

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

in World Politics



 **Tamar
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International Organizations in World Politics

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Preface

As this book was going to press, 195 countries met in Paris under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) to discuss climate change. There, they reached an agreement to work together to slow the increase in the global average temperature, in order to minimize or avoid potentially catastrophic consequences for the planet: severe droughts, rising sea levels, destructive storms, and associated challenges to food and water security. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hailed the agreement as “a monumental triumph for people and our planet.” Laurent Fabius, the French foreign minister presiding over the conference, called the agreement a “historical turning point.” The deal commits every country to take action to address climate change. But the agreement is also voluntary and unenforceable, which means it remains up to the states, supported by other stakeholders, to keep their promises and implement measures that will make a difference. Skeptics immediately expressed concern that the agreement will not go far enough to stop temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius, which scientists estimate as the point of no return.

The simultaneous expressions of euphoria and concern in the aftermath of the UN-sponsored climate negotiations mirror the general consensus about international organizations (IOs). Some people view IOs as essential actors that make a difference by bringing states together to address problems that do not respect national borders. Others view IOs as lacking the necessary power, support, tools, or incentives to make a difference, perhaps even setting the world up for failure.

Are IOs saviors, irrelevant, or even harmful? There is no single answer to this question. There is great variation among IOs and even within a single IO over time or with respect to different issues. There are examples of successful actions and costly mistakes for each IO. The UN may be praised for getting states to negotiate on a number of topics, and it has produced new norms of behavior and even averted conflict. But there are many instances where it failed to act and the cost was human lives and enormous suffering. It is also case that IO failures tend to make global headlines, whereas the many successes, often small in scope, are likely to go unnoticed beyond the local population. There are also different ways of defining success and failure, as the Paris agreement underscores. Many would argue that the mere fact the UN brought so many countries together, and that they agreed on something in principle, is success in and of itself. Others would claim that success has only one measure: if the accord paves the way for the world to avoid the catastrophic changes that will result from excessive warming.

Approach and Organization of the Book

The book is premised on the belief that IOs play a critical role in global governance, even if their performance is mixed across institutions, issues, and time. IOs offer fora for

cooperation, provide expertise, initiate ideas and agendas, disseminate knowledge, encourage collaboration, and implement policies, programs, and projects. They can be found working to avert or end a conflict; vaccinating children; helping farmers with their crops; stopping the contagion of a financial crisis or a virus; bringing clean water to a village or saving tigers. They are involved in all the pressing issues of our time: the global environment, trade, terrorism, health, security, development, education, human rights, conflict resolution, agriculture, migration, crime, and more. Indeed, it is difficult to find a transboundary issue that that some IO somewhere is *not* engaged in. Nonetheless IO involvement does not necessarily mean the problem is solved, or is even properly addressed.

How can we understand the role of IOs in global governance? The purpose of the book is to give the reader a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of major IOs and their evolving role in international politics and global governance. It does so by first, in chapters 1 and 2, looking at the big picture—how to conceptualize IOs and their roles in the world, and different ways scholars, mainly in international relations, have thought about and debated the importance of IOs. IOs operate in a broader and more complex institutional landscape of global governance, constantly interacting with states, other IOs, civil society, business groups, philanthropists, networks of national officials, and other actors to confront the problems facing the world. States remain the most powerful actors in international politics, although a number of scholars and others are questioning whether this is changing. While the most powerful states remain critically important to the success or failure of an IO, they do not always get what they want and they are not always the most influential players among the many stakeholders that may converge around a specific issue. IOs also have different degrees of flexibility as actors in their own right.

Chapters 3-10 focus on the most influential IOs: the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO). Each IO is covered in a pair of chapters. The first chapter contains the “nuts and bolts” of the IO, beginning with the circumstances surrounding its origin. What prompted states to create the IO? How is it structured and governed? What does it actually do, and has its work changed over time? How has the IO performed? What are some different perspectives on its actions and effectiveness? The chapters show how this diverse set of organizations share several common challenges, including how to adapt to a changing world and how to remain relevant and legitimate while doing so.

The second chapter in each pair presents a case study that explores an important but difficult issue that IO has faced. The case studies cover a wide range of topics and help the reader to understand how complicated the issues, politics, and IO responses are in situations where there are no easy answers. Chapter 4 is a case study of the UN's failure to act in the Rwandan genocide of the mid-1990s, where tens of thousands of people were massacred in 100 days. Why did the UN, and the world, do so little? Chapter 6 examines the World Bank's zigzag performance in addressing major environmental issues. The World Bank has been a leader in global environmental governance while simultaneously it has been accused of causing environmental destruction. Chapter 8 reviews the IMF's role in the 2008 global financial crisis. Before the crisis erupted, the IMF was allegedly losing credibility and relevance. The crisis dramatically changed the IMF, infusing it with fresh life and importance as the centerpiece of global economic governance. How well did it perform? Chapter 10 examines the WTO's actions in the area where intellectual property rights, trade, and access to medicine interact. Balancing intellectual property rights with human health can literally be a matter of life and death.

Regional organizations are a category of IOs that deserve their own attention. Chapter 11 looks broadly at regional organizations, their roles in global governance, and the debates about them. The chapter focuses on the European Union (EU), the most innovative and powerful organization among the regionals. To illuminate a major challenge the EU is facing today, the chapter examines the euro crisis. Chapter 12 offers a case study of the peace operations of the African Union (AU). The AU moved away from its predecessor's emphasis on the principle of *non-interference* in member states, adopting instead the principle of *non-indifference*. The chapter describes and evaluates how successful the AU's peace operations have been in managing conflict in the region while pursuing a new commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

As long as we need global cooperation to work toward global solutions, IOs have a vital role to play. IOs will never exist in a vacuum, and their successes and failures are inextricably linked to the political will of their member states, and increasingly influenced by actions from other actors as well. Over a half century ago, the pioneer IO scholar Inis Claude, Jr. observed that IOs are a response "to the challenging problems and terrible dangers of international life in an era of increasing interdependence." His words still hold true today.¹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The world of people who study international organizations, work in them, or interact with them in other ways, often finds itself divided into communities or networks that focus on the smaller picture—an individual organization, region, or issue area—rather than a more holistic view across a range of organizations. This is especially true in the scholarly world. I want to thank CQ Press, consequently, for giving me the opportunity to write a book that allowed me to take more of a bird's eye view, while simultaneously exploring some of the most important IOs more in-depth. Special thanks to Charisse Kiino at SAGE, who supported this project at every step of the way. I also want to express my gratitude to Martha Finnemore for connecting me with SAGE/CQ Press, and to the editorial and production staff at SAGE/CQ Press who have been so helpful over the years, especially Elise Frasier.

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1

Introduction

Men and nations want the benefits of international organization, but they also want to retain the privileges of sovereignty, which are inseparable from international disorganization. The development of international organization has been plagued by the failure of human beings to think logically and realistically about the inexorable relationships between the purchase and the price, between the having and the eating of the cake.

—Inis Claude Jr. (1956)¹

International organizations (IOs) are essential, but controversial, actors in world politics today. They are expected to rebuild war-torn societies, help to stop the spread of the Ebola virus and other diseases, assist countries in avoiding or overcoming financial crises, adjudicate disputes between states, reduce extreme poverty and malnutrition, push countries to cooperate on major global environmental problems, make trade more free and fair, promote gender equality, reform legal systems, reduce corruption, and tackle terrorism. These examples are only a drop in the bucket, since IOs find themselves working in almost every imaginable international issue area that states cannot easily address individually, issues that former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan famously called “problems without passports.” All IOs have seen their mandates expand over time, and they all struggle to balance so many goals and tasks as they are expected to constantly adapt to a changing global context. The work of IOs directly affects the lives of billions of people. But instead of being praised for their contributions, IOs face relentless attacks from critics who believe IOs cause or enhance the same set of problems they are supposed to solve. IOs are also part of a complex global institutional landscape today that includes states, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, private foundations, and a host of other players that impact how decisions and policies are made, and whether and how problems are solved. Many global policy issues today impact multiple IOs, as well as local and regional actors. In this complex and sometimes confusing topography of governance, cooperation across levels and effective institutions are necessary to make a meaningful dent in addressing the “problems without passports.” Therefore, it is important that IOs remain relevant actors even as the institutional landscape evolves.

Whether and how to reform IOs is a topic of lively debate. For each major IO there is a spectrum of opinions, ranging from why we should abolish it to why we should help it to grow larger and do even more. The debates are rich and sometimes raucous. The only agreements are that the world has changed dramatically since most major IOs were established at the end of World War II, that the architecture of global governance from that era is ill-equipped to address the global and regional challenges of today, and that this change requires some type of shift in what IOs are expected and able to do.

The purpose of this book is to provide a comprehensive understanding of major IOs and their changing role in world politics and global governance. It presents the tools and knowledge useful for navigating the cacophony of opinions about IOs, which allow for an informed view of IO principles, practices, and performance. The tools of navigation are developed by first grounding the study of IOs in an intellectual setting that surveys different approaches to analyze the importance and impact of IOs found in the IO literature (Chapter 2). The remaining chapters examine the historical development, governance, activities, structure, and performance of a set of major IOs. The book focuses on the United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO), which are the most powerful, important, and influential IOs in the world. The UN is the leading IO created to try to maintain peace in the world. The World Bank, IMF, and WTO are the IOs that have most influenced the phenomenon of *globalization*, a process by which sharply lower communication and transportation costs and fewer barriers to transboundary flows of trade, knowledge, and people have created more integration among states, markets, people, and technologies.² The European Union is also an important player in global politics and is addressed as part of a chapter that examines regional organizations more broadly. Regional organizations play important roles in international politics today, and their ability to successfully address problems is also contested.

A second chapter on each of the major IOs presents a case study designed to illuminate a major challenge or issue confronting the organization in order to help understand both its ability to help solve global problems and the factors that influence its activities, responses, and evolution. The UN case study examines why the UN and the entire international community failed to act in the Rwandan genocide of the mid-1990s, where over half a million people were massacred in 100 days. The World Bank case study focuses on the institution's environmental behavior and performance. The bank's environmental behavior in the 1980s prompted the first major campaign by environmental NGOs against it and resulted in decades of uneven reform. This case provides insight into how such a large organization struggles with its growing number of mandates. The IMF case reviews the IMF's actions before, during, and after the 2008 global financial crisis. Before the crisis, the IMF was struggling with its legitimacy. Lending was down, staff were let go. During the crisis, the G20 leaders turned to the IMF to be a financial firefighter, and suddenly the IMF was once again at the center of global economic governance. The WTO case study looks at the role of the organization in the area of intellectual property rights, trade, and access to medicine. The issue of poor country access to medication raises big questions on how to balance intellectual property rights with saving lives. The case study on regional organizations examines the evolving role of the African Union with a focus on its ability to reduce conflict in Africa.

Understanding the role of IOs in global politics has become even more important in recent years as policymakers and scholars grapple with the concept of *global governance*—what it means, what has changed, and why it matters. The idea behind the term is that states, international organizations, NGOs, corporations, and a variety of other actors must interact to help address global problems that no actor can solve alone. The verb *to govern* has a wide variety of meanings that includes “to exercise sovereignty over” (like a government has inside a state), “to exercise authority,” “to rule without sovereign power and usually without having authority

to determine basic policy,” and to “have decisive influence.”³ *Governance*, in turn, has to do with administering, ruling, exercising authority, and exerting leadership. As the former Director-General of the WTO Pascal Lamy noted, governance also has to provide legitimacy, leadership, and coherence.⁴

It should be no surprise, then, that in the scholarly and policy worlds, there are a number of definitions for *global governance*. Some are simple and straightforward. The US National Intelligence Council and EU Institute of Security Studies, in a report entitled “Global Governance 2025: At a Critical Juncture,” defined global governance as “the collective management of common problems at the international level.”⁵ Rapid globalization, they argued, means that problems and threats that states used to be able to manage at the local level are not only more global, but may also be threats to global security and peace. Examples include food and water scarcity, ethnic conflict, terrorism, and infectious diseases. Scholars Thomas Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, by contrast, have a much broader definition of global governance. Global governance, they stated, is “the sum of laws, norms, policies, and institutions that define, constitute, and mediate relations among citizens, society, markets, and the state in the international arena—the wielders and objects of international public power.”⁶ They made two important points. Their first point echoes the global governance report noted above: Collective arrangements can help to address transboundary problems, even though there is no overarching global authority. Their second point is that global governance does not necessarily produce positive outcomes. It “can be good, bad, or indifferent.”⁷ It is important to remember that the fact that a global problem is on the radar of many different types of actors does not mean the problem will be solved, or even reduced. The different involved actors often disagree on how best to solve a particular problem. It is safe to say that global governance may often be a messy process.

Compounding the challenge of getting different types of actors to work together to address global problems is the vagueness of *who* is doing the governing. As Deborah Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan Sell pointed out, policymakers and academics often treat global governance as a process that happens, but they do not ask themselves who are the global *governors*.⁸ Governors, the authors argued, may be states, IOs, corporations, advocacy groups, and other actors, all of whom are involved in a dynamic political process in which they are exercising power across borders to have an impact on policy and policy outcomes. The authors argued that the “character of the relationship” between the governors and the governed is important to understanding global politics.⁹

The remainder of this chapter returns to the focus on IOs by offering basic definitions and concepts on IOs, what they do, when and why they were born, and a brief history of their evolution.

WHAT IS AN IO?

What is an international organization? There is no simple, straightforward definition, because there are differences between how scholars define IOs and what the term means in everyday use. The general definition of an international organization is *a formal organization with members from three or more states that pursues a specific set of goals*.¹⁰ Technically,

there are two main categories of IOs. The first is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) whose members are states represented by their governments. IGOs are established by intergovernmental agreement. Examples include the UN, the World Bank, and regional organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The second category is an international NGO whose members are individuals, groups, or associations. Amnesty International and World Wildlife Fund are well-known examples.¹¹ Today, there are thousands of international NGOs operating around the world, and they are interacting in complex ways with other more traditional actors. What distinguishes traditional NGOs from IGOs is that members of the former do not officially represent governments. To complicate matters, there are also *hybrid* organizations, with members from both inside and outside of government.¹² An example is the International Labour Organization, the first specialized agency of the UN, with a Governing Body that consists of government, employer, and employee members. In practice, when most people refer to IOs, they mean the first category, IGOs. They are mostly referring to the global organizations rather than regional ones. When referring to the second category, people use the term NGOs. This book will use the terms IO and IGO synonymously and use NGO and regional organization for those latter categories.

Another difference between scholarly and every-day language can be found in the term *international institutions*. For most people, the term international institution is synonymous with international organization. The UN, IMF, and WTO, for example, are commonly referred to as either. In this book, the terms are also used interchangeably. But in the scholarly world, *institution* also has meanings that are broader than the term *organization*. International institutions have been defined by political scientists as “persistent and connected sets of rules and practices that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations.”¹³ These are the rules that help to govern world politics. They may include international law and international norms, for example, that may or may not be the responsibility of a particular organization. In other words, in the scholarly world, an international institution may include both “the rules that govern elements of world politics and the organizations that help to implement those rules.”¹⁴

Many scholars have also used the term *institutions* synonymously with *regimes*, defined as “sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.”¹⁵ This broad definition was especially popular during the 1980s, as scholars sought to examine issues such as trade regimes or security regimes that consisted of broader governing arrangements that may or may not encompass formal organizations. One way to make the distinction between institution/regime and organization is to think of organizations as institutions with walls and bureaucrats, or as one scholar quipped, “palpable entities with headquarters and letterheads, voting procedures, and generous pension plans.”¹⁶ To illustrate, the Bretton Woods system was set up in 1944 as a regime to govern international monetary relations by pegging currencies to the dollar and the dollar to gold, but at its center was an international organization—the IMF.¹⁷ The distinction may sound like a trivial one, but it is analytically important when there is a need to separate a particular organization from the broader issues to which it is linked. In other words, there are reasons to look at the trees rather than the

forest when trying to understand how IOs themselves impact international problems and policy for better or for worse.

BRIEF HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

The modern IO has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century, when states set up a handful of organizations to cooperate on a focused set of issues such as health and trade.¹⁸ Many of the IOs created in the 19th century were born in Europe, and in the wake of major outbreaks of violence, such as the Napoleonic wars, Franco-Prussian War, and Crimean War.¹⁹

One of the first modern IOs (which still exists) was the Central Commission for Navigation of the Rhine, established in 1815 by the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna to promote free navigation on the Rhine River.²⁰ The Superior Council of Health was created in 1838 in Constantinople with Ottoman and European delegates to control outbreaks of cholera and other diseases, in part, by promoting new sanitary measures and calling for quarantines.²¹ The European Commission for the Control of the Danube was set up in 1856 to improve navigation on the Danube, as part of the Treaty of Paris signed at the end of Crimean War.

The *diplomacy by conference* that was firmly established in the 19th century was also a precursor to the modern IO, as was the development of international law.²² For example, the Congress of Vienna—itsself created by the victors of the Napoleonic Wars—provided opportunities for its members to consult periodically as a means to balance power and deter aggression. While the Congress of Vienna did not succeed in creating the regular consultations envisioned, as Inis Claude, Jr. noted, “the techniques of diplomacy had been irrevocably changed.”²³ The subsequent Concert of Europe consisted of the Great Powers (Russia, Prussia, Austria, Great Britain, and later joined by France), and met on occasion for the rest of the century to try and collaborate on issues of concern. It has been credited with opening up diplomatic channels as well as laying the foundation of an executive council that some saw as a prototype for the UN Security Council.²⁴ The process of consultation and coordination, and the dominating role of the most powerful states, contributed to norms about multilateral diplomacy and negotiation, and also reflected a growing awareness that international cooperation could help states achieve outcomes they might be unable to achieve unilaterally. All this was occurring as communication and transport links continued to draw people closer together, enhancing opportunities for both conflict and cooperation.²⁵

The 19th century developments were mixed in terms of their success. Collaboration often failed, the conference system functioned sporadically, and it did not produce permanent institutions. “The Concert of Europe was rather inappropriately named,” wrote Claude. “It was an orchestra without a conductor or regular rehearsals, whose members played with so little respect for the score that they produced cacophony more often than harmony.”²⁶ In the aftermath of World War I (1914–1918), a number of IOs and NGOs were born amid renewed efforts to create a more peaceful world and avoid a return to the horror and destruction caused by what was known as the Great War. The most important of these was the League of Nations, the forerunner of the UN. The League was established in 1920 out of the Versailles Peace Conference negotiating an end to World War I. Based in Geneva, Switzerland, its mandate was to

achieve international peace and security in part by having member states agree to submit disputes with members or nonmembers for arbitration or judicial settlement, and agree “in no case to resort to war until three months” after attempts at such settlement or decision occurred.²⁷ Articles 12–16 reflected an attempt at a collective security provision, in calling for members to respond against a member resorting to war by severing trade or financial relationships, and, if necessary, using military, naval, or air force.

The creation of the League had its immediate roots in a number of private and public efforts to help design a post-war order. Groups such as the League of Nations Society (Britain) and League to Enforce Peace (United States) were vocal. Government officials in France, Britain, South Africa, and elsewhere were also actively drafting proposals for the organization of the post-war era.²⁸ US President Woodrow Wilson ardently backed the notion of a League of Nations as early as 1916, and most famously called for “a general association of nations . . . formed . . . for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike” as the last point of his “Fourteen Points” speech presented to the US Congress in January 8, 1918.

While the League was a novel and dramatic experiment at the time, an embodiment of liberal views dating back at least to Immanuel Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* (1795), it was also burdened by a number of weaknesses that ultimately led to its failure and collapse in 1939. The League was unable to check the aggressive behavior of Japan (which quit the League in 1931), Italy (which withdrew in 1937), and Germany (which joined in 1926 and exited in 1933), and therefore slow or halt the inevitable steps leading toward World War II. Ambiguity about the specific roles of the League’s Council and Assembly and the requirement of unanimity on voting on important issues also all contributed to the League’s downfall.²⁹ And while Wilson “dominated the ideological scene” surrounding the League’s development, the United States in the end did not join, and the absence of a major international power also hurt the League deeply.³⁰ It was formally disbanded in April 1946.³¹

Today’s most powerful IOs were born in the waning days and aftermath of World War II. The UN, World Bank, IMF, General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (later to evolve into the WTO), and the European Coal and Steel Community (later to evolve into the European Union) were founded between 1944 and 1951. Their histories, governance, activities, and challenges are discussed in subsequent chapters. Like the League of Nations, they were created above all as grand, dramatic experiments to help avoid future world wars, even though individual countries may have had additional reasons for participating.

The number of IOs has also grown dramatically since the end of World War II. In some ways it is even difficult to know how many there are. According to the *Yearbook of International Organizations* 2014–2015, there are at least 260 “conventional” intergovernmental international organizations today, of which almost three-quarters have regionally-based membership. These organizations vary enormously in size, scope, goals, and influence. By contrast, there are over 8,500 international NGOs. The *Yearbook* adds additional categories that show even more variety, including “organizations emanating from places, persons, bodies”; “organizations of special form”; and “autonomous conference series” to name a few.³² But there is no consensus on numbers, with other sources listing fewer or more.

In terms of size, the entire UN family, for example, consists of 193 nations and employs around 45,000 people. The UN once put the seemingly large numbers of employees into perspective by pointing out that Disneyland and Disney World together employed more

people than the UN.³³ Its core budget for 2014–2015 was \$5.7 billion.³⁴ Its peacekeeping budget, which can fluctuate substantially as missions change, was around \$8 billion.³⁵ By contrast, the Geneva-based WTO has a small staff of 635 and a budget of less than 200 million Swiss francs in 2013–2014.³⁶

RANGE OF IO GOALS

IO goals also range from the very narrow to the very broad. The small, Paris-based International Institute of Refrigeration, with a membership of 38 countries, has the specific mandate of expanding knowledge of refrigeration technology and applications. Compare that to the World Bank, which works in poor countries to reduce poverty, combat HIV/AIDS, promote sustainable development, support private sector development, modernize judicial and legal systems, build educational systems, and promote gender equality and justice. When organizations have huge, broad goals, it is also difficult to measure their performance. The UN Security Council, for example, is tasked with “maintaining international peace and security.” Does that mean it is unsuccessful every time there is a conflict or that we can realistically expect it to reduce all conflict?

Regional organizations also come in all shapes and sizes from the very large (European Union) to the much smaller Asian and Pacific Coconut Community. Like their global relations, their goals cover a broad range of sectors and activities. IOs, global and regional, operate in areas that include security, development, education, telecommunications, health, environment, human rights, trade, agriculture, labor, migration, tourism, and so on—just about every imaginable issue that crosses borders.

WHY DO STATES CREATE IOs?

States create IOs to pursue a variety of common interests and to serve a variety of functions that states cannot achieve individually. At the most basic level, an IO provides a forum where states can meet regularly to accomplish whatever goals they have set for it. This regular communication makes it easier for states to share information and to pursue common interests, which results, ideally, in greater cooperation through specific actions that help to achieve shared goals. IOs bring together experts and decision makers to create and disseminate new knowledge, policies, and rules. They also help to implement and monitor the outcomes of these actions. Therefore, IOs help to coordinate global responses and the global rules themselves, and they monitor and enforce actors' compliance with those rules. The small United Nations Environment Programme, for example, has played a critical role facilitating interstate agreement on a variety of international environmental treaties, such as ozone depletion and persistent organic pollutants. It also works to promote state compliance with international environmental agreements.

IOs also provide states the ability to coordinate their actions by pooling financial, technological, and analytical resources to accomplish common goals. For example, the World Bank and its regional relatives get financial resources from member states and then raise their own money on international capital markets, so they can lend billions of dollars a year