



# Flagging Standards: Globalization and Environmental, Safety, and Labor Regulations at Sea (MIT Press)

By Elizabeth R. DeSombre

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Shipping is among the most globalized of industries. Shipowners can choose where to register their vessels, based on cost, convenience, and the international and domestic regulations that would govern their operation. This system of open registration, also known as flags of convenience (FOC), can encourage a competition in regulatory laxity among states that want to attract shipping revenues--a race to the regulatory bottom. In *Flagging Standards*, Elizabeth DeSombre examines the effect of globalization on environmental, safety, and labor standards in the shipping industry. She finds that the economic advantages of lowered standards can be offset by the collective action of international organizations, states, and nongovernmental actors to exclude low-standard ships from the advantages of globalization. Open registries are pressured to raise their standards while traditional maritime states lower theirs somewhat when they create international or second registries. The result is a competition not for the regulatory bottom but for the middle ground. DeSombre examines the decisions made by states and shipowners that lead to this race to the middle and explores the effectiveness of strategies used by both state and nonstate actors aimed at raising regulatory standards, including port control, labor actions against FOC ships that fail to meet international labor standards, and trade restrictions against shipped goods that were not obtained within the requirements of international agreements. Globalization, DeSombre finds, may lead to a downward trend in regulatory standards but has also created many opportunities to raise these standards and does not necessarily signal a reduction of state control.

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By *Elizabeth R. DeSombre*

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

This book presents us with an exhaustively researched discussion of several dimensions of the regulation of a particular industry, placed in the context of scholarship on regulatory competition. The research is original, and the conclusions well argued, persuasive, and important.

(David Vogel, Haas School of Business and Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley)

This is a novel and important book. It makes a set of strong and compelling arguments, supported by solid empirical evidence, about the effects of globalization on environment, seaman safety, and fishing. It makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the means by which states can control, rather than be victimized by, the process of globalization.

(Ronald B. Mitchell, Department of Political Science, University of Oregon)

Regulation of oceangoing vessels is the perfect domain in which to study the complex interplay of sovereignty, globalization, and international rulemaking. *Flagging Standards* takes good advantage of the opportunity, replacing simple bromides about 'rising tides' and 'races to the bottom' with careful scholarship that yields powerful insights. DeSombre's political-economic analysis of the goods (and bads) of international shipping suggests a way forward in the effort to respond to the environmental pressures of globalization.

(Ken Conca, Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland, author of *Governing Water: Contentious Transnational Politics and Global Institution Building*)

#### About the Author

Elizabeth R. DeSombre is Camilla Chandler Frost Professor of Environmental Studies and Director of the Environmental Studies Program at Wellesley College. She is the author of *Flagging Standards: Globalization and Environmental, Safety, and Labor Regulations at Sea* (MIT Press, 2006) and other books.

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