

## INITIAL COIN OFFERINGS: THE TOP 25 JURISDICTIONS AND THEIR COMPARATIVE REGULATORY RESPONSES

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### ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the evolving ICO market as it existed in January 2018. It evaluates hand-selected data for the top 25 ICO jurisdictions by market capitalization. The author codes the regulatory responses of the top 25 ICO jurisdictions in the world and provides a comparative analysis of their respective regulatory responses.

*Key Words:* Initial Coin Offerings, Blockchain, Distributed Ledger Technology, Regulation, Market Abuse, Investor Protection, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Data Science, Data Scientists, Innovation, Entrepreneur, Start-up, Big Data, Crypto Economics, Diversification, Optimization, Efficiency, Governance, Bad Actors, Risk Factors, Regulation

*JEL Categories:* K20, K23, K32, L43, L5, O31, O32

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## I. Introduction

Initial Coin Offerings (ICOs) provide unprecedented liquidity and efficiency for capital formation while minimizing transaction cost. While ICOs have historically allowed primarily crypto start-ups, financial technology start-ups, and the crypto community to raise funds, in 2018, legacy businesses with established businesses and products increasingly used ICO fundraising to finance their business activities.

ICOs display several core beneficial characteristics that help explain their attractiveness for crypto startups and legacy businesses alike. ICOs' comparative advantage over other means of capital formation consists mainly of their cost-effectiveness that helps offsets the complex and unpredictable economic dynamics in the crypto marketplace. Unlike other means of capital formation, ICO's allow promoters to avoid sacrificing equity for financing. Instead, ICO promoters can use the proceeds of the ICO exclusively for product development. ICOs provide low barriers to entry for a diverse body of investors and thus increase the diversity and the heterogeneity of start-up funding.

ICOs are creating unparalleled efficiencies for capital formation. First, ICOs enable borderless online sales with much fewer points of friction. ICOs enable the promoters to bypass the typical legal, jurisdictional, and business hurdles by directly marketing to a worldwide pool of investors. Moreover, ICOs are still in 2018 subject to rather limited accreditation standards. While accreditation standards have been instituted by some jurisdictions, including full compliance checklists for ICO registrations, ICOs are overall still subject to rather limited accreditation standards and regulatory formality.

ICOs provide unparalleled liquidity for all of its constituents. First, global cryptocurrency exchanges provide significant continuous access to trading ICO tokens which allows for significant liquidity at the earliest possible time in the lifecycle of the underlying business. ICOs provide liquidity to investors much faster than any other form of capital formation. ICOs also allow venture capital funds to capitalize on existing profits much earlier while avoiding a long, complex, and time intensive processes leading up to an IPO, acquisition, or similar late liquidity event in the lifecycle of the business. Finally, promoters can get the earliest possible liquidity of their token reserves simultaneously with the financing for their product launch.

## II. Regulatory Concerns

Regulators have been evaluating possible risk factors associated with ICOs since the inception of the ICO market. Regulators are particularly motivated by several ICO risk factors for retail investors. Unlike shareholders in the traditional corporate infrastructure who are able to vote for or against directors or to nominate directors, ICO investors have no control over the promoters whatsoever. Token holders typically invest in the future promise of an idea or future infrastructure product associated with the platform they invest in without having access to a tangible underlying product. Capped ICO raises evolved in an attempt by the crypto community to address the uncertainty for investors about the valuation of the underlying platform in cases of uncapped raises. However, capped ICO raises create significant incentive for investors to attempt to get in first, raising the likelihood of retail investor frenzy. Moreover, the lack of mandatory disclosures for ICOs leads many promoters to make irregular or no disclosures about the platform as time passes, leading to a significant lack of transparency in the ICO market. Promoters can also change the smart contract to change ICO sales rules mid-course during the ICO.

Unlike traditionally listed businesses that have a long history of business success before being listed on a stock exchange, most crypto platforms cannot generate revenue to offset costs. Crypto platforms typically do not have employees in the traditional sense that create and advertise the platform product. Worse yet, because they have no product and no revenue to offset costs, crypto platforms' revenue raised is typically required to last for the lifecycle of the platform, requiring crypto platforms to set aside a large number of tokens for future funding needs.

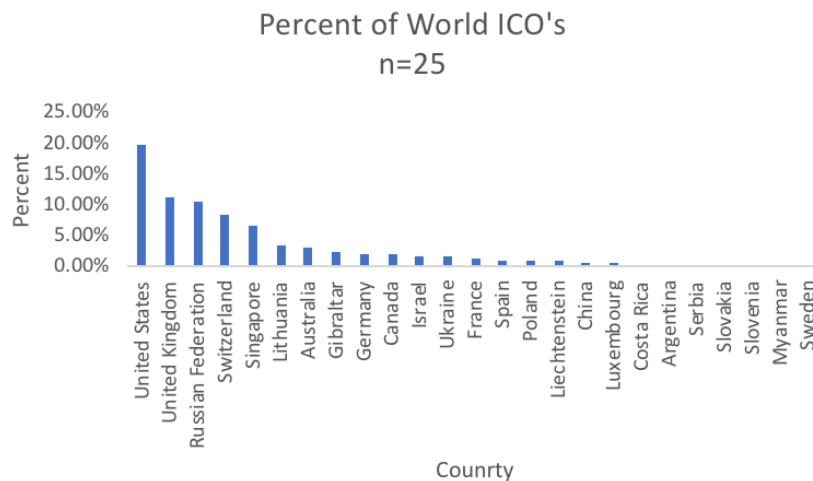
ICO investors have no preemptive rights or other anti-dilution protections. If the promoters decide to issue more reserve tokens to additional investors, the ICO investors may be diluted in the future. The only real control token holders have to protect themselves is to sell their tokens post-ICO. In fact, many venture capital funds that received tokens in exchange for their pre-ICO investments often quickly sell their tokens to protect themselves

against devaluation.

ICOs are subject to very high volatility. Unlike any prior financing vehicles, ICOs provide the highest possible liquidity for investors at the earliest possible time in the lifecycle of the issuer. Investors in legacy businesses receive significant assurances pertaining to the business success of the issuing entity because the issuing entity is subject to ongoing disclosure requirements. ICOs on the other hand, give investors very limited assurances through upfront and continuous disclosures, making the token market highly volatile.

Token holders typically do not receive a liquidity preference that would protect them in the case of bankruptcy or termination of the platform they invested in. In cases of bankruptcy, token holders typically have no recourse at all after the debt holders and outside creditors were satisfied with the liquidation value of the entity. By contrast, in a typical venture capital seed stage investment, the venture capital fund should typically obtain at least a simple liquidity preference. This allows venture capital funds to reclaim their initial seed investment before other creditors are satisfied.

### III. Top 25 ICO Countries



*Figure 1: Percent of World ICOs*

Figure 1 represents the percent of the world's ICO's that were launched in that country for 2017. This is based on the raw number of ICO's and not how much was raised through that ICO.

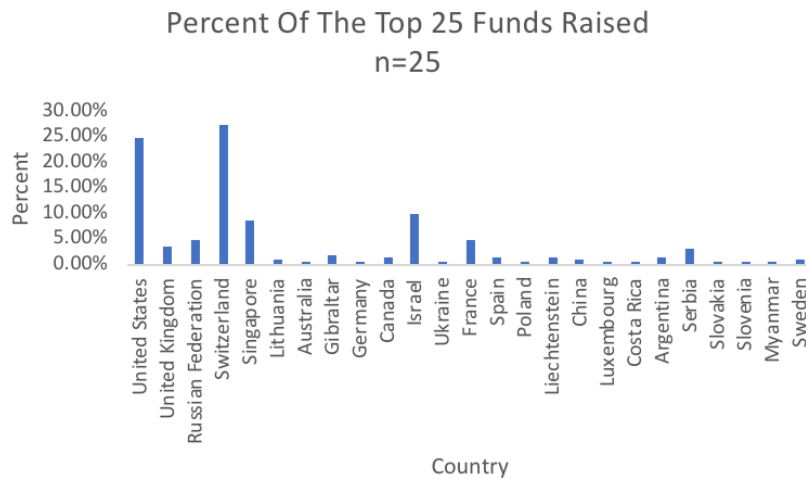


Figure 2: Percent of the Top 25 Funds Raised

Figure 2 shows the percent of funds raised of the top 25 country ICOs (not of the world) in the 2017 time period. Switzerland leads the world in total ICO Funds raised, followed by the United States.

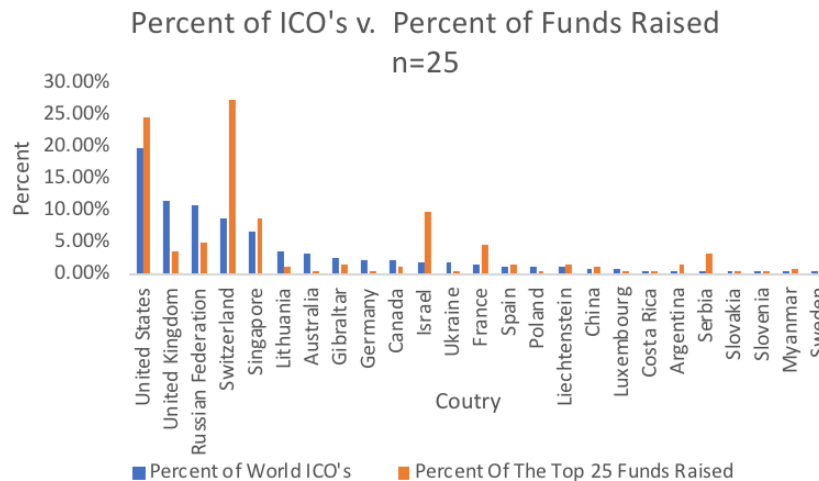
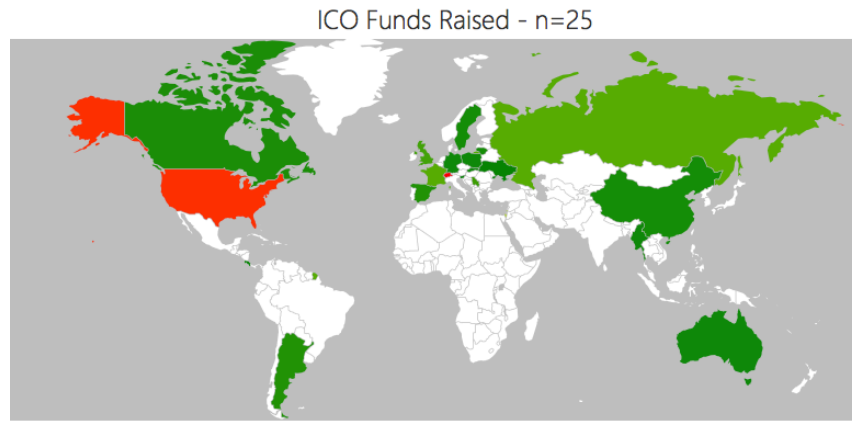


Figure 3: Percent of ICOs v. Percent of Funds Raised

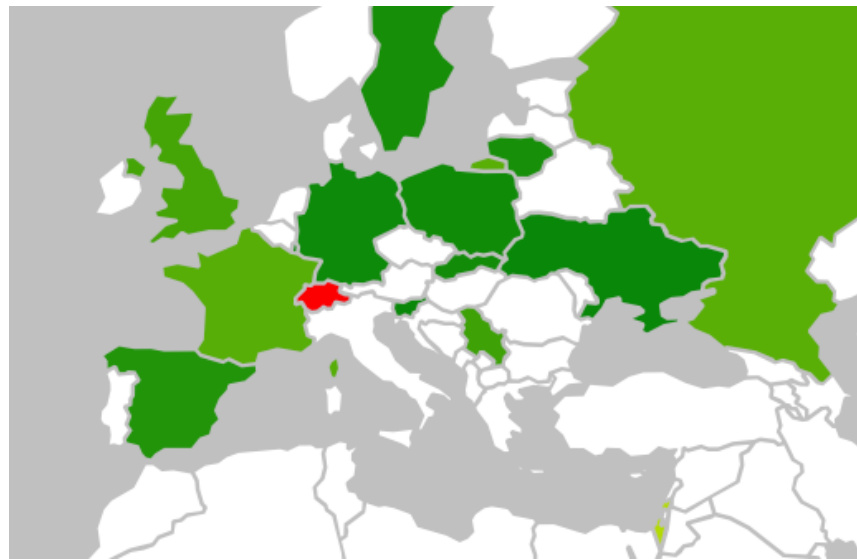
Figure 3 is a combination of figures 1 and 2. It shows the discrepancy in the number of ICO's launched and the amount raised. Switzerland is the country with the 4<sup>th</sup> most ICO's launched

but the greatest amount of funds raised in total. Accordingly, the average project in Switzerland is raising a greater than average amount of funds. This can be attributed to the fact that many of the world's most successful ICOs get launched in Switzerland.



*Figure 4: Heat Map ICO Funds Raised World*

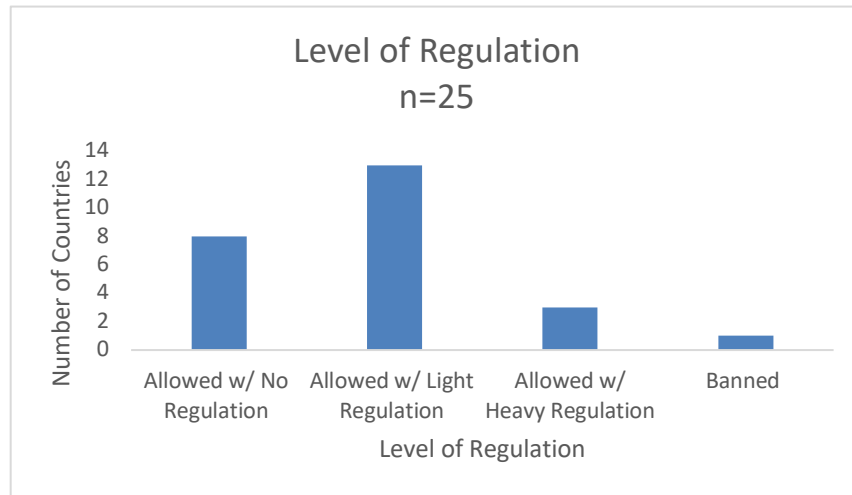
Figure 4 shows where ICO funds are being raised. The red countries show the highest dollar value of ICO funds raised, followed by the darker green and then lighter green.



*Figure 5: Heat Map ICO Funds Raised Europe*

Figure 5 shows a more focused view of figure 4. Switzerland and Israel have greater funds raised than their surrounding countries. Figure 5 shows how different countries throughout Europe compare to each other.

#### IV. Regulatory Responses



*Figure 6: Level of Regulation*

Figure 6 describes the level of regulation of the top 25 ICO countries. This chart indicates that the majority of the countries examined in this study are in the category of allowing ICO's and cryptocurrencies. There are fewer countries that have banned ICO's and cryptocurrencies altogether. For the most part, the general view of the world governments appears to be that they are using existing laws to regulate these cryptocurrencies.



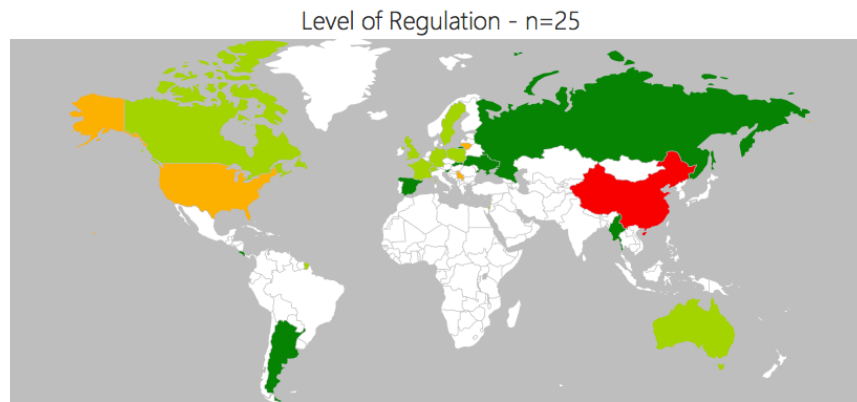


Figure 7: Heat Map - Level of Regulation

Figure 7 shows a heat map of the level of regulation throughout the world. The dark green areas represent the areas in the world where the government has suggested either regulation is premature or have stayed silent. Government bodies of countries in red have stipulated that blockchain technology is prohibited in some capacity in their country. The shades of light green and yellow fall somewhere in between.

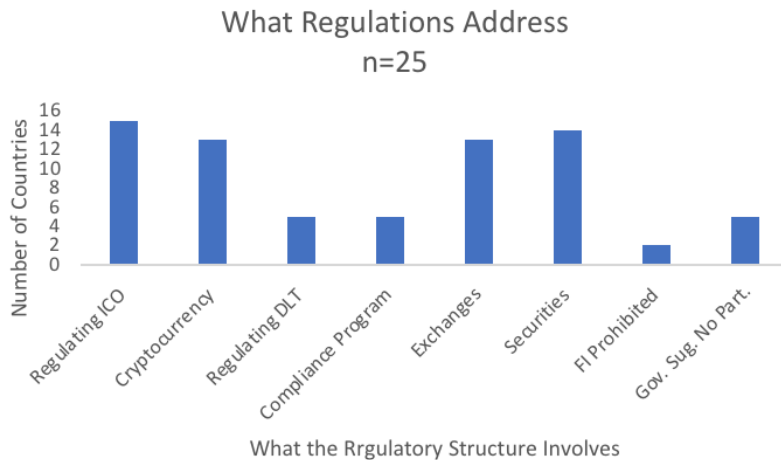
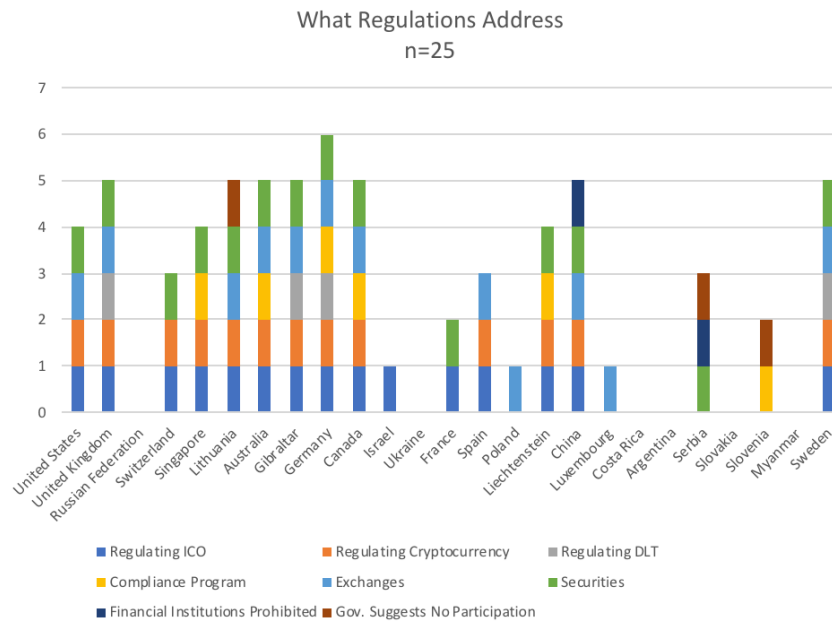


Figure 8: What Regulation Addresses

Figure 8 shows the sub issues addressed by governments. ICO's and cryptocurrencies are the main issues addressed. Although (federal)

securities law is the main way countries are regulating this technology, there is also concern about the regulation of exchanges within such countries which may fall outside of the federal securities laws, at least in part. Finally, few governments have prohibited financial investors from investing, but a greater number of governments have suggested not to take part. Many countries have issued warnings, but have not made a suggestion to its citizens as to whether to take part or not.



*Figure 9: What Regulations Address*

Figure 9 shows what the top 25 countries are doing to address these new technological developments. Some states have developed and considered these issues more than others. Some states have decided to stay silent as to developing regulations involving ICO's and cryptocurrencies. There are other reasons that may exist such as blockchain technology may not be considered as salient of an issue for some or others may not understand the technology and how it applies to the existing laws.

Figures 6 to 9 are based on the core regulatory actions or proposals in the jurisdictions listed below and their regulators (excluding the

United States)<sup>1</sup>. The summaries provided below on the regulatory responses are naturally incomplete and require much more analysis to be determinative for jurisdictional choices. All research herein has been based on the originally issued government guidance on their respective approaches, not third party reporting on such initiatives.

### **United Kingdom**

The Financial Conduct Authority is the agency of the UK government that regulates financial activity such as ICO's and Cryptocurrency. The FCA has taken the position that ICO's may be regulated as securities depending on the different aspects and rights the coin holder obtains through holding the coin.<sup>2</sup> They propose a case by case analysis to determine whether the ICO falls under the regulatory authority of the FCA.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, they recognize the lack of jurisdiction when the ICO is based overseas.<sup>4</sup>

The FCA has also taken steps to regulate DLT. Although they state that their objective is to regulate the outcome rather than the process, the FCA has acknowledged that DLT has unique aspects that can work around current regulations.<sup>5</sup> As a result of a study, the FCA determined that the current laws are flexible enough to cofer DLT businesses.<sup>6</sup>

### **Russian Federation**

The Central Bank of the Russian Federation is the regulatory authority in Russia that is considering ICO and cryptocurrency

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<sup>1</sup> The regulatory setup for cryptocurrencies and DLT business was still too uncertain in the United States to be included in the below discussion at the time of publication of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Initial Coin Offerings, (2017), <https://www.fca.org.uk/news/statements/initial-coin-offerings>, (last visited Jan. 30, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Discussion Paper on distributed ledger technology, (2017) <http://www.fca.org.uk/publication/discussion/dp17-03.pdf>, (last visited Jan. 30, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> FCA publishes feedback statement on Distributive Ledger Technology (2017), <https://www.fca.org.uk/news/press-releases/fca-publishes-feedback-statement-distributed-ledger-technology>, (last visited Jan. 30, 201)

regulation.<sup>7</sup> At the time of publication, the Central Bank of Russia has indicated that the regulation of this technology is premature. For this reason, the Russian government has declined to put forth any regulations to control ICO's, cryptocurrency, or DLT.

### **Switzerland**

The Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority has the power to regulate financial matters within Switzerland. FINMA has said that current ICO activity is covered by money laundering, banking, securities and collective investment laws.<sup>8</sup> FINMA has been supporting blockchain technology and sees its benefits within the financial markets.<sup>9</sup> In an attempt to balance this benefit with investors rights, anytime there is a report of breach of regulatory law, FINMA will investigate.<sup>10</sup>

### **Singapore**

The regulatory authority in Singapore is the Monetary Authority of Singapore. In August of 2017, the MAS released guidance on how they plan to approach regulation of digital tokens.<sup>11</sup> In this statement the MAS stated they will regulate tokens if they fall under the Securities and Futures Act (SFA).<sup>12</sup> There is no direct regulation under the SFA unless the currency is linked to an ownership or security interest in the issuers assets or property.<sup>13</sup> If

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<sup>7</sup> On the use of Private “virtual currencies”(crypto currency), (2017), [http://www.cbr.ru/press/PR/?file=04092017\\_183512if2017-09-04T18\\_31\\_05.htm](http://www.cbr.ru/press/PR/?file=04092017_183512if2017-09-04T18_31_05.htm), (last visited Jan. 20, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> FINMA is investigating ICO procedures, (2017), <http://www.finma.ch/en/news/2017/09/20170929-mm-ico/>, (last visited Jan. 13, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> MAS clarifies regulatory position on the offer of digital tokens in Singapore (2017), <http://www.mas.gov.sg/News-and-Publications/Media-Releases/2017/MAS-clarifies-regulatory-position-on-the-offer-of-digital-tokens-in-Singapore.aspx> (last visited Jan. 8, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

such rights are attached to the currency, the issuer must register with MAS, unless exempted for another reason.<sup>14</sup>

MAS also issued a warning to investors considering investing in these securities.<sup>15</sup> If the securities fall under MAS-regulation, there will be a triggering of conduct rules, which concerns fair dealing.<sup>16</sup> If the security falls outside the MAS-regulations, there will be no duty of fair dealing.<sup>17</sup>

### **Lithuania**

Lithuania current regulatory body (Bank of Lithuania) takes the position that these financial devices are too risky and discourage investors from investing in them.<sup>18</sup> If a party decides to still launch an ICO or cryptocurrency under Lithuanian jurisdiction, the current laws surrounding securities and money laundering may apply.<sup>19</sup>

The terms for financial institutions stipulates that if a financial institution seeks exposure to cryptocurrencies, they separate the financial services of the cryptocurrency from the other investments.<sup>20</sup> Although this may be difficult for many institutions, there is still a possibility that a financial institution can invest in cryptocurrency if they keep the crypto exposure separate.

### **Australia**

The Australian Securities and Investment Commission is the regulatory body for cryptocurrency in Australia. Australia is trying to determine whether the Corporations Act applies to ICO's and

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<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> Consumer Advisory on Investment Schemes Involving Digital Tokens (2017), <http://www.mas.gov.sg/News-and-Publications/Media-Releases/2017/Consumer-Advisory-on-Investment-Schemes-Involving-Digital-Tokens.aspx>, (last visited Jan. 13, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> Position of the Bank of Lithuania on Virtual Currencies and Initial Coin Offering (2017) <https://www.lb.lt/uploads/documents/files/Pozicijos%20del%20virtualiu%20valiutu%20ir%20VV%20zetonu%20platinimo%20EN.pdf>. (Last visited Jan. 13, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

cryptocurrencies.<sup>21</sup> If an ICO/cryptocurrency falls under the Corporations Act, additional disclosures are triggered. For instance, an ICO might trigger a disclosure requirement if the ICO is a managed investment scheme (MIS).<sup>22</sup> A few other possible triggers of the Corporations Act involve, for instance, the ICO is being offered as a share of a company, as a directive, or as a non-cash payment.

Australia has also implemented what they call the “Innovation Hub” to help fintech companies comply and navigate the regulatory world.<sup>23</sup> Through this program, the ASIC is also able to keep track of what is happening in the market.<sup>24</sup> This allows both parties to eliminate uncertainty that may exist.

### **Gibraltar**

The Gibraltar Financial Service Commission is in charge of regulating cryptocurrency in Gibraltar. Gibraltar has taken notice of the increased use of DLT, cryptocurrency and exchanges.<sup>25</sup> Starting January 1st, 2018, there will be new regulations to address DLT, exchanges and cryptocurrency.<sup>26</sup>

GFSC states that “ICOs are an unregulated means of raising finance in a venture or project”.<sup>27</sup> Under certain circumstances, however, tokens can fall under Gibraltar securities law.<sup>28</sup> In order for a currency to be considered a security a token must be an equivalent

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<sup>21</sup> Initial Coin Offering (2017), <http://asic.gov.au/regulatory-resources/digital-transformation/initial-coin-offerings/>, (last visited Jan. 13, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> A MIS is present if (1) people contribute assets (such as digital currency) to obtain an interest in the scheme ('interests' in a scheme are generally a type of 'financial product' and are regulated by the Corporations Act), (2) the assets are pooled together with one or more other contributors or used in a common enterprise to produce financial benefits or interests in property, and (3) the contributors do not have day-to-day control over the operation of the scheme but, at times, may have voting rights or similar rights. *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> Innovation Hub, (2017), <http://asic.gov.au/for-business/your-business/innovation-hub/>, (last visited Jan. 13, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Statement on Initial Coin Offering, (2017), <http://www.gfsc.gi/news/statement-on-initial-coin-offerings-250>, (last visited on Jan. 21, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

to shares in a company.<sup>29</sup> Most currencies are not regulated under securities law because the creator takes steps to make sure there is no interest in the project.

### **Germany**

Under the current law, BaFin has stated that cryptocurrencies are financial instruments.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the regulation being applied to the currency is dependent of the rights the cryptocurrency holds.<sup>31</sup> The main difference involves whether ownership rights apply, which will trigger securities law.<sup>32</sup> BaFin has also stated that just because a German citizen is in possession of the currency, does not necessarily mean that German law will apply.<sup>33</sup> This deals with a jurisdictional issue where in order for Germany enforce the law, the coin offeror must be specifically marketing to the German population in different ways.<sup>34</sup>

As of the date of publication, BaFin has decided that they will decide on a case by case basis whether any of this new technology is in violation of the Banking Act, Investment Code, Payment Service Supervision Act, or the Insurance Supervision Act.<sup>35</sup>

### **Canada**

The Canadian Securities Administration is the regulatory authority in Canada. The CSA applies a four-factor test in determining whether a cryptocurrency have to be registered as securities.<sup>36</sup> The factor test will consider substance over form when considering: (1)

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<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup>Initial Coin Offering: High Risk For Customers, (2017), [http://www.bafin.de/shareDoc's/Veroeffentlichungen/DE/Fachartikel/2017/fa\\_bj\\_1711\\_ICO.html](http://www.bafin.de/shareDoc's/Veroeffentlichungen/DE/Fachartikel/2017/fa_bj_1711_ICO.html)

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> Consumer warnings: the risk of initial coin offerings, (2017) <https://www.coindesk.com/germanys-securities-regulator-warns-icos-pose-numerous-risks/>, (last visited Jan. 30, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> See Supra note 30.

<sup>35</sup> See supra note 30

<sup>36</sup> Canadian Securities Regulators Outline Securities Law Requirements That May Apply To Cryptocurrency Offerings (2017), <https://www.securities-administrators.ca/about.aspx?id=-1606>, (Last visited Jan. 8, 2018).

Soliciting a broad base of investors, including retail investors; (2) Using the internet, including public websites and discussion boards, to reach a large number of potential investors; (3) Attending public events, including conferences and meetups, to actively advertise the sale of the coins/tokens; and (4) Raising a significant amount of capital from a large number of investors.<sup>37</sup>

The CSA has also developed a regulatory sandbox specifically for Fintech companies to stay in compliance.<sup>38</sup> The regulatory sandbox allows a fast track for registration or exemption depending on the circumstances.<sup>39</sup> The thought behind the regulatory sandbox is to allow a flexible process for complying with the current regulations.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, the CSA touches on exchanges and how this relates to regulation. In determining whether an exchange must be registered, they must meet the qualifications for being a marketplace.<sup>41</sup> When an exchange is considered a marketplace<sup>42</sup> or alternative trading system<sup>43</sup>, the exchange is required to register.<sup>44</sup> At the time of publication, there were no registered marketplaces or ATS's in Canada.

## Israel

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<sup>37</sup> CSA Staff Notice 46-307 Cryptocurrency Offerings, (2017) [http://www.osc.gov.on.ca/en/SecuritiesLaw/csa\\_20170824\\_cryptocurrency-offerings.htm](http://www.osc.gov.on.ca/en/SecuritiesLaw/csa_20170824_cryptocurrency-offerings.htm), (Last visited Jan. 8, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> A marketplace consists of three elements: (1) brings together buyers and sellers of securities; (2) brings together the orders for securities of multiple buyers and sellers; and (3) uses established non-discriminatory methods under

<sup>43</sup> An ATS differs from an exchange in that it: (1) require an issuer to enter into an agreement to have its securities traded on the marketplace; (2) provide, directly, or through one or more subscribers, a guarantee of a two-sided market for a security on a continuous or reasonably continuous basis; (3) set requirements governing the conduct of subscribers, other than conduct in respect of the trading by those subscribers on the marketplace; and (4) discipline subscribers other than by exclusion from participation in the marketplace

<sup>44</sup> CSA Staff Notice 46-307 Cryptocurrency Offerings, (2017) [http://www.osc.gov.on.ca/en/SecuritiesLaw/csa\\_20170824\\_cryptocurrency-offerings.htm](http://www.osc.gov.on.ca/en/SecuritiesLaw/csa_20170824_cryptocurrency-offerings.htm), (Last visited Jan. 8, 2017).



Israel has formed a committee to consider the regulation of cryptocurrencies and ICO's.<sup>45</sup> The committee will lay the groundwork for future regulation. As of now, the overarching tone from the committee has been to embrace blockchain technology and become an "ICO hub".<sup>46</sup> With this tone from the committee, it is likely that future regulation will be favorable to ICO's and blockchain technology.

### **Ukraine**

The National Bank of Ukraine has the power to regulate cryptocurrencies in Ukraine. A statement for the Bank of Ukraine lays out the different views other countries have presented,<sup>47</sup> concluding that the Ukraine has not taken a position on the issue yet. Instead, they are going to discuss the issue at the next financial stability board meeting, which will be held in August of 2018.<sup>48</sup> At the present time, Ukraine is not saying anything as to how they are going to treat this technology.

### **France**

France's regulatory authority on the matter of cryptocurrency is the AMF. The AMF has taken the position that they are still not sure what this technology is or how to regulate it.<sup>49</sup> For this reason,

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<sup>45</sup> Stan Higgins, ICO Oversight? Israeli Regulators Form Token Sale Study Committee, Coindesk, Aug. 30, 2017, <https://www.coindesk.com/ico-oversight-israeli-regulators-form-token-sale-study-committee/>.

<sup>46</sup> Avi Mizrahi, Israeli Regulator: We need to Welcome Cryptocurrency and Develop International ICO Hub, Bitcoin, Dec. 4, 2017, <https://news.bitcoin.com/israeli-regulator-need-welcome-cryptocurrency-develop-international-ico-hub/>.

<sup>47</sup> Comment of the Deputy Chairman of the National Bank of Ukraine Oleg Churia on the status of Bitcoin in Ukraine, (2017), [http://bank.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article?art\\_id=53411806 &cat\\_id=55838](http://bank.gov.ua/control/uk/publish/article?art_id=53411806 &cat_id=55838), (last visited Jan 21, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> The AMF Publishes a discussion paper on Initial Coin Offerings and institutes the Unicorn programme, (2017), [http://www.amf-france.org/en\\_US/Actualites/Communiqués-de-presse/AMF/annee-2017?docId=workspace%3A%2F%2FSpacesStore%2F5097c770-e3f7-40bb-81ce-db2c95e7bdae](http://www.amf-france.org/en_US/Actualites/Communiqués-de-presse/AMF/annee-2017?docId=workspace%3A%2F%2FSpacesStore%2F5097c770-e3f7-40bb-81ce-db2c95e7bdae), (last visited Jan. 31, 2017).

France has implemented a new program called the Universal Node to ICO Research & Network (UNICORN). Through this program, France will explore the scope of regulation to be implemented. As of now, the three ways of regulating they are considering are: (1) promoting best practices with existing legislation (2) extend the scope of existing text to include ICOs as securities and (3) propose ad hoc legislation adapted to ICOs.<sup>50</sup>

### **Spain**

There is currently no information on the regulation of ICO's or cryptocurrency beyond gambling laws.

### **Poland**

In a joint statement by the Polish National Bank and Financial Supervision Commission, the regulatory authorities said cryptocurrencies are not considered legal tender.<sup>51</sup> As a result of this lack of legal tender, the government issued warnings about investing.<sup>52</sup> The government makes a clear distinction between investing in DLT and virtual currencies.<sup>53</sup> The government says that DLT's may be subject to other laws that don't apply to virtual currencies.<sup>54</sup> The statement does not explicitly prohibit financial institutions from participating in the crypto market but advised these institutions not to invest.

The KNF issued an additional statement concerning ICO's specifically.<sup>55</sup> The statement laid out what an ICO was and the risks

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<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> Announcement of the National Bank of Poland and the Polish Financial Supervision Authority regarding virtual currencies (2017), [http://www.nbp.pl/home.aspx?f=aktualnosc\\_2017/ww-pl.html](http://www.nbp.pl/home.aspx?f=aktualnosc_2017/ww-pl.html), last visited (Jan 20, 2018)

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> The KNF's statement on selling so-called coins or tokens (Initial Token Offerings – ITOs or Initial Coin Offerings – ICOs), (2017), [http://www.knf.gov.pl/knf/en/komponentry/img/The\\_KNFs\\_statement\\_on\\_selling\\_socalled\\_coins\\_or\\_tokens\\_ICO\\_60238.pdf](http://www.knf.gov.pl/knf/en/komponentry/img/The_KNFs_statement_on_selling_socalled_coins_or_tokens_ICO_60238.pdf), (last visited Jan 20, 2018).

associated with investing.<sup>56</sup> Depending on the way the currency is structured, there can be a lack of legal protections if the currency does not fall under the regulations financial markets have to follow.<sup>57</sup>

### **Lichtenstein**

Until recently, Lichtenstein had been relatively silent with regards to taking a stance of whether securities law applied to ICO's and cryptocurrencies. In September of 2017, the Financial Market Authority came out with a fact sheet concerning ICO's and cryptocurrency.<sup>58</sup> In the legality section, the government states that the applicability of securities and financial instrument law will depend on the rights attached to the token.<sup>59</sup> If corporations have questions concerning ICO's, Lichtenstein has established a fast track fintech department to address these issues.<sup>60</sup>

In December of 2017, the Financial Market Authority issued the non-profit organization CBN a no action letter.<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that CBN's ICO currency did not come with any right to assets or property.<sup>62</sup> This could be seen as an indicator of the government's position on companies engaging in ICO/cryptocurrency activity.

### **China**

The People Republic of China have taken a firm stance against ICO's, banning them entirely.<sup>63</sup> This also applies to the offering of coins and the exchanges used to trade the coins.<sup>64</sup> China believes

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<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> Fact Sheet on Initial Coin Offerings (2017), <https://www.fma-li.li/files/fma/fma-factsheet-ico.pdf>, (last visited Jan. 19, 2018).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> CBN Foundation, <https://cbn.foundation/#>, (last visited Jan. 19, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Steve Jurvetson, CBN Foundation Whitepaper, 41-2 (2017).

<sup>63</sup> 关于防范代币发行融资风险的公告, (2017), <http://www.cbrc.gov.cn/Chinese/home/docView/BE5842392CFF4BD98B0F3DC9C2A4C540.html> (last visited Jan. 19, 2018).

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

that ICO's hurt the market because of potential deception and fraud.<sup>65</sup> The PRC recognizes that this has been going on in their country and as a result, issuers of these currencies must take steps to protect investors rights under the current laws.<sup>66</sup>

### **Luxembourg**

The Commission de Servellance du Secteur Financier is the regulatory authority tasked with the regulation of cryptocurrency. The CSSF has not issued any regulations by themselves. Instead they have relied on statements from the IOSCO and ESMA.

### **Costa Rica**

There is currently no information on where the government stands on the regulation of ICO's, cryptocurrency or blockchain technology.

### **Argentina**

There is currently no formal statement by the government, but the futures market of Mercado de Termino de Rosario is considering the application bitcoin.

### **Serbia**

The National Bank of Serbia is the regulatory authority over ICO's in Serbia. Serbia has taken the position that financial institutional are not allowed to participate in ICO's or other cryptocurrency investments because they are not legal tender.<sup>67</sup> For individuals, the government warns against investment because of security issues.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the disallowance of cryptocurrency as legal tender, in 2016 the National Bank of Serbia stipulated that they would be

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<sup>65</sup> *Id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> NBS Warns that Bitcoin is Not Legal Tender in Serbia (2014), <http://www.nbs.rs/internet/english/scripts/showContent.html?id=7607&konverzija=yes> (last visited Jan. 22, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

considering regulation on the treatment of cryptocurrencies.<sup>69</sup> At the time of publication, no new regulation from the Serbian authorities existed.

### **Slovakia**

Slovakia's regulatory body that deals with financial matters is the National Bank of Slovakia.<sup>70</sup> The national bank takes the view that cryptocurrencies are not considered money because countries enjoy monetary sovereignty.<sup>71</sup> This makes it difficult to regulate because cryptocurrencies cannot fall under the monetary policy of the country.<sup>72</sup> This also means that cryptocurrencies do not fall under the definition of electronic money because there is no monetary value.

The National Bank of Slovakia has also stated "bitcoiny nemajú ani povahu finančné ho nástroja" which translates to "bitcoin does not have the nature of a financial instrument".<sup>73</sup> As a result of taking this position, cryptocurrency does not fall under securities and financial instrument law.<sup>74</sup>

### **Slovenia**

Slovenia's regulatory body for ICO transactions is the Bank of Slovenia. Slovenia issued a warning to investors about the dangers of ICO and cryptocurrency investment but have since declined to

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<sup>69</sup> Bitcoin Will Not Replace Euro or Any Other Currency (2016), <http://www.nbs.rs/internet/latinica/scripts/showContent.html?id=9612&konverzija=yes> (last visited Jan. 27, 2018)

<sup>70</sup> Niekoľko úvah k virtuálnej mene bitcoin (2017), [http://www.nbs.sk/\\_img/Documents/\\_PUBLIK\\_NBS\\_FSR/Biatec/Rok2013/08-2013/06\\_biatic13-8\\_nadasky.pdf](http://www.nbs.sk/_img/Documents/_PUBLIK_NBS_FSR/Biatec/Rok2013/08-2013/06_biatic13-8_nadasky.pdf) (last visited Jan. 19, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

take a position on regulation.<sup>75</sup> Currently, there are no regulations or position taken by the government beyond the formal warning.<sup>76</sup> There is hope that when the government finally takes a stance on the treatment of ICO and cryptocurrency regulation it will be in hopes to foster innovation as opposed to restrict. In a statement, the Prime Minister said that the country is currently studying the technology in hopes of having Slovenia being the blockchain hub of the European Union.<sup>77</sup> One of the ways in which they are looking to accomplish this is through a Blockchain Think Tank, which allows companies a point of contact on compliance and development issues.<sup>78</sup>

### Myanmar

Myanmar officials have not taken a position on blockchain technology.

### Sweden

The Swedish regulatory authority finansinspektionen (FI) controls the regulation around ICO's and cryptocurrency. The FI has taken the stance that ICO's are investment products that may be traded.<sup>79</sup> Although there is no explicit ban on financial companies raising money through ICO's, no Swedish company has attempted to do so yet.<sup>80</sup> Along with this notice, Sweden has also issued a warning about the risks associated with cryptocurrencies and the ICO

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<sup>75</sup> Financial Stability Board Warning, (2017), <https://www.bsi.si/en/media/1138/financial-stability-board-warning>, (last visited Jan. 27, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> *Id.*

<sup>77</sup> Slovenia's Challenges 2020: A vision for the development of regulation of blockchain technology in modern society, (2017), [http://www.vlada.si/en/prime\\_minister/news/a/slovenias\\_challenges\\_2020\\_a\\_vision\\_for\\_the\\_development\\_and\\_regulation\\_of\\_blockchain\\_technology\\_in\\_modern\\_society\\_1108/](http://www.vlada.si/en/prime_minister/news/a/slovenias_challenges_2020_a_vision_for_the_development_and_regulation_of_blockchain_technology_in_modern_society_1108/), (last visited Jan. 27, 2017).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> FI role regarding innovation (2017), [http://www.fi.se/contestassets/d3cd30fe473d4a7995f0c38209ddb7f1/fintech\\_report\\_eng.pdf](http://www.fi.se/contestassets/d3cd30fe473d4a7995f0c38209ddb7f1/fintech_report_eng.pdf), (last visited Jan 30, 2018).

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

market.<sup>81</sup> Along with this general warning, FI cites the ESMA publications that reference, depending on the cryptocurrency structure, a possible triggering of securities law as well as other consequences.<sup>82</sup>

## V. Conclusion

The majority of the countries examined in this study permit ICO's and cryptocurrencies or do not explicitly prohibit them. Of the entirety of countries considered, only a very small minority has banned ICO's and cryptocurrencies altogether. For the most part, the general view of the world governments appears to be that they are using existing laws to regulate cryptocurrencies or wait to see how other countries react to the crypto evolution. Regulatory efforts can take several forms but appear to involve some of the following approaches or permutations thereof: regulating ICOs, regulating cryptocurrencies, regulating DLT, mandating compliance programs, regulating exchanges, securities regulation, prohibition of exposed financial institutions, government suggestions to consumers not to participate.

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<sup>81</sup> Warning for Risks with Initial Coin Offerings (ICO), (2017), <http://www.fi.se/sv/publicerat/nyheter/2017/varning-for-risker-med-initial-coin-offerings/>, (last visited Jan. 30, 2018)

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*