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Voluntary Environmental Agreements When Regulatory Capacity Is Weak

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Abstract

Voluntary agreements (VAs) negotiated between environmental regulators and industry are increasingly popular. However, little is known about whether they are likely to be effective in developing and transition countries, where local and federal environmental regulatory capacity is typically weak. We develop a dynamic theoretical model to examine the effect of VAs on investment in regulatory infrastructure and pollution abatement in such countries. We find that under certain conditions, VAs can improve welfare by generating more private-sector investment in pollution control and more public-sector investment in regulatory capacity than the status quo.

Key Words: voluntary environmental regulation, developing country

JEL Classification Numbers: Q28, O13, C72

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1. Introduction

The conventional approach to industrial pollution control is to establish laws requiring firms to cut emissions. Voluntary regulation, by contrast, provides incentives—but not mandates—for pollution control. In industrialized countries, such regulation has become quite popular over the past two decades (OECD 1999, 2003). Environmental authorities in developing countries, particularly those in Latin America, have also embraced voluntary regulation and are rapidly putting new programs in place. For example, in Colombia, more than 50 voluntary agreements between environmental authorities and industrial associations were signed between 1995 and 2003 (Lara 2003). And in Mexico, 10 such agreements involving more than 600 firms were signed during the 1990s (Hanks 2002).

Although voluntary environmental programs in industrialized countries and in developing countries share many features, their objectives are generally different. In industrialized countries, regulators typically use voluntary programs to encourage firms to overcomply with mandatory regulations or to cut emissions of pollutants for which mandatory regulations do not exist. In developing countries, by contrast, regulators generally use voluntary programs to help remedy rampant noncompliance with mandatory regulation (Blackman and Sisto in press).

The broad reason for widespread noncompliance with mandatory regulation in developing countries is well known: the infrastructure needed to enforce regulations is weak or altogether absent at federal and local levels. For example, federal authorities are usually responsible for developing and promulgating written environmental regulation. However, in many cases, such regulation is incomplete, confused, or inappropriate. Local authorities are typically responsible for monitoring and enforcing written regulations. However, in most developing countries, regulatory power is concentrated at the national level, and local institutions

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are relatively weak. In addition, local regulators are often strongly influenced by private-sector interest groups and lack the political will for strict enforcement (World Bank 1999, Blackman and Sisto in press, Willis et al. 1999).

The voluntary initiatives that regulators in developing countries are using to try to overcome these constraints include voluntary agreements (VAs) negotiated between environmental regulators and industry associations in specific polluting sectors and/or geographic areas (also known as “negotiated environmental agreements” and “voluntary environmental agreements”) as well as preestablished public programs to which individual firms or facilities are invited to participate.[1] In this paper, we focus on the former type of voluntary regulation.

VAs in developing countries often entail four types of commitments. First, a group of industrial firms agrees to make the investments needed to comply with existing mandatory regulations within a certain period. Second, as quid pro quo, environmental authorities agree not to sanction the firms for noncompliance during this grace period. Third, regulatory authorities agree to make the investments needed to eliminate barriers to the enforcement of mandatory regulations, for example, by promulgating missing regulations. Finally, environmental authorities promise to subsidize the firms’ investment in pollution control. Such VAs are usually widely publicized at the local level.

Blackman and Sisto (in press) present a detailed description and analysis of four consecutive high-profile VAs between regulators and trade associations representing the leather tanning industry in León, Guanajuato—Mexico’s leather goods capital and a notorious environmental hotspot. In each of these VAs, tanners agreed that within 2–4 years, they would cut emissions of organic and inorganic water pollutants by building in-house industrial wastewater treatment facilities, implementing pollution prevention measures, and in some cases, relocating to industrial parks where common effluent treatment plants could be built. In addition, the tanners promised to improve their handling and disposal of solid and hazardous tanning wastes. As quid pro quo, local environmental authorities agreed not to fine tanners for violating mandatory emissions standards during a 2- to 4-year grace period. Federal and local regulators also agreed to fix long-standing problems with mandatory environmental regulations, including a complete lack of rules governing wastewater discharges into local sewers (a responsibility of

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[1] See OECD 1999 for a taxonomy of different types of voluntary regulation.

local regulators) and confusing and inconsistent rules governing the handling and disposal of solid and hazardous tanning wastes (a federal responsibility). Finally, under pressure from federal regulators, local environmental authorities agreed to build a municipal wastewater treatment plant, establish zoning laws for tanneries, and finance a tannery pollution control education and research center. All four tannery VAs were signed by top federal environmental authorities and were well publicized. (For descriptions of other VAs in developing and transition countries, see Lara 2003, Dvorák et al. 2002, Freitas and Gereluk 2002, Hanks 2002, and Koehler 2002.)

Unfortunately, the track record of VAs in developing countries is decidedly mixed. Some appear to have performed as advertised. For example, according to Freitas and Gereluk (2002), a Brazilian nationwide VA spurred significant reductions in benzene emissions in the metal and petrochemical industries. However, other VA's clearly have not performed well. For example, the aforementioned tannery VAs ultimately were mostly ignored by the signatories (Blackman and Sisto in press). Similarly, Lara (2003) finds that compliance with a sample of 13 Colombian VAs was negligible.

Such negative evaluations beg the question of whether a VA is likely to be an appropriate regulatory instrument for developing countries. The theoretical economics literature on VAs—which, to our knowledge, focuses exclusively on VAs in industrialized-country settings—does not provide much reason for optimism. (For reviews of this literature, see Lyon and Maxwell 2002 and Khanna 2001.) This literature argues that industry associations participate in and comply with VAs to preclude more stringent mandatory regulation (e.g., Alberini and Segerson 2002, Maxwell et al. 2000, Segerson and Miceli 1998). For example, in Segerson and Miceli (1998), a "background legislative threat" motivates industry to negotiate a VA. Moreover, the stronger this threat, the more pollution abatement the VA generates. In developing countries with weak regulatory capacity, however, threats of strict mandatory regulation are not credible. Hence, the existing theoretical literature seems to imply that VAs are not likely to be effective in developing countries with limited regulatory capacity.

In this paper, we argue that existing theoretical models of VAs lack the dynamic structure needed to understand the role VAs play in developing and transition countries. We develop a game-theoretic model in which investment in abatement may occur in stages, and we use it to examine the effect of VAs on investment in abatement and in regulatory infrastructure when local and federal regulatory capacity is weak. We find that VAs hold promise for increasing both types investment and enhancing welfare in precisely those situations where the regulatory capacity is weak. The intuition for this result is as follows. A VA in our model provides a grace period during which no penalties are applied to the industry for failure to comply but after which more stringent penalties may be applied. A VA thus changes industry's dynamic investment pattern, reducing short-term investment but increasing long-term investment. We find that when the probability of effective mandatory regulation is low and the VA allows for a significant increase in penalties for noncompliance, the latter effect outweighs the former, and the VA can enhance welfare.

The analytics used to derive our results are technical and lengthy. In this article, we focus mainly on presenting the results along with the intuition that underpins them. Readers interested in the details are referred to Blackman, Lyon and Sisto (2006).

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we outline our analytical model, including the basic assumptions, the timing of the regulators' and polluter's decisions, the notation, and the agents' payoff functions. In Sections 3 and 4, we present equilibrium results for cases with a VA (status quo) and without a VA, respectively. In Section 5, we compare welfare from the status quo and VA equilibria. In Section 6, we summarize our findings and offer some conclusions.

2. Model

We study the interaction of three types of agents: a federal regulator, a local regulator, and a local industry. The two local agents are indexed by $k \in \{L,I\}$, where L denotes the local regulator and I denotes the local industry (see list of terms in Table 1). We consider two types of regulatory instruments: mandatory regulation and a VA. The instruments are indexed by $j \in \{N,V\}$, where N denotes the absence of a VA and V denotes the presence of a VA. Finally, the model has three periods—Periods 0, 1, and 2—indexed by $t \in \{0,1,2\}$.

We assume the industry's pollution is completely uncontrolled in Period 0, and we use D to denote this level of emissions. In subsequent periods, the industry decides how much to invest in pollution control or, equivalently, how much pollution to abate. We assume the industry's investments in pollution control constitute a durable good, abatement capital, that can be built up over time. We use X_t to denote the total number of units of pollution that the industry abates in each period, and x_t to denote the number of additional units of pollution abated in each period. Hence, X_t is a state variable (abatement capital), and x_t is a control variable (abatement investment). The industry pays a cost $C(X_t)$ for abatement capital. We assume that costs are increasing in abatement at an increasing rate, that is, $C(X_t)$ is convex in X_t.

We assume that to implement pollution control policies, the local regulator needs both federal-level regulatory capacity (e.g., laws and regulations) and local-level regulatory capacity (e.g., local monitoring institutions). In other words, federal- and local-level regulatory capacity are perfect complements. However, both are missing in Period 0. Unlike the industry's investment decision, which can be incremental, federal and local investment decisions are "all-or-nothing."

The federal regulator's only function in our analysis is to supply the federal regulatory capacity. The variable $Z_t \in \{0,1\}$ indicates the federal regulator's pollution control capacity in period t. We assume a constant hazard rate in each period such that if federal regulatory capacity was not in place in the previous period, it will be in place in the present period with probability ρ. Ex ante, the probability of capacity being in place in period t is defined as α_t, where $\alpha_1 = \rho$ and therefore $\alpha_2 = 1 - (1 - \rho)^2 = \rho(2 - \rho)$. Note that $\alpha_2 > \alpha_1$. Hence, from the perspective of an agent in Period 1, the probability that federal capacity will be in place increases over time.

In each period, the local regulator must decide whether to build its own regulatory capacity, another dichotomous all-or-nothing choice. The variable $y_t \in \{0,1\}$ describes the local regulator's investment in local regulatory infrastructure. We assume that the local regulator's investment is durable, so that if it is made in Period 1, no further investment is needed in Period 2. The variable Y_t denotes the local regulator's cumulative pollution control capacity in period t. Hence, y_t is a control variable, and Y_t is a state variable. The cost to the local regulator of investing in regulatory capacity is $R(y_t)$, where $R(0) = 0$ and $R(1) = R$.

Each period, the federal regulator threatens to fine the local regulator a lump-sum amount equal to P_j if the local regulator does not build regulatory capacity. This feature of the model is meant to capture pressure to improve environmental quality placed on local regulators by federal regulators. The penalty could be pecuniary or nonpecuniary (e.g., political capital). In Mexico in the 1990s, for example, federal authorities threatened to withhold disbursements of tax revenues to Guanajuato state if the state did not build and begin operating a municipal wastewater treatment plant for the city of León (Blackman and Sisto in press). Although the federal regulator threatens to sanction the local regulator for failing to invest in regulatory capacity, the federal regulator cannot make good on the threat unless it has built its own regulatory capacity. The local regulator, in turn, threatens to require industry to pay a fee, F_j, for every unit of pollution it emits. However, as noted above, the local regulator cannot apply this sanction unless both federal and local regulatory capacity are in place.

In motivating the industry to invest in pollution control, the local regulator can use mandatory regulation—a fee per unit of emissions—or a VA. A VA has two functions. It designates Period 1 as a grace period during which sanctions will not be applied to the local regulator (penalty P_j) or to the industry (fee F_j), and it increases the amounts of these sanctions. A VA increases the regulatory sanctions because political constraints on the severity of such sanctions are relaxed when signatories abrogate a formal high-profile VA. Finally, we assume that the local regulator obtains a benefit, $B(X_t)$, from abatement undertaken by the industry. These benefits arise from reductions in damages to human health and environment, among other things. The benefits are increasing in abatement at a decreasing rate, that is, $B(X_t)$ is (at least weakly) concave.

We assume that all but two of the parameters of our model are freely observable by all of the agents in the model. These two parameters are the existence in each period of federal regulatory capacity and the existence in each period of local regulatory capacity. A necessary condition for such capacity is that regulators possess the political will to impose sanctions, a capability that is virtually impossible to observe except when successfully demonstrated. Hence, we assume that regulatory capacity is revealed through enforcement. That is, the local regulator knows for certain that federal regulatory capacity exists only when the federal regulator levies a fine, and the industry knows for certain that local regulatory capacity exists only when the local regulator charges a pollution fee.

The timing of the agents' interactions is as follows. In Period 0, only one event occurs: the local regulator offers or does not offer a VA. In Period 1, the local regulator and the industry decide whether to invest. If a VA has not been signed, then fines and fees are levied if the requisite federal and local regulatory capacity is in place, and federal and local regulatory capacity is revealed. If a VA has been signed, then sanctions are not applied in Period 1 (because the VA establishes an enforcement amnesty in Period 1) and regulatory capacity is not revealed. Finally, in Period 2, the same events occur regardless of whether a VA has been signed or not: the local regulator and the industry decide whether to invest, sanctions are applied if regulatory capacity is in place, and regulatory capacity is revealed.

Given the assumptions and notation presented above, the industry's payoff in each period comprises two types of costs: the incremental cost of investing in pollution abatement, $[C(X_t) - C(X_{t-1})]$, and the expected total pollution fee levied by the local regulator, $\alpha_t F_j(D - X_t)Y_t$. Hence, the industry's two-period discounted expected payoff with expectation taken at the end of Period 0 is

$$E\left(\Pi_t^I \middle| t=0\right)=\sum_{t=1}^{2}\delta^{t-1}\left[-[C(X_t)-C(X_{t-1})]-\alpha_t F_j(D-X_t)Y_t\right]. \qquad (1)$$

The local regulator's payoff in each period is comprised of a benefit—the benefit from industry's pollution abatement, $B(X_t)$—and three types of costs—the incremental cost of the industry's investment in pollution abatement, $(C(X_t) - C(X_{t-1}))$; the cost of installing local regulatory capacity, $R(y_t)$; and the expected penalty for not putting local regulatory capacity in place, $\alpha_t P_j(1 - Y_t)$. The inclusion of the cost of industry's investment in the local regulator's payoff is routine in the industrial organization literature (see, for example, Tirole 1988 and Baron 1989). It may be interpreted in either of two ways: the local regulator is a traditional welfare maximizer unconcerned about distributional issues and that therefore treats all benefits and costs equally, or the local regulator is strongly influenced by industry lobbying, as is often the case in developing-country settings (Prud'homme 1995, Blackman and Sisto in press). In any event, the local regulator's two-period discounted expected payoff with expectation taken at the end of Period 0 is

$$E\left(\Pi_t^L \middle| t=0\right)=\sum_{t=1}^{2}\delta^{t-1}\left[B(X_t)-[C(X_t)-C(X_{t-1})]-R(y_t)-\alpha_t P_j(1-Y_t)\right]. \qquad (2)$$

3. Status Quo: No Voluntary Agreement

This section focuses on the "status quo" situation in which the regulators and the industry do not sign a VA in Period 0. We describe and provide insight into the (somewhat technical) equilibrium conditions for the status quo, which are summarized in Table 2.

3.1. Industry

How much will the industry invest in Period 1? Because the industry knows that the local regulator cannot successfully charge pollution fees unless local regulatory capacity exists, the industry invests in pollution abatement in Period 1 only if it determines—by examining the local regulator's payoff function (which is public information)—that the local regulator will install regulatory capacity in Period 1.

Even if the industry determines that the local regulator will, in fact, install capacity in Period 1, the industry still remains uncertain about whether it could be required to pay a pollution fee in Period 1 because both the local regulator and the federal regulator must install regulatory capacity for fees to be successfully levied. Therefore, if the industry decides to invest in pollution abatement, then it picks a level of investment X_{N1}* that takes into account the uncertainty about the federal regulator's regulatory capacity. It chooses a level of abatement investment according to the first-order condition

$$C'(X_1) = \frac{F_{\mathrm{N}}\rho[1+(1-\rho)\delta]}{(1-\rho\delta)}. \tag{3}$$

This chosen level of investment balances the marginal cost of the investment in Period 1 (left side of the equation) against the expected marginal benefit of this investment (right side). The latter is just the expected discounted per-unit fee in both Periods 1 and 2 that is avoided by abatement investment. The expected discounted per-unit penalty is the per-unit fee (F_{N}), multiplied by $\rho[1+(1-\rho)\delta]/(1-\rho\delta)$, a term that takes into account both discounting of the second-period fee and uncertainty about the federal regulator's investment in regulatory capacity.

It is easy to show that this term is always less than one because both ρ and δ are, by definition, less than one. It is also easy to show that this term is greater than and increasing in ρ (at an increasing rate). Hence, the optimal level of abatement investment $X_{\mathrm{N1}}*$ is smaller than the amount that would equate marginal cost of abatement investment with the marginal penalty F_{N}, and the difference is greater when ρ is smaller. In sum, Equation 3 implies that the industry's choice of how much to invest in Period 1 strikes a middle ground between the amount that it would invest if it knew for certain that the federal regulator would not install capacity in Period 1—that is, 0—and the amount that it would invest if it knew for certain that the federal regulator would install regulatory capacity—that is, the amount that equates the marginal cost of investment with the per-unit penalty F_{N}.

It is important to note that industry's first-period investment, $X_{\mathrm{N1}}*$, is convex in the probability of federal capacity being installed—that is, when ρ is small, the industry is cautious and invests very little in Period 1. However, as ρ grows, the industry rapidly increases Period 1 investment. The driver of this convexity is the term (1 – ρδ) in the denominator of the right side of Equation 3, which is convex in ρ, just as the function $1/(1-x)$ is convex in x. The term (1 – ρδ) essentially discounts one benefit of first-period investment: the benefit that arises because such investment reduces the incremental cost of investment in Period 2. As we demonstrate, this benefit arises only when federal capacity is installed in Period 1. Therefore, it is discounted by ρ (the probability that federal capacity is installed in Period 1) as well as by δ.

How much will the industry invest in Period 2? We consider two scenarios. The first is that the local regulator lacked incentives to install regulatory capacity in Period 1, and as a result, the industry did not invest in pollution control in Period 1. In this case, the industry will invest in Period 2 only if it knows (again, from an examination of the local regulator's payoff function) that the local regulator will invest in Period 2. In this scenario, the industry's optimal second-period abatement investment, $X_{N2}*$, will depend on the action the federal regulator took in Period 1. If the federal regulator invested in Period 1, then the industry will invest according to the following first-order condition

$$C'(X_2) = F_N . \tag{4}$$

If the federal regulator did not invest in Period 1, then the industry will invest according to

$$C'(X_2) = \rho F_N . \tag{5}$$

These conditions simply dictate that in selecting a second-period level of investment, $X_{N2}*$, the industry must balance the marginal cost of the abatement in Period 2 (left side of each equation), against the expected marginal benefit of abatement (right side of each equation).

The second scenario for the industry's second-period investment is that the local regulator installed regulatory capacity in Period 1, and as a result, the industry invested in pollution control according to Equation 3. In this scenario, too, the industry's decision to undertake additional investment depends on the federal regulator's actions in Period 1. If the federal regulator installed regulatory capacity in Period 1, then the industry will undertake investment in Period 2 above and beyond that already undertaken in Period 1 if and only if the following condition is met

$$\rho[1 + \delta(2 - \rho)] < 1 . \tag{6}$$

This condition is met only when ρ, the ex ante probability that federal authorities invest in regulatory capacity in each period given that it has not yet done so, and δ, the discount factor, are sufficiently small. The intuitive reason is that when the both ρ and δ are small, industry's first-period abatement investment is also relatively small and would be too small to suffice as a second-period level of abatement investment in situations where federal authorities invest in Period 1. When industry expands its abatement investment in Period 2, it does so until the marginal cost of further investment is equal to the marginal per-unit emissions fee—that is, until Equation 4 is satisfied. We simplify the remainder of the paper by restricting the analysis to values of ρ and δ such that the "expansion condition" given by Equation 6 holds.

If the federal regulator did not install capacity in Period 1, then the industry does not invest in Period 2, regardless of what the federal regulator does or does not do in Period 2. The reason is that the industry's first-period investment is at least as great as that it would want to have in place in Period 2 given continuing uncertainty about whether federal regulatory capacity will be in place in Period 2.

3.2. Local Regulator

How does the local regulator decide whether to install capacity—a dichotomous all-or-nothing choice—when no VA exists? In general, the local regulator makes this decision by comparing the costs and benefits of such investment. The cost is always simply R. The benefits have two components: (a) the avoided expected federal fine for not having installed local capacity, and (b) the net expected benefit of the pollution abatement that the industry undertakes when it determines that the local regulator will install regulatory capacity. The direct benefits and costs that the local regulator considers in making its decision depend on three parameters: the cost of installing local regulatory capacity (R); the ex ante probability that the federal authority installs federal regulatory capacity, given that it has not done so previously (ρ); and the federal fine for not installing local capacity (P_N). These parameters define three cases. For each, we describe the conditions under which the local regulator invests and provide intuition for these results.

Case 1 occurs when the local regulator's cost of installing regulatory capacity is less than the avoided expected federal fine for not installing it—that is, when $R < \rho P_N$. In this case, the local regulator always installs capacity in Period 1. The reason is that the cost to the local regulator of installing regulatory capacity is less than one of the two components of the benefit from this investment—component (a), the avoided expected federal fine for not installing regulatory capacity. Clearly, then, the cost of installing capacity must be less than both components of the benefits added together.

Case 2 occurs when the local regulator's cost of installing regulatory capacity is greater than the avoided expected federal fine for not installing it but less than the certain federal fine, that is, when $\rho P_N < R < P_N$. In this case, a necessary and sufficient condition for the local regulator to invest in Period 1 is that the benefits exceed the costs. Table 2 presents a mathematical condition derived from a comparison of benefits and costs for this case. Whether the condition holds depends on the specific parameterization of the model. If it does not hold, then the local regulator does not install capacity in Period 1 and must decide whether to install capacity in Period 2. The local regulator makes this decision by comparing the benefits and costs of installing capacity in Period 2. It turns out that a necessary and sufficient condition for the benefits to exceed the costs is that the federal regulator must have installed capacity in Period 1.[2]

Case 3 occurs when the local regulator's cost of installing regulatory capacity is greater than the certain federal fine for not installing it, that is, when $R > P_N$. Here again, the local regulator decides whether to install capacity in Period 1 by comparing the expected benefits and costs of doing so. Table 2 presents a necessary and sufficient condition for investment derived from the regulator's comparison of benefits and costs for this case. If this condition was not met so and local regulator did not install capacity in Period 1, then the local regulator must decide whether to install capacity in Period 2. Again, it does this by comparing the benefits and costs of such investment. However, it turns out that because the cost of the first-period investment exceeded the benefits, the costs of second-period investment necessarily exceed the benefits, even if the federal regulator installed capacity in Period 1. Therefore, if the local regulator did not invest in Period 1, it does not invest in Period 2 either.

4. Voluntary Agreement

Under a VA, neither the industry nor the local regulator have any reason to invest in Period 1 because the grace period ensures they will not be charged pollution fees during this period. The industry's and the local regulator's only decision is how much to invest in Period 2. The equilibrium conditions are quite simple (Table 2).

4.1. Industry

The industry invests in pollution abatement in Period 2 only if it determines (from an examination of the local regulator's payoff function) that the local regulator will invest. If the industry does invest, then it selects a level of investment $X_{V2}*$, dictated by the first-order condition

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[2] To see this, note that if the federal regulator installed federal regulatory capacity in Period 1, then the local regulator faces a certain penalty (P_N) if it does not install local regulatory capacity in Period 2. We know that for Case 2, the cost of installing local regulatory capacity (R) is less than one of the two components of the benefits of installing capacity—component (*a*), the avoided certain penalty, P_N—and is therefore clearly less than both components added together. Hence, if the federal regulator installed capacity in Period 1, then the local regulator installs capacity in Period 2. However, if the federal regulator did not install capacity in Period 1, then it is easy to show that the cost of installing capacity will outweigh the benefits. Hence, if the federal regulator did not install capacity in Period 1, then the local regulator does not install capacity in Period 2.

$$C'(X_2) = \alpha_2 F_V . \tag{7}$$

Here again, the optimal level of investment balances the marginal cost of investment (left side) and the marginal expected benefit (right side), which in this case is simply the expected per-unit pollution fee under the VA.

It is useful to compare the industry's investment in pollution abatement under the VA and the status quo. The industry's investment under the VA (X_{V2}*, given by Equation 7), exceeds the total second-period investment it would choose under the status quo in the case where the federal regulator did not install capacity in Period 1 (X_{N2}*, given by Equation 5). The reason is that the probability a pollution fee will be charged under the VA [α_2, which is equal to $\rho(2 - \rho)$] exceeds the probability that a fee will be imposed under the status quo (ρ), and the per-unit fee under the VA (F_V) exceeds the fee under the status quo (F_N). Because by definition, industry's abatement investment in Period 2 (X_{N2}*) is at least as great as its abatement investment in Period 1 (X_{N1}*), this logic also implies that X_{V2}* is at least as great as X_{N1}*. Hence, the only scenario in which the industry's investment under the VA could possibly be lower than its investment under the status quo is when the federal regulator installed capacity in Period 1. In this case, industry faces a certain pollution fee in Period 2 under the status quo, and X_{N2}* is given by Equation 4. By definition, however, this scenario (federal investment in regulatory capacity in Period 1) is highly unlikely when ρ is small. In sum, in expectation, industry investment under the VA will be larger than under the status quo as long as ρ is small.

4.2. Local Regulator

Under a VA, the local regulator compares the cost of installing regulatory capacity, *R,* and the benefit, which is simply the avoided expected penalty, $\alpha_2 P_V$, and installs capacity if and only if the latter exceeds the former. In using this simple decision rule, the local regulator might appear to ignore the net benefits and costs of the industry investment. Actually, however, the local regulator simply responds as best it can to the investment strategy that it expects the industry to pursue; the local regulator takes the industry's investment decision as given and makes its own best decision.

5. Welfare Analysis

To this point, we have analyzed the behavior of the industry and the local regulator with a VA and under the status quo. We have shown that a VA can induce greater investment than the status quo in Period 2 but also that a VA fails to produce any investment in Period 1. Hence, to assess the overall desirability of a VA relative to the status quo, we must conduct a detailed analysis of social welfare.

5.1. Welfare Function

We construct welfare, W_j, as the discounted expected benefit from the industry's total investment in pollution abatement net of the costs of that investment, of any investment in local regulatory capacity, and of any penalty paid by the local regulator to the federal regulator. In this construction, welfare is the net benefit of regulation to local (versus federal) stakeholders. We omit the costs paid by the federal regulator to install regulatory capacity, because the federal regulator's investments are exogenous to the local regulator's and the industry's decisions and therefore would simply net out in a comparison of welfare generated by the VA versus status quo regulation. Also, we omit fees paid by the industry to the local regulator, because they represent a transfer among local agents. Given these assumptions, the general form of the welfare function is identical to the local regulator's payoff function (Equation 2).[3]

We assume simple functional forms for the benefit and cost functions to facilitate the numerical simulation presented in the next section. Specifically, we assume a linear benefits function, $B(X) = bX$, where b is a parameter and where $F < b$ so that per-unit pollution fees are never so large as to induce overinvestment. In addition, we assume a quadratic cost function, $C(X) = X^2$.[4] Finally, as noted above, penalties and fees under the VA are larger than under the status quo. We assume that this differential is sufficiently large that even when discounted for uncertainty about the federal regulator's actions, expected fees under the VA are greater than certain fees under the status quo (i.e., $\alpha_2 F_V > F_N$), and expected fines under the VA are greater than certain fines under the status quo (i.e., $\alpha_2 P_V > P_N$). These assumptions about the relative size of penalties and fines under the VA and the status quo reflect our argument that the VA enables regulators to impose greater expected penalties; without these assumptions, the VA could result in lower expected penalties than the status quo. These assumptions have the effect of ensuring that the VA can enhance welfare compared with the status quo.

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[3] It is standard to include both benefits (to society) and costs (to industry) in a social welfare function. See, for example, Segerson and Miceli 1998 or Maxwell, Lyon, and Hackett 2000.

[4] The assumption of linear benefits and quadratic costs is made purely as a simple way to ensure a concave social welfare function and does not affect the results in any qualitative way. For a similar approach, see Glachant 2003, in which linear benefits and quadratic costs also are assumed.

As discussed in Section 3, the investment behavior of local regulator—and, in turn, the industry—depends on the parameters that determine the local regulator's direct cost and benefit of investment. The cost is always simply R, whereas the benefit depends on the penalties incurred by the local regulator for not installing such capacity (P_N and P_V) and on the two parameters associated with the probability that the federal regulator installs capacity (ρ and α_2). Therefore, to derive equilibrium results, we must consider four "welfare cases" that are defined by these parameters (for details, see the Appendix). Note that we have four cases rather than the three discussed in Section 3.2 because the welfare analysis involves two additional parameters, α_2 and P_V.

The general form of the welfare function for each of these four cases is given by Equation 2. Because this general form is quite unwieldy, we simplify it by taking into account the behavior of the local regulator and the industry in each case. (For example, in cases where the local regulator does not invest in Period 1, we omit the benefits and costs of investment for both the local regulator and the industry because the industry does not invest in Period 1 when the local regulator does not.) As a result, the simplified welfare function for each of these four cases is slightly different in appearance from—but entirely consistent with—Equation 2 (for details, see the Appendix).

5.2. Numerical Simulations

In this section, we compare the expected value of welfare under the VA, $E(W_V)$, to the expected value of welfare under the status quo, $E(W_N)$. It is difficult to establish analytical comparative statics on the magnitude of $E(W_V)$ relative to $E(W_N)$. Therefore, we rely on numerical simulation. Our results are presented in Table 3.[5,6]

We emphasize one striking and broad finding: in each of the first three welfare cases, the lower the probability that the federal regulator will install regulatory capacity in each period (given that the regulator has not installed capacity previously), the better the VA's performance relative to the status quo—that is, the ratio of $E(W_V)$ to $E(W_N)$ is decreasing in ρ. In fact, in our

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[5] We omit Case W4, wherein the local regulator never installs regulatory capacity under any conditions and (as a result) industry does not invest under any conditions.

[6] In the simulations we have examined, industry profits are typically lower under a VA in exactly the circumstances under which the VA enhances welfare. This is not a fundamental problem, however, because the regulator can allocate some of welfare increase to providing technical assistance or other subsidies to obtain the industry's cooperation.

simulations, $E(W_V)$ exceeds $E(W_N)$ only when ρ is low. In Case W1, the VA is socially beneficial only for $\rho \leq 0.20$, and in Cases W2 and W3, the VA is socially beneficial only for $\rho \leq 0.25$.

The intuition for these results is as follows. For $E(W_V)$ to exceed $E(W_N)$, the welfare gained from investment in Period 2 under the VA, X_{N2}, must be large enough to outweigh the fact that the VA elicits no investment in Period 1. This can easily occur when ρ is small, because in such situations, the industry typically invests very little in Period 1 or Period 2 under the status quo. Recall that the industry's investment strategy under the status quo is to make one investment decision at the beginning of Period 1, wait and see whether the federal regulator installs capacity later in this period, then make a second investment decision at the beginning of Period 2. The industry's first-period abatement investment is very small for small values of ρ because of the convexity of the investment function, which we discussed in Section 3.1. The industry's second-period investment strategy is to invest if and only if the federal regulator installed capacity in Period 1, which is unlikely when ρ is small. Hence, when ρ is small, expected industry investment in Periods 1 and 2 is quite low under the status quo, and as a result, the local regulator's decision to use a VA costs little in terms of forgone first-period investment. At the same time, the VA allows for an increase in the pollution fee, which amounts to a penalty for failing to invest in abatement. This increased penalty induces industry to make a greater second-period investment than it would under the status quo. When ρ is small, the increased second-period investment outweighs the lost first-period investment, and the VA improves social welfare.

Our findings are different from those of Segerson and Miceli (1998). Whereas we find that a VA is socially desirable only when the probability of enforcing mandatory regulations is low, Segerson and Miceli find that a VA is always socially desirable, regardless of the probability of enforcing mandatory regulation. The reason for the difference is twofold. First, in Segerson and Miceli's model, a VA primarily serves to reduce transaction costs, so it is always socially desirable, all other things equal. We do not impose such ad hoc assumptions, which would bias our results in favor of a VA. Second, the Segerson and Miceli model is essentially static—it allows for industry to invest only at a single point in time. In contrast, the VA plays an inherently dynamic role in our model. It creates an enforcement amnesty in Period 1 but increases the penalties regulators can wield in Period 2 and, in doing so, eliminates the industry's first-period abatement investment and increases its second-period abatement investment. As long as the period-by-period probability of enforcing mandatory regulation is small, this trade-off turns out to be socially beneficial.

6. Conclusion

VAs are common in developing as well as in developed countries, but they play different roles and operate differently in these disparate settings. In this paper, we have presented a dynamic model of a VA for developing countries where environmental regulations are not enforced because of a lack of requisite institutional infrastructure at the federal and local levels. We focused on the interaction between the local regulator and the local industry, both operating under uncertainty about when federal environmental regulatory capacity is likely to develop.

The VA in our model provides a grace period during which no penalties are applied to the industry for failure to invest in pollution abatement, but more stringent penalties can be applied in the longer term. A VA changes the industry's dynamic abatement investment pattern, eliminating investment in Period 1 but increasing it in Period 2. We find that when the probability of federal enforcement is low and the VA allows for a significant increase in penalties, the latter effect outweighs the former, and the VA can enhance welfare.

Our analysis provides a new rationale for the use of VAs that we believe may be of considerable importance in developing and transition countries where regulatory capacity is weak.

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Tables

Table 1. Notation

Term	*Definition*
j	index of regulatory instrument: $j \in \{\mathrm{N},\mathrm{V}\}$, where N = no VA and V = VA
k	index of local agents: $k \in \{\mathrm{L},\mathrm{I}\}$, where L = local regulator and I = local industry
t	index of time periods: $t \in \{0,1,2\}$
b	marginal environmental benefit of industry investment in pollution abatement
x_t	number of additional units of pollution industry abates in period t, equivalently, industry's additional investment in durable abatement capital in period t (control variable)
y_t	local regulator's all-or-nothing investment in regulatory infrastructure in period t, $y \in \{1,0\}$ (control variable)
$B(X_t)$	environmental benefit from industry's cumulative pollution abatement capacity
$C(X_t)$	cost to industry of its cumulative pollution abatement capacity
D	uncontrolled industry emissions in Period 0
F_j	fee per unit of emissions levied on industry by local regulator
I	an element of k, the index of regulatory local agents, indicating the local industry
L	an element of k, the index of regulatory local agents, indicating the local regulator
N	an element of j, the index of regulatory instruments, indicating no VA
P_j	lump sum fine levied on local regulator by federal regulator for failing to install local regulatory capacity
$R(y_t)$	cost to local regulator of investment in local regulatory infrastructure with $R(0) = 0$ and $R(1) = R$
V	an element of j, the index of regulatory instruments, indicating a VA
$W(X_t)$	net social benefit of investment in pollution control = $B(X_t) - C(X_T)$
X_t	total units of pollution industry abates in period t, equivalently, cumulative investment in durable abatement capital in period t (state variable)
Y_t	cumulative investment in local regulatory infrastructure in period t (state variable)
Z_t	cumulative investment in federal regulatory infrastructure in period t (state variable)
α_t	Period 1 ex ante probability of federal capacity being in place in period t given that it was not in place in $t - 1$
δ	discount factor
π_t^k	period t expected payoff to agent k
ρ	period t ex ante probability of federal capacity being in place in period t given that it was not in place in $t - 1$
Π_t^k	two-period discounted payoff to agent k

Table 2. Equilibria

Agent	*Status Quo (No VA)*	*VA*
Local industry	• In each period, invests if and only if the local regulator invests. Invests in Period 1 according to $C'(X_1) = \frac{F_N \rho[1+(1-\rho)\delta]}{[1-\rho\delta]} Y_1$. • Expands investment in Period 2 after having invested in Period 1 if and only if the federal and local regulators both invest in Period 1. Expands according to $C'(X_2) = F_N$.	• Invests if and only if the local regulator invests. Invests in Period 2 according to $C'(X_1) = \alpha_{21} F_V$.
Local regulator	Case 1: Local regulator's cost of installing capacity is less than the avoided expected federal fine for not installing it ($R < \rho P$) • Always invests in Period 1.	• Invests if and only if $R < \alpha_2 P_V$.
	Case 2: Local regulator's cost of installing capacity is greater than the avoided expected federal fine for not installing it, but less than the certain federal fine ($\rho P < R < P$) • In Period 1, invests if and only if $B(X_1) - C(X_1) - R + \rho[\delta(B(X_2^*(F_N)) - (C(X_2^*(F_N)) - C(X_1))]$ $+ (1-\rho)[\delta B(X_1)] - (\rho[-P_N + \delta(B(X_2^*(F_N)) - C(X_2^*(F_N)) - R)]$ $+ (1-\rho)[-\delta\rho P_N]) > 0.$ • In Period 2, invests (if he has not already invested in period one) if and only if the federal regulator invested in Period 1.	
	Case 3: Local regulator's cost of installing capacity is greater than the certain federal fine for not installing it ($R > P$) • In Period 1, invests if and only if $B(X_1) - C(X_1) - R + \rho[\delta(B(X_2^*(F_N)) - (C(X_2^*(F_N)) - C(X_1))]$ $+ (1-\rho)[\delta(B(X_1)] + \rho P_N[1 + \delta(2-\rho)] > 0.$ • In Period 2, will not invest if he did not invest in Period 1.	

Table 3. Numerical Simulations

Status Quo				*VA*			
ρ: *prob. fed capacity given no capacity last period*	**X_{N1}*:** *t = 1 industry investment without VA*	**X_{N2}*|(Z_1 = 1):** *t = 2 industry investment without VA given t = 1 fed capacity*	**$E(W_N)$:** *expected welfare without VA*	**X_{V2}*:** *t = 2 industry investment with VA*	**$E(W_V)$:** *expected welfare with VA*	**$E(W_V)/E(W_N)$:** *(expected welfare w/ VA)/(expected welfare without VA)*	**Expansion condition**[a]
Case W1 ($R < \rho P_N$)							
0.00	0.000	0.500	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
0.05	0.049	0.500	1.112	0.146	1.297	1.166	0.138
0.10	0.099	0.500	2.219	0.285	2.492	1.123	0.271
0.15	0.153	0.500	3.322	0.416	3.590	1.081	0.400
0.20	0.210	0.500	4.427	0.540	4.598	1.039	0.524
0.25	0.270	0.500	5.537	0.656	5.519	0.997	0.644
0.30	0.335	0.500	6.660	0.765	6.358	0.955	0.759
0.35	0.405	0.500	7.802	0.866	7.121	0.913	0.870
0.40	0.481	0.500	8.973	0.960	7.811	0.870	0.976
Case W2 ($\rho P_N < R < P_N$)							
0.00	0.000	0.500	0.000	0.000	–0.450	—	0.000
0.05	0.049	0.500	0.611	0.146	0.847	1.386	0.138
0.10	0.099	0.500	1.716	0.285	2.042	1.190	0.271
0.15	0.153	0.500	2.819	0.416	3.140	1.114	0.400
0.20	0.210	0.500	3.923	0.540	4.148	1.057	0.524
0.25	0.270	0.500	5.033	0.656	5.069	1.007	0.644
0.30	0.335	0.500	6.156	0.765	5.908	0.960	0.759
0.35	0.405	0.500	7.299	0.866	6.671	0.914	0.870
0.40	0.481	0.500	8.472	0.960	7.361	0.869	0.976
Case W3 ($\rho P_N < P_N < R < \alpha_2 P_V$)							
0.00	0.000	0.500	0.000	0.000	–1.080	—	0.000
0.05	0.049	0.500	–0.088	0.146	0.217	2.471[b]	0.138
0.10	0.099	0.500	1.018	0.285	1.412	1.387	0.271
0.15	0.153	0.500	2.119	0.416	2.510	1.185	0.400
0.20	0.210	0.500	3.219	0.540	3.518	1.093	0.524
0.25	0.270	0.500	4.321	0.656	4.439	1.027	0.644
0.30	0.335	0.500	5.430	0.765	5.278	0.972	0.759
0.35	0.405	0.500	6.550	0.866	6.041	0.922	0.870
0.40	0.481	0.500	7.690	0.960	6.731	0.875	0.976

NOTES: For all three cases: $b = 10$; $D = 2$; $P_N = 1$; $P_V = 6$; $F_N = 1$; $F_V = 3$; $\delta = 0.9$. We vary R to meet the conditions that define each case (for Case W1, $R = 0$; for Case W2, $R = 0.5$; for Case W3, $R = 1.2$). We omit Case W4 (described in the Appendix), in which neither the local regulator or industry ever invests under status quo or under VA and higher fines and fees under VA reduce local welfare below that for status quo.

[a] See Equation 6. This condition restricts ρ values that can be considered to those in the first column.

[b] For this case, welfare is negative without VA. We omit the negative sign on the ratio to avoid implying that the case with VA performs worse than the case without VA.

Appendix: Welfare Function, by Case

Case W1: $R < \rho P_N < P_N < \alpha_2 P_V$
VA: $\delta[bX_{V2} - (X_{V2})^2 - R]$ No VA: $bX_{N1} - X_{N1}{}^2 - R + \rho\{\delta[bX_{N2} - (X_{N2}{}^2 - X_{N1}{}^2)]\} + (1-\rho)\delta bX_{N1}$
Case W2: $\rho P_N < R < P_N < \alpha_2 P_V$
VA: $\delta[bX_{V2} - (X_{V2})^2 - R]$ No VA: $\rho[-P_N + \delta(bX_{N2} - X_{N2}{}^2 - R)] + (1 - \rho)(-\delta\rho P_N)$
Case W3: $\rho P_N < P_N < R < \alpha_2 P_V$
VA: $\delta[bX_{V2} - (X_{V2})^2 - R]$ No VA: $bX_1 - (X_1{}^2) - R + \rho\{\delta bX_2 - [X_2{}^2 - (X_1{}^2)]\} + (1 - \rho)\delta bX_1$ if $Y_1 = 1$, $-\rho P_N[1 + \delta(2 - \rho)]$ if $Y_1 = 0$
Case W4: $\rho P_N < P_N < \alpha_2 P_V < R$
VA: $-\delta\alpha_2 P_V$ No VA: $-\rho P_N[1 + \delta(2 - \rho)]$