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M.J. Peterson  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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# Understanding Intergovernmental Organizations and their Member States as Co-Participants in an Authority Relationship

MJ Peterson, University of Massachusetts Amherst

After more than a decade of rising unilateralism, the Covid-19 pandemic and accelerating atmospheric warming are providing stark reminders that global interconnections remain strong and that coordinated shared effort is necessary to adequately addressing many problems. Discussions of global governance<sup>1</sup> and provision of “global public goods”<sup>2</sup> suggest that some portion of both can be provided by nonstate actors like multinational corporations, transnational professional bodies, transnational nongovernmental organizations, or private transnational regulatory organizations.<sup>3</sup> Yet even these discussions acknowledge that governments of states will remain central because state administrative structures still hold the largest concentrations of coordinating capacity in the world.

Tapping into government capacities can occur in more than one way. Discussions of “networked governance” suggest that coordination could be supplied by developing transgovernmental networks of officials drawn from cognate government agencies in each participating state.<sup>4</sup> Though structured as IGOs, the 19<sup>th</sup> century “public international unions” resembled contemporary transgovernmental networks because member states’ delegations to the IGO deliberative forum were composed primarily of officials from the relevant functional agency rather than the foreign ministry. Yet they also had a central staff to assist in information management and other functions.

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<sup>1</sup>e.g., Prakash and Hart 1999; Held and McGrew 2002.

<sup>2</sup>e.g. Kaul *et al.* 2003.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Abbott and Snidal 2009.

<sup>4</sup> e.g., Bang and Esmark 2009; Hollstein, Matiaske, and Schnapp 2017.

Depending on the array of views among governments, either an IGO or a transgovernmental network can provide effective coordination. Using either is possible when there is wide agreement among the whole set of approximately 200 independent states about whether to coordinate and what rules to adopt for coordinating or when a core group of strong states agree and can use their national legal systems to impose the rules on other states.<sup>5</sup> Yet when a core group of the strong need other governments' active assistance to implement the coordination, an IGO is often more effective than a transgovernmental network because the authority relationship created by establishing an IGO provides more explicit mechanisms through which the strong can commit to using their capability in particular ways and/or assure smaller states that weakness will not be heavily exploited.<sup>6</sup> Thus coordinating through intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) will continue to be an important feature of world politics.

### **Shortcomings of Current Perspectives on IGOs**

The conceptions of IGOs currently most prevalent among analysts of international relations treat IGOs in ways that miss important elements of their interactions with the governments of member states. In what is probably the most prevalent conception, IGOs are tools used by the predominant actors in the international system to enforce their preferred order on other actors. This basic proposition can take many forms depending on what actors are defined as predominant. For realists and some others, these predominant actors are one preeminent power ("the hegemon") or a small group of cooperating great powers.<sup>7</sup> Marxists emphasize a transnational capitalist class, though

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<sup>5</sup> Drezner 2007, 72-76.

<sup>6</sup> e.g., Ikenberry 2001; Deudney 2007; Stone 2011.

<sup>7</sup> e.g., Pauly 1998; Stone 2011.

typically regard it as operating in the political realm through the governments of major market economy states.<sup>8</sup> Neopluralists perceive increased transnational organization among many groups, but acknowledge both the advantages held by financiers and major corporations and the continuing autonomy of states in shaping world politics.<sup>9</sup> Functionalists<sup>10</sup> and some others<sup>11</sup> attribute broad influence to networks of like-minded national officials who use IGOs to advance their shared vision of how particular problems should be addressed. Whatever the form of a power-centered approach, the weaker actors, including most member state governments in an IGO, are treated as objects or “agenda-takers” with no or little range of choice.

In a second conception of IGOs, derived from theories of delegation first developed in studies of national politics<sup>12</sup> but also used extensively in studies of the European Union,<sup>13</sup> the coalition of member states with sufficient votes in the IGO’s decision-making bodies to set its directions function as a collective principal using the IGO as its agent.<sup>14</sup> This literature tends to focus on how the voting coalition is maintained and does or does not exert control over the IGO, leaving aside member governments’ individual experiences with the IGO.

In a third conception, any IGO with a significant-sized bureaucratically-organized staff is likely to escape member governments’ control as the staff operates according to the dynamics of bureaucratic organizational methods and ambitions.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> e.g., Chimmi 2004; Cooke 2005.

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Cerny 2010.

<sup>10</sup> e.g., Mitrany 1943.

<sup>11</sup>e.g., Murphy 1984.

<sup>12</sup> e.g., Bendor, Glazer, and Hammond 2001; Huber and Shipan 2002; Braun and Gilardi 2006.

<sup>13</sup> e.g., Pollack 2003.

<sup>14</sup>Hawkins *et al.* 2006.

<sup>15</sup> e.g., Ness and Brechlin 1988; Vaubel 1996; Frey 1997; Barnett and Finnemore 2004.

The power-centered and principal-agent conceptions overlap since a like-minded group of governments ruling particularly powerful states can be defined as the effective collective principal even in an IGO with a global membership. However the conception of interaction guiding the principal-agent conception rests on rational choice theory assumptions about how political actors behave and interact while the political tool conception can be applied with equal vigor by realist, liberal, Marxist, and critical theorists of international relations despite their very different epistemological and ontological commitments. The principal-agent and runaway bureaucracy conceptions also overlap, since principal-agent theory treats both principals and agents as autonomous, unitary, self-seeking actors – the agents seeking opportunities to exploit their position for their own benefit as they perform their delegated tasks, and the principals using various means to curb agent self-seeking. From this vantage point, the view of IGOs as autonomous bureaucracies outside member government control is can be regarded as elaboration on what happens when principals cannot or will not exert effective control over agents.

The three conceptions share one important analytical weakness – they tend to obscure the relations between an IGO and the governments of the weaker member states. These governments tend to be lumped together despite their considerable variation, either as objects rather than actors – done-to rather doing – or as actors with narrow ranges of choice – agenda-takers rather than agenda-makers, experiencers of others' choices as *faits accomplis* rather than participants in making decisions and creating outcomes. At the same time, they also mis-state IGOs' place in organizing cooperation, though in different ways. The power-centered and principal-agent conceptions encourage under-estimating

the ability of an international organization to operate as autonomous actors in world policies, while the autonomous bureaucracy conception encourages over-estimating that ability.

Both types of mis-estimation can be reduced by adopting a perspective that keeps all of the member state governments and the organization in view simultaneously, one conceiving of IGOs and governments of member states as co-participants in an authority relationship. This perspective also parallels a well-established distinction between an IGO as negotiating forum and an IGO as separate actor prominent in most descriptive accounts of international organizations<sup>16</sup> and in the legal literatures on international administration or the law of international organizations.<sup>17</sup>

Though a few IGOs are no more than discussion forums, most IGOs provide services or resources to member state governments. IGOs that provide services or resources, particularly the latter, actually develop two relations with member state governments. The first, familiar from the principal-agent literature, is that between member state governments as a collective principal that creates and uses the IGO as an agent. The second, and much less familiar, is that between the IGO head and staff as they carry out their work and the individual member state governments to which the IGO provides services or resources. Because the services or resources come with instructions about how to use them, this relation means the IGO is a provider bearing instructions and the individual member state governments are recipients of those instructions as well as of the services or resources.

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<sup>16</sup> e.g. Rittberger and others 2011; Hurd 2020.

<sup>17</sup> e.g. Amerasinghe 2005; Sands and Klein 2009.

Though obscured by the connotations of most of the words used for analyzing such relations, this relation between the IGO staff and individual member governments is one of co-participating that can be analyzed as a type of authority relationship in which the IGO (most often represented by its head and staff) has the directing role and individual member governments fill follower roles. Taking this perspective seriously moves analysis beyond the implicitly one-way character suggested by the conceptions of IGOs as tools of the powerful, IGOs as agents of a collective principal, or IGOs as runaway bureaucracies.

Regarding interactions between IGOs and member state governments as an authority relationship also permits connecting the relations of the IGO leadership and staff with individual member governments to their relations with all the governments of member states as a collective principal. Any IGO with decision-making forums that include representatives of a broad array of member states contains a feedback loop from the individual relations to the collective principal because member government representatives in the forum will be aware of and draw on their own government's individual experience with the IGO as they participate in defining the terms of delegation or overseeing IGO activity. How member governments interact with the IGO head or staff affects how the head and staff carry out their work, and can induce them to shift organizational practices within the limits of the discretion they possess as agents.

### **The Existence of Authority Relations in World Politics**

Despite greater attention among analysts of world politics to the concepts of hierarchy<sup>18</sup> and authority,<sup>19</sup> using the phrase “authority relation” to describe what is

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<sup>18</sup> e.g., Cooley 2004; Lake 2011; Renshon 2017; McCormack 2018.

happening between IGOs and individual member state governments still seems strange. This sense of strangeness derives in large part from longstanding presuppositions about what is implied in saying the word “authority.”

Often the difficulty of seeing authority relations operating in world politics results from an implicit equating of authority with one type of authority existing within states – rational-legal authority based on office holding<sup>20</sup> – because the absence of a world government makes it impossible to identify any form of legal-rational authority operating at the global level.<sup>21</sup> A different way of thinking about authority – an actor being “an authority” because of expertise rather than “in authority” because of a formal role<sup>22</sup> – is implied in the large literatures on the influence of experts in international-level policy processes,<sup>23</sup> and many IGOs do develop expertise in various fields. Yet this alternate version of acquiring authority has also failed to gain strong traction, perhaps because being “an authority” seems like a weaker claim to lead than being “in authority,” but also because of perceptions, confirmed in an increasing academic literature, that even expert consensus, especially on issues that rest on socially-defined rather than physical facts, is seldom politically neutral.<sup>24</sup>

Another conceptual obstacle to considering authority relationships as part of world politics is rooted in how the word “authority” is commonly defined. Standard dictionary definitions begin with formulations suggesting that authority is something possessed by a leader. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “authority” as “power or

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<sup>19</sup> e.g., Hall 2015; Hooghie, Marks, Lenz, Bezuijen, Ceka, and Derderyan 2017; McNamara 2017; Zurn 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Weber 1925/1978, chapter 3.

<sup>21</sup> Lake 2010, 587 and 589.

<sup>22</sup> Peters 1958.

<sup>23</sup> e.g., Littoz-Monnet 2017.

<sup>24</sup> e.g. Neumann and Sending, 2018; Voeten 2021, chaps 5 and 8.



right to enforce obedience; moral or legal supremacy; the right to command or give ultimate decision.”<sup>25</sup> *Webster’s* uses “power to require and receive submission; the right to expect obedience; superiority derived from a status that carries with it the right to command and give final decisions.”<sup>26</sup>

Yet read more carefully, the dictionary definitions hint that authority is a relationship. The phrases “to enforce obedience,” “receive submission,” and “expect obedience” all point to interactions between actors giving instructions and other actors expected to comply with them. This suggests that authority is the product of a social relationship in which the participating actors mutually acknowledge the leader’s right to instruct and the followers’ obligation to conform. Recent work on authority in international relations,<sup>27</sup> as well as expositions of the “practice turn”<sup>28</sup> and the “relational turn”<sup>29</sup> in international relations theory have taken this direction.

### *Defining an Authority Relationship*

An authority relationship involves two types of participating actors. The first type holds the right to tell others what to do. The second type have obligations to do as they are told or accept being punished for disobedience. These types of actors have been given a variety of names. The words “rulers,” “governors,” “commanders,” or “superiors” have been used to identify actors with rights to instruct others about what to do, while the words “subjects,” “governed,” “commanded” or “subordinates” have been used to identify actors with obligations to follow instructions. Most of these words have very hierarchical connotations drawn from the familiar forms of national level political

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<sup>25</sup> 1989, no. 1a.

<sup>26</sup> 1993, no. 2a.

<sup>27</sup> e.g., Albin 2001: 15-17, 220-222; Lake 2010: 587; Bernstein 2011: 19.

<sup>28</sup> e.g., Neumann 2002; Adler and Pouliot 2011; Bueger and Gadinger 2015.

<sup>29</sup> e.g., Nexon 2010; Jackson and Nexon 2019.

interactions. Using a different vocabulary, the phrase “authority holder” to denote participants having a right to instruct and the word “addressee” to denote participants having the obligation to act as instructed, is an effort to moderate hierarchical expectations. Using “addressee” is also intended to avoid the common national-level assumption that there is wide power distance – social norms that inhibit lower status individuals or groups from engaging in overt challenges to higher-status individuals or groups<sup>30</sup> – between givers and receivers of instructions. Though differences in material capability have major influence on outcomes in world politics, the principle of sovereign equality of states creates a much narrower power distance between IGOs and member states than prevails in national political systems, and this has important implications. Using the word “instructions” for authority holder communications with addressees rather than the more common “commands” is also intended to avoid evoking the notions of authority drawn from the experience of steeply hierarchical social systems with significant power distance among actors.

Many discussions of authority relationships divide the shared expectations that bind authority holders and addressees together into substantive and procedural.<sup>31</sup> Yet by itself that two-part distinction oversimplifies and provides less analytical traction than a conception that divides both the substantive expectations and the procedural expectations into sets of related aspects. Myres McDougal suggested such a finer grained approach in their definition of authority as the “structure of community expectations about who, with what qualifications and mode of selection is deemed competent to make decisions by

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<sup>30</sup> Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010: 95-97.

<sup>31</sup> e.g., Scharpf 1997; Grant and Keohane 2005.

what procedures and criteria.”<sup>32</sup> Michael Bayles offered a more detailed formulation in his statement that the “operating rules” for any authority relation take the form “Person X with qualifications Q may issue directions D in manner M to person or persons Y concerning subject or subjects S for purpose P.”<sup>33</sup>

While helpful for defining the terms under which addressees accept an authority holder’s instructing, these definitions do not pay sufficient attention to the other side of an authority relationship – addressee perception of whether continuing to participate in the authority relationship is worthwhile. Addressees consider this in two related evaluations – first a prospective assessment of the relevance of the instructions they are given for attaining the goal, and then a retrospective assessment of the efficacy of following the instructions for reaching the goal. Incorporating addressee assessment of relevance expands the subject area expectations by raising the question of which instructions within the larger set of possible instructions that could be issued seem prospectively to be most conducive to goal attainment. Addressees might regard an instruction as non-relevant for several reasons, including perceived failure to fit the actual shape of the problem at hand or perception that it is more likely to elicit action benefitting the authority holder or some group of favored addressees than group attainment of the shared goal. Similarly, efficacy denotes retrospective addressee evaluation of experience with the cooperative effort so far to determine whether and to what extent there has been progress toward the desire or away from the aversion defining the goal of the cooperative effort.

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<sup>32</sup> McDougal 1959, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bayles 1976, 105.

Thus the authority relationship between an IGO and the governments of its member states involve 3 sets of procedural expectations and 4 sets of substantive expectations. The procedural expectations are specifications of:

*Selection*: the qualifications and selection process by which the role of instruction-giver is assigned to one or more particular actors;

*Addressees*: the rules defining the set of actors assigned to roles of receiving and following the instructions; and

*Procedures*: the forms and ways in which instructions should be conveyed to addressees

The substantive expectations are specifications of:

*Goal*: the purpose or outcome to be pursued;

*Area*: the subjects on, or issue areas within which, instructions may be given;

*Relevance*: the types of actions or inactions addressees may be instructed to undertake; and

*Efficacy*: whether and to what extent continued cooperation within the authority relationship has actually produced progress toward the goal.

Each set of expectations can vary separately from the others, and therefore be evaluated individually. Yet in actual authority relationships addressee perceptions regarding fulfillment of one set of expectations affects perceptions of fulfillment on another. Area, relevance, and efficacy criteria are particularly closely interconnected because they all draw on ability to identify discrete action paths from defined goal to its attainment and then sort them into the more and less effective way to secure success.

Focusing on authority relationships also highlights another feature that standard dictionary definitions of the term “authority” tend to obscure, namely that authority relations exist and persist because they facilitate harnessing actors’ individual capabilities together for attainment of a shared purpose.<sup>34</sup>

Actors able to attain their goals alone do not need to form relationships with other actors for that purpose. It is when lone effort has failed or appears likely to fail that actors form relationships. In a sufficiently large group, structuring the relationship as an authority relationship giving some actor a right to instruct the rest of the group permits – though does not guarantee – more effective coordination of effort.<sup>35</sup> The facilitating effects of creating a leadership role exist even among groups of highly intelligent actors. They may even need a “signal-caller” more than less intelligent actors because they are able to identify a larger number of reasonable action paths to a goal but have the same need to converge on following one of those paths to act effectively as a group.<sup>36</sup>

Treating authority as a relationship also makes clear that both authority holders and addressees remain autonomous participants in the interaction. Though addressees are “subordinated” in that they accept the role of instruction-followers, they do not lose their ability to make independent judgments of their own situation, their own goals, or the merits of different ways to pursue those goals. Despite some suggestions that addressees do “surrender judgment”,<sup>37</sup> following an instruction is better understood as a suspension of judgment. Even when immediately complying, addressees are assessing the difficulty

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<sup>34</sup> Michels 1930, 319; Jenkins 1976, 38; Dalton, Barnes, and Zaleznik 1968, 37; Connolly 1987, 21 and the similar tradition in organization theory going back to Barnard 1938, 163 and Simon 1976, 125-26.

<sup>35</sup> e.g., Shinn 1971, 93; Gamson, Fireman and Rytina 1982, 122; Connolly 1987, 21; Raz 1990, 6-7; Rosler 2005, 187-188.

<sup>36</sup> Finnis 1990, 174

<sup>37</sup> e.g., Flathman 1980, 35.

and effects of acting according to that instruction or to other instructions that might follow, and forming their own conclusions about whether they should continue to defer to a particular authority-holder's instructions.<sup>38</sup> Claims that authority holders should be accountable to others are simply explicit assertions of addressees' individual and collective rights to judge the competence and effects of authority-holder actions, and to draw their own conclusions about whether a particular authority holder continues to deserve its position.

Addressees' ability to evaluate the impact of acting as instructed on themselves and/or the community as a whole, means that any authority relationship also includes more or less explicit mechanisms for review of authority holder performance. With IGOs, these mechanisms fall squarely within the "delegation" definition of accountability in which the actors who create the authority relationship review the authority holder's performance and not within the "participation" definition of accountability in which the actors affected by the authority-holder's actions review it.<sup>39</sup> In the past, the two definitions converged – governments of member states were simultaneously the delegators (in their external capacity as sovereign) and the participants (in their internal capacity as provider of order and security to their country's population).

In recent decades distinguishing between the "principals" (the governments of member states) and the "people" affected by an IGO's activity (human individuals and groups) has become more common as greater attention has been given to the activities of non-state actors and analytical attention focused on "human" rights, development, and security as well as on "state" rights, development, and security. Both member state

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<sup>38</sup>Day 1963: 268; Benn 1967, 217; Rosenblum, 1987, 106; Rosler 2005, 95-98.

<sup>39</sup> Grant and Keohane 2005, 31.

governments and IGO heads and staff experience these demands for accountability to “people” as coming from outside, typically from nongovernmental organizations or other groups in civil society, claiming to speak on behalf of those directly affected.

Meanwhile, the NGOs or organized civil society groups regard themselves as making up for the lack of direct lines of accountability from authority holders to ordinary people that would exist if intergovernmental organizations were one level of government in a federated world democracy.

### *IGOs as Authority Holders*

Like any authority holder, an IGO is outnumbered by the governments of member states that are its direct addressees and possesses much fewer material resources than they collectively possess. IGOs are thus very dependent on willing member state cooperation, and need to draw as heavily on claims to legitimacy explaining why member governments should comply as on addressee calculations of self-interest. Discussions of political legitimacy have identified several distinct foundations for willing compliance with authority holder instructions. Robert Dahl suggested that it often rests on a habit of obeying a particular authority holder.<sup>40</sup> This does not have strong effect during the early years of an IGO’s existence, but can develop over time. Arnold Wolfers’s distinction between states’ “material goals” – possessing ample territory, wealth, and military capability – and “milieu goals” – establishing practices at the international level allowing them to maintain their internal political, economic, social, and cultural systems<sup>41</sup> – has inspired suggestions that governments willingly support IGOs that help protect their

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<sup>40</sup> Dahl 1957, 202.

<sup>41</sup> Wolfers 1962, 73-77.

preferred domestic arrangements.<sup>42</sup> International lawyers promoting notions of global or international administrative law<sup>43</sup> regard following agreed procedures as a major source of willing compliance. Advocates of adopting norms of deliberative democracy at the international level<sup>44</sup> link willing obedience to decision-making processes that provide ample opportunities for a wide array of actors to explicate their differing views and conform to strong expectations that serious efforts will be made to either reconcile them or demonstrate persuasively that some views deserve more assent than others. Global communitarians link legitimacy to conformity with emerging global norms focused on the physical security, economic circumstances, and other life conditions of individuals and groups.<sup>45</sup> Functionalist and neo-functionalist theories of international relations<sup>46</sup> suggest that willing support follows from leader ability to deliver various benefits – such as durable peace, greater prosperity, or more effective cross-border use of new technologies. Relevant expertise enhancing an IGO's to function as an effective coordinator provides another pragmatic basis for accepting its instructions. Thus voluntary compliance has normative, cognitive, and pragmatic roots,<sup>47</sup> with willing support greatest and most durable when participating states regard the authority relationship as both advancing their material interests and conforming to their conceptions of what is morally or ethically right.<sup>48</sup>

The second feature of contemporary world politics that complicate IGO efforts to act as authority holders is the existence of a large array of nonstate actors with

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<sup>42</sup> Ruggie 1983; Deudney 2007.

<sup>43</sup> e.g., Kingsbury and Stewart 2005; Bogdandy, Dann, and Golsman 2008.

<sup>44</sup> e.g., Mügge 2011, 57-60; Smith 2018.

<sup>45</sup> e.g., Held and McGrew 2003; Archibugi 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Mitrany 1943; Haas 1958; Lindberg 1963.

<sup>47</sup> Koppell 2008, 180-82; drawing on Suchman 1995, 574.

<sup>48</sup> Lake 2010, 590.



capabilities and goals of their own. Private entities engaged in providing elements of global governance in particular areas,<sup>49</sup> advocacy groups campaigning for adoption of certain policies or practices,<sup>50</sup> and other IGOs pursuing their work in related or overlapping fields can create pressures that neither IGOs nor their member governments can ignore completely. As internal war has replaced interstate war as the predominant form of armed conflict in the contemporary world, rebel factions and other nonstate armed groups have become central to IGO peacebuilding efforts.

### **Interactions between IGOs and Member State Governments**

A typical intergovernmental organization has three main bodies: 1) a plenary intergovernmental forum of delegates representing every member government – most often called the “assembly” or “general conference,” 2) a smaller intergovernmental supervisory group consisting of delegates from some member governments – most often called the “board” or “council” – chosen by the plenary forum or by some rule specified in the organization’s charter, and 3) an executive head, senior officials and other staff employed by the organization. The plenary intergovernmental forum approves general policy, agrees on the amount resources and the mode acquiring of resources to be provided to the head and staff, has ultimate say in any disagreements not sent to a dedicated dispute settlement process, and approves proposals to amend the agreement creating the organization. The smaller intergovernmental group provides closer supervision of the head and staff than can the plenary forum and in some organizations specifically approves certain staff actions. The fact that only some member states are represented creates the potential for a different coalition of members to run the

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<sup>49</sup>e.g., Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999; Hall and Bierstaker 2003; Avant, Finnemore, and Sell 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Khagram, Riker and Sikkink 2002.

supervisory group than run the plenary forum. The persons serving as delegates to the supervisory group often work closely with the staff and may, if the supervisory group meets often enough, come to align their views with head and staff perspectives unless very closely instructed by their own governments. The executive head, senior officers, and staff function in many respects as “process manager,”<sup>51</sup> carrying out the tasks assigned to them in the agreement or by the intergovernmental forums, working out the details of the procedures through which those tasks are accomplished, encouraging greater compliance by participating states, and providing suggestions for improving the agreement or its implementation.

#### *Allocation of Authority Relationship Roles*

Understanding an IGO as an authority holder is best advanced by regarding both the intergovernmental supervisory group and the executive head/staff as authority holders. While the head and staff exercise have considerable discretion to manage the organization and conduct its relations with individual member states, the intergovernmental supervisory group often needs to approve specific actions. Even when that is not the case, its task of providing closer supervision of the head and staff through more frequent meetings make the supervisory body a more rapid channel through which unhappy members can communicate their unhappiness as well as a site yielding “insider” advantages for the governments represented on the supervisory body. Treating the intergovernmental supervisory group as an authority holder sharing that role with the head and staff differs from many analyses of IGOs-as-actors, but is consistent with broader understandings of authority relations. Democratic theory defines “the people” as

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<sup>51</sup> Cropper 1995.

the ultimate source of the authority held by the national government. “The people” is an entity with its own distinct existence apart from individual citizens, appearing occasionally, wither when convened through elections and referenda or when convening itself through widespread civil disobedience or rebellion. Normally “the people” delegates authority to the national government. A plenary intergovernmental forum can be seen in much the same way, as the occasionally convened gathering of “the membership” apart from the individual members, each of which has its own ongoing day-to-day interactions with both the intergovernmental supervisory group and the IGO head and staff.

Thus engaging in individual or small group pushback against particular instructions from the supervisory body or the IGO head or staff provides member governments with an alternative to seeking change via appeal to the plenary intergovernmental forum for decisions. The result is a two-track connection between IGOs and member states:

#### FIGURE 1 HERE

The collective member governments-organization track of interaction has been explored more systematically than the organization-individual member government track (Hurd 2020), particularly because this is the main focus of the principal-agent literature on IGOs. Yet understanding the dynamics of interactions within the IGO-individual member government is at least equally important because most of an IGO’s efforts as an authority holder occur in its relations with individual members and their reactions shape the IGO’s success as an authority holder.

In both tracks of IGO-member government interaction, the participants are operating within the set of shared meanings contained in the procedural and substantive expectations defining the authority relationship. Though distinct analytically, the interactions and the shared meanings are closely related: the interactions are conducted and understood in light of the shared meanings, and interaction in the IGO-individual member track provides many more occasions for revising shared meanings than does explicit debate about and formal adoption of revised goals, substantive policies, and procedural rules in the IGO-collective members track.

The shared meanings shaping interaction in an authority relationship do shift over time, often as the sets of ethical and causal beliefs prevalent enough in the wider society within which the authority relationship operates to become the new social facts. In the contemporary international system, these shifts often occur as nonstate actors, particularly transnational advocacy coalitions adopt and spread new ways of thinking. This, then, is a mechanism by which the IGO-member governments relationship is influenced from outside.

### *The Flow of Interaction*

Though the common expedient of simplifying analysis by treating both authority-holders and individual addressees as unitary actors will be used in much of what follows, a full appreciation of the dynamics in an authority relationship between an IGO and one or more member state governments at particular moments often requires identifying and tracking internal divisions severe enough to affect an IGO's or a member government's choices and conduct. Factional disagreements or shifts in personnel within a particular member state government can affect its reactions to IGO instructions, even to the point of

one faction using IGO instructions as a lever against competing factions. Intra-government disagreements, particularly within governments of major states, may also provide entry points for the IGO head or staff to influence choices. They also provide opportunities for nonstate actors seeking to affect the substance or procedures of the IGO-member government relationship from outside. On the IGO's side, division of authority between the intergovernmental forums and the organization's staff means that member states are dealing with distinct entities regarding different aspects of the authority relationship. IGOs having both a plenary assembly and a smaller governing council clearly contain potential for member state efforts to invoke one rather than the other if that will be more favorable, and either can be summoned to put pressure on the head or staff.

While current activity proceeds in the shadows projected by recollections of past activity and anticipations of future activity, analyzing interactions within a social relationship requires assigning some reasonable starting and ending points to each particular interaction. In what follows, interactions are defined as involving three moments of decision: 1) the authority holder issues an instruction, 2) addressees react to the instruction, and 3) the authority holder responds to addressee reactions.

Like any authority holder, the IGO can modulate the substantive and operational aspects of an instruction in several ways, allowing it to fit general policies to particular moments. Besides choosing when to issue an instruction, it can adjust the difficulty of obeying the instruction by considering how easily the action required can be accomplished within member governments' current resources and existing routines and by defining a shorter or longer timeframe for complying. It may specify in detail what

addressees must do (as is typical of command and control policies or EU Regulations) or it may indicate the desired end state and allow addressees to decide exactly how to get there (as is typical of market-based policies or EU Directives). In an authority relationship with a relatively small number of addressees, the usual situation of IGOs, the issuance of instructions may follow after some amount of discussion with an addressee about what the instructions will contain. Even so, it is the IGO's decision about what to include that shapes the rest of the interaction.

The second moment of the interaction, addressee reactions, begins when an instruction is issued. Because they suspend rather than surrender their own judgment, member governments react to instructions not only on the basis that instructions ought to be obeyed because they emanate from an acknowledged authority holder, but also on the basis of their own assessment about how obeying will affect their individual interests and attainment of the common purpose.

Member governments receiving instructions can react in any of seven ways: 1) complying rapidly and fully, 2) complaining while complying, 3) complaining while delaying action in hope that events or the volume of complaints will lead to a change of instructions, 4) avoiding the instruction by finding a way to secure an immediate goal outside the IGO relationship, 5) quietly disobeying all or some part of the instruction, 6) evading the instructions through extended inaction, or 7) defying the IGO by withdrawing from the IGO or remaining a member while publicly challenging it. The first four reactions are most likely when the addressee is unhappy with particular instructions but not its whole relation to the IGO; the fifth and sixth reflect deeper

unhappiness with instructions; the seventh typically stems from unhappiness with features of the relationship and not just a particular instruction.

The third moment of the interaction, authority holder response to addressee reactions, begins when addressee reactions become clear. Any addressee reaction to instructions other than quiet and rapid compliance contains some amount of pushback, whether against the particular instruction, some wider process of which the particular instruction is a part, the current authority holder, or the whole authority relation. In abstract logic, an IGO as authority holder can adopt any of 6 responses to each addressee reaction: 1) do nothing, 2) increase efforts to persuade addressees to comply, 3) modify the instruction to remove whatever addressees regard as most irritating, 4) cancel the instruction, 5) reward addressees that comply, or 6) punish addressees that do not comply.

Actual interactions confirm that many of the sequences of acts suggested by the logical possibilities seldom, if ever, occur. An authority holder need not respond to addressees that rapidly and spontaneously comply. Effective response to complaints about the instruction requires the authority holder to determine which of three forms of complaint – one sincere and two strategic – particular addressees are pursuing. Sincere complaints rest on an addressee's own ethical or practical objections and ask the authority-holder to reconsider the instruction based on the merits of those objections. Strategic complaints have other purposes. The first type of strategic complaint is “for show” –voiced so the addressee can show some internal or external audience which it believes needs to be conciliated that it is attentive to that audience's opposition to the

mandated actions while it follows the instruction.<sup>52</sup> The second type of strategic complaint is a bargaining probe – complaints intended to elicit information about authority holder flexibility regarding the timing, scope, or thoroughness of compliance – that will guide its reaction to the instruction. Both sincere and bargaining probe complaints require an IGO as authority holder to consider whether and how far it is willing to alter instructions.

The authority holder faces equally complex calculations when faced with stronger forms of pushback. It might decide to ignore isolated partial compliance or avoidance, particularly if other addressees are complying. Yet if partial compliance or avoidance starts spreading to other addressees, it will have to respond. It might decide to respond with additional arguments about why the instruction should be followed now, with rewards for complying, with punishments for continued failure to comply, or with modifications of instructions to reduce addressee resistance. Which course an IGO pursues depends partly on its own approach to securing compliance, partly on whether noncompliant member governments' arguments or examples are inspiring others to act in similar fashion, and partly by the resources available to it. An IGO with a small staff and budget is very limited in its ability to use material rewards and punishments. Its responses may be limited to the positive of praising or the negative of shaming, which work best with member governments concerned to maintain a reputation for compliance among other member governments or among third parties, including domestic constituencies.<sup>53</sup> Others may have more material levers in the form of withholding financial or other assistance.

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<sup>52</sup> Mayer 1995.

<sup>53</sup> e.g., Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2002; Pelc 2013.



An authority holder's ability to reward and punish is also bounded by the written and unwritten procedural rules of the authority relationship and the norms of the wider society within which the authority relationship exists. In international politics, continued respect for the norm of state sovereignty limits the range of punishments an IGO can inflict, even in the area of human rights where efforts to redefine sovereignty as including government accountability to "the international community" have been under way since 1945. Despite considerable advance in international human rights law and institutionalized international enforcement mechanisms, many governments remain strongly opposed to outside review of their conduct, much less intervention to stop massive human rights violations.

The overall shape of the interaction dynamics triggered by addressee pushback depends greatly on the number and characteristics of the addressees pushing back. When an instruction about a very particular situation is delivered to a single addressee, the authority holder response to reactions can be tailored very closely to that particular addressee's concerns and dispositions. When an instruction needs to be delivered to multiple addressees, particularly if the situation is one that recurs frequently, each of the addressees receiving the instruction can react in different ways. When that happens, the multiplicity of individual addressee reactions puts the authority holder in the more complex situation of being engaged simultaneously in multiple interactions.

Typically an authority holder simplifies this situation for itself by clustering the multiple addressees of the instructions into groups according to the nature and intensity of their reaction, and develops a distinct response to each cluster. The existence of clusters of addressees engaged in different reactions often allows an authority holder to

engage in “divide and rule” tactics; modulating responses so that some clusters of addressees are conciliated while others are punished.

However the success of divide and rule depends on the number and the relative capabilities of addressees in the clusters. Ability to frustrate authority-holder divide and rule tactics is one area where governments of strong member states have clear advantages over those of weaker member states. Just like major interest groups in national politics, major powers in world politics are significant enough to IGO success that responding to them consumes more IGO time and resources than responding to others. Yet the need to be perceived as more than a tool of the strongest members imposes some limits on how far an IGO can go in conciliating the strongest members.<sup>54</sup> The very steep differences in capability among states means that governments of individual weaker member states are likely to get lost in the shuffle unless they join together in a large cohesive caucus of their own or piggyback on positions staked out by the strong. The strength derived from numbers contributes to the continuing viability of both the Group of 77 and the regional groups in most UN bodies today despite increasing differences in interests among their members.

Though an authority holder issues an instruction at one moment, member governments differ in the speed of their reactions, creating a situation in which those which have not yet reacted can recalibrate their reaction as they how others are reacting and the IGO responding to those earlier reactions. This is particularly relevant when avoidance or evasion occurs. Avoidance or evasion by a large number of weak member states or a small number of major ones can weaken or even destroy an authority relation

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<sup>54</sup> Traub 2006, chapters 15-22 provides UN examples.

by eroding other addressees' confidence that the remaining cooperators can attain group goals so exerts considerable pressure for changing instructions.

### *Shared Meanings and Addressee Consent*

Relational accounts of authority also help explicate how the shared expectations defining the authority relationship influence the course of interaction as addressees react to instructions and authority holders respond to those reactions. Such accounts emphasize that an authority holder's claim of a right to instruct is effective as long as and insofar as addressees accept that claim. Even authority holders possessing ample material resources depend on eliciting a considerable amount of voluntary cooperation because providing rewards or imposing punishment on large numbers of addressees will quickly exhaust those resources and create situations in which avoidance, evasion, or defiance spread. Thus an authority holder wants to be able to appeal both to the "logic of consequences" arising from addressee calculations of what reaction is in their own interest and the "logic of appropriateness" arising from addressees' sense of what is morally or procedurally correct.

Analyzing authority as a relationship anchored in ongoing consent by the addressees seems particularly apt in international relations for two reasons. First, governments are bound to IGOs by practical considerations, not by ties of loyalty stemming from shared history and culture. Second, the balance of resources as between IGOs and member states is such that only rarely can an IGO engage in coercive bargaining or create conditions that impose material constraints others' choices. Thus it is apt that the root of the word "governance" in the phrase "global governance" is found in the Greek word *kubernân*, which originally referred to steering a ship but was applied

to politics by Plato.<sup>55</sup> Just as keeping a ship on course requires adjusting to winds and currents, an IGO acting as an authority holder needs to remain attentive to member government circumstances and preferences.

The considerations used by member state governments to evaluate an IGO's leadership of a collective effort to reach goals can be grouped around the three procedural and four outcome-focused sets of expectations prevailing among the participants in an authority relationship:

Table 1 HERE

Though the goal definition is one of the outcome-centered criteria, it is also central to maintaining the relationship because it provides the motivational link holding the authority relationship together. Thus it is both motivator and indicator of success for cooperation through an authority relationship.

IGOs, like governments, typically prepare against one threat to continued existence – complete fulfillment of the goal – by having multiple goals, at least some of which refer to social or material conditions requiring constant attention. The UN Charter is a good example, with goals ranging from maintaining international peace and security, promoting respect for the equal rights of states and peoples, and cooperating to solve international problems “of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian nature”.<sup>56</sup> The IMF was able to make a transition from the original Bretton Woods system of stable exchange rates based on declared par values against gold or the US dollar to a new world

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<sup>55</sup> Kjaer 2004, 3.

<sup>56</sup> UN Charter, 1945, Article 1.

of managed floating rates because its Articles of Agreement specified the goal of promoting international monetary cooperation through “a permanent institution which provides the machinery for consultation and collaboration on international monetary problems”.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, the World Bank Articles of Agreement suggest that its goal of fostering economic development could be reached and the organization no longer needed in provisions for dissolving it and returning its assets to the member states.<sup>58</sup>

### *Interaction Guided by Procedural Concerns*

Selection criteria provide addressees with assurance that they will be able to understand – and in most instances have some say in – the process by which and candidate qualifications grounds on which member states selected for the supervisory group and individuals heading or holding responsible positions on the IGO’s staff are chosen.

In most IGOs, the selection criteria formally laid down in the founding treaty are supplemented by informal criteria that achieve normative status over the years. Because it is often difficult to change the formal rules, the informal ones acquire greater importance and become the main point of contention. Thus the UN General Assembly was unable to change the Charter rule that the Security Council nominates and the General Assembly confirms appointment of the Secretary General,<sup>59</sup> but after long urgings by a large coalition of NGOs and readiness for some change among member governments, was able to agree on a more open process with multiple candidates and opportunities for representatives of all member states to attend discussion sessions with

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<sup>57</sup> IMF Articles of Agreement, 1944, Article 1 (i).

<sup>58</sup> World Bank Articles of Agreement, 1944, Article V, section 2.

<sup>59</sup> UN Charter, 1945, Article 97.

each candidate during the 2016 selection leading to appointment of Antonio Guterres.<sup>60</sup> The informal rule established in 1944 that the President of the World Bank will be an American and the Managing Director of the IMF a European came under increasing challenge after the 2008 financial crisis, but has not yet been broken.<sup>61</sup>

Procedural criteria link authority holder and addressee expectations regarding how instructions are formulated and issued. In highly formalized authority relationships where broader policy guidelines are expected to shape the content of particular instructions, procedural criteria also include rules for considering and adopting those broader policy guidelines. Different IGOs use any of a number of strikingly different voting rules. The UN Security Council is steeply hierarchical; the 5 permanent members are each able to prevent a decision by voting “no” while the 10 elected (nonpermanent) members can do so only if 7 of them vote “no.” The regional distribution of elected seats and political coalitions among UN member states have confined this collective “no” to the realm of logical possibility. Many IGOs have one state-one vote rules, most linked to requiring a qualified majority for adoption of decisions. In the UN and elsewhere, non-plenary bodies often have rules allocating numbers of seats in proportion to regional group percentage of the total membership, so replicate the coalition dynamics of the plenary bodies. The IMF and the World Bank are unusual among IGOs in adopting financial world practices of allocating votes by shareholding and then allocating shares in relation to each member state’s relative economic weight. In earlier decades, contentions about their voting rules included demands for reducing, if not eliminating economic weight; as more non-Western countries have acquired greater weight in the world

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<sup>60</sup> Newman 2018, 232-323.

<sup>61</sup> Cogan 2009.

economy, the demands have shifted towards eliminating the “over weighting” of Western member’s vote shares inherited from earlier eras.<sup>62</sup> Yet the impact of the weighting is reduced in day-to-day operations by rules that the Executive Directors should decide on individual loan agreements and related actions by consensus as often as possible.<sup>63</sup>

Procedural criteria can also include rules about formulating instructions. Their content varies considerably. Formal rules create strong differences between UN Security Council invocations of Chapter VII<sup>64</sup> and Chapter 6.<sup>65</sup> Under Chapter 7, a state identified as the source of a threat to peace, a breach of the peace, or an act of aggression has opportunities to explain why it should not be subject to collective measures, but discussions of what collective measures will be carried out how occurs among the members of the Security Council and/or the states contributing to imposition of the collective measures. Under chapter 6, no state is identified as “the troublemaker” and discussion of any peacekeeping or conflict resolution action to be undertaken will include the state or states where the conflict or threat of conflict is acute. Being somewhat in-between, the more recent efforts to use “peacebuilding” to end internal conflicts have involved invoking Chapter VII both to give peacekeeping forces broader permission to use force and exclude internal factions from UN operational planning.<sup>66</sup>

In the IMF, World Bank, and UN aid agencies, instructions in the form of loan agreements or program authorizations result from a recipient government-initiated process of requesting loans or programs. This creates an additional opportunity for borrower government interaction with those IGOs’ staffs as they formulate their loan

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<sup>62</sup> e.g., G-24 2018, par. 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> Bichsel 1994, 148.

<sup>64</sup> UN Charter 1945, Articles 39-51 on collective measures.

<sup>65</sup> UN Charter 1945, Articles 33-38 on peaceful settlement of disputes.

<sup>66</sup> Thakur 2006; Diehl and Balas 2014; High Level Panel 2015.

applications.<sup>67</sup> Savvy requesting governments can increase the likelihood of receiving what they desire in two ways. First, when lending slows, they can take advantage of the IGO's need to maintain levels of activity. The World Bank was concerned in the 1990s when several of its middle income borrowers reduced their borrowing, a trend hidden in overall lending data by loans to new member in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, while emergence of additional financial options for middle income member states in the 2000s were a significant factor in World Bank loan policy changes.<sup>68</sup> Avoidance of IMF loans was so severe in the early 2000s that it had to reduce staff and adopt other cost-saving measures.<sup>69</sup>

Over time member governments became better able to take known staff preferences regarding loan conditions into account when preparing loan proposals. In the 1970s many of the newly independent African and Asian member states still relied heavily on outside consultants to formulate loan proposals.<sup>70</sup> This began to change in the 1980s. In 1981, the Government of India's domestic economic advisors were sufficiently skilled that they came to the IMF with a set of policy conditions they were willing to accept that the loan was authorized even though some of the standard IMF policy conditions were not included.<sup>71</sup> By 1990, many borrower governments could perceive IMF staff willingness to agree to loan arrangements that included less than the full range of IMF-desired policy commitments.<sup>72</sup> On the IMF side, this reflected expectations that discussions during the periodic reassessments of progress linked to release of additional

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<sup>67</sup> Moseley, Harrigan and Toye 1991; Killick 1998.

<sup>68</sup> Lyne, Nelson, and Tierney 2009, 420.

<sup>69</sup> Davis 2007.

<sup>70</sup> ul Haq 1973, 85; Gruhn 1978.

<sup>71</sup> Chaudhry, Kelkar, and Yadav 2004.

<sup>72</sup> Ferguson 1988, 218-19.



tranches of the loan would narrow the distance between IMF staff and borrower government views,<sup>73</sup> later supplemented by a shift towards working to assure “country ownership” of loan conditions.<sup>74</sup> On the borrower side it reflected both stronger macroeconomic management expertise and reduced distance between government and IMF economic policy orientations.<sup>75</sup>

The loan application process also provides World Bank and IMF member states with an informal way to influence the IGO’s operating policies. The Executive Directors (the intergovernmental supervisory body), where votes also depend on shareholding, adopt the lending and operational policies. This suggests that the governments of the larger economy states set policy, yet aggregate borrower government responses have often led to change. One of the more revealing examples occurred with World Bank adoption of a new Structural Adjustment Loan program in 1980. Most member governments avoided applying for them, showing interest only after a separate Sectoral Adjustment Loan program with different policy conditions was adopted in 1983.<sup>76</sup> Another is the reluctance of developing countries to use the IMF’s newer medium-term lending facilities in favor of a series of the long-established short term loans.<sup>77</sup>

Supplemental instructions issued as part of an authority holder response to addressees are also bounded by shared expectations about the range of rewards or punishments that may be applied to lagging, avoiding, disobedient, or challenger addressees. If a government or a local armed faction involved in a conflict is sufficiently uncooperative, there is often little the UN can do to prevent attacks on refugee camps,

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<sup>73</sup> Stiles, 1990, 968; Polak 1991, 68-72.

<sup>74</sup> Vreeland 2007, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Callighy 1989; Sender 2002.

<sup>76</sup> Jayarajah and Branson 1995; Owusu 2003, 159.

<sup>77</sup> Bird, Hussein, and Joyce 2004.

recruitment of soldiers in refugee camps, or extorting payment for letting supplies shipped overland through checkpoints.<sup>78</sup> Though both the World Bank and IMF can cancel remaining tranches of a loan for failure to comply with conditions stipulated in the Bank loan agreement or IMF Letter of Intent, all member governments know that in most situations the Bank or the IMF prefer to use the other responses of extending deadlines for compliance, waiving particular conditions, or renegotiating loan terms available to them.<sup>79</sup>

Addressee criteria define which addressees receive what instructions when. Addressee criteria may mandate that a particular type of instruction go to all addressees, to certain groups of them, or to one or a few particular addressees. Formally most UN Specialized Agencies have rules specifying that all members receive the same instructions. Yet with decolonization in the late 1950s through early 1970s, most of them developed technical aid programs providing assistance to less developed countries. Any member of the IMF needing money to tide it over a balance of payments crisis was equally eligible to apply, yet between 1983 and 2008 no country in the World Bank's "high income" classification applied. This shift made the IMF's de facto clientele identical to the World Bank's set of middle and low income borrower members.<sup>80</sup> UN peacekeeping and relief agencies pay particular attention to a varying set of "post conflict states."

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<sup>78</sup> e.g., Stoddard *et al* 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Collier 1999; World Bank, 2000-1, chap. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Bird, Hussein and Joyce 2004.

*Interaction Guided by Substantive Concerns*

While the selection, procedural, and addressee rules define member governments' place and influence within an IGO, the four outcome-centered criteria provide standards for judging the value of joint action within the authority relationship. They shift attention away from considerations of procedural fairness to considerations of how well complying with IGO instructions is contributing to goal attainment.

Goal criteria not only define the motivation for participating in the authority relationship; they indicate the desired conditions or outcomes being pursued, providing the standard against which performance is measured. Since goal statements are typically stated in broad terms, the particular mode of qualitative or quantitative assessment for determining whether activity guided by authority holder instructions is contributing toward goal attainment get expressed more clearly in the efficacy criteria.

Reformulations of goal statements can have ramifications for all of the substantive criteria by altering perceptions of the areas of activity needed, the relevance of different action paths to goal fulfillment and the modes of assessing efficacy.

Area criteria identify the limits on substantive content of instructions; they demarcate the sorts of actions the authority holder may and may not choose for the addressees. Even in international affairs the area criteria structuring a particular authority relationship are built on beliefs defined within the relationship and beliefs derived from wider social practice. Thus IGOs operate not only within the explicit delegations of authority provided by member states but also within a wider international law tradition

that favors narrow interpretation of the range of “implied powers” that might be derived from the express grants of authority.<sup>81</sup>

The amount of IGO-member governments contention over area criteria is affected by the nature and specificity of the goal. Much of the reason the UN family of IGOs is perceived as unwieldy and not particularly effective stems from the broad and vague goal statements. Promoting economic development is a particularly good example.

Definitions of activity contributing to development have broadened considerably since 1945. These can be visualized conveniently with a 12-point star chart of the expansion of activities mentioned in UNDP and World Bank annual reports:<sup>82</sup>

FIGURE 2 HERE

Though broader conceptions of fostering development were beginning to appear, World Bank definitions of activity continued to focus mainly on enhancing GDP growth.

UNDP activity was focused mainly on getting organized and providing technical aid to

FIGURE 3 HERE

support growth efforts. Yet continuing

argument among academic economists, policy think tanks, government agencies, and

IGO staffs led to a broadening of concerns as

FIGURE 4 HERE

economic growth was perceived to depend on more than finance and particular technical skills, the definition of beneficiaries expanded from states to the humans within states, and environmental concerns added to the mix.

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<sup>81</sup> Klabbers 2015, .

<sup>82</sup> Peterson, 2018 using the activity classification presented in Degnbol-Martinussen and Engberg-Pedersen 2003).

The result was an unwieldy set of action areas leading to suggestions that the expansion had reduced UNDP and World Bank effectiveness.<sup>83</sup> The extent of sprawl is evident in the 8 Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000<sup>84</sup> and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015.<sup>85</sup>

The expansion also created opportunities for transnational advocacy coalitions and nongovernmental organizations to affect the relative priority attached to different action paths. Human rights groups had some impact; environmental groups were able to secure some significant changes to World Bank policies regarding loans for large infrastructure projects in the mid to late 1980s.<sup>86</sup>

Relevance criteria arise out of the fact that within any particular area of endeavor there are a range of plausible instructions, and address two sets of concerns. The first is whether the instructions appear well-designed for the particular situation at hand. As widely discussed during and after the Asian Crisis of 1997-98, IMF loan conditions geared to nudging a country towards ending balance of payments deficits were not well-designed for situations in which financial distress stemmed from sudden large-scale capital flight.<sup>87</sup> The second is whether instructions are being used to advance distributional bias favoring the authority holder and/or those addressees it wishes to reward disproportionately. Shared relevance criteria cannot ensure complete non-bias in distribution, but they do create some limits on the degree of authority holder self-enrichment and favoritism.

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<sup>83</sup> Browne 2013; Woods 2018, 296-7.

<sup>84</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 55/2.

<sup>85</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1.

<sup>86</sup> Fox and Brown 1998.

<sup>87</sup> Bluestein 2001.

Efficacy criteria are distinct from relevance criteria because they involve assessing whether operating within the terms of the authority relationship contributes to goal attainment. Clearly diversions of effort away from agreed areas or instructions that fail relevance criteria increase the likelihood that efficacy will be low, but it is possible for all other sets of criteria to be satisfied and efficacy to still be low. Low efficacy may be the product of poorly-framed instructions, addressee failure to carry them out with sufficient energy, or more general authority holder incompetence. Hence conclusions that cooperation within an authority relationship is not efficacious are followed very quickly by efforts to identify and remove the source of inefficacy.

UN efforts to deal with the “complex humanitarian emergencies” stemming from endemic internal conflicts reflect uncertainty about which action paths are most effective arising from significant differences in local situations,<sup>88</sup> but also a sense that UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations involved in providing relief to victims of natural disasters or conflict-induced displacement were unwieldy and insufficiently coordinated.<sup>89</sup>

Though academic economists and economic policy analysts inside governments have been able to identify a few ways to prompt development that do not work, the increase in the number of areas of activity regarded as relevant to development means there is still no agreement on identifying clearly superior action paths. Thus contention about whether the programs provided by UN Agencies, the World Bank, and other official aid agencies are effective persists.<sup>90</sup> Yet a few action paths have been taken off

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<sup>88</sup> Gowan 2018, 440).

<sup>89</sup> Hoffman and Weiss 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Kusick and Tobin 2006; Flores and Narudden 2009; Bearce and Tirone 2010; Castells-Quintana and Larru, 2015.

the table. Import-substituting industrialization faded as developing country governments became discouraged by its limitations.<sup>91</sup>

The shift from “national” to “human” development has suggested a redefinition of relevance and efficacy criteria for assessing instructions. Both began by focusing on “economic growth” as defined by a state’s total and per capita GDP. The spread of “human development” conceptions since 1990<sup>92</sup> has shifted the focus to observable and measurable aspects of government services like access to education, healthcare, and safe water. World Bank efforts to discourage corruption or persuade governments to reduce the regulatory barriers to starting private businesses have also involved creating measurements of policy effort or results in those areas.<sup>93</sup>

Having an easily-measured goal referring to physical conditions, such as reduction of pollutants or slowing atmospheric temperature rise, simplifies definition of relevance and efficacy criteria. Yet even when the better action paths can be identified by application of scientific or technical expertise, there is no guarantee that governments will converge on similar perceptions of urgency. This has been painfully apparent in global negotiations about averting human-induced climate change.<sup>94</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Using an authority relationship framework to describe and analyze the relations between an IGO and its member states does confirm many of the beliefs about how IGOs operate widely shared among analysts, but also provides a more nuanced understanding of what is going on. As authority holders, IGOs do have the incentives to expand their

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<sup>91</sup> Mengisteab 1992 on African governments; Gwinne and Kay 2000 on Latin American governments.

<sup>92</sup> McNeill 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Stevens 2019.

<sup>94</sup> Victor 2012; Dessler and Parson 2019, ch. 5.

areas of activity identified by many analysts, bringing all of the member governments into view suggests that this is not always a wise choice. Much depends on whether the member governments – on their own or as encouraged by academics, NGOs, or transnational advocacy groups – conclude that the expansion enhances the efficacy of goal attainment. While power-centric analyses of IGOs often seem confirmed in the short run, the authority relationship analysis helps identify weaker member reactions that store up difficulties for the IGO in the longer run. Asian borrowers did accept the terms of IMF arrangements in 1997-98, negative reactions to the process led to a continuing avoidance of IMF loans among an even wider set of East and Southeast Asian governments.<sup>95</sup>

Though it can be argued that the fact IGOs lack sufficient material resources to reinforce their instructions by constraining uncooperative addressees through rewards or punishments means they should not be regarded as authority holders, their problems differ in degree but not in kind from the problems faced by national governments. National governments also lack enough material resources to reward or punish everyone in the country, and actually rely for effectiveness on voluntary compliance with instructions by most addressees. This becomes obvious when order breaks down, either because domestic actors successfully challenge the government or because the government itself fractures into contending factions.

Life for IGOs is further complicated by the fact that the typical authority relationship between an IGO and its member states' governments is not a closed one in which activity affects only the authority holders and addressees. Globalization has fostered closer cross-border links among individuals and groups while the expansion of

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<sup>95</sup> Lipsy and Lee 2019, 42.



political agendas at both the national and international level means that some obligations defined in international treaties now affect individuals and groups quite directly; this is particularly true in the area of human rights but also arises in many areas of international regulatory coordination. As the various non-state actors perceive that their interests are directly affected by what is going on in an IGO, they will seek to influence the authority dynamic in play there. Some may be in a position to interact directly with the IGO staff and affect its activity using “insider” politics. Business, particularly multinational corporations, and professional groups whose expertise is central to the intergovernmental organization’s mission are likely to be in this position. Others with less access to IGO “insider” channels will rely on “outsider” politics like protests and transnational advocacy campaigns, with the claim of speaking for the individuals whose lives are affected by the IGO’s activity and therefore have a right to hold the organization accountable to “the people.”

Nonstate actor activity can help or hinder IGO activity depending on the matchup between an IGO’s current activities and nonstate actors’ preferences. Public criticism, particularly if picked up by a significant number of member governments, will complicate the IGO’s activity as an authority holder. Yet nonstate actors can also facilitate an IGO’s efforts, as when an environmental group supplies information about the extent and source of some activity that the IGO or the member governments have trouble tracking. These facilitating possibilities have led to suggestions that intergovernmental organizations can expand their own capacity for implementing decisions by recruiting nonstate actors as partners in governance efforts.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> e.g., Abbott et al. 2020.

IGOs do have one problem national governments do not. The simultaneous existence of multiple IGOs that could coordinate cooperation on some common concern allows governments to engage in “forum shopping” and try to get the concern addressed in an IGO they prefer.<sup>97</sup> Notable examples include the ongoing EU-USA argument on genetically modified organisms in food and animal feed<sup>98</sup> or the arguments about patent protection for medicines.<sup>99</sup> Yet multiple IGOs need not be competitors; the complex regimes literature suggests that they can develop arrangements of reciprocal deference based on which IGO has the better resources for dealing with some problem.<sup>100</sup>

In all, viewing IGOs and member states as co-participants in an authority relationship provides a more nuanced view of how IGOs and member governments interact over time, indicating some of the limits of the power-focused, principal-agent, and runaway bureaucracy accounts of IGO activity. It supports claims that the multilateral form does limit the extent to which even a hegemonic major power can use the IGO as a tool of its own foreign policy by highlighting the channels through which weaker member states can exert counter-pressures. It also captures important sources of change in IGO-member state interactions not captured by focusing only on the collective principal. It also indicates that even the most ambitious bureaucracy is limited in what it can accomplish by both material and ideational constraints on its activity.

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<sup>97</sup> Busch 2007; Lefler 2015; Hoffmann 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Schaffer and Pollock 2005.

<sup>99</sup> Ragavan and Vanni 2021.

<sup>100</sup> Orsini, Morin, and Young 2013; Alter and Raustiala 2018.

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**Figures and Tables**

Figure 1

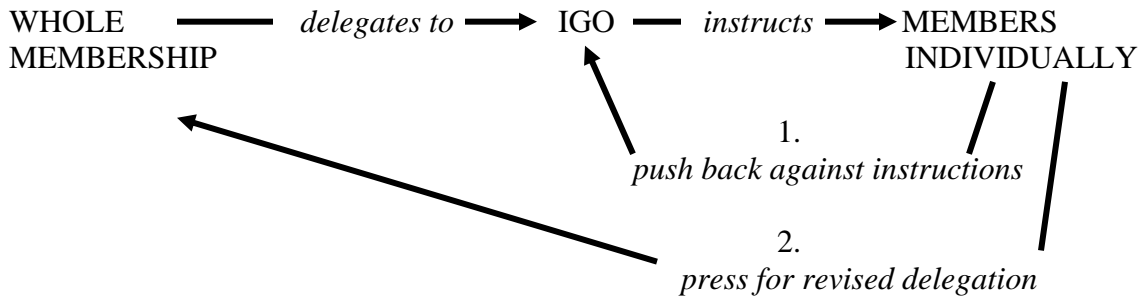


Table 1

procedural criteria	1. <i>selection criteria</i> : consistency of the way particular authority holders acquire their positions with established norms and practices of selecting leaders
	2. <i>procedural criteria</i> : consistency with established norms and practices of the form of instructions and the method by they are provided to addressees
	3. <i>addressee criteria</i> : conformity with established norms and practices defining the particular addressees receiving types of instructions in particular situations
outcome-focused criteria	4. <i>goal criteria</i> : degree of agreement between authority holder(s) and addressee(s) understanding of the goals or purposes to be advanced through co-participation in the authority relationship
	5. <i>area criteria</i> : degree of congruence between the activities or concerns addressed in particular instructions with the range of substantive activities or concerns mutually accepted as needing to be addressed for attainment of the desired goal or outcome
	6. <i>relevance criteria</i> : degree of perceived connection among addressees between following the particular instructions given and higher likelihood of attaining shared goals
	7. <i>efficacy criteria</i> : level of addressee confidence that following the particular instructions given will lead to successful attainment of the goal within a reasonable period at a reasonable cost



FIGURE 2

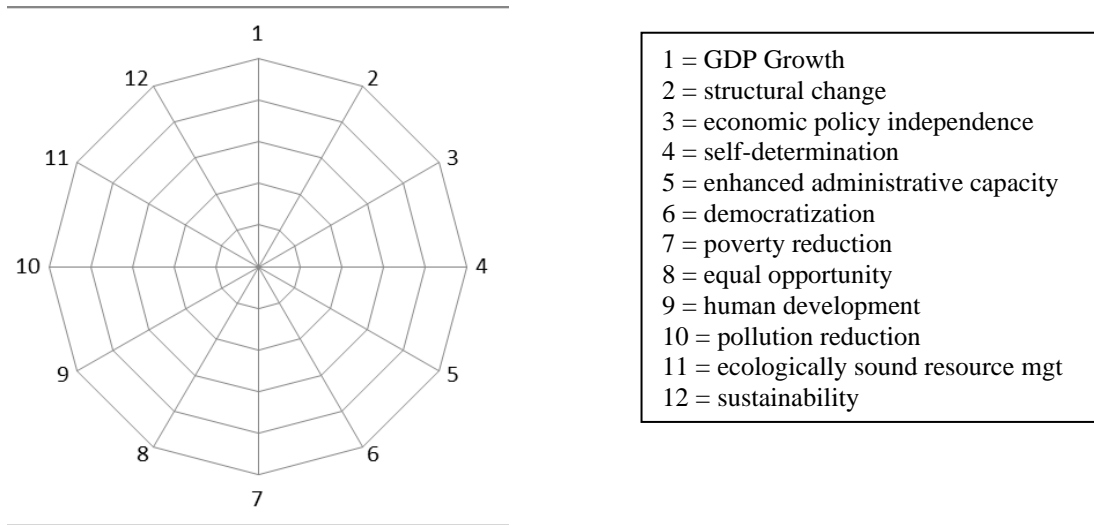


FIGURE 3

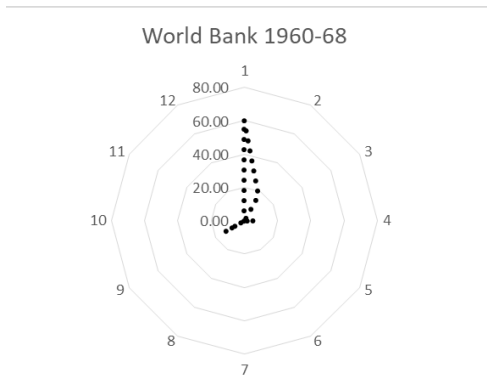


FIGURE 4

