A Defense of the Doctrine of Preemption: Revealing the Fallacy that Federal Preemption Contributed to the Financial Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

At the center of our national culture is the belief that every American should own a home, the so-called “American dream.” Yet, during the recent financial crisis, our nation experienced the worst displacement of Americans out of their homes since the Great Depression. Thus, it is important to objectively understand what contributed to the crisis and what did not. Some have used the financial crisis to promote changes in the long-standing doctrine of federal preemption. These proponents have argued that federal preemption of state laws resulted in the financial crisis and reform legislation was needed. For example, then Governor of New York Eliot Spitzer argued that the federal government used preemption “in an unprecedented assault on state legislatures, as well as on state attorneys general and anyone else on the side of consumers.” According to Mr. Spitzer, the use of preemption made the federal government “a willing accomplice to the lenders” engaged in the predatory lending that ultimately resulted in the subprime mortgage crisis.

Congress responded with the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (“Dodd-Frank Act”). The Dodd-Frank Act made sweeping reforms to the financial world in an effort “[t]o promote the financial stability of the United States” in the wake of the financial crisis. Financial institutions are now subject to a myriad of

1 Anthony DePalma, Why Owning a Home is the American Dream, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 11, 1988, at RP5.
2 Bd. of Governors of the Fed. Reserve Sys., The U.S. Housing Market: Current Conditions and Policy Considerations 1, 3 (2012) (explaining that, since 2006, “an unprecedented number of households have lost, or are on the verge of losing, their homes,” and that the decline in housing prices between 2007 and 2009 was “unprecedented since the Great Depression”).
5 Id.
7 Id. pmbl.
new laws. One of the areas of reform concerns federal preemption for national banks and federal thrifts. This Article will examine the doctrine of federal preemption in the banking realm and whether federal preemption did, in fact, contribute to the financial crisis.

This Article will first explore the basic framework of the doctrine of preemption in the context of banking. Part I will begin by discussing the judicial constructs of preemption law in banking, including an examination of the seminal case of Barnett Bank of Marion County, N.A. v. Nelson. In Part II, this Article will provide a critical examination of how the Dodd-Frank Act maintained some of these judicial constructs and altered others. While this Article analyzes the impact of these changes on the doctrine of preemption, the overall effect of these provisions is yet to be realized.

In Part III, this Article will then examine whether federal preemption contributed to the financial crisis. Those in opposition to federal preemption have argued that federal preemption prevented states from regulating and enforcing state laws against national banks and federal thrifts, and this lack of regulation and enforcement resulted in the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis. Based on independent data and an analysis of the preemption doctrine, this Article will argue that federal preemption did not contribute to the crises.

Finally, in Part IV, this Article will examine the benefits versus the costs of eliminating federal preemption and requiring national banks and federal thrifts to comply with the varying laws of fifty states. Based on this analysis, this Article will argue that the costs of eliminating federal preemption far outweigh the supposed benefits.

I. FEDERAL PREEMPTION

The Supremacy Clause provides that federal law “shall be the supreme [l]aw” of the United States, notwithstanding any contrary state law.

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11 See Joseph R. Mason et al., The Economic Impact of Eliminating Preemption of State Consumer Protection Laws, 12 U. PA. J. BUS. L. 781, 790 (2010) (“[C]ritics of preemption continue to push three main arguments, including blaming federal regulation for the subprime crisis, alleging that federal regulation has been lax, and that preemption threatens the banking market’s stability.”).
Therefore, within constitutional bounds, the federal government has the authority and power to preempt state law. The following Subpart will analyze the doctrine of federal preemption in the context of banking.

A. Preemption in the Banking Context

The doctrine of preemption starts with an initial inquiry: whether Congress, in promulgating a specific statute, intended the federal law to preempt state law. If a court finds such congressional intent “to set aside the laws” of a state, then the “Supremacy Clause requires” the court to uphold the federal law, and the state law will be preempted. In the context of banking, the Supreme Court has held that national banks “are governed in their daily course of business” by certain kinds of state law, including laws with respect to contracts, purchase and sale of property, debt collections, and liability for debts owed by banks. In other matters, the law of preemption generally follows three basic principles: (i) express preemption, (ii) implied or field preemption, and (iii) conflict preemption.

12 U.S. CONST. art. VI, cl. 2; McCulloch v. Maryland, 17 U.S. (4 Wheat.) 316, 360–61 (1819) ("The 6th article of the constitution of the United States, declares, that the laws made in pursuance of it, 'shall be the supreme law of the land, any thing in the constitution, or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding.' By this declaration, the States are prohibited from passing any acts which shall be repugnant to a law of the United States.").

13 See Richard Scott Carnell ET AL., The Law of Banking and Financial Institutions 92, 95 (4th ed. 2009) ("Within constitutional limits, Congress has supreme authority . . . . Congress has very broad authority to regulate national banks, federal savings institutions, and federal credit unions and to preempt any inconsistent state law.").

14 Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 30 ("Th[e] question [of preemption] is basically one of congressional intent."); Cal. Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass'n v. Guerra, 479 U.S. 272, 280 (1987) ("In determining whether a state statute is pre-empted by federal law and therefore invalid under the Supremacy Clause . . . . our sole task is to ascertain the intent of Congress."); Fid. Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass'n v. de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. 141, 152 (1982) ("The pre-emption doctrine, which has its roots in the Supremacy Clause, requires us to examine congressional intent." (citation omitted)); Wells Fargo Bank of Tex., N.A. v. James, 321 F.3d 488, 491 (5th Cir. 2003) (explaining that "our paramount concern is to effectuate the intent of Congress" when determining whether a state law is preempted).


16 Nat'l Bank v. Commonwealth, 76 U.S. (9 Wall.) 353, 362 (1869); see also 12 C.F.R. §§ 7.4007(c), 7.4008(e) (2014) (providing that state laws with respect to contracts, torts, criminal law, rights to collect debts, acquisition and transfer of property, taxation, and zoning "apply to national banks to the extent consistent with the decision of the Supreme Court in Barnett Bank of Marion Cnty., N.A. v. Nelson").

17 Baptista v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., 640 F.3d 1194, 1197 (11th Cir. 2011), cert. denied, 132 S. Ct. 253 (2011); James, 321 F.3d at 491; Bank of Am. v. City of S.F., 309 F.3d 551, 558 (9th Cir. 2002); Am. Bankers Ass'n v. Lockyer, 239 F. Supp. 2d 1000, 1007 (E.D. Cal. 2002); Caleb Nelson, Preemption, 86 VA. L. REV. 225, 226 (2000).
Express preemption can be analyzed in the forms of express statutory preemption, express regulatory preemption, and express nonpreemption. Express statutory preemption occurs when a valid federal statute explicitly states that it preempts state law. In this instance, the courts will follow the express congressional intent. The particular federal law will govern, and the state law purporting to apply to the bank will be preempted. A bank subject to the federal law will need to comply only with the federal law; the state law is not applicable to the bank.

Express regulatory preemption occurs when a federal regulation explicitly states that it preempts state law. Courts have found that federal regulations have the same preemptive effect as federal statutes. Moreover, a “pre-emptive regulation’s force does not depend on express congressional authority” to preempt state law. The basic analysis in this regard is whether the regulatory body was acting within its regulatory authority in promulgating the regulation, and whether the regulation is a reasonable interpretation of federal law

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18 See CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 94.
19 See, e.g., 12 U.S.C. § 1831d(a) (2012) (“In order to prevent discrimination against State-chartered insured depository institutions, . . . with respect to interest rates, if the applicable rate prescribed in this section exceeds the rate such State bank . . . would be permitted to charge . . . such State bank . . . may, notwithstanding any State constitution or statute which is hereby preempted . . . charge on any loan . . . .”); Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 31; Cal. Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 479 U.S. at 280; de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 152–53; Jones v. Rath Packing Co., 430 U.S. 519, 530–31 (1977); James, 321 F.3d at 491; Bank of Am., 309 F.3d at 558; Am. Bankers Ass’n, 239 F. Supp. 2d at 1007.
20 Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 30 (explaining that if Congress intended the federal statute to preempt state law, then “the Supremacy Clause requires courts to follow federal, not state law”).
21 de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 152–53 (noting that preemption is “compelled” when the congressional intent is “explicitly stated in the statute’s language” (quoting Jones, 430 U.S. at 525)).
22 CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 94.
23 See de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 147 (explaining that federal thrift associations “shall not be bound by or subject to any conflicting State law which imposes different . . . due-on-sale requirements” (quoting 41 Fed. Reg. 18,296, 18,287 (May 3, 1976))). The current federal regulation provides for a “permanent preemption of state prohibitions on the exercise of due-on-sale clauses” by both federal savings associations and state-chartered thrift institutions. Preemption of State Due-On-Sale Laws, 12 C.F.R. § 591.1 (2002).
25 de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 154.
and not an abuse of regulatory discretion.\textsuperscript{26} If a court finds express regulatory preemption exists, then a bank subject to the federal regulation will need to comply only with the federal regulation; the state law is similarly not applicable to the bank.\textsuperscript{27}

Express nonpreemption can occur when the federal statute or regulation explicitly provides that it does not preempt state law.\textsuperscript{28} As a result, both the federal law or regulation (as the case may be) and the state law would be applicable to the bank.\textsuperscript{29} As a practical matter, the bank must comply with the stricter of the two.\textsuperscript{30} For example, if the federal law is stricter, then effectively, the bank would have to comply with that law.\textsuperscript{31}

If an express statutory or regulatory preemption (or express nonpreemption) does not exist, then the analysis becomes whether the federal statute reveals an implicit intent by Congress to preempt state law.\textsuperscript{32} Thus, state law can be preempted by implication. Courts will consider whether the “nonspecific statutory language” or the “structure and purpose” of the federal statute clearly indicates an implicit intent to preempt state law.\textsuperscript{33} For example, the federal law may indicate a clear intent to occupy that entire field of law.\textsuperscript{34} This form

\textsuperscript{26} Id. at 153–54 (“Where Congress has directed an administrator to exercise his discretion, his judgments are subject to judicial review only to determine whether he has exceeded his statutory authority or acted arbitrarily.”); Shimer, 367 U.S. at 383 (“If [the administrator’s] choice represents a reasonable accommodation of conflicting policies that were committed to the agency’s care by the statute, we should not disturb it unless it appears from the statute or its legislative history that the accommodation is not one that Congress would have sanctioned.”); see also Blum, 457 U.S. at 145–46 (“The [federal administrator’s] decision to apply the [federal] regulation . . . is eminently reasonable and deserves judicial deference.”); Ridgway, 454 U.S. at 57 (finding that there had “been no suggestion that these regulations are unreasonable, unauthorized, or inconsistent with the [federal statute]”).

\textsuperscript{27} CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 94.

\textsuperscript{28} Id.

\textsuperscript{29} Id.

\textsuperscript{30} See id. (“One law is more stringent than another if it prohibits more, requires more, or allows less.” (emphasis omitted)).

\textsuperscript{31} Id.


\textsuperscript{34} Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 31; see de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 153 (“[A] scheme of federal regulation [created by the federal statute] may be so pervasive as to make reasonable the inference that Congress left no room for the States to supplement it, because the Act of Congress may touch a field in which the federal interest is so dominant that the federal system will be assumed to preclude enforcement of state laws on the same subject . . . .”) (quoting Rice v. Santa Fe Elevator Corp., 331 U.S. 218, 290 (1947)) (internal quotation
of preemption is referred to as field preemption. Prior to the Dodd-Frank Act, some courts viewed the Home Owners’ Loan Act (“HOLA”), the federal statute which provides for the chartering and regulation of federal savings associations, as occupying the field with respect to such institutions.

If an express statutory or regulatory preemption does not exist, and there does not appear to be any implication that the federal law occupies a particular field of law, then the analysis turns to whether the state statute conflicts with the federal law. This type of preemption is known as conflict preemption. Courts may find conflict preemption when the federal law and the state law are in “irreconcilable conflict.” For instance, conflict preemption may be found when it would be physically impossible for the bank to comply with both the federal law and the state law. For example, a state law may provide that all banks in the state must open by 8:00 a.m., and a federal law might provide that national banks may not open until 9:00 a.m. It would be a physical impossibility for a national bank located

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35 Bank of Am. v. City of S.F., 309 F.3d 551, 558 (9th Cir. 2002); Am. Bankers Ass’n v. Lockyer, 239 F. Supp. 2d 1000, 1007-08 (E.D. Cal. 2002); Nelson, supra note 17, at 227.


37 See Meyers v. Beverly Hills Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 499 F.2d 1145, 1147 (9th Cir. 1974) (“[F]ederal law preempts the field of prepayments of real estate loans to federally chartered savings and loan associations, so that any California law in the area is inapplicable to federal savings and loan associations . . . operating within California.”); California v. Coast Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 98 F. Supp. 311, 318 (S.D. Cal. 1951) (stating that the Home Owners’ Loan Act “embrace[s] the entire field” and that it is thus “clear that Congress has preempted the field, making invalid the state statutes plaintiffs rely upon . . . when attempted to be invoked against a Federal savings and loan association”); see also First Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n of Wis. v. Loomis, 97 F.2d 831, 834 (7th Cir. 1938) (affirming the finding of the district court that “the plaintiff is a corporation organized and existing pursuant to and by virtue of [the Home Owners’ Loan] Act . . . and that as a Federal savings and loan association it is under the sole authority and control of the laws of the United States”).

38 Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 31; de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 153; Bank of Am., 309 F.3d at 558.


41 See Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 31 (declaring physical impossibility to be an “irreconcilable conflict”); de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 153 (“[S]tate law is nullified to the extent that it actually conflicts with federal law. Such a conflict arises when ‘compliance with both ‘federal and state regulations is a physical impossibility . . . .’” (quoting Fla. Lime & Avocado Growers, Inc. v. Paul, 373 U.S. 132, 142-43 (1963)); Bank of Am., 309 F.3d at 558; Am. Bankers Ass’n, 239 F. Supp. 2d at 1008 (“[A]ctual conflict arises when simultaneous compliance with state and federal law is a physical impossibility . . . .” (internal quotation marks omitted)).
in this state to comply with both the federal law and the state law. Conflict preemption also may be found when the state law is an obstacle to the accomplishment of the purposes and objectives of the federal law. This form of conflict preemption is referred to as obstacle preemption. Thus, obstacle preemption can occur when the state law is inconsistent with the federal law, or the state law interferes with federal policy.

The principles of conflict preemption continue to apply even when the state law is particularly important to the state. For example, in *Fidelity Federal Savings & Loan Ass’n v. de la Cuesta*, despite acknowledging that “real property law is a matter of special concern” to a state, the Supreme Court held that a federal regulation permitting federal savings and loan associations to enforce due-on-sale clauses in mortgage loans preempted a conflicting state law. Moreover, as the Supreme Court indicated in *de la Cuesta*, a conflict with state law may be found when a federal law or regulation provides permission to take certain actions, such as permitting federal savings and loan associations to include and enforce a due-on-sale provision in their mortgage agreements, but does not require that those actions be taken. Similarly, preemption may be found when it is possible for a national bank to comply with both the federal and the state laws; however, the state laws “infringe the national banking laws or impose an undue burden on the performance of the banks’ functions.” In addition, preemption may occur if the state law “frustrates the purpose

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43 Nelson, supra note 17, at 228–29.

44 See id. (stating that obstacle preemption may be found both when “state and federal law contradict each other” and when “the effects of state law will hinder accomplishment of the purposes behind federal law”); see also CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 94 (discussing the key question of whether “the state law interfere[s] with the policy of the federal law” (emphasis omitted)).


46 de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 153, 159.

47 Id. at 155 (“The conflict does not evaporate because the . . . regulation simply permits, but does not compel, federal savings and loans to include due-on-sale clauses in their contracts and to enforce those provisions when the security property is transferred.”).

Moreover, the principles of conflict preemption in banking are not hindered by a presumption against preemption. The presumption against preemption “rests on the assumption that Congress did not intend to supplant state law.”50 As the Supreme Court has explained, when Congress legislates in a field which has been “traditionally occupied” by the states, courts “start with the assumption that the historic police powers of the States were not to be superseded by the Federal Act unless that was the clear and manifest purpose of Congress.”51 However, a presumption against preemption “is not triggered when the State regulates in an area where there has been a history of significant federal presence.”52 “National banking is the paradigmatic example.”53 Thus, “because there has been a ‘history of significant federal presence’ in national banking, the presumption against preemption of state law is inapplicable.”54

B. Barnett Bank of Marion County, N.A. v. Nelson

The seminal case in the preemption law of banking is *Barnett Bank of Marion County, N.A. v. Nelson*, in which the Supreme Court addressed the issue of whether a federal bank statute and a Florida state statute were in “irreconcilable conflict.”55 The facts and the Supreme Court’s analysis of the case are worth discussing in detail, especially in light of the preeminence of this case in subsequent case law and con-

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50 *Bank of Am.*, 309 F.3d at 558.


52 United States v. Locke, 529 U.S. 89, 108 (2000); see also Robert S. Peck, *A Separation-of-Powers Defense of the “Presumption Against Preemption,”* 84 TUL. L. REV. 1185, 1195 (2010) (“The presumption does not apply where there has been a history of significant federal presence . . . .” (internal quotation marks omitted)).


54 *Bank of Am.*, 309 F.3d at 559 (quoting *Locke*, 529 U.S. at 108). See also Wachovia Bank v. Burke, 414 F.3d 305, 314 (2d Cir. 2005) (“The presumption against federal preemption disappears, however, in fields of federal regulation that have been substantially occupied by federal authority for an extended period of time. Regulation of federally chartered banks is one such area.” (quoting Flagg v. Yonkers Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 396 F.3d 178, 183 (2d Cir. 2005)).

gressional statutes. The federal statute at issue in the case, 12 U.S.C. § 92, granted to national banks the power to sell insurance in small towns, specifically those towns that do not exceed 5,000 people. The federal statute provided in relevant part that a national bank located and doing business in any place the population of which does not exceed five thousand inhabitants . . . may, under such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the Comptroller of the Currency, act as the agent for any fire, life, or other insurance company authorized by the authorities of the State . . . to do business in [that] State, by soliciting and selling insurance . . . .

The Florida statute provided that a bank may sell insurance in these small towns; however, such a bank may not be a subsidiary of a holding company. Barnett Bank was a subsidiary of a holding company.

The Court acknowledged that the two statutes do not directly conflict, which would be the case if the federal statute required national banks to sell insurance and the state law prohibited national banks from selling insurance. This hypothetical circumstance would be a case of physical impossibility. Instead, the Court considered whether the state statute, which prohibited a national bank that is a subsidiary of a holding company from selling insurance in these small towns, “stood as an obstacle to the accomplishment” of one of the purposes of the federal statute. In effect, the Court considered whether conflict preemption applied.

The state of Florida argued that the federal statute is limited to only those circumstances where a contrary state law does not exist. Thus, the Court considered whether the literal language of the fed-

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57 Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 28.


60 Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 29.

61 Id. at 31.

62 See id. (describing the inability to comply with two conflicting statutes as a “physical impossibility”); Fla. Lime & Avocado Growers, Inc. v. Paul 373 U.S. 132, 142–143 (1963) (“[F]ederal exclusion of state law is inescapable and requires no inquiry into congressional design where compliance with both federal and state regulations is a physical impossibility for one engaged in interstate commerce.”).

63 Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 31 (quoting Hines v. Davidowitz, 312 U.S. 52, 67 (1941)).

64 Id.

65 Id. at 32 (“[T]he State of Florida and its supporting amici argue . . . that the Federal Statute grants national banks a permission that is limited to circumstances where state law is not to the contrary.”).
eral statute indicated a broad or a limited permission, and found that the plain language of the statute suggested a broad permission. The statute provided that national banks “may . . . act as the agent” for sales of insurance. Moreover, the federal statute was not qualified by any reference to state regulation with respect to the licensing of banks as insurance agents. The federal statute expressly provided that any “rules or regulations” governing a national bank’s sale of insurance would be prescribed by the Comptroller of the Currency. In fact, the only reference to state regulation was limited to the licensing of insurance companies.

Further, the federal statute provided that the grant of authority to sell insurance is “in addition” to other powers granted to national banks. The Court explained that grants of “powers” to national banks, whether enumerated or incidental, historically have been interpreted “as grants of authority not normally limited by, but rather ordinarily pre-empting, contrary state law.” In a case where Con-

66 Id. (“[T]he Federal Statute’s language suggests a broad, not a limited, permission. That language says, without qualification, that national banks ‘may . . . act as the agent’ for insurance sales.” (quoting 12 U.S.C. § 92)).

67 12 U.S.C. § 92 (emphasis added); Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 32.

68 See 12 U.S.C. § 92; Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 32 (discussing that 12 U.S.C. § 92 only refers to state regulation in the context of “licensing—not of banks and insurance agents, but of the insurance companies whose policies the bank, as insurance agent, will sell”).


70 Id.

71 Id.

72 Enumerated powers of national banks are those powers expressly granted to national banks by statute. See, e.g., 12 U.S.C. § 24 (2012) (granting national banks the power to receive deposits and make loans); CARNEILL ET AL., supra note 13, at 108 (explaining that a “bank’s authority depends on the analysis of the statutory text”).

73 Incidental powers of national banks are those powers that have been interpreted by the courts or the applicable Federal banking regulator to be incidental to the business of banking. See 12 U.S.C. § 24 (2012) (granting national banks the power “to exercise . . . all such incidental powers as shall be necessary to carry on the business of banking”); see also NationsBank of N.C. v. Variable Annuity Life Ins. Co., 513 U.S. 251, 259 (1995) (holding that the business of banking is not limited to the enumerated powers set forth in 12 U.S.C. § 24 and the Comptroller of the Currency has the discretion to authorize activities beyond those powers expressly set forth in the statute); CARNEILL ET AL., supra note 13, at 108–09.

74 Barnett Bank of Marion Cnty., N.A. v. Nelson, 517 U.S. 25, 32 (1996); see also Fid. Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n v. de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. 141, 170 (1982) (holding that a federal regulation permitting national banks to include a “due on sale” clause in mortgage agreements preempts a conflicting state statute prohibiting the acceleration of a debt upon sale of the property); Franklin Nat’l Bank of Franklin Square v. New York, 347 U.S. 373, 375–79 (1954) (holding that a federal statute permitting national banks to accept savings deposits preempts a conflicting state statute prohibiting the use of the word “savings” in the advertising of certain state and national banks); First Nat’l Bank of San Jose v. California, 262 U.S. 366, 368–69 (1923) (finding that national banks’ “power” to receive deposits
The Court reasoned that Congress would not want the states to “forbid, or significantly impair,” that power. In contrast, states continued to have the power to prescribe laws to regulate national banks where those state laws did not “prevent or significantly interfere” with the exercise by the national bank of the powers granted by federal authority.

The federal statute in this case explicitly granted a national bank the power to sell insurance. The federal statute did not expressly condition the exercise of that power upon state permission, and thus the federal statute contained no “indication” that it was Congress’s intent to subject that power to a state restriction.

The Court concluded that the word “may” in the federal statute should have a broad interpretation that did not condition the federal power upon state permission. Thus, the Court held that the federal statute granted national banks the power to sell insurance regardless of whether or not a state permitted banks to sell insurance. Under the “ordinary legal principles of preemption,” the state statute was preempted.

As further discussed in Part II.A, the Barnett decision continues to be the seminal case in the preemption law of banking.
II. THE DODD-FRANK ACT AND FEDERAL PREEMPTION

In the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress addressed the doctrine of federal preemption in the banking realm. This Part will first discuss the preemption standard provided in the statute.

A. The Preemption Standard

In the spirit of reform premised by the statute, the Dodd-Frank Act specifically addresses preemption with regard to State consumer financial laws.83 A “State consumer financial law” is a state law “that does not directly or indirectly discriminate against national banks and that directly and specifically regulates the manner, content, or terms and conditions of any financial transaction . . . with respect to a consumer.”84 The Act’s preemption standard provides that a State consumer financial law will be preempted only if one of the following three circumstances apply: (i) the “application of a State consumer financial law would have a discriminatory effect on national banks” as compared to the effect of the law on state-chartered banks,85 (ii) the State consumer financial law “prevents or significantly interferes” with the national bank’s exercise of its powers “in accordance with the legal standard for preemption” in the Barnett decision,86 or (iii) the State consumer financial law is preempted by another federal law.87 Notably, with respect to national banks, the Dodd-Frank Act does not address preemption of state laws that do not meet the criteria of a “State consumer financial law.”88 Thus, existing preemption standards would still apply to national banks with respect to those state laws. Further, the Dodd-Frank Act expressly provides that the National Bank Act “does not occupy the field in any area of [s]tate law.”89

In considering the preemption standard, it is evident Congress was concerned with discrimination against national banks. As an initial matter, a state law will not fall within the scope of a “State consumer financial law” if it directly or indirectly discriminates against

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84 Id. § 25b(a)(2).
85 Id. § 25b(b)(1)(A).
86 Id. § 25b(b)(1)(B).
87 Id. § 25b(b)(1)(C).
88 Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,551 n.11; see id. at 43,556 n.47 (“[N]othing in Dodd-Frank affects the [Comptroller’s] authority to address preemption questions concerning laws other than ‘state consumer financial laws.’”).

national banks. A state law that directly discriminates against national banks presumably would permit less or require more of a national bank than a state-chartered bank. For example, if a state law required national banks to provide drive-up window service while state-chartered banks were not held to the same requirement, then the state law would directly discriminate against national banks. Similarly, if a state law required national banks to be closed on Saturdays but state-chartered banks were permitted to be open on Saturdays, then the state law would directly discriminate against national banks.

A state law that indirectly discriminates against national banks is somewhat less obvious; however, one can imagine a circumstance in which the state law required borrowers of national banks to pay a two percent mortgage recordation tax while borrowers of state-chartered banks paid a mortgage recordation tax of only one percent of the loan amount. In this example, the fee is paid by the borrower; thus, the state law indirectly discriminates against national banks by requiring borrowers of national banks to pay higher fees than borrowers of state banks.

If a state law “does not directly or indirectly discriminate against national banks” and “directly and specifically regulates the manner, content, or terms and conditions of any financial transaction” with a consumer, then the state law will be considered a “State consumer financial law” under the statute. The analysis then turns to whether the state law may be preempted pursuant to one of the three prongs of the preemption standard.

The first prong of the preemption standard, which may be aptly called “discriminatory effect preemption,” is a new standard for finding preemption of a State consumer financial law. This prong provides that a State consumer financial law may be preempted, even if it

90 Id. § 25b(a)(2).
91 Id.
92 Interpretive Letter No. 1132 from John Walsh, Acting Comptroller of the Currency, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, to Sen. Thomas R. Carper, at 2 & n.5 (May 12, 2011). While discriminatory effect preemption is a new standard in the preemption of State consumer financial laws, the concern of a possible discriminatory effect against national banks has a long history in the usury laws of banking. See, e.g., Tiffany v. Nat’l Bank of Mo., 85 U.S. 409, 413 (1873) (expressing a concern with “expos[ing] [national banks] to the hazard of unfriendly legislation by the States,” and thus holding that national banks may charge interest at the same rate as that permitted to be charged by state-chartered banks, but if a higher rate is permitted to be charged by other lenders in the state, national banks may charge that higher rate); cf. 12 U.S.C. § 1831d(a) (2012) (permitting insured state-chartered banks to charge the highest rate of interest permitted by lenders in the state as a means of avoiding discrimination against insured banks in general).
does not directly or indirectly discriminate against national banks but rather, if it has a “discriminatory effect on national banks” as compared to the effect on state-chartered banks.\footnote{12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(1)(A)–(B) (2012).} One may look to the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (“ECOA”)\footnote{Equal Credit Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 93-495, 88 Stat. 1521 (1974) (codified as amended at 15 U.S.C. §§ 1691(a)–(f) (2012)).} to discern the meaning of discriminatory effect within banking law. The ECOA prohibits discrimination against credit applicants on the basis, inter alia, of age, gender, marital status, race, color, religion, or national origin.\footnote{15 U.S.C. § 1691(a)(1).} The Federal Reserve Board adopted an “effects test” in interpreting the ECOA.\footnote{CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 354; see 12 C.F.R. § 202.6 (2013).} The ECOA may prohibit a particular practice by a creditor that has a “disproportionately negative impact” or effect on one of the protected classes.\footnote{12 C.F.R. § 202.6(a)(2). An exception exists if the “practice meets a legitimate business need” of the creditor that cannot reasonably be accomplished as well in a way that is less unequal in its effect. \textit{Id.}} This may be the case even if the creditor had “no intent to discriminate” and the practice itself appears to be “neutral on its face.”\footnote{\textit{Id.}}

As applied to the discriminatory effect preemption prong, a State consumer financial law may be deemed to have a discriminatory effect on national banks as compared to the effect on state banks if, for example, the law provides that all businesses located in the state must pay a fee to the state to obtain a license to operate. Under this law, state banks would be required to pay the single fee to the state to obtain a license while national banks would be required to pay the fee for a state license plus the fee to the Comptroller of the Currency to obtain a charter to operate as a national bank.\footnote{See \textit{infra} note 411 and accompanying text.} Thus, this state law, while appearing neutral on its face, would have a disproportionately negative impact or effect on national banks as compared to state banks.

The second prong, generally referred to as “\textit{Barnett} standard preemption,”\footnote{Interpretive Letter No. 1132, \textit{supra} note 92, at 2–4.} has been a source of debate regarding whether the prong preserves and codifies the \textit{Barnett} precedent of conflict preemption\footnote{See \textit{Barnett Bank of Marion Cnty., N.A. v. Nelson}, 517 U.S. 25 (1996).} or creates a new preemption standard. This debate will be further discussed in Part II.A.1. The third prong simply acknowl-
edges preemption of State consumer financial laws by other federal laws.\footnote{\textit{JOURNAL OF CONSTITUTIONAL LAW}}

The Dodd-Frank Act also provides new procedures the Comptroller must follow under the \textit{Barnett} standard preemption prong.\footnote{\textit{Interpretation}} Any preemption determination under this prong may be made either "by a court, or by regulation or order of the Comptroller of the Currency on a case-by-case basis."\footnote{\textit{104}} In each instance, the Comptroller must make a determination about the impact the "particular State consumer financial law" has on national banks that are subject to either the particular state law or, more broadly, the law of another state with "substantively equivalent terms."\footnote{\textit{105}} The Comptroller must consult with the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection ("BCFP") in determining that another state’s law is "substantively equivalent" to the state law at issue.\footnote{\textit{106}} This language was intended to allow the Comptroller "to make a single determination" regarding the consumer financial laws of multiple states provided each law includes "substantively equivalent terms."\footnote{\textit{107}} Moreover, the Comptroller may not preempt a State consumer financial law "unless substantial evidence, made on the record of the proceeding, supports the specific finding [of preemption] ... in accordance with the legal standard" of the \textit{Barnett} decision.\footnote{\textit{108}} The Comptroller is further required to conduct a periodic review every five years after making a preemption determination with respect to a State consumer financial law.\footnote{\textit{Interpretation}} The Comptroller’s review is subject to notice and public comment.\footnote{\textit{Interpretation}} The following Subparts examine the debate regarding the interpretation of the \textit{Barnett} preemption standard and illustrate how the standard will be applied by the Comptroller and the courts.

1. \textit{Interpretation}

The \textit{Barnett} standard preemption prong provides that a State consumer financial law may be preempted if it "prevents or significantly interferes" with the national bank's exercise of its powers "in accord-
ance with the legal standard for preemption” in the *Barnett* decision.111 Two competing theories have been proffered regarding how this prong should be interpreted.

In a May 12, 2011 letter to Senator Thomas Carper, who along with Senator Mark Warner authored the final version of the preemption provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act, the Acting Comptroller of the Currency, John Walsh, discussed his interpretation of the *Barnett* standard preemption prong.112 According to Walsh, the use of the phrase “in accordance with the legal standard for preemption” in the *Barnett* decision should be interpreted as Congress’s intention that the Comptroller use the standard for conflict preemption discussed in *Barnett*.113 Walsh acknowledged that the statute includes the phrase “prevent[s] or significantly interfere[s]” from the *Barnett* case and, therefore, the conflict preemption analysis will start with this formulation.114 However, Walsh argued that the statute requires that phrase to be analyzed “in accordance with the legal standard for preemption” in the *Barnett* decision; thus, the Comptroller’s analysis will incorporate the Supreme Court’s entire analysis of conflict preemption in *Barnett* rather than just the single phrase.115

This analysis appears to be sound. In examining the plain language of the statute, if Congress intended to narrow the preemption standard to a “prevents or significantly interferes” standard, then the qualifying phrase, “in accordance with the legal standard for preemption” in the *Barnett* case,116 would be unnecessary. Alternatively, if Congress intended the “prevents or significantly interferes” language to be the new standard for preemption, then the qualifying phrase might simply state “in accordance with” the *Barnett* case. However, the qualifying phrase refers to the “legal standard for preemption” in the *Barnett* decision.117 Thus, Congress appears to have contemplated a “legal standard for preemption” broader than the “prevents or significantly interferes” language.

This interpretation is reinforced by the “substantial evidence” requirement of the statute, in which a finding of preemption must be

111 *Id.* § 25b(b)(1)(B).
112 Interpretive Letter No. 1132, *supra* note 92, at 1.
115 *Id.* § 25b(b)(1)(B).
116 *Id.* § 25b(b)(1)(B).
117 *Id.*
“in accordance with the legal standard” of the *Barnett* decision. The interpretation is further supported by statutory and judicial precedent. The language of the *Barnett* standard preemption provision in the Dodd-Frank Act is effectively the same language Congress used in the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act of 1999 when setting forth preemption standards for the sale of insurance by national banks. Moreover, the Sixth Circuit in *Ass’n of Banks in Insurance v. Duryee*, applied the same *Barnett* “legal standards for preemption” provision in the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act to preempt certain state licensing laws that prohibited national banks from acting as insurance agents in small towns with a population of 5,000 or less. The Sixth Circuit’s analysis makes clear that the “*Barnett Bank* standard” of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act refers to the entire analysis of the Supreme Court in the *Barnett* decision.

Further, Senator Carper released a statement indicating that the Comptroller’s view of the *Barnett* standard preemption provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act is consistent with his intent and the legislative language. Senator Carper highlighted that the *Barnett* standard preemption provisions in the Dodd-Frank Act “do not create a brand new preemption standard, but instead clarify that the traditional preemption tests, as laid out by the Supreme Court in the *Barnett* case, continue to apply.”

However, the Department of the Treasury took a different view. In a June 27, 2011 letter to Acting Comptroller Walsh, General Counsel of the Department of the Treasury George W. Madison argued

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118 Id. § 25b(c); see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 3 & n.13 (explaining the “substantial evidence” requirement of the statute).
119 15 U.S.C. § 6701(d)(2)(A) (2012); *Ass’n of Banks in Ins. v. Duryee*, 270 F.3d 397, 404–05, 408–10 (6th Cir. 2001) (citing the *Barnett Bank* decision as the standard for findings of preemption); see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 3.
120 15 U.S.C. § 6701(d)(2)(A) (“In accordance with the legal standards for preemption set forth in the [*Barnett Bank* decision], no State may ... prevent or significantly interfere with the ability of a depository institution ... to engage ... in any insurance sales, solicitation, or crossmarketing activity.”); see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 3; Letter from Sen. Thomas R. Carper & Sen. Mark R. Warner to Timothy Geithner, Sec’y of the Treasury, at 2 (July 8, 2011) (noting the similarities in the language between the Dodd-Frank Act and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act).
121 *Ass’n of Banks in Ins.*, 270 F.3d at 400–01, 404–05, 408–10; see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 3.
122 *Ass’n of Bank in Ins.*, 270 F.3d at 404–05, 408 (discussing in detail the Court’s entire analysis in the *Barnett Bank* decision and finding preemption under the “traditional *Barnett Bank* standards”); see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 3.
that the “plain language of the statute” provides that a State consumer financial law may be preempted if the law “prevents or significantly interferes with the exercise by the national bank of its powers.”

Therefore, according to the Treasury, Congress intended the “relevant test” to be the more narrow “prevents or significantly interferes” standard in the Barnett decision and not the broader interpretation of the “entirety of the Barnett opinion” advocated by the Comptroller.

In pointed response, Senator Carper and Senator Warner authored a joint correspondence to the Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner reiterating that the “Barnett standard was maintained.” Senators Carper and Warner explained that the “prevents or significantly interferes” language “is not a limiting phrase” but rather is “stating the touchstone of the Barnett case.” Further, the Senators emphasized that a finding by the Comptroller to preempt a State consumer financial law will be upheld by a court only if the determination is “in accordance with the legal standard” of the Barnett decision. Therefore, the Dodd-Frank Act “explicitly order[s]” a court to review the Comptroller’s preemption finding “based on the legal standard of Barnett, not some part of it.” As the Senators stated, it would be an “absurdity” if Congress were instructing courts to use a standard of review that is broader than the standard used by the Comptroller of the Currency.

In the final rule implementing the preemption provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act, the Comptroller further explained that the statute’s reference to the “legal standard for preemption” in the Barnett decision is a reference to “conflict preemption, applied in the context of powers granted national banks under Federal law.” The Dodd-Frank Act was not intended to establish, nor does it establish, a new “prevents or significantly interferes” standard for preemption. The “prevents or significantly interferes” language in the statute is simply a reference to “part of” the Supreme Court’s “discussion of its reasoning” in the Barnett decision and was not intended to be construed as

126 Id. at 2.
127 Letter from Carper & Warner, supra note 120, at 1 (emphasis added).
128 Id.
129 Id. at 2 (quoting 12 U.S.C. § 25b(c) (2012)).
130 Id. (emphasis added).
131 Id.
132 Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,555.
133 Id.
the “legal standard for preemption” in the decision.\textsuperscript{134} Thus, the statute “incorporates the conflict preemption legal standard and the reasoning that supports it in the Supreme Court’s Barnett decision.”\textsuperscript{135}

In sum, Congress’s intent clearly was to maintain and codify the Barnett preemption standard.\textsuperscript{136} This “standard is conflict preemption, as supported by the reasoning” of the Barnett decision.\textsuperscript{137} This reasoning includes the “prevents or significantly interferes” formulation, “but is not bounded by” it.\textsuperscript{138} Thus, the standard is broader than the “prevents or significantly interferes” language and incorporates the entirety of the Barnett preemption analysis.\textsuperscript{139} The Comptroller will, therefore, consider the Supreme Court’s entire analysis of conflict preemption in the Barnett decision when determining whether to preempt a State consumer financial law.\textsuperscript{140} This crucial clarification in the interpretation of the preemption standard is exceedingly important in the doctrine of preemption for national banks. If Congress had not intended to preserve the conflict preemption analysis in the Barnett decision, but instead sought to create a new, narrower “prevents or significantly interferes” standard, then “it would have been rejecting not just Barnett, but also . . . well over a century of judicial precedent upon which the decision was founded.”\textsuperscript{141}

2. Application

Based on this interpretation of the Barnett standard preemption prong, exactly what factors will guide the Comptroller in determining whether a State consumer financial law is preempted? According to the Comptroller, the “essence” of the analysis under the Barnett conflict preemption standard is an “evaluation of the extent and nature” of any “impediment” a state law imposes on the “exercise of a power

\textsuperscript{134} Id.
\textsuperscript{135} Id.
\textsuperscript{137} Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 5, at 43,555.
\textsuperscript{138} Id.
\textsuperscript{139} Letter from Carper & Warner, supra note 120, at 1–2.
\textsuperscript{140} Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 2–3 & n.13.
\textsuperscript{141} Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 5, at 43,555.
granted national banks under Federal law.” \(^{142}\) The “conflict” the Comptroller analyses under the conflict preemption standard is the “nature and scope of that impediment.” \(^{143}\) Moreover, the “prevents or significantly interferes” formulation is the “touchstone” of the Barnett standard for conflict preemption and the related analysis. \(^{144}\) For example, in Barnett, the state statute restricting the ability of a national bank to sell insurance in small towns imposed an “impediment” on the “exercise of a power granted national banks under Federal law.” \(^{145}\) Based on the Supreme Court’s analysis, the “nature and scope” of that impediment significantly interfered with the ability of a national bank to exercise its power granted under federal law to sell insurance in small towns. \(^{146}\) Thus, the state statute was preempted. \(^{147}\)

Similarly, under the Barnett standard, state laws that require national banks to make certain disclosures or refrain from using certain terms in advertising with respect to taking deposits or making loans would “present a significant interference” with the exercise of powers granted national banks under federal law. \(^{148}\) For instance, in Franklin National Bank of Franklin Square v. New York, the Supreme Court found a “clear conflict” between a federal statute that permitted national banks to accept savings deposits and a state statute that prohibited the use of the word “savings” in the advertising of certain state and national banks. \(^{149}\) The Court found “no indication that Congress intended to make this phase of national banking subject to” state law. Thus, the state statute was preempted. \(^{150}\) Franklin National Bank was

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\(^{142}\) Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,556. It should be noted that while the preemption analysis in the Barnett decision could be applied to any type of state law, the scope of the Barnett standard preemption provisions in the Dodd-Frank Act is limited to the determination of whether a state consumer financial law is applicable to national banks. Id. at 43,556 n.47.

\(^{143}\) Id. at 43,556.

\(^{144}\) Id. at 43,555; Letter from Carper & Warner, supra note 120, at 1; see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 2 (explaining that the preemption provision includes the phrase “prevents or significantly interferes” from the Barnett case and, therefore, the conflict preemption analysis will start with this formulation).


\(^{146}\) Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 32–33; Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,556.

\(^{147}\) Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 28, 37–43.

\(^{148}\) Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,557.


\(^{150}\) Id. at 378.

\(^{151}\) Id. at 374; see also Gutierrez v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A., 704 F.3d 712, 726 (9th Cir. 2012) (“The requirement to make particular disclosures falls squarely within the purview of federal banking regulation and is expressly preempted . . . .”); Rose v. Chase Bank USA, N.A., 513 F.3d 1052, 1056–38 (9th Cir. 2008) (finding that the National Bank Act preempted a state law requiring certain disclosures on convenience checks issued by na-
expressly discussed in the Barnett opinion and is one of the many cases upon which the Barnett decision relied.\footnote{152}

Moreover, state laws that impose an impediment on a fundamental or core banking business would significantly interfere with the ability of a national bank to manage that business.\footnote{153} For example, state laws that would impact the ability of a national bank to “underwrite and mitigate credit risk, manage credit risk exposures, and manage loan-related assets” would “meaningfully interfere” with the “fundamental” banking business of making loans and managing the associated credit risks.\footnote{154} Similarly, state laws that would impose or alter standards with respect to the depository activities of a national bank, such as standards affecting the types and terms of deposit accounts or the availability of funds, would “significantly interfere” with the management of a “core” business of national banks.\footnote{155} State laws directed at the depository activities of a national bank are significant because such laws affect the “overall risk management and funding strategies” of a bank, “including liquidity, interest rate risk exposure, funding management, and fraud prevention.”\footnote{156}

Judicial interpretation of the preemption provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act provides further enlightenment. For example, in Baptista v. JPMorgan Chase Bank, N.A., the Eleventh Circuit reviewed the dismissal of a class action suit against JPMorgan Chase for charging a check cashing service fee to a non-account holder.\footnote{157} The plaintiff-
appellant alleged the service fee violated a Florida statute that “prohibit[ed] a bank from ‘sett[ling] any check drawn on it otherwise than at par.’”158 In considering the question of what type of preemption would be applicable (i.e., express preemption, field preemption, or conflict preemption), the Eleventh Circuit underscored that the Dodd-Frank Act amended the preemption section of the National Bank Act “to address this very issue.”159 Upon review of the Barnett preemption standard in the statute, as well as the Barnett case itself, the court found that “under the Dodd-Frank Act, the proper preemption test asks whether there is a significant conflict between the state and federal statutes—that is, the test for conflict preemption.”160 Applying this test, the court found a “clear conflict” to exist.161 The state statute which prohibited the charging of fees to non-account holders was in “substantial conflict with federal authorization,” which permitted such fees to be charged.162 Thus, the state statute was preempted.163

A number of points may be drawn from the Baptista case. In its analysis, the Eleventh Circuit observed that the Supreme Court in Barnett found that the “controlling question” was whether the state law “forbid[s], or . . . impair[s] significantly, the exercise of a power that Congress explicitly granted.”164 The Eleventh Circuit concluded that the “proper preemption test” under the Dodd-Frank Act is “the test for conflict preemption.”165 This analysis was directly in line with that of the Comptroller and with the intent of Congress. The “prevents or significantly interferes” formulation or even the “forbid[s], or . . . impair[s] significantly” formulation is the “touchstone” of the preemption analysis.166 However, the analysis does not end with either of these formulations. As the Eleventh Circuit and the Comp-

158 Id. (quoting FLA. STAT. § 655.85 (2011)).
159 Id. at 1197.
160 Id.
161 Id. at 1198.
162 Id.
163 Id.
164 Id. at 1197 (quoting Barnett Bank of Marion Cnty., N.A. v. Nelson, 517 U.S. 25, 33 (1996)).
165 Id.
166 See Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,555 (noting that the “prevents or significantly interferes” formulation is the “touchstone” of the Barnett standard for conflict preemption and the related analysis); Letter from Carper and Warner, supra note 120, at 1 (explaining that the “prevents or significantly interferes” language “is not a limiting phrase” but rather “stat[es] the touchstone of the Barnett case”); see also Interpretive Letter No. 1132, supra note 92, at 2 (explaining that the provision includes the phrase “prevents or significantly interferes” from the Barnett case and, therefore, the conflict preemption analysis will start with this formulation).
troller pointed out, the preemption standard under the Dodd-Frank Act is the broader test of “conflict preemption” based on the entirety of the analysis in the Supreme Court’s *Barnett* decision.167

Further, as discussed previously in Part I.A, the principles of conflict preemption continue to apply even when the state law is particularly important to the state.168 The state law in *Baptista* “[d]id not directly or indirectly discriminate against national banks and . . . directly and specifically regulate[d] the manner, content, or terms and conditions of [a] financial transaction . . . with respect to a consumer.”169 Thus, the state law at issue in *Baptista* was a State consumer financial law under the meaning of the Dodd-Frank Act.170 While State consumer financial laws are, without question, of particular importance to the state, it is evident that even after the financial crisis, during which many consumers suffered financial harm,171 courts will continue to honor the principles of conflict preemption as indicated by the decision in *Baptista* to preempt a State consumer financial law.172

Moreover, not only was the state statute in *Baptista* a State consumer financial law, but, in particular, it was a law that protected individuals who did not have a bank account in which to deposit a check and, therefore, would need to cash the check with the bank upon which the check was drawn.173 Such individuals are most likely of limited financial means and lack the wherewithal to open and maintain the minimum balances necessary for a modern bank account.174 These are exactly the type of individuals the Dodd-Frank Act

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167 *Baptista*, 640 F.3d at 1197; Dodd-Frank Implementation, *supra* note 3, at 43,555 (“Th[e] standard is conflict preemption, as supported by the reasoning of the [Barnett] decision.”).

168 *See supra* notes 45–46 and accompanying text.


171 156 CONG. REC. S5888 (daily ed. July 15, 2010) (statement of Sen. Johnson) (explaining that, as a result of the financial crisis, “Americans . . . were losing their homes, jobs, and long-term savings”).

172 *See Baptista*, 640 F.3d at 1196–98.

173 *Baptista* did not have a checking account with Chase. It may be presumed that Baptista also did not have a checking account with any other bank and, therefore, needed to cash the check with the bank upon which it was drawn. *See id.* at 1196. *See also* Wells Fargo Bank of Tex., N.A. v. James, 321 F.3d 488, 490 (5th Cir. 2003) (describing a similar statute that was enacted in Texas “as a consumer protection measure . . . to ensure that Texas employees, and in particular the working poor, receive payment for the face value of their paycheck.”).

174 *See James*, 321 F.3d at 490 (“[I]ndividuals who do not have a checking account and who seek to cash checks at the institution which issued the [check] are predominantly low-income individuals . . . .”); 156 CONG. REC. S5871 (daily ed. July 15, 2010) (statement of Sen. Akaka) (“Regular checking accounts may be too expensive for some consumers un-
One of the primary purposes of the statute was “to protect consumers from abusive financial services practices.” Yet, the Dodd-Frank Act directs courts to precisely the conflict preemption analysis undertaken in Baptista, which resulted in the preemption of a State consumer financial law that otherwise would have prevented a bank from charging a consumer a $6.00 fee to cash a $262.48 check. While some may find this to be an untenable result, it is the correct result for two reasons.

First, preemption is the correct result under the Baptista court’s preemption analysis. Specifically, the National Bank Act permits banks to “exercise . . . all such incidental powers as shall be necessary to carry on the business of banking[] by discounting and negotiating promissory notes, drafts, bills of exchange, and other evidences of debt.” In addition, the Comptroller promulgated a regulation pursuant to the National Bank Act that permits a national bank to “charge its customers non-interest charges and fees, including deposit account service charges.” The Comptroller’s interpretation of the term “customer” included “any person who presents a check for payment.” The Eleventh Circuit found that the Comptroller was authorized to “regulate banking and banking-related activities.” Further, the Comptroller’s interpretation of the term “customer” to be “any person presenting a check for payment” was “not unreasonable.” The court noted that the significant objective of the Comptroller’s regulation was to permit national banks not only to charge such fees but also to provide national banks with the “option of how to charge” the fees. The Eleventh Circuit found that the state law

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177 Baptista, 640 F.3d at 1196–98.
178 Id.
179 Id. at 1196 (quoting 12 U.S.C. § 24).
180 Id. at 1196–97 (quoting 12 C.F.R. § 7.4002(a) (2001)).
181 Id. at 1197 (quoting James, 321 F.3d at 490 & n.2).
182 Id. at 1198.
183 Id.
184 Id. at 1198 n.2 (“[T]he establishment of non-interest charges and fees, their amounts, and the method of calculating them are business decisions to be made by each bank, in
“reduce[d] the bank’s fee options by [fifty percent].” Thus, the state statute prohibiting the charging of a check cashing service fee to non-account holders was in “substantial conflict” with the Comptroller’s regulation pursuant to the National Bank Act that allowed banks to charge these fees. Therefore, the court correctly held that the state statute was preempted.

Second, the check cashing fee is not an abusive practice. Rather, charging a check cashing fee to non-account holders is a means of mitigating the risk of paying on a check with a fraudulent endorsement. The basic rule is that the depository bank is liable for a check paid with a forged endorsement. When the depository bank presents a check for payment to the drawee or payor bank, the depository bank warrants to the drawee bank that the check does not contain a fraudulent endorsement. If the drawee bank pays on a check that does contain a fraudulent endorsement, then the drawee bank has recourse against the depository bank. However, if the drawee bank cashes the check rather than paying the check through the normal clearance process, then the drawee bank bears the risk of a fraudulent endorsement. For example, under the facts of the Baptista case, Chase cashed the check for a non-account holder. Therefore, the bank did not know the payee on the check and could not verify the signature endorsing the check. As the drawee bank cashing a check for a non-account holder, Chase assumed the considerable risk that the endorsement on the check may have been forged. Thus, the check cashing fee is an appropriate means of mitigating the bank’s substantial risk of paying on a check with a forged endorsement. As discussed in this Subpart, state laws affecting the depository activities


185 Baptista, 640 F.3d at 1198.
186 Id. at 1196–98.
187 Id. at 1198.
189 U.C.C. §4-208(a) (2002); Smith, supra note 188.
190 U.C.C. §4-208(b); Smith, supra note 188.
191 CARNEIL ET AL., supra note 15, at 51.
192 Baptista, 640 F.3d at 1196.
of a national bank, such as standards relating to the terms of deposit accounts, would “significantly interfere” with the management of a “core” business of national banks because such laws affect the “risk management” of a bank, including the prevention of fraud.194

While the Dodd-Frank Act provided the reform of new procedures to be followed by the Comptroller in preemption determinations,195 the Barnett standard of conflict preemption was maintained for State consumer financial laws.196 Thus, the doctrine of preemption has been effectively unchanged in this area.197 The Comptroller and the courts have the same latitude as before to find State consumer financial laws in conflict with federal laws and therefore preempted. The law of preemption was also unchanged with regard to state laws that do not qualify as State consumer financial laws.198 In contrast, the statute provided for discriminatory effect preemption as a new standard for finding preemption of a State consumer financial law.199 Thus, the standard for preemption of state law has been broadened in this respect.

The following Subpart provides an analysis of the standard of review that courts should apply to the Comptroller’s preemption decisions. The Dodd-Frank Act has instituted a significant reform in this area.

B. Standard of Review

Courts have developed two levels of deference when reviewing actions by an administrative agency.200 The “higher level of deference is known as ‘Chevron deference’” and is based on the principles articulated by the Supreme Court in Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.201 Courts will provide Chevron deference “when it appears that Congress delegated authority to the agency generally to make rules carrying the force of law, and that the agency interpreta-

194 Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,557; see also supra notes 155–56 and accompanying text.
195 See supra notes 103–10 and accompanying text.
196 See supra notes 136–37 and accompanying text. With regard to national banks, the statute addresses only State consumer financial laws. See supra note 88 and accompanying text.
197 See U.S. Bank Nat’l Ass’n v. Schipper, 812 F. Supp. 2d 963 n.1 (S.D. Iowa 2011) (“[T]he Dodd-Frank Act adopts the same standard applied by the Watters court . . . . Thus, the Dodd-Frank Act did not materially alter the standard for preemption the Court must apply in this case.”).
198 See supra note 88 and accompanying text.
tion . . . was promulgated in the exercise of that authority.” An agency may show that it is empowered to act with the force of law “in a variety of ways, as by an agency’s power to engage in adjudication or notice-and-comment rulemaking, or by some other indication of a comparable congressional intent.”

Prior to the Dodd-Frank Act, the standard of review applied to a decision by the Comptroller of the Currency was based on the *Chevron* framework. Under this framework, a court first considers whether the federal statute reveals an “unambiguously expressed intent of Congress’ that addresses ‘the precise question at issue.’” If Congress’s intent is found, “that is the end of the matter.” A court will enforce that intent. Thus, if “Congress has spoken unambiguously as to the precise question at hand, the court must enforce Congress’ intent” even if the agency empowered to administer the statute has “adopted an alternate interpretation.”

However, if Congress has not “directly spoken to the precise question at issue,” *Chevron* provided that a court will defer to an administrative agency’s interpretation where it “is based on a permissible construction of the statute” the agency administers. In *Chevron*, the Supreme Court further explained that “a court may not substitute its own construction of a statutory provision for a reasonable interpretation made by the administrator of an agency.” Moreover, if the agency’s interpretation “represents a reasonable accommodation of conflicting policies that were committed to the agency’s care by the statute, [the courts] should not disturb it unless it appears from the statute or its legislative history that the accommodation is not one that Congress would have sanctioned.” Courts have interpreted *Chevron* to “require deference to any reasonable interpretation of the statute offered by the agency.” As stated by the Supreme Court in

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207 *Indep. Ins. Agents of Am., Inc.* 997 F.2d at 959 (citing *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 842).
209 *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 842–43.
210 *Id*. at 844.
211 *Id*. at 845 (quoting United States v. Shimer, 367 U.S. 374, 383 (1961)).
212 Zaring, *supra* note 203, at 144.
NationsBank of North Carolina, N.A. v. Variable Annuity Life Insurance Co., if the agency’s interpretation “fills a gap or defines a term in a way that is reasonable” the courts will give the agency’s interpretation “controlling weight.” Thus, where Congress’s intent is not found, courts will defer to an administrative “agency’s reasonable interpretation of a statute it is charged with administering.” Courts defer to agency interpretations under Chevron based on a “presumption” that when Congress leaves “ambiguity in a statute meant for implementation by an agency,” Congress intended that the agency would resolve the ambiguity and should “possess whatever degree of discretion the ambiguity allows.”

The Comptroller of the Currency is the agency charged with administering the National Bank Act. Congress granted the Comptroller the general authority to “prescribe rules and regulations” under the National Bank Act as well as the specific authority to make preemption determinations under the statute. Thus, if the review-
ing court finds ambiguity in the meaning of the National Bank Act, then the Comptroller "can give authoritative meaning to the statute within the bounds of that uncertainty."\(^{219}\) However, the existence of ambiguity in the statute "does not expand Chevron deference to cover virtually any interpretation of the National Bank Act."\(^{220}\) While the Comptroller’s regulation does not need to be "the best interpretation of the statute," the regulation must be a "reasonable" interpretation of the statute.\(^{221}\)

Courts also will review the agency’s interpretation of its own regulation promulgated pursuant to a statute to determine whether that interpretation is reasonable.\(^{222}\) The standard used when an agency interprets a regulation it has promulgated is provided by *Auer v. Robbins*.\(^{223}\) A court’s first step in determining whether to provide *Auer* deference is to consider whether the language of the agency’s regulation is ambiguous.\(^{224}\) If a reviewing court determines that the agency’s regulation is "ambiguous as to the precise issue" in question, then the "agency’s interpretation of its own regulation is controlling unless authority to preempt certain state laws." (citing Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. v. Boutris, 419 F.3d 949, 962–63 (9th Cir. 2005)).

\(^{219}\) *See Cuomo*, 557 U.S. at 535 (noting that the Comptroller’s regulation interpreting the term "visitorial powers" in the National Bank Act to include "conducting examinations [and] inspecting or requiring the production of books or records" of a national bank is a reasonable interpretation of the National Bank Act (quoting 12 C.F.R. § 7.4000 (2009))); *see also* 12 U.S.C. § 484(a) ("No national bank shall be subject to any visitorial powers except as authorized by Federal law, vested in the courts of justice . . . .")

\(^{220}\) *Cuomo*, 557 U.S. at 519 (holding that the Comptroller’s regulation preempting a state’s enforcement of its own laws in state court is not a reasonable interpretation of the term "visitorial powers" in the National Bank Act (citing 12 C.F.R. § 7.4000)).

\(^{221}\) *See Smiley*, 517 U.S. at 737–40, 744–45, 747 (holding that the Comptroller’s regulation interpreting the term "interest" in the National Bank Act to include late payment fees on credit cards is a reasonable interpretation of the statute); *see also* 12 U.S.C. § 85 (noting that interest may be charged on any "evidence of debt"); 12 C.F.R. § 7.4001(a) (2011) (noting that interest "includes any payment compensating a creditor or prospective creditor for an extension of credit" as well as fees associated with the extension of credit, such as late fees).

\(^{222}\) *See Baptista v. JPMorgan Chase Bank*, N.A. 640 F.3d 1194, 1198 (11th Cir. 2011) (finding preemption where state law conflicts with the Comptroller’s regulation promulgated pursuant to the National Bank Act and the agency’s interpretation of its regulation is "not unreasonable"); *see also* 12 C.F.R. § 7.4002 (providing for preemption when in accordance with United States Constitutional principles).

\(^{223}\) *See Baptista*, 640 F.3d at 1197–98 (noting that the standard used to determine whether to defer to an agency’s interpretation of a regulation it has promulgated is *Auer* deference); *see also* Wells Fargo Bank of Tex., N.A. v. James, 321 F.3d 488, 494 (5th Cir. 2003) (citing *Auer* v. Robbins, 519 U.S. 452, 458 (1997) (confirming that *Auer* deference is the legal standard used when an agency interprets a regulation it has promulgated).

\(^{224}\) *James*, 321 F.3d at 494 (citing Christensen v. Harris Cnty., 529 U.S. 576, 588 (2000)) (explaining the *Auer* deference legal test).
it is clearly erroneous." Thus, under Auer, "an agency’s interpretation of its own regulation is also entitled to Chevron deference." In addition, courts will consider whether the agency’s current interpretation is a deviation from its prior policy. A deviation from prior policy may be found when the agency’s new interpretation constitutes a “change of official agency position.” However, prior agency letters that contradict a new regulation would likely be “too informal” to be considered a “binding agency policy.” Nevertheless, Chevron deference has sometimes been afforded based on a new agency letter in cases where a formal notice and comment rulemaking was not required. Moreover, while a “[s]udden and unexplained change” or a change that does not consider “legitimate reliance on prior interpretation” may be found to be “arbitrary, capricious[,] or] an abuse of discretion,” change in and of itself is “not

225 See id. (citing Auer, 519 U.S. at 461) (holding that the Comptroller’s interpretation of the term “customer” in its regulation to mean “any person who presents a check for payment” is not clearly erroneous and, therefore, is controlling; determining that a state statute which prohibited banks from paying a check drawn on it other than at par regardless of whether the payee is an account holder at the bank is in “irreconcilable conflict” with the Comptroller’s regulation permitting national banks to charge fees when cashing checks for non-account holders, and thus, is preempted); see also 12 C.F.R. § 7.4002(a) (providing that national banks may charge “non-interest charges and fees, including deposit account service charges”); cf. Cuomo, 557 U.S. at 531–32 (finding the “Comptroller’s interpretation of its regulation . . . . cannot be reconciled with” the regulation or the statute).

226 Bate v. Wells Fargo Bank, N.A. 454 B.R. 869, 877 (Bankr. M.D. Fla. 2011) (citing Auer, 519 U.S. at 461) (explaining that where an agency’s regulations were not created by the agency, but rather represent a “codification” of Supreme Court precedent, the agency’s interpretation of its regulations “should not be given Chevron deference” and thus applying Skidmore-level deference to the Comptroller’s interpretation). The Bate court’s decision to use a Skidmore standard of review was in part based on the Supreme Court case of Wyeth v. Levine, 129 S. Ct. 1187 (2009). Bate 454 B.R. at 878 & n.57. Wyeth concerned a declaration of preemption by the Food and Drug Administration (“FDA”) with regard to state law. Wyeth 129 S. Ct. at 1193. The Supreme Court found that Congress had not granted the FDA authority to preempt state law. Id. at 1201–02. Therefore, the Court applied Skidmore-level deference. Id. at 1201. In contrast, as the Bate court acknowledged, “the OCC has been given authority to make determinations on the preemption of consumer protection laws.” Bate, 454 B.R. at 878.

227 Smiley v. Citibank (S.D.), N.A. 517 U.S. 735, 742–43 (1996) (finding that the Comptroller’s regulation did not constitute a change in the official policy of the agency); Indep. Ins. Agents of Am., Inc. v. Ludwig, 997 F.2d 958, 962 (D.C. Cir 1993) (holding that the Comptroller’s interpretation of the National Bank Act to permit national banks located in a town of 5,000 or less to sell insurance outside that town is a reasonable interpretation of the statute and does not diverge from prior policy).

228 Smiley, 517 U.S. at 742–43.

229 Id. at 743.

invalidating.\textsuperscript{231} As stated by the Supreme Court in \textit{Smiley v. Citibank (South Dakota), N.A.}, “the whole point of \textit{Chevron}” is that the agency responsible for interpreting the ambiguities of a statute should have the discretion to interpret that statute, including the discretion to change its interpretation.\textsuperscript{232}

The second and lower level of deference is “\textit{Skidmore} deference” based on the Supreme Court’s decision in \textit{Skidmore v. Swift & Co.}\textsuperscript{233} \textit{Skidmore} deference generally applies when an agency is not acting with the force of law.\textsuperscript{234} In contrast to the higher level \textit{Chevron} deference,\textsuperscript{235} which is based on a “reasonableness” standard,\textsuperscript{236} the level of deference provided to an agency under the \textit{Skidmore} standard is based on “the thoroughness evident in [the agency’s] consideration, the validity of its reasoning, its consistency with earlier and later pronouncements, and all those factors which give it power to persuade.”\textsuperscript{237} There is a significant distinction between the two levels of deference. Under \textit{Chevron}, a court is deciding whether the agency’s interpretation is “within the bounds of reasonableness” notwithstanding the possibility that the court itself may have arrived at a different interpretation.\textsuperscript{238} Under \textit{Skidmore}, the court itself is deciding how to best interpret the law with the agency’s interpretation provided as a reference.\textsuperscript{239} Under \textit{Chevron} deference, the courts “must defer” to an agency’s reasonable interpretation of a statute; however, under \textit{Skidmore} deference, the courts “may defer” depending upon the persuasiveness of the agency’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{240} Thus, in contrast to \textit{Chevron}

\textsuperscript{231}\textit{Smiley}, 517 U.S. at 742 (“[T]he mere fact that an agency interpretation contradicts a prior agency position is not fatal.”).

\textsuperscript{232}\textit{Id.}; see also \textit{NationsBank of N.C.}, 513 U.S. at 263 (“[A]ny change in the Comptroller’s position might reduce, but would not eliminate, the deference we owe his reasoned determinations.”).


\textsuperscript{234}\textit{Mead}, 533 U.S. at 237 (“\textit{Chevron} left \textit{Skidmore} intact and applicable where statutory circumstances indicate no intent to delegate general authority to make rules with force of law, or where such authority was not invoked . . . .”); \textit{Zaring}, \textit{supra} note 203, at 145–46 (explaining the difference between \textit{Chevron} deference and \textit{Skidmore} deference).

\textsuperscript{235}\textit{Bate}, 454 B.R. at 877 (explaining the levels of deference accorded agency interpretations of which \textit{Chevron} deference is the most deferential).

\textsuperscript{236} See \textit{supra} notes 210–14 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{Bate}, 454 B.R. at 877 (quoting \textit{Skidmore v. Swift & Co.}, 323 U.S. 134, 140 (1944)) (explaining the factors involved in determining the level of deference to grant under the \textit{Skidmore} standard).


\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Zaring}, \textit{supra} note 203, at 146.
deference, agency interpretations reviewed under *Skidmore* deference are “not controlling upon the courts.”

In the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress adopted *Skidmore* deference as the new standard of review of a decision by the Comptroller to preempt a state law. Under the statute, a court reviewing a preemption determination by the Comptroller must “assess the validity of such determinations” based upon (i) the thoroughness of the Comptroller’s consideration, (ii) the validity of the Comptroller’s reasoning, (iii) the consistency with the Comptroller’s other valid determinations, and (iv) any other persuasive and relevant factors. Thus, courts must now use the four part *Skidmore* test in reviewing a preemption decision by the Comptroller. Moreover, the new standard of review is applicable to the Comptroller’s preemption determinations regarding any state laws, not only State consumer financial laws.

Congress apparently has decided to accord the Comptroller the lower level of deference under *Skidmore*, even though Congress has delegated to the Comptroller the general authority “to make rules carrying the force of law” in its role as the agency charged with administering the National Bank Act. An agency determination made under such congressional delegation of authority is normally provided with *Chevron*-level deference. In the context of preemption, this agency deference was bolstered by the Supreme Court’s determination that a “pre-emptive regulation’s force does not depend on express congressional authorization” to preempt state law. Thus, an agency may rely on its general rulemaking authority and does not need express congressional authority to preempt state law.

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241 *Id.* (quoting *Skidmore*, 323 U.S. at 140).
242 *See* 12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(5) (2012) (setting forth *Skidmore* deference as the standard of review to be used when courts review preemption determinations by the Comptroller); *see also Bate*, 454 B.R. at 877 n.46 (“*Skidmore* level deference has been incorporated in the new Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act . . . .”).
244 *Id.; Skidmore*, 323 U.S. at 140 (establishing a four-part test for deference).
245 *See* 12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(5)(A) (“A court reviewing any determinations made by the Comptroller regarding preemption of a State law by title 62 of the Revised Statutes or section 371 of this title shall assess the validity of such determinations . . . .” (emphasis added)).
246 *Id.*
247 *United States v. Mead Corp.*, 535 U.S. 218, 226–27 (2001); *see also supra* notes 216–17 and accompanying text.
248 *See supra* notes 202–03 and accompanying text.
250 *Cf. Thomas W. Merrill, Preemption and Institutional Choice*, 102 Nw. U. L. REV. 727, 768 (2008) (finding the Supreme Court’s statement to indicate only an implied proposition of general agency authority to preempt state law).
er, the Comptroller’s authority to make preemption determinations does not rest solely on Supreme Court precedent. Congress has delegated to the Comptroller the specific authority to make preemption determinations under the National Bank Act. As a result, the Comptroller has been accorded *Chevron*-level deference in its determinations pursuant to the National Bank Act, including its determinations of preemption. Thus, the Dodd-Frank Act marks a sea change in the level of deference provided to the Comptroller’s decisions to preempt a state law.

However, the effect of this shift in the standard of review remains to be seen. As a practical matter, it is unlikely a court will refuse to provide deference to an agency interpretation that is reasonable even if the lower level *Skidmore* deference is applied. Moreover, scholars have argued that “the ‘reasonable agency’ standard is, increasingly clearly the standard that courts actually apply to all exercises of judicial review of administrative action, no matter what standard they purport to use.” Taken a step further, in the *Baptista* case, despite the court expressly acknowledging the preemption standard set forth in the Dodd-Frank Act, the Eleventh Circuit did not even allude to the statute’s new *Skidmore* standard of review. Instead, the Eleventh Circuit simply noted that *Auer* level deference should be applied when an agency is interpreting its own regulations. Thus, the court applied the *Chevron* reasonableness standard to the Comptroller’s interpretation of its regulation promulgated pursuant to the National Bank Act.

The Eleventh Circuit’s reasoning regarding the standard of review in the *Baptista* case poses some questions. Why did the court follow the Dodd-Frank Act with respect to the standard for preemption, yet fail to follow the statute’s directive regarding the standard of review? The simple answer may be that the preemption provisions of


\[252\] See supra notes 204, 219 and accompanying text.

\[253\] See 12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(5)(A) (referring to the section of the statute that accords *Skidmore* deference as the standard of review for preemption).

\[254\] Zaring, *supra* note 203, at 159.

\[255\] Id. at 137.

\[256\] Baptista v. JP Morgan Chase Bank, N.A. 640 F.3d 1194, 1197–98 (11th Cir. 2011); see *supra* note 242 and accompanying text.

\[257\] Baptista, 640 F.3d at 1197–98.

\[258\] Id. at 1198 (adopting the Fifth Circuit’s reasoning to find preemption by the federal regulation at issue, in accordance with the agency’s interpretation of its own regulation).

\[259\] See generally id. at 1197–98.

the Dodd-Frank Act, while enacted, were a little over two months short of the effective date. On the other hand, given the court’s lack of acknowledgement of the statute’s new standard of review, is the Eleventh Circuit’s application of Auer deference and determination of Chevron reasonableness in the Baptista case an indication that courts will continue to give deference to preemption interpretations by the Comptroller that are reasonable even under the statute’s new Skidmore standard? While these questions may not be answered imminently and certainly not unequivocally, it is possible that some courts reviewing a determination by the Comptroller to preempt a state law may continue to use the reasonableness standard of Chevron.

Nevertheless, an examination of the new four-prong standard of review is warranted. The first prong directs a reviewing court to assess the thoroughness of the Comptroller’s consideration in deciding to preempt a state law. Courts have interpreted this prong to require “in-depth consideration of the disputed issue.” Arguably, this prong presents a more rigorous standard of review of the Comptroller’s preemption determinations than required under Chevron. However, at least with respect to State consumer financial laws, the new procedures the Comptroller must follow in making a preemption determination should meet the “thoroughness” requirement. For example, any determination by the Comptroller under the Barnett standard preemption provision may be made either “by regulation or order... on a case-by-case basis.” In each case, the Comptroller must make a determination about the effect of the “particular State consumer financial law” on national banks subject to that state law or the law of another state with “substantively equivalent terms.”

261 The preemption provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act became effective on the designated transfer date, which the Act defined as one year after the date of enactment. The date of enactment was July 21, 2010; thus, the transfer date was July 21, 2011. See Dodd-Frank Act, Pub. L. No. 111-203, pmbl., 124 Stat. 1376; see also 12 U.S.C. § 25b note (2010) (“Enactment and amendment of section by Pub. L. 111-203 effective on the designated transfer date...”). The Eleventh Circuit decided the Baptista case on May 11, 2011. Baptista, 640 F.3d at 1194.
265 Doe v. Leavitt, 552 F.3d 75, 81 (1st Cir. 2009).
266 Chevron, 467 U.S. at 842–45.
267 See 12 U.S.C. § 25(b)(5)(A); Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,551 n.11.
269 Id. § 25b(b)(3)(A).
The Comptroller must consult with the BCFP in determining that the law of another state is “substantively equivalent” to the state law at issue.\footnote{Id. § 25b(b)(5)(B).} Moreover, the Comptroller may not preempt a State consumer financial law “unless substantial evidence, made on the record of the proceeding, supports the specific finding [of preemption] in accordance with the legal standard” of the \textit{Barnett} decision.\footnote{Id. § 25b(c).} Thus, these new requirements appear to build in a level of thoroughness in the Comptroller’s determinations which should be sufficient to withstand judicial review of this prong.

The second prong requires a court to assess the validity of the Comptroller’s reasoning in making a preemption determination.\footnote{Id. § 25b(b)(5)(A).} In reviewing the validity of an agency’s reasoning, a court will consider “whether an agency pronouncement is well-reasoned, substantiated, and logical.”\footnote{De La Mota v. U.S. Dep’t of Educ., 412 F.3d 71, 80–81 (2d Cir. 2005); see also Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc. v. U.S. Consumer Prod. Safety Comm’n, 597 F. Supp. 2d 370, 391 (S.D.N.Y. 2009) (finding that the Commission’s opinion letter regarding the phthalate proscriptions of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act “does not demonstrate the thoroughness of consideration and validity of reasoning that would warrant deference under \textit{Skidmore}”).} Thus, the question is whether this prong introduces a more rigorous standard than the \textit{Chevron} reasonableness test, or whether this prong is simply a codification of \textit{Chevron}.\footnote{See 12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(5)(A); \textit{Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc.}, 467 U.S. 837, 842–45 (1984).} Arguably, for a decision to be reasonable, that decision must be well-reasoned, logical, and substantiated or supported.\footnote{See generally NationsBank of N.C., N.A. v. Variable Annuity Life Ins. Co., 513 U.S. 253, 263–64 (1995) (holding that the Comptroller’s interpretation of the National Bank Act regarding the brokerage of annuities is reasonable and finding that “any change in the Comptroller’s position might reduce, but would not eliminate, the deference . . . owe[d] [to] his reasoned determinations”); Baptista v. JP Morgan Chase Bank, 640 F.3d 1194, 1198 n.2 (11th Cir. 2011) (finding that the Comptroller’s interpretation of the term “customer” to include “any person presenting a check for payment” was supported by the National Bank Act and the Comptroller’s regulation promulgated thereunder, and, thus, that it was not unreasonable); Colaio v. Feinberg, 262 F. Supp. 2d 273, 279, 289, 300 (S.D.N.Y. 2003) (finding the Special Master’s interpretive policies with respect to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund in the Air Transportation Safety and System Stabilization Act to be valid under \textit{Skidmore} because the “policies do not contradict the Act or its regulations, are supported by evidence and valid reasoning . . . are persuasive as carrying out congressional intent . . . [and thus] are reasonable and proper implementations of the Act and regulations”); Hadley v. Workforce Appeals Bd., 303 P.3d 1037, 1040 (Utah Ct. App. 2013) (finding that “[a] claimant acts reasonably where “the decision to quit [is] logical, sensible, or practical” (quoting Utah Admin. Code R994-405-105(1)(a))).} For example, in \textit{Colaio v.}
Feinberg, a federal district court held that a Special Master’s interpretive policies with regard to the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund were valid under the Skidmore standard because, inter alia, the policies “[were] supported by evidence and valid reasoning,” and were therefore reasonable. Additionally, in Hadley v. Workforce Appeals Board, the court explained that a claimant for unemployment benefits “act[ed] reasonably” when, inter alia, the decision to resign is “logical, sensible, or practical . . . .” Thus, borrowing from other fields of law, this prong may be interpreted to be a codification of the Chevron reasonableness standard. Nevertheless, this prong will likely be the crux of a court’s standard of review analysis.

The third prong requires a court to assess whether the decision is consistent with the Comptroller’s other valid determinations. As discussed in this Part, this prong historically has been applied by courts in reviewing the Comptroller’s decisions under the Chevron standard. Thus, this prong does not change the standard applied to the Comptroller’s determinations; rather, this prong merely codifies judicial precedent.

The fourth prong provides a reviewing court with discretion to consider any other persuasive and relevant factors. This formulation is a slight variation of the Skidmore standard, which provides for a court to consider “all those factors which give [the agency] power to persuade.” Courts have interpreted this prong of the Skidmore standard to include consideration of the agency’s thoroughness, the validity of its reasoning, and its consistency as factors that “either contribute[] to or detract[] from the power of an agency’s interpretation to persuade.” However, additional factors may be considered, such as the agency’s expertise, “as factors in an agency’s power to persuade.”

In considering whether this catch-all prong introduces a more rigorous standard of review of the Comptroller’s preemption decisions, it is notable that under the Chevron reasonableness test, courts

276 Colaio, 262 F. Supp. 2d at 279, 289, 300.
277 Hadley, 303 P.3d at 1040.
280 See supra notes 227–31 and accompanying text.
283 Doe v. Leavitt, 552 F.3d 75, 80–81 (1st Cir. 2009) (citing Skidmore, 323 U.S. at 140).
284 Id. (citing Kristin E. Hickman & Matthew D. Krueger, In Search of the Modern Skidmore Standard, 107 COLUM. L. REV. 1235, 1257 (2007)).
are not restricted in considering any persuasive and relevant factors in deciding whether the agency’s interpretation is reasonable.\textsuperscript{285} Moreover, the Comptroller’s expertise in the area of national banking law is well settled.\textsuperscript{286} Thus, any persuasive and relevant factors reviewed under this prong are likely to provide additional support to a court’s decision rather than introduce a more rigorous standard of review of the Comptroller’s preemption determinations.

Thus, while the Dodd-Frank Act’s new standard of review marks a sea change in the level of deference to be accorded to the Comptroller in his preemption determinations,\textsuperscript{287} the ultimate effect of this reform may, in practice, be minimal. All in all, the standard of review to be used in reviewing agency actions has always been a source of debate,\textsuperscript{288} and Congress’s decision to employ a new standard to be used in reviewing the Comptroller’s determinations to preempt state laws will likely be a source of continuing disagreement and idiosyncratic application by the courts.

The next Subpart addresses the issue of subsidiary preemption. While the Dodd-Frank Act endeavored to provide a meaningful reform in this area of preemption law, the effort is based on an unfounded premise.

C. Subsidiaries of National Banks

Prior to the Dodd-Frank Act, the preemption law with respect to subsidiaries of national banks was governed by the Supreme Court’s decision in \textit{Watters v. Wachovia Bank, N.A.}\textsuperscript{289} An analysis of the case is worthwhile to appreciate the many considerations involved in the issue of subsidiary preemption.

1. Watters v. Wachovia Bank, N.A.

The \textit{Watters} case addressed the question of whether the mortgage lending activities conducted by an operating subsidiary of a national bank were subject to state reporting, licensing, and visitorial re-

\textsuperscript{285} See Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Res. Def. Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 842-66 (1984) (considering how clearly Congress has spoken on the issue and the reasonableness of the agency’s interpretation without limiting the factors considered in the analysis; the Court considered, inter alia, the statutory language and the legislative history).

\textsuperscript{286} See supra note 216 and accompanying text.


\textsuperscript{288} Zaring, supra note 203, at 138, 152; see also Funk, supra note 238, at 1253 (“The doctrine describing judicial deference to federal agency opinions is riddled with inconsistencies and disparate application.”).

quirements. Specifically, the case concerned a Michigan state law that required “mortgage brokers, lenders and servicers that are subsidiaries of national banks to register with the [state] and submit to state supervision.” In addition, the Michigan law authorized the state commissioner to “take regulatory or enforcement action against covered lenders” under the state statute. Wachovia Bank was a national bank that conducted its real estate lending activities through a state-chartered, wholly owned corporation approved by the Comptroller as an operating subsidiary of Wachovia Bank.

As discussed by the Watters Court, the National Bank Act provides national banks with an express authorization to “engage in real estate lending.” Further, the statute permits national banks “[t]o exercise . . . all such incidental powers as shall be necessary to carry on the business of banking.” A national bank’s incidental powers include the power to “conduct certain activities through ‘operating subsidiaries.’” Such “operating subsidiaries” are “authorized to engage solely in activities the [national] bank itself could undertake, and [are] subject to the same terms and conditions as those applicable to the [national] bank.”

As the Court pointed out, the Comptroller supervises operating subsidiaries of national banks in the same manner as national banks. Moreover, the Comptroller “treats national banks and their operating subsidiaries as a single economic enterprise” and “appl[ies] the same controls whether banking ‘activities are conducted directly or through an operating subsidiary.’”

Citing the Barnett decision, the Watters Court found that the determination of preemption focuses “on the exercise of a bank’s pow-

\footnotesize
290 Id. at 7, 14 ("Visitation . . . is the act of a superior or superintending officer, who visits a corporation to examine into its manner of conducting business, and enforce an observance of its laws and regulations." (quoting Guthrie v. Harkness, 199 U.S. 148, 158 (1905))).
292 Id. at 9-10.
293 Id. at 7.
294 Id. at 7, 12 (citing 12 U.S.C. § 371).
296 Id. at 7, 15–16 (citing 12 U.S.C. § 24a(g)(3)(A); 12 C.F.R. § 5.34(e) (2006)).
297 Id. at 7, 18 (citing 12 U.S.C. § 24a(g)(3)(A); 12 C.F.R. § 5.34(e)).
298 Id. at 16 (citing 12 C.F.R. § 5.34(e)(3)); see also U.S. Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Related Organizations: Comptroller’s Handbook 53 (2004) [hereinafter Comptroller’s Handbook] (“Operating subsidiaries are subject to the same supervision and regulation as the parent bank, except where otherwise provided by law or OCC regulation.”).
299 Watters, 550 U.S. at 17.
ers, not on its corporate structure.\textsuperscript{300} According to the \textit{Watters} Court, “[a] national bank has the power to engage in real estate lending through an operating subsidiary, subject to the same terms and conditions that govern the national bank itself; that power cannot be significantly impaired or impeded by state law.”\textsuperscript{301}

Moreover, “[t]o prevent inconsistent or intrusive state regulation from impairing” the powers granted to national banks, the National Bank Act provides that “[n]o national bank shall be subject to any visitorial powers except as authorized by Federal law,” vested in the courts of justice.\textsuperscript{302} As stated by the \textit{Watters} Court, the National Bank Act was specifically “designed to prevent” the “diverse and duplicative superintendence of national banks” by the states.\textsuperscript{303}

Thus, the Court held that the mortgage lending activities of Wachovia Bank, “whether conducted by the bank itself or through the bank’s operating subsidiary, [were] subject to” the sole superintendence of the Comptroller of the Currency.\textsuperscript{304} Neither the national bank nor its operating subsidiary was subject to state mandated reporting, licensing, or visitorial requirements.\textsuperscript{305}

\textbf{2. Reversal of Watters by the Dodd-Frank Act}

In the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress addressed preemption with respect to subsidiaries and affiliates of national banks.\textsuperscript{306} A State consumer financial law will be applicable to any “subsidiary or affiliate of a national bank” that is not itself a national bank “to the same extent that the State consumer financial law applies to any person, corporation, or other entity subject to such State law.”\textsuperscript{307} Under this provision, the Dodd-Frank Act eliminated preemption for operating subsidiaries of national banks with respect to State consumer financial laws.\textsuperscript{308}

The Dodd-Frank Act further provides that the “applicability of \textit{any} State law to any subsidiary or affiliate of a national bank” that is not

\textsuperscript{300} Id. at 18 (citing Barnett Bank of Marion Cnty., N.A. v. Nelson, 517 U.S. 25, 32 (1996)).

\textsuperscript{301} Id. at 21 (citing Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 33–34; 12 U.S.C §§ 24 (Seventh), 24a(g)(3)(A), 371).

\textsuperscript{302} Id. at 11, 13–14 (quoting 12 U.S.C. § 484(a)).

\textsuperscript{303} Id. at 13–14; see also id. at 11 (“[F]ederal control shields national banks from unduly burdensome and duplicative state regulation.”).

\textsuperscript{304} Id. at 7.

\textsuperscript{305} Id. (explaining that reporting, licensing and visitorial requirements mandated by the state do not apply to the national bank or its operating subsidiary).


\textsuperscript{307} Id. § 25b(e).

\textsuperscript{308} Id.
itself a national bank will not be preempted, annulled, or affected by the federal banking laws. Thus, the Dodd-Frank Act reversed the \textit{Watters} opinion and eliminated preemption for operating subsidiaries of national banks with respect to \textit{all} state laws, not only State consumer financial laws. Therefore, operating subsidiaries of national banks must comply with all state laws.\footnote{Id. § 25b(b)(2), (h)(2), (e), (h)(2) (emphasis added).}

A clarifying distinction should be made here. As discussed in Part II.A, with respect to national banks, the Dodd-Frank Act does not address the preemption of state laws other than State consumer financial laws.\footnote{Id. § 25b(b)(2), (h)(2); see \textit{Watters}, 550 U.S. at 7.} Thus, as it pertains to national banks, the Dodd-Frank Act addresses preemption of State consumer financial laws only.\footnote{12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(2), (e), (h)(2).} However, with respect to subsidiaries of national banks, the Dodd-Frank Act addresses all state laws and eliminates preemption of all state laws for subsidiaries of national banks.\footnote{Id.}

3. \textit{Elimination of Subsidiary Preemption}

While these provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act were enacted in the spirit of reform, the elimination of preemption for subsidiaries of national banks will be exceedingly more burdensome on the national charter. National banks must ensure that every subsidiary complies not only with federal law but also with the particular laws of the many states in which the subsidiary is doing business.\footnote{Id. § 25b(b)(2), (e), (h)(2).} Moreover, these provisions appear to be based on one of two concerns: (i) the concern that an operating subsidiary of a national bank engaged in mortgage activities would unduly benefit from the preemption of state laws by conducting its mortgage lending business in a manner that would harm the inhabitants of the particular state, or (ii) the concern that an operating subsidiary of a national bank engaged in mortgage activities would unduly benefit by the preemption of state laws by conducting its mortgage lending business unfettered by state laws while its state-regulated competitors would be held to those state laws, thereby creating an unequal playing field in favor of the national bank subsidiaries.\footnote{See generally 156 CONG. REC. S5870-02 (daily ed. July 15, 2010) (explaining that one of the purposes of the Dodd-Frank Act is “to protect consumers”); see also \textit{Watters} v. \textit{Wachovia}}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 309 Id. § 25b(b)(2), (h)(2), (e), (h)(2) (emphasis added).
\item 310 Id. § 25b(b)(2), (h)(2); see \textit{Watters}, 550 U.S. at 7.
\item 311 12 U.S.C. § 25b(b)(2), (e), (h)(2).
\item 312 See supra note 88 and accompanying text.
\item 314 Id. § 25b(b)(2), (e), (h)(2).
\item 315 Id.
\item 316 See generally 156 CONG. REC. S5870-02 (daily ed. July 15, 2010) (explaining that one of the purposes of the Dodd-Frank Act is “to protect consumers”); see also \textit{Watters} v. \textit{Wachovia}.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
With respect to the first concern, as found by the Supreme Court in the Watters opinion, the Comptroller regulates a national bank and its operating subsidiaries as one economic unit.\textsuperscript{317} Both the Comptroller and Congress have viewed a national bank and its operating subsidiaries as a single economic enterprise “for accounting purposes, regulatory reporting purposes, and for purposes of applying many Federal statutory or regulatory limits.”\textsuperscript{318} Similarly, in determining whether national banks have the power to engage in new activities, the Supreme Court has consistently viewed national banks and their operating subsidiaries as a single entity.\textsuperscript{319} Moreover, Congress has expressly provided that an operating subsidiary of a national bank may engage “solely in activities that national banks are permitted to engage in directly and are conducted subject to the same terms and conditions that govern the conduct of such activities by national banks.”\textsuperscript{320} Thus, operating subsidiaries are subject to the same rigor of regulatory oversight the Comptroller applies to the parent national bank.\textsuperscript{321}

Perhaps due to the regulatory oversight, operating subsidiaries of national banks were not responsible for originating the vast majority of subprime mortgages in the years leading up to the subprime mortgage crisis.\textsuperscript{322} Rather, as will be discussed in Part III.B, state-regulated lending institutions, for which federal preemption did not apply, were responsible for underwriting the overwhelming majority of subprime mortgages.\textsuperscript{323} Moreover, evidence indicates that subprime lenders regulated by the states, in particular independent mortgage

\textsuperscript{317} Watters, 550 U.S. 1, 43 (2007) (Stevens, J., dissenting) (“[T]he primary advantage of maintaining an operating subsidiary as a separate corporation is that it shields the national bank from the operating subsidiaries’ liabilities. . . . The federal interest in protecting depositors in national banks from their subsidiaries’ liabilities surely does not justify a grant of immunity from laws that apply to competitors.”).


\textsuperscript{320} 12 U.S.C. § 24a(g)(3)(A) (2012). In contrast, other affiliates of national banks may engage in activities that are not permitted for national banks to engage in directly. See id. §24a(a)(2)(A)(i) (authorizing financial subsidiaries to engage in activities that are “financial in nature or incidental to a financial activity”).

\textsuperscript{321} Watters, 550 U.S. at 17 (citing COMPTROLLER’S HANDBOOK, supra note 298, at 64).

\textsuperscript{322} See infra note 445 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{323} See infra notes 438–42 and accompanying text.
companies regulated solely by the states, engaged in abusive lending practices.324 For example, Congress has found that many prospective borrowers were steered into accepting mortgage loans they could not afford.325 Therefore, operating subsidiaries of national banks did not unduly benefit from the preemption of state laws. Instead, state-regulated lending institutions were the entities that conducted their mortgage lending businesses in a manner that harmed the inhabitants of the state in which they were operating.

With respect to the second concern, the operating subsidiaries of national banks are held to federal law by the Comptroller of the Currency.326 In contrast, as further discussed in Part III.B, nothing in the doctrine of preemption prevented the states from regulating and enforcing state laws with respect to state-regulated lending institutions, for which federal preemption did not apply.327 Yet, these state-regulated institutions were responsible for originating the vast majority of subprime mortgages, despite the unfettered ability of the states to regulate these lenders.328 Clearly, the market recognized this imbalance in regulatory oversight, as evidenced by the significant share of subprime mortgages originated by state-regulated lending institutions.329 As a result, national banks and their operating subsidiaries were, in effect, unduly harmed by the apparent difference in regulatory oversight applied to the state-regulated lending institutions, thereby creating an unequal playing field in favor of the state-regulated lenders and not the other way around.

For example, the subprime mortgage crisis caused an overall market decline in housing prices.330 As a result, many homeowners experienced negative equity.331 Negative equity, or more commonly an “underwater” mortgage, occurs when the value of the home is reduced below the mortgage balance.332 While declines in housing prices initially affected subprime loans because these mortgages generally included minimal or no down payments, as housing prices con-

324 See infra notes 436, 453–54 and accompanying text.
325 156 Cong. Rec. S5870 (daily ed. July 15, 2010) (Remarks of Sen. Akaka) (“Prospective homebuyers were steered into mortgage products that had risks and costs that they could not understand or afford.”).
326 Watters, 550 U.S. at 16–17.
327 See infra notes 434–37 and accompanying text.
328 See infra notes 438–42 and accompanying text.
329 See infra notes 439, 441 and accompanying text.
332 Id. at 4.
continued to decline, “even many prime borrowers who had made sizeable down payments fell underwater,” resulting in a high level of delinquencies in the housing finance market.\(^{333}\) For example, NBT Bancorp Inc., the holding company of NBT Bank, National Association, was not active in the subprime mortgage market.\(^{334}\) Yet, delinquencies in the bank’s residential mortgages increased nearly five times between 2007 and 2012.\(^{335}\) Moreover, losses on residential real estate loans during the same time period more than tripled.\(^{336}\) Thus, national banks and their operating subsidiaries were unduly harmed by the decline in housing prices. This decline was set in motion by the state-regulated lending institutions, which originated the overwhelming majority of subprime mortgages,\(^{337}\) ultimately resulting in the subprime mortgage crisis.\(^{338}\)

As another example, some national banks acquired investments in mortgage-backed securities backed by “poorly underwritten subprime mortgages, unduly relying on the investment grade ratings” of these securities.\(^{339}\) Mortgage-backed securities are created by pooling together various mortgages and creating a debt security that is sold to investors.\(^{340}\) When the subprime mortgage market collapsed, many of these mortgage-backed securities became impaired causing losses to investors, including national banks.\(^{341}\)

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\(^{333}\) Id. at 5.

\(^{334}\) NBT BANCORP INC., 2012 ANNUAL REPORT 41 (2013) (noting that “[s]ubprime mortgage lending, which has been the riskiest sector of the residential housing market, is not a market that [NBT Bancorp Inc.] has ever actively pursued,” instead, NBT Bancorp Inc. “is a prime lender”).

\(^{335}\) Residential real estate mortgages placed on nonaccrual status increased from $1,572,000 in 2007 to $8,083,000 in 2012. Compare NBT BANCORP INC., 2007 ANNUAL REPORT 30 (2008), with NBT BANCORP INC., 2012 ANNUAL REPORT, supra note 334, at 49. Loans are placed on nonaccrual status, that is, interest is no longer accrued on the loans, when payments become delinquent. Compare NBT BANCORP INC., 2012 ANNUAL REPORT, supra note 334, at 71, with NBT BANCORP INC., 2007 ANNUAL REPORT, supra note 335, at 52.


\(^{337}\) See infra notes 439, 441 and accompanying text.

\(^{338}\) See infra note 404 and accompanying text.


In sum, the elimination of preemption for subsidiaries of national banks will be particularly burdensome on the national charter and is regrettably based upon an unfounded premise. Undoubtedly, national banks will respond to this change by merging their operating subsidiaries into the parent bank rather than incurring the burdensome cost of complying with the diverse laws of the fifty states.

The following Subpart will discuss the visitorial powers provision of the National Bank Act and the ability of the states to enforce laws against national banks.

C. Visitation

The National Bank Act provides that “[n]o national bank shall be subject to any visitorial powers except as authorized by Federal law, vested in the courts of justice.” The Comptroller had issued a regulation interpreting the term “visitorial powers” to include “conducting examinations, inspecting or requiring the production of books or records of national banks, or prosecuting enforcement actions” against national banks. The regulation also affirmed that only the Comptroller of the Currency “may exercise visitorial powers with respect to national banks . . . .” Thus, under the Comptroller’s regulation, only the Comptroller of the Currency had the authority to prosecute enforcement actions against national banks.

The Supreme Court considered the statutory term “visitorial powers” in Cuomo v. Clearing House Ass’n and found the Comptroller had reasonably interpreted “visitorial powers” to include “conducting examinations and inspecting or requiring the production of books or records of national banks.” However, the Supreme Court did not find reasonable the Comptroller’s extension of the term “visitorial powers” to include prosecuting enforcement actions in state court.

According to the Court, a state’s visitorial powers should be distinct...
guished from its power to enforce the law, and only the former is preempted by the National Bank Act. Moreover, the purpose of the statute’s reservation of powers “vested in the courts of justice” was intended to preserve the courts’ ordinary powers of enforcing the law. Thus, the Court held that a state attorney general is permitted to bring judicial enforcement actions against national banks.

Remarkably, the Cuomo Court asserted that its prior decision in Watters was fully in accord with the distinction between supervision and law enforcement. However, the state regulations preempted in Watters included the power to enforce the law. One may query how the Court’s prior decision in Watters was fully in accord with the distinction between supervision and law enforcement, when the Watters decision preempted a state law that included the power of law enforcement. Yet, the Cuomo Court did not address this inconsistency in its reasoning. Rather, the Cuomo Court maintained that “the sole question [in Watters] was whether operating subsidiaries of national banks enjoyed the same immunity from state visitation” as the parent national bank. Thus, the Cuomo Court narrowed the scope of the Watters decision to apply only to the question of how operating subsidiaries of national banks are to be treated with respect to state visitation, without acknowledging that state visitation in the Watters case included the power to enforce the law.

Congress also addressed the issue of visitorial powers in the Dodd-Frank Act. In accordance with the Supreme Court’s decision in Cuomo, the visitation provisions of federal banking law do not limit or restrict the authority of a state attorney general “to enforce an applicable law” against a national bank by bringing an action in court.

348 Id. at 526–29.
349 Id. at 530.
350 Id. at 536.
351 Id. at 528.
352 Watters v. Wachovia Bank, N.A. 550 U.S. 1, 9–10 (2007); see also Cuomo, 557 U.S. at 552 (Thomas, J., dissenting) (“[T]he Court was fully aware that the Michigan statutes [in Watters] granted state banking commissioners the very enforcement authority that petitioner seeks to exert over the national banks in this case.”).
353 Id. at 528.
354 See id. at 528–29 (stating explicitly that “[t]he opinion addresses and answers no other question”).
355 See id. at 552–53 (Thomas, J., dissenting) (“The Court’s conclusion in Watters that § 484(a) deprives the States of inspection and enforcement authority over the mortgage-lending practices of national banks lends weight to the agency’s construction of the statute.”).
Thus, the Dodd-Frank Act codified the *Cuomo* decision.\textsuperscript{357} A state attorney general has the authority to bring an action against a national bank in court to enforce a non-preempted state law.\textsuperscript{358} These visitatorial powers provisions apply to federal thrifts and their subsidiaries "to the same extent and in the same manner" as national banks and national bank subsidiaries.\textsuperscript{359}

The codification of the *Cuomo* decision may result in any of three potential outcomes. The states may serve as a back-up enforcement authority to the federal regulators. For example, if a federal regulator fails to enforce an applicable law against a national bank, a federal thrift, or their respective subsidiaries, then the states may use this enforcement power to bring an action in court to enforce that law. Alternatively, the states may use this enforcement power collaboratively by working together with the federal regulator to ensure that applicable laws are enforced. Then again, the states may choose to work independently of the federal regulator, potentially resulting in the duplicative enforcement regimes that the *Watters* Court sought to avoid.\textsuperscript{360}

Additionally, as discussed in Part III.B, states have always had the sole power to regulate and enforce applicable laws with respect to independent mortgage companies.\textsuperscript{361} Notwithstanding this absolute authority held by the states, independent mortgage companies were responsible for originating the vast majority of subprime mortgage loans.\textsuperscript{362} With the codification of the *Cuomo* decision,\textsuperscript{363} it remains to be seen whether or not the states will use this relatively new enforcement power with respect to national banks and federal thrifts in an effective manner.

The next Subpart will explore the doctrine of preemption regarding federal savings associations and the particularly apposite reform established by the Dodd-Frank Act.

\textsuperscript{357} See 12 U.S.C. § 25b(i)(1) (noting the statute expressly states that it is "[i]n accordance with the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in *Cuomo* ").

\textsuperscript{358} See *Dodd-Frank Implementation*, supra note 3, at 43,552 (grounding its assertion on the Supreme Court opinion in *Cuomo*).

\textsuperscript{359} 12 U.S.C. § 1465(c).

\textsuperscript{360} See *Watters v. Wachovia Bank*, N.A. 550 U.S. 1, 13–14 (2007) (noting the National Bank Act was specifically "designed to prevent" the "diverse and duplicative superintendence of national banks" by the states).

\textsuperscript{361} See *infra* note 442 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{362} See *infra* note 441 and accompanying text.

D. Federal Savings Associations

As discussed in Part I.A, the Home Owner’s Loan Act was viewed by some courts as occupying the field with respect to federal savings associations. 364 For example, the Ninth Circuit has held that “federal law preempts the field of prepayments of real estate loans to federally chartered savings and loan associations, so that any California law in the area is inapplicable to federal savings and loan associations operating within California.” 365 Moreover, a field preemption standard for federal savings associations was explicitly set forth in regulations promulgated by the Office of Thrift Supervision (“OTS”), the prior regulator of federal thrifts. 366 As provided by the regulations, the OTS “occupies the entire field of . . . deposit-related regulations” and the “entire field of lending regulation” with respect to federal savings associations. 367 Even the Supreme Court has given an implicit nod to the field preemption doctrine for federal savings associations. As expressed by the Court in Fidelity Federal Savings & Loan v. de la Cuesta, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (the first regulator of federal thrifts) 368 was authorized by the HOLA to promulgate comprehensive “regulations governing ‘the powers and operations of every [f]ederal savings and loan association from its cradle to its corporate grave.’” 369 More specifically, the Court found that the “broad language of the [HOLA] expresses no limits on the [Federal Home Loan Bank] Board’s authority to regulate the lending practices of federal savings and loans.” 370

364 See supra notes 36–37 and accompanying text.
365 Meyers v. Beverly Hills Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 499 F.2d 1145, 1147 (9th Cir. 1974).
367 12 C.F.R. § 557.11(b) (2011) (authorizing the scope of authority with respect to deposit-related regulations); id. § 560.2(a) (authorizing the scope of authority with respect to lending regulation).
368 See Fid. Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n v. de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. 141, 144 (1982) (“The [Federal Home Loan Bank] Board . . . was formed in 1932 and thereafter was vested with plenary authority to administer the Home Owners’ Loan Act of 1933 . . . .” (citation omitted)).
370 de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 161 (emphasis added) (“Congress plainly envisioned that federal savings and loans would be governed by what the Board—not any particular state-deemed to be the ‘best practices.’”); see also First Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n of Bos. v. Tax Comm’n of Mass., 437 U.S. 255, 258 n.3 (1978) (noting that the HOLA “protects federal associations from being forced into the state regulatory mold”).
However, as part of the reform legislation, the Dodd-Frank Act changed the preemption standards applicable to federal savings associations to conform to the legal standards applicable to national banks. Congress also expressly provided that the Home Owners’ Loan Act \(^{372}\) “does not occupy the field in any area of \([s]tate law.\)” \(^{373}\) Thus, federal savings associations will no longer benefit from field preemption. Instead, in accordance with the legal standards applicable to national banks, the conflict preemption standard of \textit{Barnett} \(^{374}\) will be applied to federal thrifts. Moreover, operating subsidiaries of federal thrifts will no longer benefit from any type of preemption. Instead, in accordance with the legal standards applicable to operating subsidiaries of national banks, operating subsidiaries of federal thrifts will be subject to relevant state laws. \(^{375}\)

In considering this change in the preemption standard for federal thrifts from field preemption to conflict preemption, \(^{376}\) it is important to understand the initial divergence in preemption standards between national banks and federal thrifts. As provided in the HOLA, one of the primary purposes for the creation of thrift institutions was to provide financing for home ownership. \(^{377}\) Indeed, the Supreme Court has noted that the “HOLA, a product of the Great Depression of the 1930’s, was intended ‘to provide emergency relief with respect to home mortgage indebtedness’ at a time when as many as half of all home loans in the country were in default.” \(^{378}\) Thus, Congress enacted the HOLA to “provide[] for the creation of a system of federal sav-

\(^{371}\) 12 U.S.C. § 1465(a) (“Any determination by a court or by the Director [of the Office of Thrift Supervision] or any successor officer or agency regarding the relation of a State law to a provision of this chapter or any regulation or order prescribed under this chapter shall be made in accordance with the laws and legal standards applicable to national banks regarding the preemption of State law.”).

\(^{372}\) \textit{Id.} §§ 1461–1470.

\(^{373}\) \textit{Id.} § 1465(b).

\(^{374}\) \textit{Id.} § 25b(b) (noting that “in accordance with the legal standard for preemption in the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States \textit{in Barnett Bank of Marion County,} a State consumer financial law is preempted if “the State consumer financial law prevents or significantly interferes with the exercise by the national bank of its powers”); \textit{see supra} notes 371, 373 and accompanying text.

\(^{375}\) \textit{See} 12 U.S.C. §§ 25b(b) (2), (e), (b) (2), 1465(a); 12 C.F.R. §§ 7.4010(a), 34.6 (2011).

\(^{376}\) Dodd-Frank Implementation, \textit{supra} note 3, at 43,556 n.48 (noting that a conflict preemption standard “is in contrast to the \[Office of Thrift Supervision’s\] preemption rules, which assert an ‘occupation of the field’ preemption standard for Federal savings associations”).


ings and loan associations... 'to promote the thrift of the people... to finance their homes and the homes of their neighbors.'”

Therefore, the policy underlying the field preemption doctrine for federal savings associations was to protect the powers of federal savings associations in providing credit for individuals to purchase a home. In contrast, national banks did not share this same fundamental purpose to promote home ownership, and thus did not benefit from field preemption of state laws. Rather, the courts historically have relegated national banks to the higher standard of conflict preemption. While a field preemption standard was not universally applied by the courts, the benefits of a field preemption standard for federal savings associations in certain jurisdictions should not be underestimated. For example, in the Ninth Circuit, the courts have consistently held that federal law occupied the field with respect to federal thrifts. Thus, many California state laws were preempted

379 Id. at 160 (quoting S. REP. NO. 91, at 2 (1933)).
380 12 U.S.C. § 1464(a) (specifying that thrift institutions are created “for the deposit of funds and for the extension of credit for homes and other goods and services... The lending and investment powers conferred... are intended to encourage such institutions to provide credit for housing safely and soundly”); California v. Coast Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 98 F. Supp. 311, 316 (S.D. Cal. 1951) (finding one of the purposes for the creation of federal savings and loan associations is to provide financing for home ownership).
382 Some courts did apply a conflict preemption standard for federal savings and loan associations. See, e.g., de la Cuesta, 458 U.S. at 159, 170 (implicitly acknowledging the doctrine of field preemption for federal thrifts while still applying a conflict preemption standard in holding that a federal regulation permitting federal savings and loan associations to enforce due-on-sale clauses preempted a conflicting state law). Thus, the impact of a conflict preemption standard on federal thrifts may not be significant in certain areas, such as the law regarding due-on-sale clauses.
383 See, e.g., Meyers v. Beverly Hills Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 499 F.2d 1145, 1147 (9th Cir. 1974) (“[F]ederal law preempts the field of prepayments of real estate loans to federally chartered savings and loan associations, so that any California law in the area is inapplicable to federal savings and loan associations operating within California.”); Glendale Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n v. Fox, 459 F. Supp. 903, 911 (C.D. Cal. 1978) (“The Ninth Circuit has taken the position that Congress, in the HOLA, delegated to the [Federal Home Loan] Bank Board the authority to regulate the operations of federal savings and loan associations to the exclusion of state regulation.”); Coast Fed. Sav. & Loan Ass’n, 98 F. Supp. at 318 (“[T]he [Home Owners’ Loan] Act... which authorized the creation, operation and supervision of federal savings and loan associations... embrace[s] the entire field... It seems clear that Congress has preempted the field, making invalid the state statutes plaintiffs rely upon... when attempted to be invoked against a Federal savings and loan association.”).
without the need to apply the more rigorous standard of conflict preemption.

While the policy underlying a field preemption standard for federal thrifts, that of helping to provide home ownership to our nation’s citizens, has been a long-standing hallmark of our national policy, the use of a field preemption doctrine for federal thrifts in order to further the national policy of home ownership was misguided. As now firmly established by the Dodd-Frank Act, federal thrifts should be held to the same preemption standards as national banks. There are three reasons for this conclusion.

First and foremost, the National Bank Act was passed with the underlying policy of creating a system of national banks authorized to issue a uniform national currency. A uniform national currency would, in turn, facilitate interstate commerce. However, courts historically did not apply a preemption of the field standard for national banks in order to further the national policy goal of facilitating interstate commerce. Even in modern times, where national banks facilitate interstate commerce through deposit services, trust and investment services, and commercial and consumer lending activities, courts still do not apply a preemption of the field standard for national banks.

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384 See supra notes 377–79 and accompanying text.
385 See supra notes 371–75 and accompanying text.
387 See Veazie Bank v. Fenno, 75 U.S. (8 Wall.) 533, 548 (1869) (finding that “Congress has undertaken to supply a currency for the entire country which may be used in all the transactions of commerce”).
388 See, e.g., First Nat’l Bank of San Jose v. California, 262 U.S. 366, 368–69 (1923) (finding that national banks’ “power” to receive deposits preempts contrary state escheat law).
389 MICHAEL P. MALLOY, BANKING & FINANCIAL SERVICES LAW 27–28 (2d ed. 2005) (“[C]ommercial banks [i.e., national banks and state banks] are authorized to offer the full range of banking services, including demand accounts (i.e., checking accounts) for business and personal use, savings and time deposits, investment and loan services, trust department services, and the like.” (emphasis omitted)).
Second, similar to the HOLA for federal thrifts, the National Bank Act covers nearly every aspect of a national bank’s existence. Moreover, similar to the prior regulators of federal savings associations, the Comptroller of the Currency has broad authority granted by the National Bank Act to regulate the operations of national banks. Yet, courts have not found that Congress, in the National Bank Act, intended to preempt the entire field of law with respect to national banks, nor have courts found that the Comptroller’s regulations preempt the field regarding national banks.

Third, a consistent preemption standard for both national banks and federal savings associations is certainly warranted given the similarities in services provided by both types of depository institutions. For example, a large proportion of home mortgages are now underwritten by national banks. Thus, for all these reasons, preemption law with respect to federal thrifts should be guided by the same standard that applies to national banks: a conflict preemption standard.

The following Part will address the argument that federal preemption resulted in the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis.

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391 See 12 U.S.C. §§ 21–216 (2012); Bank of Am. v. City of S.F., 309 F.3d 551, 558 (9th Cir. 2002) (“[S]ince the passage of the National Bank Act in 1864, the federal presence in banking has been significant.” (citing Barnett Bank, 517 U.S. at 32–33)).

392 See 12 U.S.C. §§ 1–216; CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 61 (“[T]he Comptroller operates with broad autonomy reinforced by statute.”); MALLOY, supra note 389, at 40 (“Approval by the Comptroller is required for virtually all significant actions to be taken by a national bank – chartering, establishment of branches, changes in corporate control and structure of organization – and the [Comptroller] also supervises the day-to-day activities of national banks, including the loan and investment policies of the banks, trust activities, issuance of securities and the like.”); ROBERTSON, supra note 386, at 1.

393 Idaho Dep’t of Fin. v. Sec. Pac. Bank Idaho, N.A. 800 F. Supp. 922, 925 (D. Idaho 1992) (“It is clear that Congress has not completely preempted the entire banking field either expressly or impliedly, so any preemption must arise out of an actual conflict between federal and state law.”).


395 CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 27–28 (“No longer do stark contrasts exist between commercial banks and thrift institutions. Thrifts can make commercial and consumer loans. They can offer credit cards, trust services, and personal and corporate checking accounts. . . . Banks and their affiliates, in turn, originate a large proportion of all home mortgages.”).

396 Id. at 28.
III. THE FALLACY THAT FEDERAL PREEMPTION CONTRIBUTED TO THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

There are those who believe that federal preemption of state laws is “bad public policy” and should not be permitted. According to this line of reasoning, federal preemption allowed predatory lending to occur and ultimately resulted in the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis. Predatory lending generally involves lending terms and practices that are unfair, abusive, deceptive or fraudulent to the borrower, and is generally associated with subprime mortgage loans. While not all subprime mortgage loans were predatory in nature, subprime mortgage loans generally were granted to individuals “with impaired or limited credit histories, or high debt relative to their income.” Not surprisingly, subprime mortgage loans experienced high rates of default. According to a study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, between 2003 and 2007, “defaults on subprime loans within six to eighteen months of origination . . . increased with each successive” year. Many economists and experts in the field believe the subprime mortgage crisis was caused by “the combination of a number of factors in which subprime lending played a major part.”

Another type of nonprime loan that contributed to the financial crisis is the Alt-A mortgage loan. Alt-A mortgages have better credit

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397 Dodd-Frank Implementation, supra note 3, at 43,553.
398 Id.; see also Mason et al., supra note 11, at 790 (discussing arguments that blame federal “preemption of state banking laws” for permitting “banks to originate predatory subprime . . . mortgages”); Spitzer, supra note 4, at A25 (arguing that the federal government engaged in an “aggressive . . . campaign” aimed at preventing the states from protecting consumers against predatory lending practices).
400 See Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 339, at 7 (“Predatory lending is usually a subset of subprime lending, but it is different from the type of subprime lending that was lawful but involved exceptionally weak underwriting standards.”).
402 See Bianco, supra note 341, at 6 (noting that “high default rates” were experienced on subprime mortgage loans granted to “higher-risk borrowers with lower income or lesser credit history than ‘prime’ borrowers”).
404 Bianco, supra note 341, at 3.
405 See generally Prabha Natarajan, Toxic Debt Returns to Fashion, WALL ST. J., Sept. 2, 2010, at C6 (“Alt-A mortgages became infamous during the financial crisis for their inadequate or
quality than subprime loans; however, these alternative mortgage
products have inferior credit quality when compared to prime
loans. 406 Alt-A mortgages were marketed to individuals with credit
scores that were better than those of subprime borrowers; however,
these alternative mortgage products required “little or no verification
of income.”407 In addition, Alt-A mortgages generally included higher
loan amounts relative to the value of the home, and higher debt relative
to the borrower’s income, than prime loans.408 Similar to sub-
prime mortgage loans, Alt-A mortgages experienced high rates of de-
fault.409

Keeping in mind the issues associated with nonprime mortgage
loans, this Part will address the argument that federal preemption re-
sulted in the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis and re-
veal the fallacy of this premise. Based on independent data and an
analysis of the preemption doctrine, this Part will demonstrate that
federal preemption did not contribute to the crises.

Before addressing these matters, it is important to understand the
complex structure of the regulatory environment for different lending
institutions. This Part will first discuss the federal bank and thrift
regulatory agencies and the financial institutions regulated by each
agency.

A. The Federal Regulatory Agencies and the Institutions they Regulate

The federal bank and thrift regulatory agencies have evolved over
the long history of banking. The Office of the Comptroller of the
Currency, the first banking regulator, was established under the Na-
tional Currency Act of 1863, now known as the National Bank Act of
1864,410 as the regulator of national banks.411 The Comptroller’s au-

406 See Patrick Bajari et al., A Dynamic Model of Subprime Mortgage Default: Estimation and
Policy Implication 4 n.3 (Nov. 23, 2011) (unpublished paper), available at


408 See Bianco, supra note 341, at 6 (stating that mortgage loans classified as Alt-A exhibit an
increased risk profile because these loans generally have “higher loan-to-value and debt-
to-income ratios” compared to prime mortgages).

409 Id.


411 Id.; see CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 61 (“The Comptroller of the Currency . . . regulates . . national banks”); MALLOY, supra note 389, at 19 (“Approval by the
Comptroller is required for virtually all significant actions to be taken by a national bank–chartering, establishment of branches, changes in corporate control and structure of or-
authority also extends to subsidiaries of national banks.  Under the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress granted the Comptroller the additional authority to regulate federal savings associations.  Previously, federal savings associations were regulated by the OTS.  However, the Dodd-Frank Act abolished the OTS and transferred the powers and responsibilities of the OTS to the Comptroller of the Currency, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (“FDIC”), and the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve (“Federal Reserve Board”), as further delineated in this Subpart.

The Federal Reserve System was established in 1913 under the Federal Reserve Act.  The Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Reserve banks (collectively, the “Federal Reserve”) are responsible for regulating bank holding companies and state-chartered banks that are members of the Federal Reserve System.  The Federal Reserve shares the supervision of state-chartered member banks with the respective states in which those banks are chartered.  The Federal Reserve also has limited responsibility for regulating nonbank affiliates of member banks, including nonbank affiliates of national banks and nonbank affiliates of state member banks.  Under the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress granted the Federal Reserve Board the additional authority to regulate savings and loan holding organizations—and the [Comptroller] also supervises the day-to-day activities of national banks, including the loan and investment policies of the banks, trust activities, issuance of securities and the like.”; ROBERTSON, supra note 386, at 44–45, 81.


The OTS previously regulated federally chartered savings associations, state-chartered savings associations, and savings and loan holding companies.  See id. § 5412(b).  The OTS shared supervision of the state-chartered savings associations with the respective states in which those institutions were chartered.  CARNELL ET AL., supra note 13, at 63.  Prior to the OTS, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board was the regulator of federal and state thrifts and thrift holding companies.  MALLOY, supra note 389, at 51.


See 12 U.S.C. §§ 334, 338, 1828a(b) (noting that in connection with the examination of state member banks, the Federal Reserve may examine the affiliates of the state member banks to determine “the relations between [the state member banks] and their affiliates and the effect of such relations on the affairs of” the state member banks).

Id. § 1846(a).
companies.\footnote{421} Previously, these institutions were regulated by the OTS.\footnote{422} Also under the Dodd-Frank Act, the Federal Reserve Board now has examination authority with respect to a designated nonbank financial company and any of its subsidiaries.\footnote{423}

The FDIC was established under the Banking Act of 1933.\footnote{424} The FDIC regulates state-chartered banks that are not members of the Federal Reserve System.\footnote{425} These state-chartered non-member banks are supervised by both the FDIC and the respective states in which the bank is chartered.\footnote{426} Under the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress granted the FDIC the additional authority to regulate state-chartered savings associations.\footnote{427} Previously, the OTS was the federal regulator of these institutions.\footnote{428}

With the abrogation of the OTS and the transferring of regulatory authority for federal savings associations to the Comptroller of the Currency,\footnote{429} the Dodd-Frank Act streamlined the bank and thrift regulatory environment. The Comptroller now regulates both national banks and federal thrifts.\footnote{430} However, state-chartered banks and thrifts continue to be subject to supervision by both a federal banking agency (the FDIC or the Federal Reserve) and the state in which the institution is chartered.\footnote{431}
As discussed in Parts I and II, federal preemption applies to national banks and federal savings associations. The next Subpart will focus on the lending institutions for which federal preemption does not apply.

**B. Preemption Does Not Apply to State-Regulated Lending Institutions**

In examining whether federal preemption contributed to the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis, it is important to distinguish between financial institutions subject to federal preemption and those not subject to federal preemption. Federal preemption applies to national banks and federal thrifts. These banking institutions are regulated primarily by a federal banking agency. However, federal preemption does not apply to lending institutions regulated by the states. These state-regulated mortgage underwriters include state-chartered banks and thrifts, nonbank affiliates of national banks and federal thrifts under a holding company, and independent mortgage companies that are not affiliated with a bank or thrift. Therefore, prior to and during the financial crisis, states were free to enact and enforce mortgage lending laws with respect to these state-regulated lending institutions without the threat or imposition of federal preemption.

However, despite the states’ power to regulate and enforce mortgage lending laws unimpeded by federal preemption, the “vast majority” of nonprime loans, including subprime mortgages and Alt-A mortgages, were originated by state-regulated lending institutions.

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432 See supra Parts I, II.A, II.E.
433 As provided by the Dodd-Frank Act, national banks and federal thrifts are both regulated by the Comptroller of the Currency. See supra notes 411–13 and accompanying text.
434 Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 339, at 5.
435 Nonbank affiliates of national banks and federal thrifts under a holding company should be clearly distinguished from operating subsidiaries of national banks and federal thrifts. Prior to the Dodd-Frank Act, operating subsidiaries of national banks and federal thrifts received the same preemption of state laws that the parent national bank or federal thrift received. See Watters v. Wachovia Bank, N.A. 550 U.S. 1, 7 (2007); 12 C.F.R. §559.5(n) (2003) (noting that state law applies to an operating subsidiary of a federal thrift only to the same extent that it applies to the parent federal thrift). In stark contrast, federal preemption did not apply to the affiliates of national banks and federal thrifts under a holding company. See generally Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 339, at 6–7. These nonbank affiliates share the same parent holding company with the particular national bank or federal thrift. See id. at 5, chart 1.
436 See Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 339, at 5. This Article will define “independent mortgage companies” as entities that are not affiliated with a bank or thrift and are in the business of providing residential mortgage loans to consumers.
437 Id. at 5–6.
438 Id. at 8.
Independent data indicates that during the peak of the mortgage crisis from 2005 to 2007, seventy-two percent of the nonprime loans, including nearly seventy-eight percent of the subprime loans, were originated by lending institutions subject to state jurisdiction.\(^{439}\) Thus, federal preemption did not apply with respect to nearly three-quarters of the nonprime loans, including nearly eighty percent of the subprime mortgages.\(^{440}\) Moreover, independent mortgage companies, alone, were responsible for originating more than half of the nonprime loans, including nearly sixty-four percent of the subprime loans.\(^{441}\) These independent mortgage companies were regulated solely by the states in which the companies were operating and did not benefit from federal preemption.\(^{442}\) In contrast, during the same time period, national banks and their subsidiaries accounted for only twelve percent of the nonprime loans.\(^{443}\)

A study of data associated with loans made under guidelines established by the Community Reinvestment Act ("CRA") reveals that “only six percent of all the higher-priced loans” made to “lower income borrowers or neighborhoods” were extended by lenders covered by the CRA.\(^{444}\) The CRA covers insured depository institutions.\(^{445}\) The Act does not cover independent mortgage companies or nonbank affiliates of national banks and federal thrifts under a holding company. Thus, these state-regulated lenders, for which preemption does

\(^{439}\) Id. at 8, app. B at 3–4 (acknowledging that data is derived from Loan Performance Corp., now owned by First American CoreLogic, Inc.); id. app. B at 4 n.2 (“The [72 percent and 78 percent] figure[s] understate[] the actual extent of state authority, because loans made by affiliates of federal thrifts are [not included in these percentages] but actually are subject to state authority.”).

\(^{440}\) See id. at 8; see also id. app. B at 4.

\(^{441}\) See id. app. B at 2, 4 (“Lenders supervised only by the states originated 63.6 percent of subprime loans during these years, and 57.1 percent of combined nonprime [loans] . . . .”); see also Mason et al., supra note 11, at 803–04 (“Our analysis indicates that the vast majority of subprime loans were originated by lenders outside of the banking system’s regulatory apparatus.”).

\(^{442}\) Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 339, at 4 (“[M]ortgage lenders that are not affiliated with banks or thrifts are subject only to state supervision.”).

\(^{443}\) See id. app. B at 4 (explaining that, from 2005 to 2007, national banks and their subsidiaries originated 12.1% of the nonprime loans, including 10.6% of the subprime loans, while federal thrifts and their subsidiaries originated 15.9% of the nonprime loans, including 11.5% of the subprime loans). But see id. app. B at 4 n.2 (noting that these figures are somewhat overstated because loans made by affiliates of federal thrifts are included in the percentages for federal thrifts).

\(^{444}\) U.S. DEPT OF TREASURY, FINANCIAL REGULATORY REFORM, A NEW FOUNDATION: REBUILDING FINANCIAL SUPERVISION AND REGULATION 69 (2009) (“[T]he worst abuses were made by firms not covered by [the] CRA.”).

not apply, were responsible for originating ninety-four percent of all the higher-priced loans. 446

In examining the argument that federal preemption resulted in the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis, it is clear that the argument is flawed. As the independent data demonstrates, the “overwhelming majority” of subprime mortgages were originated by state-regulated lending institutions for which federal preemption did not apply. 447 In particular, independent mortgage companies, those lending institutions regulated solely by the states, accounted for more than half of the subprime mortgage originations. 448 As stated by Barney Frank, former Chairman of the House Committee on Financial Services and co-sponsor of the Dodd-Frank Act, the subprime mortgage crisis was caused not by the regulated banks, but instead “[b]y loans being made outside of the regular banking system.” 449 In discussing the “role of regulation,” Representative Frank observed that “[r]easonable regulation of mortgages by the bank . . . regulators allowed the market to function in an efficient and constructive way, while mortgages made and sold in the unregulated sector led to the crisis.” 450 Even state attorneys general have found that “[a]lmost all of the leading subprime lenders [were] mortgage companies and finance companies, not banks or direct bank subsidiaries.” 451 For example, one particularly notorious independent mortgage company held a significant share of the subprime mortgage market. According to the Washington State Department of Financial Institutions, “Ameriquest Mortgage Company was the largest privately held retail

446 Mason et al., supra note 11, at 782, 791.
447 Id. at 782; see also id. at 787–88 (“The overwhelming majority of instances of predatory lending involved loans originated by institutions not subject to preemption, but instead under the purview of state laws.”).
448 See supra notes 441–42 and accompanying text.
mortgage lender in America and the largest subprime lender by volume.452

Moreover, evidence indicates that state-regulated subprime lenders, in particular, independent mortgage companies regulated solely by the states, engaged in abusive lending practices.453 For example, despite the ability of the states to regulate and enforce state lending laws unhampered by federal preemption, Ameriquest was permitted to engage in “unlawful mortgage lending practices from January 1, 1999 through December 31, 2005” before entering into a multistate settlement agreement with forty-nine states in January 2006.454 Ameriquest could have applied for a charter to become a national bank or a federal thrift and, thus, receive the benefit of federal preemption for its multistate mortgage lending operations. Yet, Ameriquest chose to remain an independent mortgage company regulated by the states. Clearly, Ameriquest did not view federal preemption as a means of avoiding compliance with state law nor was preemption involved in any way in the predatory lending activities of this state-regulated mortgage company.

Perhaps even more revealing is the fact that a number of large bank holding companies chose to establish their subprime mortgage lending operations in the affiliate of the national bank (for which preemption did not apply) rather than in the national bank (for which preemption did apply).455 One could query why these bank holding companies chose to place their subprime mortgage lending operations in an entity that did not benefit from federal preemption. Perhaps the level of regulation differed, making state-regulated mortgage lending institutions more attractive to the subprime mortgage market. Whatever the reason, it is clear that bank holding companies were not relying on federal preemption to shield their subprime mortgage lending institutions from state law. Instead, state laws, including any laws the states chose to enact with respect to regu-

453 U.S. DEP’T OF TREASURY & U.S. DEP’T OF HOUSING & URBAN DEV., supra note 399, at 13 (“[A]n unscrupulous subset of these subprime . . . lenders (often those not subject to federal banking supervision) . . . engage[d] in abusive lending practices that strip[ped] borrowers’ home equity and place[d] them at increased risk of foreclosure.”).
455 Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 339, at 6–7; see also id. at 7 (“For example, HSBC, Citigroup, Wells Fargo, and Countrywide (when it owned a national bank) conducted most of their subprime mortgage lending in holding company affiliates of national banks that were . . . subject to . . . state supervision.”).
lation, supervision, and enforcement, were fully applicable to these state-regulated affiliates of national banks.\textsuperscript{456}

Moreover, the power of states to regulate the affiliates of national banks under a holding company has been made explicit by Congress.\textsuperscript{457} The Bank Holding Company Act “expressly empowers states to regulate bank holding companies and their subsidiaries.”\textsuperscript{458} Thus, states have the statutory authority, granted by Congress, to regulate the affiliates of national banks under a bank holding company. In contrast, the Savings and Loan Holding Company Act is silent regarding the power of states to regulate savings and loan holding companies and their subsidiaries.\textsuperscript{459} However, the Second Circuit has interpreted “Congress’s silence . . . as implicit approval of state regulation.”\textsuperscript{460} Thus, states also have the authority to regulate affiliates of federal thrifts under a holding company.

Additionally, independent data indicates that, between 2000 and 2009, approximately 240 federally regulated banks converted from a federal charter to a state charter.\textsuperscript{461} Of this amount, roughly twelve percent converted to a state charter to avoid federal regulatory actions.\textsuperscript{462} According to another study, between 2000 and 2011, almost 300 national banks converted to a state charter while only ninety-two state-chartered banks converted to a nationally chartered bank.\textsuperscript{463} The apparent reason for the conversions from a national charter to a state charter was the “pursuit of leniency” a state regulator would be expected to provide in comparison to a federal regulator.\textsuperscript{464} Thus, many federally chartered banks converted to state-regulated institu-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{456} Id. at 6 (“[T]he overwhelming majority of subprime lending was done outside of national banks in entities that were subject to state law . . . .
\item \textsuperscript{457} See 12 U.S.C. § 1846(a) (2012) (“No provision of this chapter shall be construed as preventing any State from exercising such powers and jurisdiction which it now has or may hereafter have with respect to companies, banks, bank holding companies, and subsidiaries thereof.”).
\item \textsuperscript{458} Sears Roebuck & Co. v. Brown, 806 F.2d 399, 410 (2d Cir. 1986) (citing 12 U.S.C. § 1846).
\item \textsuperscript{459} See id. (“[T]he [Savings and Loan Holding Company Act] does not expressly allow regulation of S&L holding companies by states . . . .”)
\item \textsuperscript{460} Id. (basing its interpretation upon Congress’s indication that “it was aware at the time of the [Savings and Loan Holding Company Act’s] passage that states already regulated savings and loan holding companies and their subsidiaries”.
\item \textsuperscript{462} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{464} See Appelbaum, \textit{supra} note 461.
\end{itemize}
tions in an effort to avoid federal regulation, notwithstanding the state lending laws that would be fully applicable to these newly converted state banks.\footnote{465} Evidently, these banks were not relying on federal preemption to avoid compliance with state law.

As demonstrated, the doctrine of federal "preemption did not and does not prevent regulation" of independent mortgage companies.\footnote{466} Nor does federal preemption prevent regulation of other state-regulated lending institutions, including affiliates of national banks and federal thrifts under a holding company and state-chartered banks and thrifts.\footnote{467} Nevertheless, nearly three-quarters of the nonprime loans, including nearly eighty percent of the subprime loans, were originated by state-regulated lending institutions for which federal preemption did not apply.\footnote{468} State-regulated lenders also were responsible for originating ninety-four percent of all the higher-priced loans.\footnote{469} Moreover, state-regulated subprime lenders engaged in abusive and unlawful lending practices, despite the unhampered ability of the states to regulate and enforce state anti-predatory lending laws against these lenders.\footnote{470}

The supposed link between federal preemption and the subprime mortgage crisis is even more tenuous when one considers the choice of bank holding companies to place their mortgage lending business in the affiliate of the national bank rather than in the national bank,\footnote{471} knowing federal preemption would not apply to the affiliate of the national bank. Clearly, bank holding companies were not relying on federal preemption to shield their mortgage lending subsidiaries from state laws. Rather, state laws were fully applicable to these state-regulated mortgage lenders.\footnote{472} The argument against federal preemption is further weakened by the choice of nationally chartered banks to convert to state charters despite the applicability of state lending laws to state-regulated institutions.\footnote{473} Similar to the bank holding companies, these banks were not depending upon federal...
preemption to protect their mortgage lending activities from state laws.

Even granting that national banks and federal thrifts engaged in nonprime lending, albeit to a minimal extent,\textsuperscript{474} this fact does not support the argument that federal preemption led to the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis. Obviously, state lending laws did not prohibit nonprime mortgage lending, in and of itself, as evidenced by the significant percentage of subprime loans and Alt-A loans originated by state-regulated mortgage lenders.\textsuperscript{475} Thus, the origination of nonprime loans by national banks and federal thrifts does not implicate federal preemption as a contributing cause of the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis. There is no nexus between federal preemption and the subprime mortgage crisis.

As an illustration, suppose the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") is responsible for dam safety on waterways used for interstate commerce, and New York State is responsible for dam safety on reservoirs in the state used for drinking water. There are ten dams located in the state. Two of the dams are regulated by FEMA and the other eight dams are regulated by the state. The FEMA regulated dams benefit from federal preemption of state laws. The other eight dams are fully subject to state laws. The state experiences a severe storm and a hundred-year flood. All ten dams suffer breaches during the flood which cause massive property damage downstream. Would it be reasonable to blame the property damage on the preemption of state laws? I would argue that federal preemption did not contribute to the damage. Had the two FEMA-regulated dams been subject to state laws, the result would have been the same. The storm still would have occurred, the dams still would have been breached, and the massive property damage still would have been suffered.

Likewise, the argument that federal preemption is to blame for the financial crisis is a fallacy. Federal preemption did not lead to the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis, nor did federal preemption contribute to the crises.

The next Part will discuss the supposed benefits of eliminating federal preemption versus the costs.

\textsuperscript{474} See supra note 443 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{475} See supra notes 439–41 and accompanying text.
IV. BENEFITS VERSUS COSTS OF ELIMINATING FEDERAL PREEMPTION

As discussed in Part II.A.1, the meaning of the preemption provisions of the Dodd-Frank Act was debated in a number of letters among the executive and legislative branches of the government. In response to a letter by the Treasury Department to the Comptroller of the Currency, Senators Carper and Warner indicated that although the Administration supported the elimination of federal preemption, Congress “rejected” that position. While the Treasury Department, in its letter to the Comptroller, did not explicitly advocate elimination of federal preemption, the Treasury argued for a narrowing of the preemption standard. Thus, fewer state consumer financial laws would be preempted under the Treasury’s interpretation.

While the elimination of federal preemption, or even a narrowing of the preemption standard, may be considered a curiously Federalist position for a Democratic administration, the overarching policy behind the position is clearly to protect consumers by ensuring the applicability of State consumer financial laws to national banks. This position is consistent with a liberal viewpoint. While protecting consumers is certainly a worthy public policy goal shared by the author of this Article, this goal would not be furthered by the elimination of federal preemption. As discussed in Part III.B, national banks and federal thrifts, those banking institutions for which federal preemption applies, were not responsible for originating the vast majority of nonprime mortgages, including subprime mortgages and Alt-A mortgages. Rather, state-regulated lenders were responsible for underwriting the bulk of these nonprime mortgages. Moreover, state-regulated lenders, in particular, independent mortgage compa-

476 See discussion supra Part II.A.1.
477 Letter from Carper and Warner, supra note 120, at 1 (“While we understand that the position of the Administration was to eliminate federal preemption for national banks, the fact is that Congress did not accept that position.”).
478 See Comment Letter from George W. Madison, supra note 125, at 1–2 (“We believe that . . . Congress intended that a state consumer financial law may be preempted only if the law ‘prevents or significantly interferes’ with the exercise of a national bank’s powers . . . .”).
479 See, e.g., Gregory M. Dickinson, An Empirical Study of Obstacle Preemption in the Supreme Court, 89 Neb. L. Rev. 682 (2011) (“Preemption defies traditional conservative—liberal alignment, as conservatives are torn between support of federalism and capitalist efficiency, and liberals are torn between support of strong national governance and multiplicity of legal remedies.”).
480 See id. at 685–86.
481 See supra note 443 and accompanying text.
482 See supra notes 438–41 and accompanying text.
nies, engaged in predatory lending practices. Federal preemption did not apply to these state-regulated lending institutions. Thus, the supposed benefit of eliminating federal preemption—the protection of consumers through the enhanced applicability of State consumer financial laws—is simply a fallacy.

At the same time, the costs of eliminating federal preemption would be staggering to the banking industry. These costs are not only measured in dollars, but also in the public policy issues that would ensue. In setting forth the preemption provisions in the Dodd-Frank Act, Congress desired to provide “certainty” to both consumers and the banking industry regarding the standard for preemption. This certainty would be greatly diminished if federal preemption was eliminated. For example, if federal preemption was eliminated or narrowed within the Barnett standard, it would create “great uncertainty” for the banking industry. National banks would need to review each of the products and services offered on a nationwide basis to determine whether the bank was in compliance with “hundreds of differing state and local laws.” Undoubtedly, litigation would follow in an attempt to determine the parameters of the new standard and whether national banks were in compliance with that new standard in all fifty states. Moreover, complying with the differing standards of individual states may “require a bank to determine which state’s law governs—the law of the state where a person provides a product or service; the law of the home state of the bank; or the law of the state where the customer is located.” Any disa-

483 See supra notes 453–54 and accompanying text.
484 Statement of John C. Dugan, supra note 399, at 5.
485 See, e.g., Alan Untereiner, The Defense of Preemption: A View From the Trenches, 84 Tul. L. Rev. 1257, 1262 (2010) (“[T]he multiplicity of government actors below the federal level virtually ensures that, in the absence of federal preemption, businesses with national operations that serve national markets will be subject to complicated, overlapping, and sometimes even conflicting legal regimes. These overlapping regulations have the potential to impose onerous burdens on interstate commerce and to disrupt and undermine federal regulatory programs.”).
486 Letter from Carper & Warner, supra note 120, at 3.
488 Letter from Carper & Warner, supra note 120, at 3.
489 Id.
490 See id. (“There can be no doubt this would lead to years of litigation before the new standard was finalized in a way that enabled national banks (and state banks chartered by states with wild card statutes) to plan and deliver products and services without significant legal risk.”).
agreement with the bank’s determination would most likely result in “litigation in multiple jurisdictions.”

Ultimately, the uncertainty that would ensue as a result of the elimination or even the narrowing of the Barnett standard would cause banks to incur significant costs. Specifically, banks would need to review the state and local laws in all fifty states to determine compliance, adjust product development and the provision of services wherever necessary in the particular jurisdictions, and continually monitor the differing state and local laws to maintain compliance. These “disparate standards would impose significant compliance costs on banks seeking to operate across state lines.”

Even Senator Elizabeth Warren, a well-known consumer protection advocate, has acknowledged that “[i]n an era of interstate banking, uniform regulation of consumer credit products at the federal level may well be more efficient than a litany of consumer protection rules that vary from state to state.”

As a result of the increased cost of compliance, “some portion of these costs” will likely be passed along to consumers. These costs, along with the inevitable litigation costs, will likely reduce the availability of banking products and services. At a time when the economy depends on the ability of the banking industry to lend to consumers in need of credit, an increase in costs to banks and a resulting decrease in banking services could have a devastating effect on the economy. Such an effect is entirely unnecessary, especially when the benefits of eliminating federal preemption are not readily apparent. Accordingly, this analysis leads to the conclusion that the costs of eliminating federal preemption would far outweigh the supposed benefits.

492 Id. at 8.
493 Letter from Carper and Warner, supra note 120, at 3.
495 Mason et al., supra note 11, at 802.
497 COMPTROLLER OF THE CURRENCY, supra note 494, at 15.
498 See Letter from Carper & Warner, supra note 120, at 3.
499 See id. (“This uncertainty would clearly increase the cost and decrease the availability of bank services, including lending, at a time of economic difficulty when we can least afford it.”).
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this Article is to explore the doctrine of preemption in the context of banking and to provide a critical examination of the preemption reforms in the Dodd-Frank Act. While this Article analyzes the impact of these changes on the doctrine of preemption, the ultimate effect of many of the reform provisions is yet to be seen. Notably, although many aspects of the preemption doctrine were altered by the statute, the preemption standard remains unchanged.

This Article also addresses the fallacy that federal preemption of state laws resulted in the subprime mortgage crisis and the financial crisis. Based on independent data and an analysis of the preemption doctrine, this Article argues that federal preemption did not contribute to the crises. Finally, this Article examines the costs of eliminating federal preemption and requiring national banks and federal thrifts to adhere to the differing laws of fifty states. Based on this analysis, it is clear that the costs of eliminating federal preemption far outweigh the ostensible benefits.