

The Estey

Journal of International Law and Trade Policy

Abstract

Why Countries Retain Membership in International Trade Institutions

William A. Kerr

Associate Member, College of Law, University of Saskatchewan, Canada

From 1947 and the onset of the GATT through to the WTO in 2024 only four countries have withdrawn from the rules-based international trade regime. This is an amazing record given the degree and ferocity of the criticisms the GATT/WTO receives. Its membership currently stands at 166 Member States. While the WTO constrains the political space to maneuver for developed countries, it is the supposed failings of the WTO for developing countries that receives the most attention. Despite this criticism, developing countries choose to remain members of the WTO. The perceived benefits must exceed the costs of membership. In part, this is due to the design of the institution, right from its outset in the late 1940s.

Keywords: criticism, GATT, membership, withdrawal, WTO