., FTSE4Good) and CSR initiatives (e.g., the Global Compact) in which membership has increased throughout the window of observation, we add year dummy variables. Other controls are the regions reported by Capital IQ (Africa and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the United States and Canada) and the ten sectors of the Global Industrial Classification Scheme, recognizing the well-documented variation in CSR practices across countries and industries (Matten and Moon 2008).

Models

All key independent variables are time varying, measured in yearly intervals from 1999 to 2014. All key independent variables are lagged by one year to

guard against endogeneity. The OLS models have robust standard errors clustered by country to guard against heteroskedasticity. The logistic models have robust standard errors using the jackknife procedure. Diagnostic tests for influential cases do not raise concerns. Poisson regressions are used to predict KLD strengths and weaknesses since these are count variables in which the variance does not exceed the mean (per Table 3). The model predicting Global Compact membership is a panel logit that predicts years to joining the Global Compact by including three splines to model duration dependence as suggested by [Beck, Katz, and Tucker \(1998\)](#). Although the Global Compact could be modeled similarly to the Global Reporting Initiative, given that both initiatives require yearly CSR reports, we have modeled the Global Compact to exclude years after joining rather than by predicting annual reporting because the Global Compact reporting requirement began only five years after the initiative was launched (1999 versus 2004) and because of the complicating factor that new members are exempted from the reporting requirement for a grace period that has changed from two years to one over the history of the initiative.

To strengthen causal influence, in addition to our parametric OLS, Poisson, and discrete-time models, we performed regressions using case-control matching of world CSR association members with non-members. For each year under analysis, we matched members with non-members who are located in the same world region and operate in the same industrial sector and have approximately the same prior-year revenues, as determined by the default coarsened exact matching algorithm of [Iacus, King, and Porro \(2012\)](#). To address potential selection biases related to CSR performance in the world CSR associations, we also match, depending on the dependent variable, on previous-year CSR initiative membership or perceived CSR performance. These models analyze whether, for companies of a similar size, location, industry, and previous-year CSR engagement and perceived performance, membership in a world business association, compared to non-membership, results in additional improvements in CSR engagement and perceived performance.

Given that statistical results are often sensitive to statistical assumptions ([Young 2009](#)), we performed a series of robustness checks to the base models to ensure that our results are stable under different modeling assumptions. In all cases, the general findings remain substantially similar under alternative statistical treatments. These robustness checks are available in the online appendix.

Results

Univariate and correlation statistics appear in table 3. Correlation statistics in all cases do not raise concerns about multicollinearity. The positive, significant correlations among and within CSR policies and evaluation indicators lend support to the idea that these indicators are tapping the same latent constructs. Correlation statistics also reveal that business participation in a world CSR association correlates positively and significantly with nearly all indicators of both CSR engagement and perceived CSR performance. However, in nearly all cases, WBCSD participation correlates more strongly with CSR engagement and

Table 3. Univariate Statistics and Pairwise Correlation Matrix

	Univariate statistics				Correlation matrix												
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 IBLF member	0.05	0.22	0.00	1.00													
2 WBCSD member	0.11	0.32	0.00	1.00	.11*												
3 WEF member	0.07	0.26	0.00	1.00	.14*	.06*											
4 CDP member	0.44	0.49	0.00	1.00	.08*	.22*	.03*										
5 Global Compact	0.14	0.32	0.00	1.00	.02	.05*	.02*	.10*									
6 Global Reporting Initiative	0.18	0.32	0.00	1.00	.08*	.24*	.07*	.22*	-.06*								
7 Global 100	0.05	0.18	0.00	1.00	.09*	.13*	.03*	.13*	.07*	.15*							
8 CDLI	0.04	0.16	0.00	1.00	.10*	.15*	.10*	.12*	.01	.14*	.12*						
9 DJSI	0.15	0.31	0.00	1.00	.12*	.22*	.07*	.27*	.12*	.28*	.26*	.21*					
10 FTSE4Good	0.21	0.36	0.00	1.00	.12*	.13*	.07*	.21*	.10*	.21*	.26*	.23*	.38*				
11 <i>Newsweek</i> Green Rankings	226.1	131.5	1.00	500	-.11*	.01	.04	.35*	.03	.07	.23*	.18*	.26*	.33*			
12 KLD Total Strengths	4.93	3.89	0.00	22.00	.02*	.03*	.01	.11*	-.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	-.07		
13 KLD Total Concerns	4.14	3.24	0.00	18.00	.26*	.28*	.23*	.37*	.15*	.51*	.21*	.14*	.27*	.23*	.36*	.34*	
14 Revenues (bn)	29.00	27.67	0.00	470.2	.18*	.28*	.09*	.12*	.09*	.14*	.08*	.12*	.03	-.05*	-.11	.53*	.39*

Note: * $p < .05$. Reported revenues are unlogged to ease interpretation. The independent variables have been lagged to match their treatment in the panel regressions. See the online appendix for the sample breakdown by headquarters nation and industrial sector.

performance than does IBLF and WEF participation, lending support to H3a and H3b.

In table 4, the results of the regression analyses generally affirm the findings of the bivariate analyses above. The first three columns regress indicators of business participation in world CSR associations on CSR engagement, while the remaining columns regress world CSR association participation on business' perceived CSR performance. Results indicate that membership in convocational structures (WEF) is positive and significant on CSR engagement (i.e., the Global Compact and Global Reporting Initiative) but only for CSR performance as measured by the Carbon Disclosure Index and the FTSE4Good Index (supporting H1a but only partially H1b). Membership in honorific structures (IBLF) does not have consistent or significant results for either engagement or performance measures (largely supporting H2a and H2b). Membership in participatory structures (WBCSD) has a positive, significant effect in increasing adoption of the Global Compact and Global Reporting initiative while also being positive and significant across a wider range of engagement measures (strongly supporting H3a and H3b). The magnitude of WBCSD coefficients, in these models and the others, tends to be much larger and much more significant than the coefficients for the other mobilizing structures. This strongly suggests that participatory mobilizing structures are more effective, not only compared to non-participants in such structures, but also to participation in the other mobilizing structures.

Across all models, WBCSD participation coefficients are relatively larger, more consistently positive, and nearly always statistically significant (with the exception of the Green Global Rankings, where the effect is large at 23 rankings places but insignificant). For example, the models that predict KLD ratings show that WBCSD participation increases the number of perceived strengths while not increasing the number of perceived concerns. Interpreting KLD coefficients as the log of the expected count of the outcome variable when the other predictor variables are held constant, for a company with the mean count of CSR strengths (about 5; logged value about 1.61), participation in the WBCSD associates with an increase ($p < .001$) in the log of the expected count of about .15 (which added to 1.61 is about 1.76, the latter of which approximates an unlogged count of about 5.78). Notably, participation in the WBCSD strongly predicts environmental performance as seen in the results for engagement with the Carbon Disclosure Project and performance in the Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index, which is probably attributable to the WBCSD's strong emphasis on environmental sustainability.

In the case-matching models, the positive significant association of the WBCSD with both CSR engagement and perceived CSR performance remains (with the exception that Global Compact participation and the FTSE4Good index become insignificant), whereas there is only a sporadic association with the CSR measures for the other mobilizing structures. We note that WEF membership also has a positive effect on two measures of CSR performance (FTSE4Good and the Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index) in the OLS models but not in the case-matching models. This suggests that convocational structures

Table 4. Models Predicting CSR Adoption and External Evaluations from World CSR Association membership, 2000–2014

	CSR engagement			CSR perceived performance						
	Carbon Disclosure Project	Global Compact	Global Reporting Initiative	Carb. Discl. Leadership Index	Dow Jones Sustain. Index	FTSE4-Good Index	Global 100 Most Sustain. Index	Global Green Rankings	KLD Total CSR Strengths	KLD Total CSR Concerns
Panel A. Regression										
World business forums										
IBLF	−0.37 (0.45)	−0.53 (0.36)	−0.02 (0.26)	0.62 (0.42)	0.18 (0.25)	0.17 (0.29)	0.21 (0.30)	13.72 (20.98)	0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)
WEF	−0.17 (0.35)	0.59* (0.24)	0.58** (0.21)	0.90* (0.41)	0.27 (0.22)	0.48* (0.23)	−0.28 (0.29)	−11.81 (17.05)	−0.02 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)
WBCSD	3.41*** (0.63)	0.48* (0.21)	0.73*** (0.18)	1.65*** (0.33)	1.19*** (0.17)	0.57** (0.20)	1.10*** (0.22)	23.26 (16.77)	0.15*** (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)
Revenues (log)	0.71*** (0.10)	0.34*** (0.06)	0.72*** (0.09)	1.04*** (0.15)	0.70*** (0.07)	0.57*** (0.08)	0.38*** (0.09)	−4.72 (5.17)	0.18*** (0.02)	0.32*** (0.02)
Constant	−3.93*** (1.68)	−6.13*** (0.98)	−8.36*** (0.54)	−16.65*** (1.74)	−13.53*** (1.32)	−8.19*** (1.45)	−9.72*** (1.57)	176.89 (69.37)	−1.29 (0.81)	−3.61*** (0.59)
Sector dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time controls	Dummies	3 splines	Dummies	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Dummies	Dummies

Company-years	4,913	9,780	6,982	5,325	11,695	11,468	9,988	1,060	2,271	2,271
Log-likelihood	−1307.42	−1274.88	−2034.46	−597.20	−2537.19	−2367.96	−1373.38	.12 (R ²)	−4614.92	−4204.39
Regression type	Logistic	Log. Fal. ⁶	Logistic	Logistic	Logistic	Logistic	Logistic	OLS	Poisson	Poisson
Years under analysis	2005–2014	2000–2014	2000–2014	2008–2013	2000–2013	2001–2013	2005–2013	2011–2014	1999–2014	1999–2014
Panel B. Case-matching models										
World business forum										
IBLF	0.01 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)	17.62 (18.88)	0.76 (0.47)	−0.17 (0.37)
WEF	−0.01 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03* (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	10.45 (14.27)	0.39 (0.33)	0.21 (0.26)
WBCSD	0.07*** (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.15** (0.06)	0.02 (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	14.51 (10.63)	0.65* (0.31)	0.08 (0.26)
Sector matching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Region matching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prior-year CSR perform. matching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

(Continued)

Table 4. *continued*

	CSR engagement			CSR perceived performance						
	Carbon Disclosure Project	Global Compact	Global Reporting Initiative	Carb. Discl. Leadership Index	Dow Jones Sustain. Index	FTSE4-Good Index	Global 100 Most Sustain. Index	Global Green Rankings	KLD Total CSR Strengths	KLD Total CSR Concerns
Year matching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Revenue matching	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note: Reported coefficients unstandardized; standard errors in parentheses; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Hubert-White standard errors for the OLS regressions and jackknife standard errors for the logistic and Poisson regressions. The Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index model, due to a small window of analysis and relatively few index members, does not converge with region or sector dummies. Logistic failure model as described by [Beck, Katz, and Tucker \(1998\)](#).

have some limited effects in improving perceived CSR performance. In the case-matching scenario, IBLF membership is also positive and significant for two CSR performance measures. This suggests that, for business participants matched on key indicators, convocational structures have some limited effects in improving perceived CSR performance and vice versa for honorific structures. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind when interpreting these findings that prior-year CSR performance matching greatly limits the amount of predictable variation, as CSR index members in one year tend to be members in following years.

Overall, especially in the OLS regressions, the results largely support our hypotheses. Convocational structures such as the WEF tend to increase CSR engagement but to have a less discernible effect on perceived CSR performance. Honorific mobilizing structures, which pool resources from members to perform philanthropic work on their behalf, appear not to be associated with subsequent CSR engagement or perceived performance. Finally, participatory structures that are administered by members have robust and consistent effects on both CSR engagement and perceived performance, when compared with non-participants and participants in other mobilizing structures.

Additional Evidence: The Evolving Mobilizing Structure of the WEF

A main argument of ours is that a mobilizing structure is more effective if participants are involved in extensive interaction with other co-constituents. Our conceptual framework to this point, however, has suggested that mobilizing structures are fixed rather than dynamic. To problematize this assumption, we examine the evolution of the WEF toward a participatory mobilizing structure with greater member interaction. Further supporting our main argument, we show cross-sectionally that WEF members that are the most involved in WEF standing initiatives (in contrast with the annual conference) have the highest assessed performance across numerous CSR dimensions.

While it remains true that the WEF's core feature is its annual mega-conference, its well-publicized convocational effort has funded an overall organizational expansion, reflected by a large increase in revenues, staff, and corporate members (figure A1 in the appendix) along with the development of more standing initiatives that are staffed by full-time WEF associates and operative throughout the year. These new "system initiatives" are fee based, ongoing, collaborative, and grouped into multiple themes, including social inclusion, natural resources, financial and monetary systems, food security, health and healthcare, and international trade. Signaling its transition toward a more participatory model, the WEF elaborated its membership structure in 2015 to include not only strategic partners, but also strategic partner associates, partners, and associate partners. Each membership category now designates a level of participation in the system initiatives, with strategic partners able to participate in up to six system initiatives, but with associate partners eligible for participation in only one initiative (table 5, panel B).

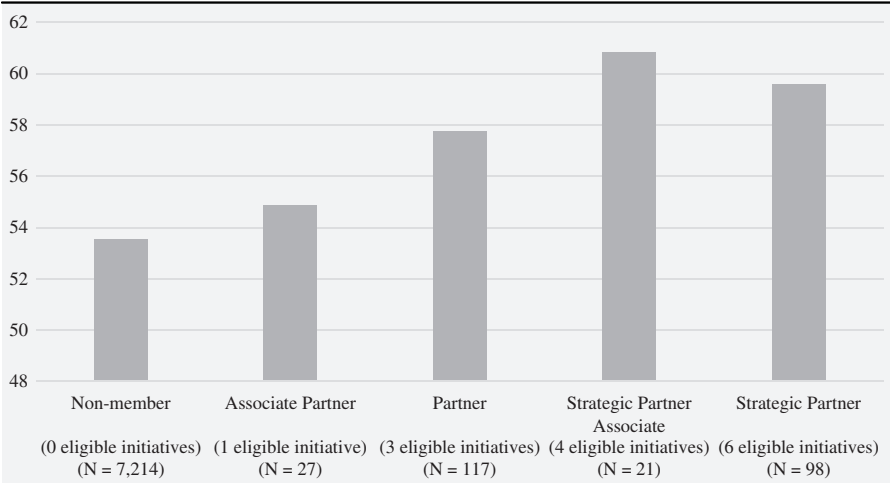
Table 5. Panel A. OLS Regressions Predicting the 2016 Main and Subdimensional CSR scores of CSRHub from the Extent of a Company's Eligible Participation in Initiatives of the World Economic Forum

	Overall Score	Community Score	Employees score	Environment score	Governance score
No. system initiatives with eligible participation	0.79*** (0.09)	0.84*** (0.11)	0.81*** (0.12)	0.97*** (0.11)	0.50*** (0.10)
Revenues (log)	0.42*** (0.05)	-0.44*** (0.06)	0.75*** (0.07)	0.35*** (0.07)	0.95*** (0.07)
2-digit SIC dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	52.93*** (0.99)	53.93*** (2.84)	49.09*** (2.42)	54.31*** (2.83)	41.66*** (3.22)
F	14.57***	14.52***	13.64***	14.92***	24.86***
R ²	0.27	0.27	0.26	.28	0.39
N	5,359	5,205	5,203	5,205	5,204

Note: Reported coefficients unstandardized; standard errors in parentheses; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$. Robust standard errors. Independent variables lagged by one year.

Whereas we previously assumed that all WEF members had the same level of engagement, this recent membership restructuring allows us to test whether variation in engagement levels across membership categories associates with higher CSR performance. To perform this test, we replicate the general approach of our models in table 4 by building OLS regressions with a similar set of controls (see table 5). The sample companies are the 7,478 that have CSR ratings on at least one dimension in the year 2016 in the online database of CSRHub. We utilize CSRHub scores because of their international scope, publicly available data, and granular reporting.¹⁴ To increase the robustness, our models predict not only the overall score, but also its main subdimensions: the areas of community, employees, environment, and governance. For our key independent variable, we use the number of initiatives in which a company is eligible for participation in the year 2015 (to ensure a one-year lag across dependent and independent variables). Non-members in the CSRHub database are coded as being eligible for zero initiatives. The results of this analysis in table 5 show that increased (eligibility for) participation in WEF standing initiatives is positively and significantly associated with highly assessed CSR performance for both the top-line score and its subdimensions. More specifically, compared to non-members, a strategic partner is expected to have a top-line CSR score that is higher than a

Table 5. Panel B. Bar Chart of the 2016 Main CSR scores of CSRHub by Membership Type in the World Economic Forum



Note: Data come from [Grayson and Nelson \(2013\)](#), [Kinderman \(2015\)](#), the CSR associations listed as “Local Networks” on the Global Compact website, and the “Regional Partners” on the WBCSD website.

non-member by about 4.74 points ($= 6 \times 0.79$), which is substantial in magnitude, being about three-quarters of a standard deviation (6.4). While these results are based on cross-sectional data and will need to be replicated as time-series data points are accumulated, these results provide additional support for our general argument that a participatory mobilizing structure is likely to be an effective way of improving member practices in the domain of global corporate responsibility.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this paper indicate that differences in the mobilizing structures of the world CSR associations have divergent effects on members’ CSR practices. Particularly, participation in convocational mobilizing structures like the WEF appears to encourage CSR engagement but have less consistent effects in promoting perceived CSR performance. Participation in honorific structures such as the IBLF appears to encourage neither CSR engagement nor CSR performance. Participation in participatory structures like the WBCSD significantly, consistently, and robustly encourages both CSR framework adoption and perceived CSR performance. These findings suggest that the mobilizing structures of international organizations have considerable but varying influence in shaping subsequent organizational practices and external evaluations of those practices.

Theoretically, these findings have implications for sociological perspectives on how international organizations shape global processes. In approaches such as

the world society perspective, international organizations are considered to shape organizational behavior and domestic policies through their centrality in the affiliative structure of international relations. Nevertheless, these perspectives have neglected differences among international organizations in their internal workings (Chorev and Babb 2009). To redress this omission, we applied the imagery of mobilizing structures from the social movement literature to the global CSR domain to propose that differences in the ways that international organizations structure participation can shape the quality of their members' CSR practices. We distinguished three types of mobilizing structures and demonstrated their differential effects. In particular, our findings suggest that less involved forms of participation have less of an impact on promoting policy adoption or improving external performance assessments. On the other hand, international organizations featuring participatory mobilizing structures, where participants are directly involved in administering the organizations and facilitating organizational policies, encourage *both* the diffusion of policies and the perceived performance of participants' activities across a broader range of practices. We believe that these findings have implications for discussions of organizational decoupling (Bromley and Powell 2012), especially in the context of globalization (Hironaka 2014).

Empirically, our paper is the first comparative, quantitative assessment of the world CSR associations. Case studies have acknowledged the prominence of CSR associations in shaping CSR policies and practice (Pigman 2007), and we add to this literature by accounting for business participation across a broader range of forums, practices, and external rankings. While CSR associations have come under intense scrutiny (Najam 1999; Schneiberg and Bartley 2008), our findings suggest that, rather than assuming all associations have positive or negative implications, differences in organizational design and mobilizing structures can push CSR practices along distinct trajectories. Associations with limited, overly broad, and highly mediated interaction appear less effective in coupling policy adoption with highly assessed practices, while associations with focused and intensive channels for businesses to engage with issues that concern their stakeholders seem better able to integrate both.

Future research can further assess the implications of these findings for global and national CSR associations as well as international organizations that focus on other substantive areas. Apart from the world associations, several university-based CSR associations, such as the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, employ mostly honorific structures, while the Global Compact's many local networks adopt more participatory structures for their participants. United Nations sub-organizations routinely adopt ceremonial mobilizing to galvanize participants around emerging global issues. Ultimately, the structures identified in this paper serve as ideal types—many organizations combine elements of ceremony, honor, and deep interaction—and further research can ascertain how their individual or combined use is salient for organizational objectives.

Using quantitative methodology and a mostly macrosociological perspective, we have not addressed the micro-level mechanisms involved in how world CSR associations promote CSR engagement and CSR performance. Our present

findings could be strengthened with data from practitioner interviews, participant observation, surveys, and other qualitative approaches. We encourage future researchers to gather such data, although we are well aware that gaining access to key international organizations in the world polity may be difficult and costly.

To conclude, world CSR associations occupy a prominent space in the international CSR field, with substantial resources and numerous memberships from leading corporations. As international organizations with considerable influence over the narratives, policies, and practices of corporate responsibility, world CSR associations nonetheless vary in their mobilizing structures by which companies are integrated into CSR movement. This paper has sought to demonstrate how internal structural aspects of world CSR associations channel business participants' CSR policy adoption and performance in distinct ways. As with many aspects of global collective action, meaningful and effective collaboration between global actors often faces institutional obstacles and uncertain legitimacy as perceived by external stakeholder audiences. More scholarly attention to these concerns can shed additional light on the salience of international organizations in shaping the diffusion and quality of socially minded business practices.

Notes

1. While these associations are commonly called “world” or “international” CSR associations, there is some geographic clustering of memberships, which we detail in our online appendix.
2. <http://www.iblfglobal.org/about>.
3. <http://www.wbcsd.org/about.aspx>.
4. <http://www.weforum.org/about/world-economic-forum>.
5. <https://tinyurl.com/kea745j>.
6. <http://www.wbcsd.org/Overview/Resources>.
7. <http://www.iblfglobal.org/resources>.
8. <http://www.cnbc.com/id/45856248>.
9. More detailed charts and figures that illustrate the expansion of the world CSR associations along various key dimensions are included in the online appendix.
10. Specific examples of inter-association collaboration are included in the online appendix.
11. The original iteration of the IBLF ceased in 2013, with its Business Standards and Emerging Markets program now continuing operations as IBLF Global.
12. See the appendix for more detailed information on membership and principles of these global CSR initiatives.
13. See the appendix for more detailed information on membership and principles of these global CSR initiatives.
14. For complete methodology, see <https://www.csrhub.com/content/csrhub-ratings-methodology>.

About the Authors

Shawn Pope graduated from Stanford University in June 2016 with a Masters and PhD in sociology. He is currently an instructor of entrepreneurship at the

Stanford PreCollegiate Summer Institutes while applying for professorships and postdoctoral positions worldwide in business and sociology departments.

Alwyn Lim is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern California. His research interests include globalization, organizations, and institutions. His current work examines the emergence, diffusion, and impact of global corporate responsibility initiatives.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online, <http://sf.oxfordjournals.org/>.

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