

REPORT

Legitimacy of International Organizations Across GLOBE Issue Areas

Project: GLOBE – The European Union and the Future of Global Governance
GA: 822654
Call: H2020-SC6-GOVERNANCE-2018
Funding Scheme: Collaboration Project



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Confidential

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Submission date: 26th February 2022
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Summary

Legitimacy has emerged as a key concern for global governance scholarship. There is growing recognition that legitimacy matters in international affairs, both from a normative perspective and because the lack of a broad-based legitimacy base makes it difficult for IOs to govern effectively. This report explores the sources of and challenges to IO legitimacy across all the domains included in the GLOBE project, namely climate change, development, finance, investment, migration, security, and trade. Based on a detailed GLOBE expert survey, it evaluates IOs in these issue areas against a selection of normative criteria – participation and equitable representation, transparency, accountability, and quality of output – with a view to enabling cross-domain comparison. It also sheds light on the drivers of legitimacy contestation in each issue area as well as the diversity of strategies IOs have used to (re-)legitimize themselves. In doing so, it reveals cross-cutting tensions and challenges but also major differences between IOs when it comes to legitimacy challenges and institutional responses.



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List of Abbreviations

AIIB: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

BIS: Bank for International Settlements

COP: Conferences of the Parties (of the UNFCCC)

EU: European Union

GDELT: Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone

ICSID: International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IO: International Organization

NDB: New Development Bank

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

P5: Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council

TRIPS: WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

UN: United Nations

UNFCCC: UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

WHO: World Health Organization

WTO: World Trade Organization



1. Introduction

Legitimacy has emerged as a key concern for global governance scholarship. There is growing recognition that legitimacy matters in international affairs, not simply as a normative preference, but because it “is central for international organizations (IOs) to make a difference in world politics” (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, p. 581). At the same time, IO legitimacy has become increasingly contested, as denationalized policymaking processes are far removed from affected domestic constituencies and often struggle to deliver outcomes that are widely considered fair and effective. This report explores the sources of and challenges to IO legitimacy across different issue areas as well as the various ways in which global governance participants strategically seek to legitimize, delegitimize, or re-legitimize IOs.

There is now a burgeoning scholarship seeking to understand and conceptualize, both in normative and empirical terms, the implications of democratic governance deficits on the global and the regional level, with research on the latter focused primarily on the European Union (Neuhold 2020). However, existing work has mostly focused on single case studies and specific institutions, missing “larger systematic and comparative analysis” (Tallberg et al. 2018, p. 12). This report responds to this concern by investigating how legitimacy struggles play out across key IOs in all GLOBE issue areas, namely climate change, development, finance, investment, migration, security, and trade. Based on a detailed GLOBE expert survey, it evaluates these IOs against a selection of normative criteria – participation and equitable representation, transparency, accountability, and quality of output – with a view to enabling cross-domain comparison. It also sheds light on the drivers of legitimacy contestation in each issue area as well as the diversity of strategies IOs have used to (re-)legitimize themselves.

Legitimacy is a notoriously slippery concept, and we find that IOs often face ambiguous or even competing normative expectations. Most of the IOs included in the survey have made conscious efforts in recent decades to become – or at least appear – more inclusive, representative, transparent, accountable, and effective. However, they often find it difficult to operationalize democratic ideals, stemming originally from domestic law and politics, in a global context. Efforts to increase democratic input and procedural standards may have implications for IOs’ ability to deliver ambitious and efficient output. They may also open up new legitimacy challenges. For example, even where IOs are committed to inclusive



deliberative processes that encourage civil society participation, this will inevitably involve choices that may create new patterns of inclusion and exclusion, which, in turn, are likely to fuel conflict and contestation.

While all IOs face legitimacy challenges, we find that these play out differently across issue areas and institutions. The seven IOs explored in this report include the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the World Bank, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). These IOs differ significantly in terms of their institutional design, the degree to which they can act autonomously and make binding decisions, and the type of policy problems they are meant to address. IOs that institutionalize (outdated) power configurations tend to raise more legitimacy concerns from a normative perspective and are likely to face more contestation. We can also expect greater tension in highly political policy domains in comparison to more 'technical' ones, although it is important to highlight that ostensibly technical or legal decisions often have distinct political implications.

We begin this report with a review of the scholarship. We differentiate normative accounts of legitimacy (concerned with the principles that underpin the right to exercise authority) from sociological approaches to legitimacy (concerned with the empirical manifestations of legitimacy beliefs). After briefly introducing our methodological approach, we then present the results of our expert survey. We proceed in two parts. The first part assesses the relative performance of IOs against four normative standards – participation and equal representation, transparency, accountability, and quality of output – based on quantitative scores and qualitative information provided by survey respondents. The second part presents a comparative overview of contestation experiences across issue domains, detailing also what kind of institutional responses these have prompted. We summarize key findings in the conclusion, which highlights cross-cutting challenges to IO legitimacy.



2. Conceptualizing Legitimacy: A Literature Review

Legitimacy is an inherently contested but increasingly important concept in global governance research and practice. Since the ability of IOs to induce compliance through coercion or material incentives is limited, legitimacy can serve as an important “currency of power,” offering important insights into why and when states obey or ignore international rules (Hurd 1999, p. 379). More precisely, legitimacy is “the glue that links authority and power,” that is, it transforms the capacity to make and enforce binding decisions into justifiable practice (Bernstein 2011, p. 20). In an increasingly crowded and competitive global institutional landscape, legitimacy is vital for IOs to retain relevance, secure resources, and build consensus on norms, rules, and policies.

Yet, the increasing denationalization of policymaking poses difficult legitimacy problems, undermining the congruence between social, political, and territorial space that underpins, at least in principle, the legitimacy of domestic governments. This incongruence is evident with regard to the input dimension of international politics, since there are few direct ways through which peoples’ views and interests are channeled into the IO decision-making process, but also the output dimension, that is, the question *who* global governance is ultimately for. As Krisch (2006) highlights, efforts to enhance accountability of global governance institutions must contend with the fact that IOs have multiple, often competing constituencies, including states, citizens, and cosmopolitan audiences, such as transnational civil society groups, as well as private sector actors. This is further complicated by the dramatic transformation of global markets, which has given rise to powerful but often invisible forces operating beyond state or IO control (Mattli 2019).

Over the past two decades, legitimacy has come to the fore as IOs have been subject to increasing contestation by states and non-state actors – manifest, for example, in anti-globalization protests and efforts by rising powers to challenge post-war institutions. As such, legitimacy and related concepts, including participation and equal representation, transparency, and accountability, have been central concerns for ongoing attempts to reform international institutions. Rapid transformations in world politics, such as the growth of private and hybrid regulatory arrangements and the shift towards informal and networked forms of collaboration, have also raised new and challenging questions regarding global governance legitimacy (Börzel and Risse 2005; Westerwinter et al. 2020).



2.1. Legitimacy – a “Master Question” in Global Governance Research?

Although legitimacy is not a new concern for international relations research, it received only marginal attention in early scholarly contributions, which were dominated by a focus on state power and self-interest. For many classical realists, legitimacy was purely instrumental, cloaking the exercise of power in moral or legal justifications (Carr 1946; Morgenthau 1948). Foundational neorealists texts barely mentioned legitimacy (Waltz 1979). In the early liberal institutionalist literature, legitimacy played a narrowly defined, functionalist role in enabling the creation and continuation of international regimes (Keohane 1984). Legitimacy of global governance was based on consent by sovereign, domestically legitimized states and did not require explicit conceptualization and theorizing. Indeed, as Clark (2005, p. 11) argues, the marginalization of legitimacy in early international relations scholarship was not a “disciplinary oversight, but rather a positive rejection of a concept widely considered inappropriate to an international setting.”

Interest in legitimacy grew in the first half of the 1990s as global governance broadened and deepened rapidly and new theoretical developments put the spotlight on ideational variables in international politics. The rise of social constructivism encouraged a turn of focus on the formation and influence of collectively held norms, including notions of legitimacy. Notably, scholars advanced legitimacy as an independent explanation for why states comply with international rules (Franck 1990), especially where noncompliance threatened to undermine states’ international reputation and/or their domestic legitimacy (Risse et al. 1999). Constructivist perspectives also highlighted the fluid and contested nature of legitimacy claims (e.g., Finnemore 1996). In turn, critical scholars were concerned with how dominant notions of legitimacy reflected and reinforced existing power structures, and how theory itself could be employed to legitimate the status quo order (Cox 1992; Tickner 1997).

Notwithstanding such critical interventions, the study and practice of global governance through much of 1990s was dominated by “liberal optimism” (Stephen 2017, p. 483), an expectation that social and economic denationalization would consolidate a robust and broadly supported global institutional structure, grounded in a commitment to democracy and human rights. However, as global governance became more expansive and intrusive – with formal authority of IOs growing and private market actors such as multinational corporations gaining influence on the international stage – new forms of social backlash emerged and legitimacy became a key concern for policymakers and researchers alike.



Zürn (2004, p. 262) has argued that such concerns were sparked by the very success of the global political order, which had expedited processes of denationalization through “executive multilateralism,” a style of governance that recognizes the importance of international coordination but largely evades parliamentary and public scrutiny. Moreover, globalization has often involved a transformation of states’ internal governance processes and institutions, with important distributive consequences, often fueling contestation on the domestic level (Hameiri and Jones 2015; Colgan and Keohane 2017).

Bottom-up resistance to globalization via executive multilateralism became apparent in growing domestic politicization of global issues and the proliferation of mass protests, often directed against IOs closely associated with neoliberal economic globalization, including the G7, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or the World Bank. Questions of legitimacy also arose in other governance domains, such as international security, in the wake of the Iraq war and other Western-led interventions (Chinkin 2012). Finally, rapid global power shifts and the rise of the so-called BRICS called into question broad acceptance of established rules and leadership roles in global governance (Stephen 2017). Thus, by the mid-2000s, legitimacy had “come to the fore as a ‘master question’ of international relations” (Mulligan 2006, p. 350).

2.2. Conceptualizing Legitimacy: Normative and Sociological Approaches

A distinction is commonly made between normative and sociological conceptualizations of legitimacy.

Normative approaches to legitimacy are concerned with the principles that underpin the right to exercise authority, grounded in the notion that “every effective belief in legitimacy” has an “immanent relation to truth” (Habermas 1975, p. 97). The sources of legitimacy, both on the national and the supranational level, are often examined along the input and output dimensions of political decision-making processes (Easton 1957; Scharpf 1997). *Input* legitimacy refers to the responsiveness of political authorities to the needs and demands of their constituencies, whereas *output* legitimacy hinges on effective problem-solving and widely accepted policy outcomes. Schmidt (2013) has introduced *throughput* as a third dimension to assess the normative legitimacy of supranational governance, focusing attention on how IOs perform with regard to procedural principles such as inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. Given the lack of electoral underpinnings for global



decision-making, the legitimacy of IOs and other global governance mechanisms has traditionally been predicated on output legitimacy. However, growing contestation over international authority has shifted attention to the input and throughput dimensions of global policymaking, especially as IOs find themselves increasingly gridlocked and/or overwhelmed in the face of ever more complex global problems (Hale et al. 2013).

Contributions from international relations, international law, and other disciplines have long debated appropriate principles and standards to assess the legitimacy of IOs (e.g., Held 1995; Dahl 1999; Zürn 2000; Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005; Archibugi et al. 2011; Scholte 2011a; Pogge 2002; Kingsbury et al. 2005; Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Esty 2006; Keohane et al. 2009). A key question is whether and to which degree domestic principles of legitimacy can be extended from the domestic to the international realm and translated into concrete standards to guide institutional reform. The primary legitimizing mechanism that has traditionally underpinned global governance, namely state consent, has become increasingly overwhelmed in light of the growing scope, reach, and diversity of supra- and transgovernmental regulation and administration. At the same time, in the absence of a global democratic polity, simply applying domestic legitimacy standards to the international level has proven equally inadequate. Consequently, normative perspectives on global governance legitimacy have “generally sought to find a middle ground between state consent on the one hand and democratic decision-making on the other” (Bodansky 2013, p. 323).

While there is no commonly agreed set of normative principles to guide the establishment of this ‘middle ground,’ contributions have recurrently emphasized the importance of inclusive participation and equal representation, transparency, and accountability, alongside other procedural principles such as legality, impartiality, or reasoned decision-making. These aspirations are also reflected in ongoing reform efforts on the global level, such as the UN Secretary General’s *Common Agenda* (UN 2021). Most procedural principles are closely interrelated. For example, enhancing participation and equal representation in IO decision-making processes is likely to promote transparency. In turn, transparency is a vital prerequisite for accountability. However, as we explore in Section 4.1., implementing procedural change is often challenging in practice, especially in a context of highly asymmetric distributions of power, resources, and capacity. Moreover, the relationship between the above-mentioned principles and IO effectiveness is not always straightforward,



revealing potential trade-offs between the different dimensions – input, throughput, output – of institutional legitimacy.

In contrast to normative contributions, **sociological approaches** conceptualize legitimacy primarily in empirical terms. That is, the key question is not whether an IO complies with procedural standards but rather whether its authority is *perceived* to be legitimately exercised. The sociological conceptualization of legitimacy can be traced back to Weber (1964, p. 382), who did not see normative principles but beliefs to be “the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey.” Sociological perspectives are grounded in the recognition that legitimacy “can only be given by others” (Finnemore 2009, p. 61). This implies the systematic analysis of the beliefs and behaviors of the various audiences of global governance, comprising political elites (e.g., national governments and bureaucracies), societal elites (e.g., journalists, NGO activists, academics), and ordinary citizens who ultimately find themselves at the receiving end of global governance.

Scholars working in the sociological tradition increasingly employ large-N methods to study the extent to which different IOs enjoy (or lack) legitimacy among relevant audiences. Two complementary research strands have emerged. The first uses survey methodology to explore legitimacy beliefs held by elites or citizens, often using trust or confidence in a given IO as a proxy for its perceived legitimacy. In seeking to explain variation in legitimacy perceptions, scholars have focused on a series of institutional factors, including the procedures, performance, and authority of IOs (Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Verhaegen et al. 2021; Dellmuth et al. 2019; Anderson et al. 2019; Panke et al. 2022). In that respect, Johnson (2011) finds that institutional procedures that privilege one member state over others, significantly lower the trust that citizens have in an IO. Interestingly, recent contributions suggest that effective delivery of policy outcomes increases popular trust in IOs, while the relationship between formal IO authority and citizens’ legitimacy beliefs is more ambiguous (Anderson et al. 2019; Panke et al. 2022). Researchers have also emphasized the linkages between trust in national and international institutions (Johnson 2011; Voeten 2013; Schlipphak 2015, Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020), suggesting that citizens often use heuristics or cues from domestic political processes to evaluate IOs and their legitimacy. Finally, recent contributions have sought to explain why elites tend to consider IOs more legitimate than ordinary people, pointing to the role of



individual characteristics, such as socio-economic status and cosmopolitan values (Dellmuth et al. 2021). Overall, this first strand of research has produced important advances in the study of IO legitimacy by expanding the set of analyzed IOs, broadening country samples, and adopting sophisticated research designs, such as survey experiments, to isolate the effect of institutional and individual factors on IO legitimacy beliefs.

The second strand of research explores how public communications about IOs contribute to the formation of legitimacy beliefs held by elites and citizens. In other words, scholars analyze the discursive practices of legitimation and delegitimation through which global governance actors strategically seek to establish, maintain, enhance, or undermine the legitimacy of international institutions (Binder and Heupel 2015; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Legitimation and delegitimation practices often occur during times of crisis, allowing researchers to systematically study how relevant actors engage with international institutions to produce or withhold legitimacy. Much of this research strand is concerned with the contestation of global governance institutions by governmental and non-governmental actors across various venues, such as the media, deliberative IO bodies, national parliaments, or even the street (e.g., large scale protests). Typically, analysts use textual data from official statements about IOs, assessing the frequency and tonality of these evaluative statements to determine whether they serve to endorse (legitimize) or challenge (delegitimize) the institution in question. For example, coding statements made during UN General Assembly debates, Binder and Heupel (2015; 2021) find that evaluative statements concerning the UN Security Council are overwhelmingly negative, suggesting that the Council faces a significant and persistent legitimacy deficit. By contrast, Kentikelenis and Voeten (2021) find that evaluative statements made by UN member states concerning the liberal international economic order and its prominent organizations (World Bank, IMF, WTO) have become less negative over time. Attempts at (de-)legitimation, however, are not only carried out by governmental actors, but often also by non-state actors, social movements, and even IOs themselves (Zaum 2013; Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). For example, civil society organizations may launch campaigns aimed at discursively (de-)legitimizing certain governance practices and social movements may take to the streets to protest or galvanize support for an IO (Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Rauh and Bödecker 2016). In turn, IOs may enhance their own legitimacy by pursuing institutional reform and/or by communicating legitimacy claims



through public-facing output and documents (Steffek 2009; Hurrelmann et al. 2007; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018). For example, Dingwerth, Schmidtke and Weise (2020) find that many IOs increasingly employ “the language of democracy” to reinforce their own legitimacy.

While the distinction between normative and sociological framings of legitimacy is conceptually useful, it does not imply a dichotomous relationship. As Beetham (1991) argues, “[a] given power relationship is not legitimate because people believe in its legitimacy, but because it can be *justified in terms of their beliefs*” (Beetham 1991, p. 11). In other words, popular legitimacy beliefs matter but these beliefs are always grounded in normative expectations. This is also recognized by global governance scholars, who have pointed to the need to further explore the relationship between legitimacy beliefs, (de-)legitimation practices and actual IO policies and procedures (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Dellmuth and Schlipphak (2019) suggest that legitimacy beliefs are the result of complex interactions between both moral convictions and rational cost–benefit calculations. Seeing an institution as legitimate implies a willingness to comply with its rules even when this is not serving one’s short-term self-interests. At the same time, “[t]here is undoubtedly a great deal of instrumentality in appeals to legitimacy,” especially on the global level, where (de-)legitimation can be an important political strategy to enhance one’s own power (Hurrell 2007, p. 78). Given that normative expectation and empirical manifestations of legitimacy are closely interlinked, this report investigates both.

2.3. Measuring Perceptions of IO Legitimacy

Despite the theoretical importance and intuitive appeal of the concept of legitimacy for global governance, there is ongoing debate about its measurement. Unlike other features and phenomena of world politics (e.g., trade flows or wars), legitimacy is not directly observable. Rather, it is a latent variable, meaning that analysts have to use a series of different indicators to approximate legitimacy, while avoiding conflation with other concepts (e.g., support for an organization). Two dominant approaches for measuring legitimacy have emerged, in line with the two sociological research strands introduced above, namely the use of survey data and the coding of evaluative statements about IOs.

The first approach to measuring IO legitimacy relies on **survey data**, either from large population-based surveys (e.g., Afrobarometer or World Value Survey) or from self-administered surveys. The respondents, either political elites or ordinary citizens, are asked



a set of questions, typically geared towards establishing the extent of their confidence in a given IO. This measures the general trust in an organization that often serves as a reservoir for IO legitimacy claims (Dellmuth et al. 2019, p. 639). Indeed, measuring confidence is a broadly applied standard in legitimacy research in both international relations and comparative politics. This ensures a high degree of comparability across fields and serves to accumulate knowledge about elite and citizen perceptions of IO legitimacy. Moreover, data from large surveys often ensure accurate estimations through several thousand respondents and, when combined with experimental questions, also yield high-quality inferences. At the same time, however, it is difficult to track changes over time in surveys unless multiple (and very costly) waves are foreseen. Moreover, citizens often do not have sufficient knowledge about IOs to contribute to an accurate assessment (Dellmuth 2016). Finally, while there is little doubt about confidence being a feature of legitimacy beliefs, the question is whether confidence alone is exhaustive of all aspects of legitimacy. As a result, recent contributions have started to combine several survey questions related to legitimacy (e.g., norms of an IO, its appropriateness and social desirability) into new aggregate measures of IO legitimacy beliefs (see Anderson et al. 2019).

The second approach to measuring IO legitimacy codes **evaluative statements** about IOs, drawn from texts in news articles, government speeches and party manifestos, or social networks (e.g., Twitter). Both classic qualitative content analysis and novel automated text analysis can be used to identify relevant statements about IOs and extract their underlying tone or sentiment. Mostly negative evaluations point to legitimacy challenges, whereas positive evaluations reflect an endorsement of IO features and practices. This approach has important advantages as it enables researchers to measure discursive engagement with global governance institutions and the intensity of public discontent (Binder and Heupel 2015). Moreover, it often covers large time periods, allowing scholars to identify and explain important temporal dynamics. At the same time, it is often unclear whether strategic considerations unrelated to an IO's legitimacy feature into evaluative statements or whether the particular public site in which IOs are challenged (e.g., media vs. UN General Assembly) may affect their discursive contestation. Scholars therefore increasingly turn to behavioral measures of (de-)legitimation, such as street protests or IO reform efforts, to complement the study of discursive evaluation (see Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Big data platforms also provide new avenues for IO legitimacy research as they are able to automatically gather and process data at an unprecedented scale (see case study below).



Using Big Data to Measure the Perceived Legitimacy of IOs

As earlier GLOBE research has explored, the growing availability of big data provides new opportunities for social science research (Saz-Carranza et al. 2020). Here, we provide a brief case study of how big data can help uncover sentiment patterns in global media discourses, allowing researchers to draw some conclusions on IO legitimacy. We focus on the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT), a Google-supported database of worldwide news which contains structured data mined from more than 150,000 broadcast, print, and web news sources in more than 100 languages. Using sentiment analysis, GDELT is able to determine the overall tone of these news items. As the following brief case study illustrates, this can provide useful background for sociological studies of IO legitimacy.

Perceived Legitimacy of the WHO: COVID-19 and the Trump Effect

We explore how attitudes towards the World Health Organization (WHO) across different geographical areas have changed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. We also probe the impact of the 'Trump effect,' that is, we show how then-US president Donald Trump's hostile stance towards the WHO has affected the perceived legitimacy of the IO. Using the GDELT database, our proxy measure for 'legitimacy' is the aggregate daily sentiment score of news reports that cover events involving the WHO.

We analyze GDELT data collected between 01/01/2019 (pre-COVID) and 21/10/2020 (a few months into the pandemic), covering the following geographical areas: Brazil (BR), China (CH), France (FR), Germany (GM), Russia (RS), Spain (SP), the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), and the world as a whole. We extract the daily average sentiment of news items in these countries/regions, divided in two series: (a) all news reports mentioning the WHO (WHO_all) and (b) news reports mentioning both the WHO and Trump (WHO + Trump). In turn, this allows us to isolate (c) news reports that mention the WHO but not Trump (WHO_woutTrump). Negative sentiments expressed in the latter are less likely to be the direct result of damaging rhetoric or action by the US president.



Figure 5: Sentiment Trends for WHO_all (blue) vs. WHO_woutTrump (green)

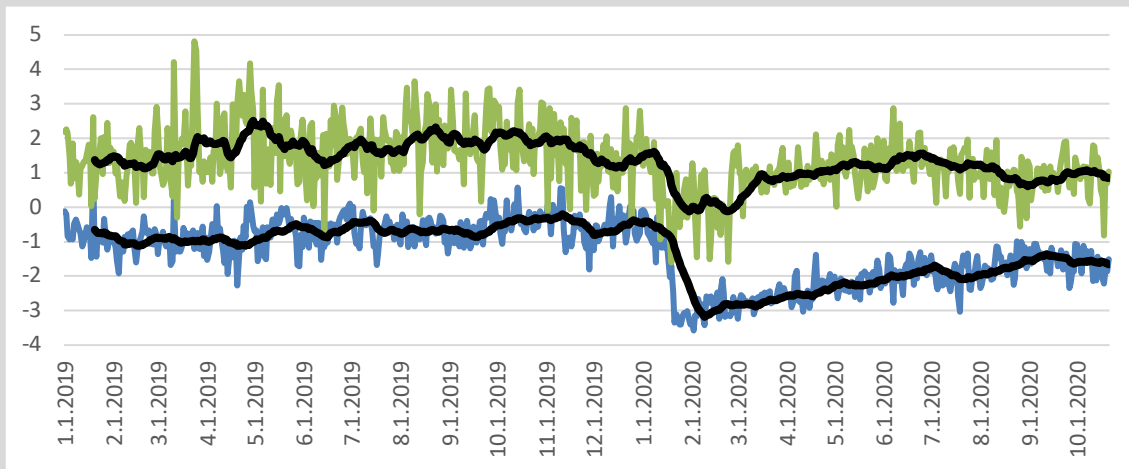


Figure 5 compares sentiment trends across all news items mentioning the WHO (blue) with those mentioning the WHO but not Trump (green), revealing significant differences in overall tone. The WHO is discussed much more positively when the 'Trump effect' is excluded. In both time series, attitudes towards the WHO turn more negative following the rapid worldwide spread of COVID-19, indicating a decrease in perceived legitimacy. However, the turn towards negative sentiments is much more pronounced and prolonged if the 'Trump effect' is not excluded.

Figure 6: Differences between average tone for WHO_all pre- and post-COVID

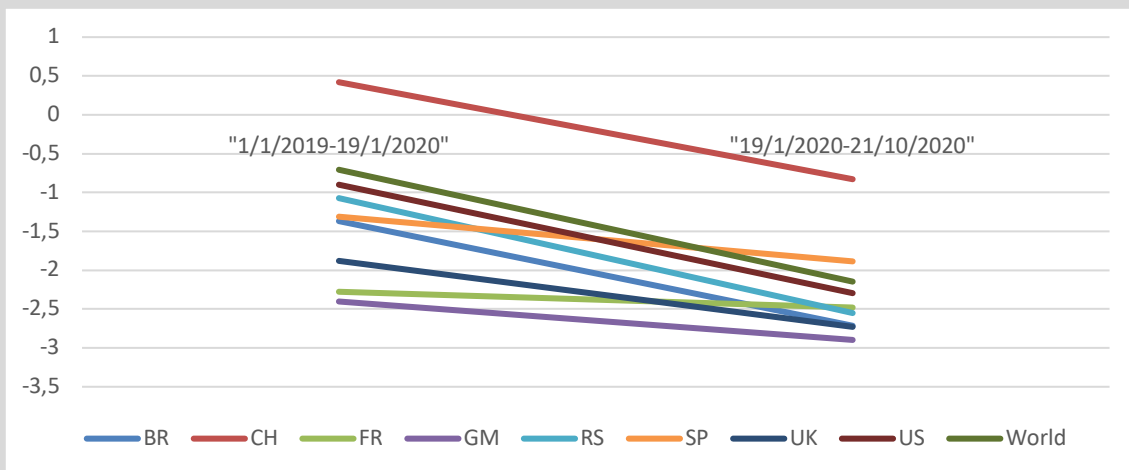


Figure 6 shows the difference between average tone in overall news coverage mentioning the WHO pre- and post-COVID, disaggregated by geographical area. Tone is mostly

negative in all countries/regions even before the onset of COVID-19 and falls further in the aftermath of the pandemic. We can also differentiate country-specific trends. For example, average tone values are lowest in Germany both pre- and post-COVID and highest in China. The greatest difference in average tone can be observed in the US, whereas France sees only small changes in average tone post-COVID.

Figure 7: Differences between average tone for WHO_woutTrump pre- and post-COVID

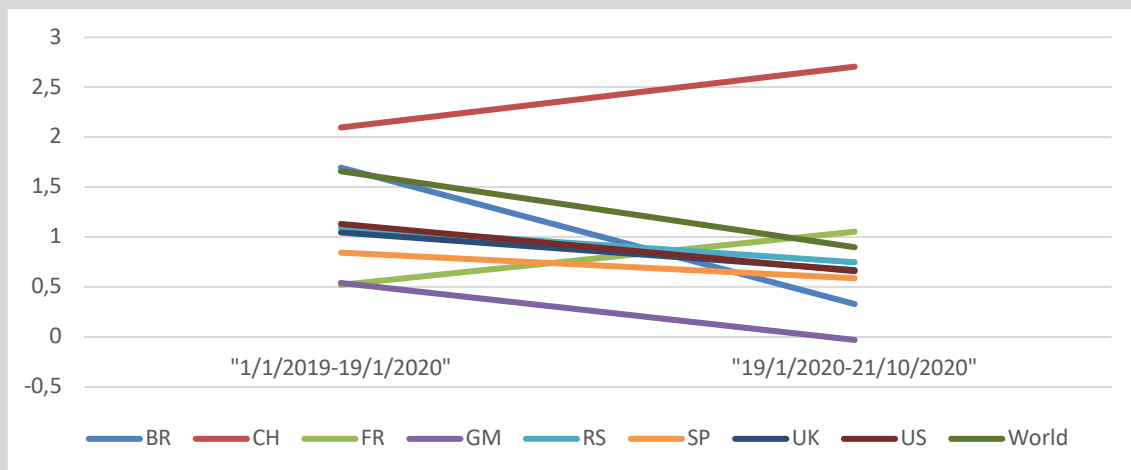


Figure 7 depicts differences in average tone pre- and post-pandemic with the ‘Trump effect’ excluded, revealing very different trends. Average tone value remains positive (above 0) in virtually all countries and regions. The decrease in average tone values is less pronounced and, as a matter of fact, tone becomes more positive in two cases, namely China and France, suggesting that, without the ‘Trump effect,’ support for the WHO increased in these two countries following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Potential and Limits of Using Big Data for IO Legitimacy Research

As this brief case study illustrates, large algorithm-based datasets can be usefully employed in IO legitimacy research. However, there are also important limits to their application. In the case of GDELT, for example, negative sentiments expressed in a news item on a particular IO might not necessarily be directed at the IO itself. Moreover, a temporary drop in support for an IO does not always equate a decrease in perceived legitimacy. As Tallberg and Zürn (2019, p. 587) argue, “legitimacy refers to a reservoir of confidence in an institution that is not dependent on short-term satisfaction with its

distributional outcomes,” meaning that an individual’s support for or sentiment towards IO policies or actions might fluctuate even as overall trust or confidence in the IO as an institution remains relatively stable. Thus, big data provides promising opportunities for legitimacy research in global governance, especially when seeking to understand trends over time or facilitating comparison across different regions, however, it always requires careful contextualization.

3. Cross-Domain GLOBE Expert Survey on IO Legitimacy

To better understand both the normative and the sociological dimensions of global governance legitimacy, we designed a small survey, aimed at gathering in-depth insights from GLOBE expert teams. The survey covers the whole range of GLOBE issue areas: climate change (Survey I), development (Survey II), finance (Survey III), investment (Survey IV), migration (Survey V), security (Survey VI), and trade (Survey VII). It was filled out by GLOBE Work Package leaders and their respective teams. As such, we were able to tap into a small but committed pool of experts, all of whom bring extensive expertise on their surveyed issue areas and IOs. We asked participants to focus on the IO that they consider most authoritative in their respective issue area. These include:

- Climate Change: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- Development: World Bank
- Finance: Bank for International Settlements (BIS)
- Investment: International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID)
- Migration: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- Trade: World Trade Organization (WTO)
- Security: United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

It is worth emphasizing that this is a very diverse group of institutions, not just in terms of issues covered but also in terms of institutional design and purpose. For example, the UNFCCC, the UNHCR and the UNSC, while having quite distinct governance structures, are not ‘standalone’ IOs but rather different organs or entities of the United Nations. The BIS is a very particular IO that is not governed by states but by central bankers. In turn,



ICSID stands out as the IO with the narrowest policy functions, focused entirely on investor-state dispute settlement. While this diversity makes for an interesting analysis, there are obvious limits to the comparative insights that might be drawn from it.

The survey was structured around two sets of questions. The first set of questions focused on the normative dimensions of legitimacy, asking respondents to assess their respective IOs according to three principles commonly associated with institutional ‘input’ and ‘throughput’ legitimacy – participation and equal representation, transparency, and accountability – as well as ‘output’ legitimacy, that is, their ability to deliver effective and fair policy outcomes. Respondents rated IOs’ compliance with these principles and performance expectations on a scale from 1 to 10, providing additional information as appropriate. The second set of questions focused on the empirical manifestations of legitimacy beliefs and the way in which (de-)legitimation processes play out within each issue area. We asked respondents about the extent to which IO legitimacy in their issue area is contested and whether there are any strategic delegitimization attempts. In turn, we also asked what strategies IOs themselves (or their supporters) have employed to enhance legitimacy and how successful these strategies have been. The full survey is included in Appendix I of this report. We received detailed responses from all the GLOBE teams leading on domain-specific Work Packages.

Before we present the survey results, it is important to highlight a few caveats. These include the relatively small size of the survey as well as the fact that it was filled out by a very particular group of observers, namely academic experts. As such, it is not necessarily reflective of the views of ordinary citizens or vulnerable groups at the receiving end of global governance. Moreover, as we emphasize throughout the report, the normative expectations underpinning IO legitimacy are often very ambiguous, so any attempt to ‘score’ them is fraught with methodological and interpretive difficulties. The specific aspects of legitimacy covered in the survey can be operationalized, observed, and measured to a degree but they still involve significant normative interpretation. These caveats notwithstanding, the survey results allow us to identify key differences and commonalities across issue areas. Moreover, engaging with the different normative expectations observers might bring to the table is arguably a valuable exercise in itself.



4. Overview of Findings

4.1. Evaluation of Normative Standards – Input, Throughput, Output

The following sections provide a cross-domain comparison of IO performance against four normative standards – participation and equitable representation, transparency, accountability, and quality of output – based on scores assigned to these IOs in the GLOBE expert survey. With few exceptions, all surveyed IOs have sought to strengthen their ‘input’ and ‘throughput’ legitimacy, albeit with very mixed results. On average, IOs score highest with regard to transparency, although the wider trend towards information disclosure has not always translated into effective accountability mechanisms. We find that IOs see themselves confronted with various tensions and dilemmas as they endeavor to enhance the democratic quality of governance whilst seeking to maintain ‘output’ legitimacy in the face of ever-more pressing and complex problems. As we also highlight, it is far from clear how the democratic quality of institutions should be assessed on the global level, as IOs remain first and foremost answerable to the states that endowed them with authority in the first place.

4.1.1. *Participation and Equitable Representation*

In contrast to governments in domestic democratic systems, the authority of global governance institutions is not directly legitimized through electoral mechanisms. Instead, the input legitimacy of IOs and other global governance institutions has been linked to equitable representation and participatory processes of deliberation, that is, ensuring all relevant stakeholders have a seat at the table and/or are able to make their voices heard. Over time, the number stakeholders considered ‘relevant’ has grown markedly and modes of engagement have diversified. In an increasingly multipolar world, institutional structures that preserve historic power constellations have become difficult to justify. And while intergovernmentalism remains the primary principle for cooperation, setting hard limits for what can be agreed, IOs are also increasingly expected to enable non-state actor involvement in global governance, e.g., by enabling the active participation of observers in international conferences, encouraging non-state action in line with globally defined goals, or creating opportunities for multi-stakeholder partnerships. Therefore, we take into account two dimensions of input legitimacy in our analysis, namely the equitable representation of state parties in IO decision-making processes as well as opportunities for non-state actor



participation.

In both regards, the survey results reveal significant variations across issue areas and IOs. Some IOs have formal decision-making mechanisms that are structurally skewed towards more powerful state parties, whereas others provide an equal say – at least on paper – to all state parties. And while some IOs provide several mechanisms for non-state engagement, others remain largely closed off to outsiders. Beyond formal institutional structures, the reflections below also point to more subtle ways in which representational inequalities are perpetuated on the global level. For example, even where decisions are taken by consensus, richer and more powerful states may wield more influence due to their political and economic weight and stronger diplomatic capacity. Similarly, in the context of asymmetric distributions of power, resources and capacity, mechanisms to increase non-state participation do not necessarily amplify the voices of those most affected by policy decisions. Finally, the relationship between input legitimacy (representation and participation) and output legitimacy (effectiveness of policy outcomes) is not straightforward, potentially presenting dilemmas for institutional reform.

Figure 1: Participation and equal representation in IOs across GLOBE issue areas (rated by survey participants on a scale from 1 to 10).

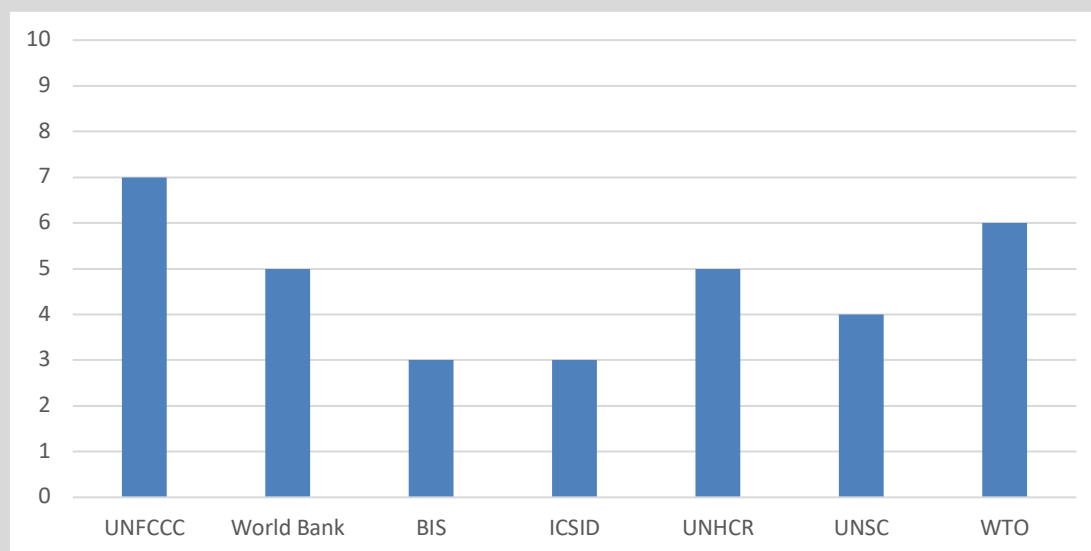


Figure 1 shows the scores assigned to individual IOs by the GLOBE expert teams, taking into account both state representation and non-state actor engagement. On the lowest end



of the spectrum are the BIS and the ICSID, two IOs whose activities have been legitimated primarily through the provision of technical and/or legal expertise rather than democratic decision-making. Indeed, the **BIS** is a club-like policy community rather than multilateral organization, which brings together central bankers and financial regulators rather than states. Its Board of Director remains Western-dominated, with six of its 18 seats reserved for *ex officio* members consisting of the governors of the founding central banks. Low-income and emerging economies find themselves on “the periphery of participation” and opportunities for civil society engagement are largely non-existent (Survey III). Yet, calls for more equitable representation and greater participation have remained relatively muted, partly because “global finance has been seen as involving highly technical private transactions that are best handled by experts or market actors operating as freely as possible from the uninformed political meddling that comes with democracy” (Porter 2001, p. 427).

In the case of **ICSID**, legitimacy concerns focus primarily on the composition of arbitrators rather than the equitable representation of states. The international arbitration landscape remains dominated by a small, dense network of mostly male professionals from Western countries (Puig 2014). The lack of geographical diversity is seen as particularly troublesome since the majority of registered cases are against non-Western respondent states (Langford et al. 2022). Beyond the composition of arbitrators, “[t]he main problem is participation of non-state and non-investor stakeholders, who are never direct participants” and enjoy only “limited *amicus* capacity or indirect participation possibilities” (Survey IV).¹

The UN-led international security regime also receives low scores for representation and participation. This is unsurprising given long-standing concerns over the institutional structure of the **UNSC**, which is widely seen as “anachronistic” and “at odds with a multipolar world” (Survey VI). Notably, the Council’s five permanent members (P5) – China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – enjoy special privileges, including the right to veto any draft resolution. Elected Council members face several constraints to making a lasting impact on the Council’s agenda, including the brevity of their two-year term, an increased burden of work that can be difficult to stem for smaller countries, as well as working methods that favor status quo arrangements (Martin 2018). Opportunities for non-

¹ *Amicus curiae* (from Latin ‘friend of the court’) mechanisms allow for third party input to assist arbitration proceedings, usually in the form of written submissions (Butler 2019).



state actor engagement also remain very limited.

Like the UN security regime, albeit to a lesser degree, the **World Bank's** decision-making structures institutionalize power asymmetries between state parties. Although governance structures have been subject to several reforms, the Bank's weighted voting system – which links voting power to capital contributions – ensures that major donor governments exercise disproportionate influence. As the largest shareholder, the United States continues to enjoy de facto veto powers and has traditionally held the Bank's presidency. Concerning the involvement of non-state stakeholders, the World Bank has made conscious efforts to increase engagement over the past decades. According to the Bank's own data, 88% of all funded projects involved civil society participation in 2015, compared to 21% in 1990 (World Bank n.d.). However, Pallas (2013) notes that the uneven distribution of power and resources means that some civil society organizations are more influential than others, qualifying expectations that increased participation serves to 'democratize' the World Bank.

In contrast to the UNSC or the World Bank, the **UNHCR's** governing body, the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), does not establish special prerogatives for certain states. Originally composed of just 25 states, ExCom membership has progressively increased to currently 107 members (UNHCR 2021a). Decisions are adopted by consensus in plenary sessions which are also open to NGOs and other external observers, although substantive outcomes are usually the result of informal consultations, which might be dominated by a small number of states (Fresia 2014). The UNHCR's dependence on voluntary financial contributions – many of which are 'earmarked' for certain countries or purposes – also increases the de-facto influence of a small number of donors, mostly from the Global North (Loescher and Milner 2011). Of main concern, however, is the fact that refugees and other persons under the UNHCR's mandate "have, at best, limited opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them directly" (Survey II). Illustrative of this, Milner (2021) notes that of the 3000 participants at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, barely more than 2% were refugees.

The two organizations ranking highest in Figure 1 are the UNFCCC and the WTO, both of which formally afford all state parties equal say in decision-making, with consensus the default decision-making mode. In contrast to other major economic IOs, the **WTO** has no executive body to decide strategic direction and delegation of authority is restricted to the dispute settlement process. However, significant power asymmetries persist and while



poorer states are not without leverage, larger trading nations are likely to find it easier to promote their own agendas or withstand political pressure to join a consensus (Joseph 2011). Moreover, consensus-based decision-making is widely seen to negatively affect output legitimacy, as the WTO has struggled for decades to negotiate new rules on a range of pressing trade issues. In terms of non-state actors, while the WTO has historically been hesitant to engage, a number of channels have been established which allow for communication, consultation and participation, e.g., through the WTO Public Forum (an annual outreach event), the submission of position papers, or participation as accredited observers at the Ministerial Conference (WTO n.d.a).

Finally, climate governance under the **UNFCCC** allows for broad participation of state and non-state actors, based on the understanding that effective climate action will require “all hands on deck” (Hale 2016). Consensus-based decision-making ensures that state parties have equal voting power, though some enjoy more leverage in the negotiations than others. Like the WTO, the UNFCCC also faces challenges to its effectiveness, given the difficulty of generating consensus among virtually all countries in the world. While decision-making rests squarely in the hands of states, the UNFCCC grants access to a large number of observers at its annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs) and has established several modes of engagement, e.g., allowing observers to make interventions during negotiations or provide written submissions to feed into workshops and technical meetings (Phillips 2018). However, civil society organizations have limited agency when it comes to the terms of their engagement with the UNFCCC regime (Orr 2016). In recent years, the UNFCCC has also established new ways of engaging with non-party stakeholders under the Global Climate Action Agenda, a broad process aimed at strengthening the linkages between intergovernmental and transnational climate action. While this has created new opportunities for interaction, researchers have noted that UNFCCC orchestration efforts do not guarantee equal participation (Bäckstrand and Kuyper 2017).

As this comparative overview suggests, equitable representation and participation are vital concerns in the debate on global governance legitimacy. However, it also illustrates the complexities of implementing commitments to more inclusive governance in practice. How to balance broad-based participation and the need to deliver operational outcomes, especially on issues that call for a rapid response? Is the ‘one country, one vote’ principle the most democratic or could some form of weighted voting (e.g., population-based)



generate fairer outcomes? Does greater inclusion of non-state actors lead to more representative decision-making or does it introduce new biases? Clearly, inclusive governance is about more than ‘broadening the tent’, it is also about the quality of deliberative interaction between governance participants. One element of this is transparency, which we turn to in the next section.

4.1.2. Transparency

Across all major policy domains, IOs are facing demands for greater transparency. In the absence of a global demos, transparency is key to foster trust between governance participants (e.g., negotiating state parties) as well as between the governing and the governed. It is also widely expected to facilitate accountability and encourage behavior that is in line with shared global priorities, thus increasing effectiveness. Indeed, in some policy areas, transparency has been promoted as “a cure-all” solution (Carnegie 2021, p. 214). Yet, while transparency has been established as a vital component of good governance, there are also calls for more critical scrutiny of its legitimizing potential and the conditions under which information disclosure can be truly empowering (Gupta 2008). Indeed, some have suggested that an over-emphasis on information may serve to obscure, and thereby maintain, existing global power asymmetries (Fluck 2015). Thus, transparency is not simply about the provision of information but also about its quality and the context in which it is provided (Bianchi 2013) – aspects which are more difficult to investigate empirically.

With these caveats in mind, survey results indicate that most IOs under investigation have made consistent efforts to enhance transparency, albeit with mixed success. The cross-domain comparison also suggests that it may not be appropriate to expect the same level of transparency across all policy domains. Indeed, in some policy areas, a degree of secrecy and confidentiality might be necessary to enable frank, open debate. Finally, it is important to distinguish between different dimensions of transparency in global governance. For example, while our focus is primarily on external transparency (the availability of relevant information to outsiders), internal transparency (information flows within the organization and between state parties) is also an important determinant of IO legitimacy. Meanwhile, transparency of state action will often be essential to ensure multilateral agreements are effectively implemented.



Figure 2: Transparency in IOs across GLOBE issue areas (rated by survey participants on a scale from 1 to 10).

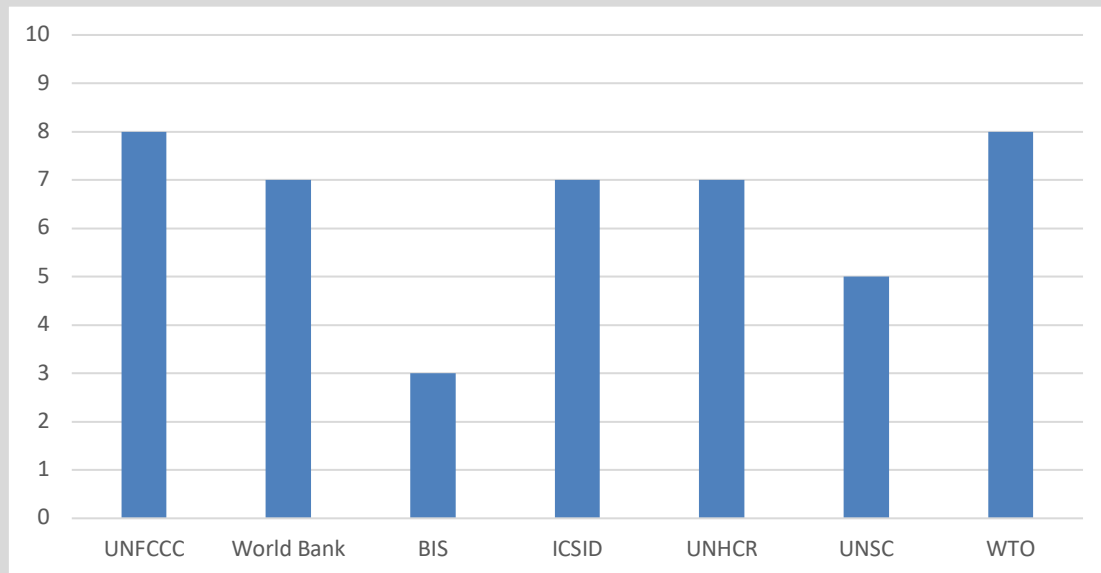


Figure 2 depicts the GLOBE expert assessment of IO transparency in each issue area. Again, the **BIS** finds itself at the lowest end of the spectrum. The dominance of informal institutions in global financial governance has long been a major concern (Sharman 2011) and the BIS has the reputation of being a particularly secretive institution (LeBor 2013). Discussions take place behind closed doors and records are only being made publicly available after a period of 30 years. While pledges to greater transparency have been made (Carstens 2018), the BIS has been slow to lift restrictions on transparency, which have traditionally been justified with the need to foster trust and frank discussions among members (Schenk 2020).

International security is another policy domain traditionally associated with secrecy and closed-door diplomacy. However, the UN security regime has seen significant improvements in terms of transparency. For example, the majority of **UNSC** debates are now open, monthly work plans are publicly available, and informal (*Arria-formula*) meetings of the Council are increasingly webcast. Nevertheless, concerns persist over a number of issues. 30% of all UNSC meetings still take place behind closed doors and reform proposals have highlighted the need to enhance consultations with the wider UN membership (ACT 2019). Other transparency concerns relate to the selection of non-permanent UNSC

members as some countries are able to sustain lengthy election campaigns, involving “increasing levels of expenditure, invitations to capitals, entertaining and gifts, as well as political lobbying by roving ambassadors and targeting of development assistance” (Martin 2018). The P5’s continued influence over the appointment process for subsidiary body chairs is another area of concern (Roele 2019).

Other surveyed IOs receive relatively high scores, reflective of conscious efforts to increase the transparency of governance procedures. The **World Bank**, long considered a secretive institution, has made “conscious and substantial shift toward greater transparency in recent years” (Survey II). In 2010, significant reforms related to the public disclosure of information, came into effect, which involved the declassification of more than 15,000 documents, the creation of a large searchable database, an expansion of the presumption of disclosure for new documents, and the establishment of an appeals process for requests of information that are initially denied (Gartner 2013). While these reforms have established the World Bank “as the most transparent international financial institution” (Hinojosa-Martínez 2013, p. 94), important exceptions to its disclosure policy remain and the Bank has been careful to protect the confidentiality of its decision-making process. The Bank has also faced controversies over irregularities in its data analysis activities (Shahal 2021) as well as its processing of major loans and grants from member states (Tett 2021).

In the case of **ICSID**, the extent to which information on arbitral proceedings is made publicly available depends on party consent. However, observers have noted that ICSID has made consistent efforts in seeking such consent and it is now mandated to publish excerpts of the legal reasoning underpinning every award (Parra 2014). Where parties agree to greater transparency, hearings may be opened to the public (e.g., via webcast). ICSID is currently in the process of amending its rules, which promise to deliver “greater transparency in the conduct and outcome of proceedings”, although parties will still have the option to object to the full disclosure of awards (ICSID 2022). Other transparency concerns relate to the appointment of arbitrators, and behind-the-scenes working practices, which may be difficult to understand for a lay public (Maupin 2013).

The **UNHCR** publishes a range of data on its activities, finances, and other relevant information in an accessible manner. It operates a dedicated publicly available reporting portal for donors and other key partners – the Global Focus website – and also reports on all its operations via the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). However, “there is



less transparency about how decisions are made” by senior management (Survey V) and concerns have been raised over poor internal communication and a lack of information flows between headquarter and field staff (Bradley 201). Moreover, Ozkul and Jarrous (2021) find that refugees themselves often find it difficult to understand and navigate bureaucratic practices and decision-making processes within the UNHCR.

In the case of the **UNFCCC**, transparency is widely seen as a bedrock principle of global climate negotiations as well as implementation activities. The former has been a main concern for COP hosts and the UNFCCC secretariat ever since the 2009 Copenhagen Summit, where the failure to create an open and inclusive negotiation process contributed to chaos and deadlock (Monheim 2016). Subsequent COPs have been conscious not to repeat these mistakes. However, even the successful 2015 Paris COP, which was praised for high levels of input and throughput legitimacy, was not fully transparent – rather the French presidency sought to carefully balance open and closed proceeding (Tabau 2016). Transparency is also a main mechanism of implementation under the Paris Agreement, with all parties required to report on progress made on their climate-related pledges.

Finally, the **WTO** has made significant efforts to increase external transparency, including by making a vast amount of data and official documentation publicly available via its website. However, the high salience of trade negotiations is widely seen to require a degree of confidentiality in order to build trust and enhance the quality of deliberations (Marx et al. 2019). The need for a base-level of confidentiality is likely factored into the WTO’s relatively high transparency score, as depicted in Figure 2. As in other policy areas, available information might be difficult to put into context for lay observers. For example, Ungphakorn and Wolfe (2021) observe that “[m]ost dispute settlement documents are available but few people can understand them because they are extremely legalistic.” In terms of internal transparency, the informal Green Room process continues to raise concerns, even as it has become much less exclusionary (Strange 2011).

Mirroring the observations made in the previous section, the quest for greater transparency in global governance is fraught with complexities. As with participation, the link between transparency and output legitimacy is not straightforward and institutions may have incentives to maintain a certain degree of confidentiality in the interest of enabling open discussions. Too much transparency could have adverse effects and “can lead to the actual discussions taking place elsewhere, in secrecy” (Tabau 2016, p. 33). Moreover, and as



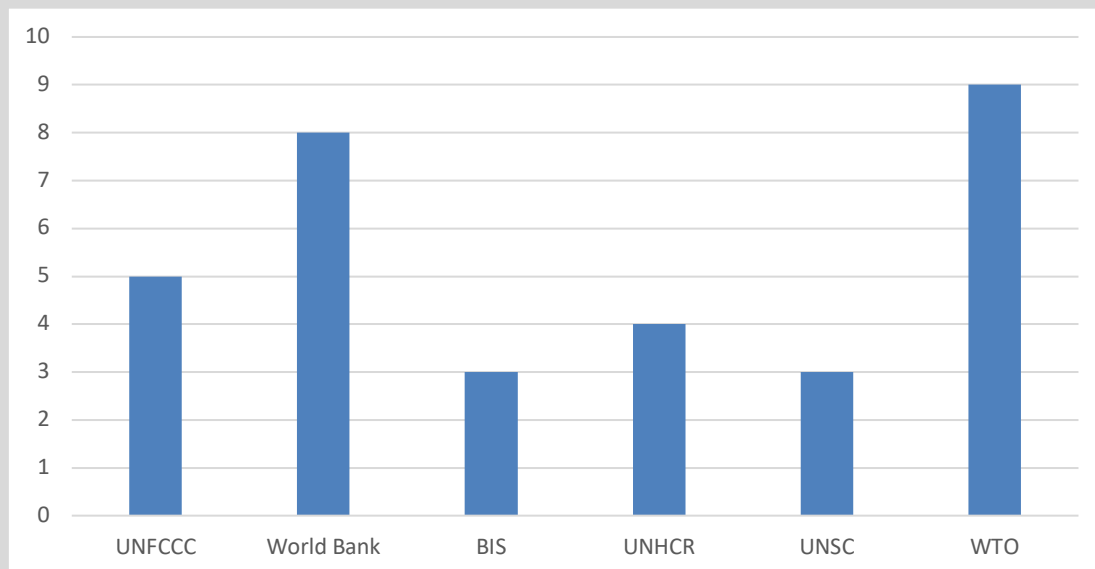
emphasized above, the mere availability of information does not automatically equal transparency, especially in policy areas where technical and/or legalistic language is prevalent. In some instances, transparency commitments may even be strategically employed to obscure governance intentions (Gupta and Mason 2016). Perhaps most importantly, and as we explore in the next section, for transparency to truly enhance the legitimacy of governance, disclosure of information must be linked to effective accountability mechanisms.

4.1.3. Accountability

Accountability is a key component of democratic legitimacy. While there is widespread agreement that IOs need to become more accountable, opinion is divided over how much accountability is possible or desirable on the global level and, crucially, to whom IOs should be accountable. As Krisch (2006, p. 250) notes, “many regulatory institutions on the global level are in fact highly accountable – up to the point that they often enjoy little freedom of independent action and are closely tied to the wishes of their constituents.” These constituents, however, are first and foremost states. For IOs to be truly democratically accountable, they must be constrained in ways that make them more responsive to those at the receiving end of global governance, “especially people who tend otherwise to be marginalised and silenced” (Scholte 2011b, p. 15). Unlike democratic governments, international bureaucracies cannot be voted in and out of office by national constituencies, creating a “mismatch between decision-makers and decision-takers” that cannot simply be resolved by extending national-level electoral accountability relationships to the global level (Lafont 2010, p. 197). After all, global policies advanced by powerful states in pursuance of their own citizens’ interests might produce outcomes that are not representative of the interests of the global population as a whole. Moreover, most IOs include member states that are not themselves democratic. While these tensions might be impossible to be resolved completely, at a minimum, IOs and their members can introduce operational procedures, checks and balances, independent reviews, and complaint mechanisms to mitigate or respond to situations where their policies and activities might cause harm and violate human rights and fundamental freedoms.



Figure 3: Accountability of IOs across GLOBE issue areas (rated by survey participants on a scale from 1 to 10).



As Figure 3 suggests, there are huge variations between IOs with regard to accountability. While some IOs (BIS and UNSC) are essentially unaccountable, others (notably the World Bank) have established, at least on paper, an array of mechanisms to reduce their own accountability deficit. Again others (e.g., the WTO) are highly responsive to member states while the necessity of other measures of accountability remains contested. Finally, in some instances, traditional notions of accountability might not apply. This is the case for the ICSID, which is not included in the ranking above.

Since the **ICSID** has few operative functions beyond facilitating the resolution of state-investor disputes, democratic accountability of the IO itself is not a major concern. That said, the investor-state tribunals held under its auspices arguably raise some accountability problems since they give arbitrators the power to “reverse, at least de facto, decisions by democratically legitimated and democratically accountable domestic decision-makers” (Kulick 2015, p. 441). In principle, the ability to wield such power is justified by the role of arbitrators as independent and impartial adjudicators. However, the fact that arbitrators operate far removed from domestic context may introduce biases, causing arbitrators to ignore the public interest dimensions of the disputes brought before them (Anderson 2018; Van Harten 2013).

The **BIS**, too, is a special case since it is informal forum and network with no supervisory or regulatory functions or responsibilities, legitimated primarily on the basis of its technocratic expertise. However, as the BIS has developed into an influential standard-setter, the BIS's club-like structure and the opaqueness and seclusive nature of its activities is creating accountability problems (Andersson 2016). Operating in a blurred space between private and public spheres, the BIS has been found to favor certain private interests, potentially undermining the development of policies and regulations that are responsive to the broader public interest (Ozgercin 2012). However, as we discuss in Section 4.2, so far, the BIS has largely managed to evade calls for greater accountability.

In contrast, the accountability deficits of the **UNSC** have drawn a considerable amount of attention, though prospects for significant reform seem equally elusive. The privileged position of the P5 makes them essentially unaccountable to others. While the UNSC acts on behalf of all UN members, “the UN Charter does not expressly provide for a regime of accountability for the Council, or indeed any of its organs” (Henderson 2014, p. 491). The UNSC is provided with a lot of discretion, allowing for “creative interpretation” of its own responsibilities (Survey VI), and there is no institution with the power to enforce the Charter's provision that the UNSC must “act in accordance with the Purposes and Principles of the United Nations” (Art 24.2). In principle, there are avenues for other UN organs to raise questions over the legality of UNSC decisions – e.g., by requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice – however, this is dependent on substantial political will and would not create binding obligations for the UNSC (Henderson 2014). It is perhaps even more difficult for individuals to seek redress for human rights violations in the context of UNSC-mandated activities, for instance, in cases of sexual violence perpetrated by peacekeepers (Freedman 2018) or the blacklisting of terrorism suspects without due process guarantees (Hovell 2016).

The **UNHCR** scores relatively “high on ‘upward accountability’ to members” – especially donor states – but “low on ‘downward accountability’ to refugees and other persons of concern” (Survey V). Given that the UNHCR is directly involved in the provision of refugee protection, sometimes taking on the role of a “surrogate state” (Deardorff Miller 2018), this accountability gap is particularly worrying. This is further complicated by the fact that UNHCR activities, such as the management of refugee camps, involve an array of subcontracted NGOs. Given their financial dependence on the UNHCR, these NGOs may



be less likely to play an effective watchdog role. Moreover, it raises the question of who should be held responsible for misconduct by implementing partners (Klabbers 2021). While mechanisms for oversight and redress exist – notably in the form of the UNHCR’s Inspector General’s Office which can process individual complaints – they are limited to investigating misconduct by staff members rather than failings of the IO as such (Johansen 2020).

The **UNFCCC** receives a middling score, due mainly to the fact that it exercises only limited authority. UNFCCC activities and outcomes are constrained by member states, making them the primary sites of accountability struggles. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the UNFCCC’s work that have accountability implications. For example, following complaints, the UNFCCC has, at several points in time, invited feedback and initiated review on how to improve the engagement of non-state actors (Bäckstrand et al. 2017; UN Climate 2021). Beyond institutional accountability, important questions arise with regard to the (state-led) implementation of UNFCCC treaties and agreements. For example, the absence of robust safeguards, some projects under the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism have resulted in serious human rights violation, including the forced displacement of local communities (Schade and Obergassel 2014). The Paris Agreement’s explicit references to human rights promise to open up new avenues for accountability. Notably, an important outcome of COP-26 was the establishment of an independent body to handle grievances related to carbon crediting projects (Diab 2021).

Of all the IOs under review, the **World Bank** has arguably seen the greatest improvement over time with regard to institutional accountability. Responding to mounting civil society pressure, the Bank has engaged in substantial reform efforts over the past decades, including the establishment of an independent accountability mechanisms, the Inspection Panel, in 1993. The panel provides opportunities for individuals and communities that have been negatively affected by World Bank projects and has been credited with amplifying the voice of the governed while also helping to improve operational policies and procedures (Barlas and Tassoni 2015). With regard to the latter, the World Bank has introduced a range of procedural safeguards to mitigate adverse social and environment impacts of its activities. While these policies are comparatively comprehensive, important implementation gaps remain and the World Bank has been criticized for its inconsistent engagement with human rights issues (Alston 2015).

Finally, assessments of the **WTO**’s accountability vary widely due to conflicting views on



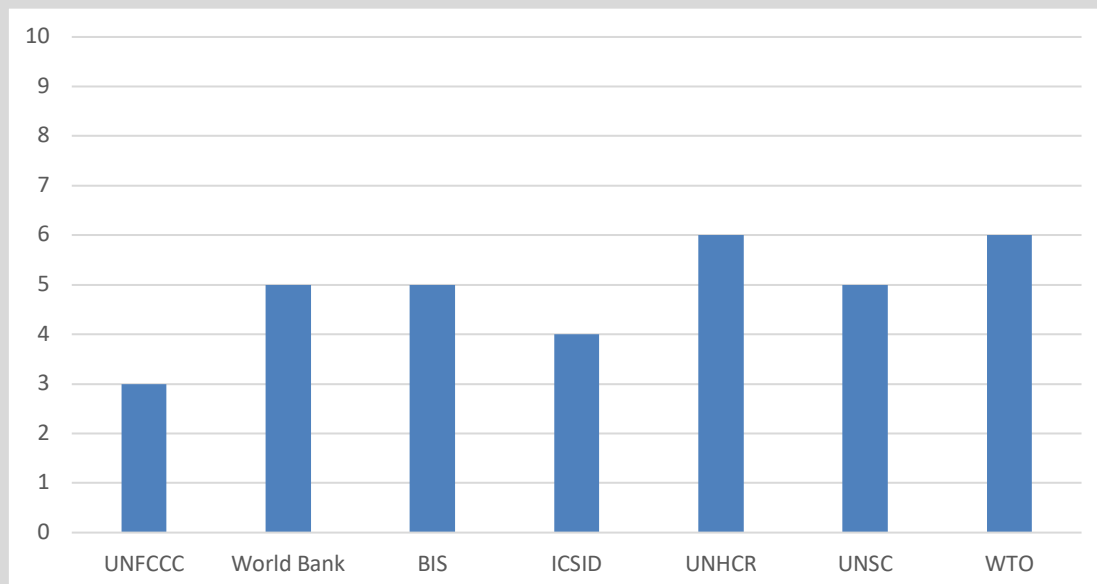
whom the WTO should be accountable to and how much autonomy it enjoys. For many observers, the WTO is first and foremost accountable to its member states (Williams 2011). From this perspective, there are few accountability problems since member states are “able to keep tight control on what is decided and implemented” (Survey VII). Like the UNFCCC, the WTO can be seen primarily as a negotiation forum and servicing structure that is not, itself, capable of imposing anything that would undermine national sovereignty. Following this line of reasoning, “the place for democratic accountability is the legislatures of each of its members. This is where the governments engaged in the trading system need to explain what they are doing and why” (Wolf 2001, p. 197). However, this logic has become increasingly contested as the scope of the WTO has become more expansive and the impact of global trade rules on domestic regulation has increased. Difficult questions of accountability also arise with regard to the human rights implications of agreements negotiated under the WTO. For example, the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) has come under scrutiny for impeding access to pharmaceuticals for the poorest populations, a concern that has recently come to the forefront in the context of COVID-19 (Thambisetty 2021).

4.1.4. Quality of Output

While IO legitimacy in a normative sense is most commonly associated with the input and throughput variables discussed above, it is also derived from the quality of output – that is, the substantiveness, effectiveness, and fairness of governance outcomes. In other words, the legitimacy of an IO depends to a large degree on whether or not it delivers benefits to its members. Indeed, IO legitimacy has long been primarily underpinned by the functional logic that institutionalized international cooperation is necessary for effective problem-solving. However, the notion of output legitimacy arguably invokes expectations that go beyond this purely functional narrative, including the expectation that outcomes are not simply “effective” but serve “the global public interest” (Steffek 2015, p. 263). It is difficult to assess both the functional dimension of output legitimacy (effectiveness) and its normative aspects in one measure. Indeed, as previous GLOBE research has explored, the notion of effectiveness alone is multidimensional, encompassing an IO’s ability to facilitate agreement and induce compliance with agreed rules as well as its contribution to the achievement of global policy goals (Coen et al. 2021).



Figure 4: Output legitimacy of IOs across GLOBE issue areas (rated by survey participants on a scale from 1 to 10).



With these caveats in mind, how might we interpret the output legitimacy scores assigned to individual IOs, as depicted in Figure 4 above? Most IOs receive a middling score, often reflecting significant variations in outcomes over time and across different aspects of their work. Thus, for IOs that finance, authorize and/or engage in ‘on the ground’ projects and missions, such as the World Bank, UNHCR, or the UNSC, the track record is very mixed. In turn, the WTO has seen its output legitimacy diminish over time, as the problems it seeks to address have become more complex and its own institutions more contested. We also see that IO output legitimacy scores do not necessarily correlate with how well they are performing with regard to input and throughput measures, a tension that we explore further below.

A case in point is the **UNFCCC**, which – while by no means perfect – enables relatively inclusive and transparent deliberation processes but receives the lowest output legitimacy score in our sample. Although negotiations under the UNFCCC have resulted in broadly supported outcomes, notably the 2015 Paris Agreement, the ultimate goal of the Convention, namely preventing “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UN 1992, Art. 2), is quickly slipping out of reach. Fairness of policy outcomes is also heavily contested, “as richer countries are not seen to be pulling their weight, both in

terms of reducing emissions and in terms of supporting poorer and climate vulnerable countries with financial resources” (Survey I). While slow progress is arguably rooted in domestic political dynamics rather than multilateral bargaining problems (Aklin and Mildemberger 2020), a higher score for UNFCCC output legitimacy seems inappropriate as many scientists expect global temperatures to increase by at least 3 °C by the end of the century (Tollefson 2021).

In the case of the **ICSID**, assessments of its output legitimacy vary substantially. While supporters of the ICSID maintain that it has been effective in increasing trust between states and investors, thereby encouraging global flows of foreign direct investment, critics have voiced concerns over procedural biases (Puig 2013). As already noted, such criticism is usually not directed at the ICSID as such but at the way in which decision-making powers have come to be concentrated in the hands of a small, select, and homogeneous group of arbitrators that operate far removed from domestic political processes. There are also indications of a broader trend of dissatisfaction and disengagement with the investor-state dispute settlement system, especially where it is seen to encroach on states’ regulatory capacity (Thompson et al. 2019) – a trend that could, in turn, affect the effectiveness of the regime.

The output legitimacy of the **BIS** is equally hard to assess. The BIS and its hosted committees have certainly been influential in shaping global financial regulation, effectively filling a “global governance gap” in this area (Survey III). However, the effectiveness of its current policy agenda remains contested (Westermeyer 2018). The informal club-like structure of BIS facilitates its mission to foster dialogue, cooperation, and information exchange amongst central banks and might allow it to take decisions more efficiently than other IOs, however, it also raises concerns over the fairness of outcomes as it amplifies the power of a small elite group. Yet, in the absence of institutional alternatives, the BIS has successfully established itself as a key player in global financial governance – a position that is mainly grounded in output legitimacy.

The **World Bank** has been quite successful in accelerating the integration of a large number of countries into the world economy, however, as Woods (2014) argues, the neoliberal policy goals that have long underpinned its globalizing agenda were not a key part of its original mission nor have they necessarily benefitted borrowing countries and their populations. Overall, the track record of World Bank projects is mixed, ranging from “very



effective to complete failures” (Survey II). According to recent data collected by the Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group, approximately 80% of completed lending projects were rated “moderately satisfactory or above” in 2019 (World Bank 2020). More critical voices are likely to contest such assessments, arguing that unless the underlying rules of the game are more favorable to borrowing countries, the World Bank’s activities will continue to fuel, rather than resolve, indebtedness, poverty, and inequality (Toussaint 2008). There is also continuous concern over adverse social and environmental and effects of World Bank projects and programs (e.g., Schlieff 2015; Sauer 2019).

In the case of the UN security regime, frequent failures of the **UNSC** to respond to acute crises and mass atrocities, such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide, have significantly diminished its output legitimacy. The Council continues to be unable to respond effectively to issues where P5 interests are at stake, with examples including the conflict in Syria or the unresolved question of Palestine. In some instances, where action has been taken, UN interventions themselves have caused harm as a result of neglect or misconduct, as in the case of the cholera outbreak in Haiti (OHCHR 2020) or the involvement of peacekeepers in sexual exploitation and abuse in the Congo and elsewhere (Larson and Dodds 2017). Yet, the UN security regime has also seen successes. As Martin (2018) notes, the UNSC’s “thematic debates have made important contributions to normative developments, such as those regarding women and peace and security, children and armed conflict, and the protection of civilians,” although the impact of such normative shifts is difficult to evaluate. And while the overall impact of UN peacekeeping efforts remains contested, they have proven effective in supporting peace processes in a number of instances, with often-noted successes including its missions in Liberia (UNMIL) and East Timor (UNTAET, UNMIT).

As a humanitarian organization, the **UNHCR** derives output legitimacy primarily from the provision of aid to refugees and other displaced people. Since its establishment, the UNHCR has succeeded in substantially broadening its own mandate and establishing itself, to an extent, as an independent and influential agenda-setter (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). The recent adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees, for instance, despite its many flaws, can be seen as a “major achievement,” especially given the difficulty of reaching any kind of consensus on this highly contentious issue (Crisp 2020, p. 365). At the same time, the UNHCR has also been subject to much criticism, including concerns over the fairness of its procedures for refugee status determination (Smrkolj 2019). More broadly speaking, the



prioritization of aid provision has arguably constrained the UNHCR's capacity to supervise the implementation of international refugee law, meaning that relatively high output legitimacy in one aspect of its work might adversely affect the effective delivery of other aspects of its core mandate.

Finally, the **WTO** has overall been quite effective in reducing trade barriers, increasing trade flows, and expanding the multilateral trading system. However, the WTO has found it "difficult to negotiate on interdisciplinary areas," including those pertaining to sustainable development, labor rights and environmental protection (Survey VII). Additionally, in recent years, the WTO has faced pressures due to increasing trade protectionism and contestation of its dispute settlement mechanisms, which previously played a vital role in the implementation of trade rules and commitments.

Tensions between Input, Throughput and Output Legitimacy

While there is general agreement that each of the governance dimensions discussed above has the potential to increase IO legitimacy, there is considerable debate about whether or not IOs can successfully respond to all of these demands at the same time. For example, it has been suggested that supranational institutions face a "democratic dilemma" as they must negotiate trade-offs between input (participation) and output (effectiveness) oriented dimensions of legitimacy (Dahl 1994). In contrast, others emphasize synergies between civil society participation and output legitimacy, pointing to more productive deliberations and the enhanced acceptability of policy decisions (Lindgren and Persson 2010). This is further complicated by different interpretations of what legitimate civil society engagement entails, what purposes it serves, and whether or not civil society organizations are actually representative of the people they claim to speak for.

Potential input-output dilemmas also arise with regard to state representation in global governance institutions. Broad participation and consensus-based decision-making – as embodied by the UNFCCC and the WTO in our sample – may enhance the legitimacy of global policy decisions, however, as previous GLOBE research has highlighted, it may lead to less ambitious policy outcomes or gridlocked negotiations (Coen et al. 2021). The 'one country, one vote' principle may also be challenged on other grounds,



indeed it “could be considered undemocratic,” since it does not take into account factors such as population size (Lopez-Claros et al. 2020, p. 96). In global climate governance, for example, some have suggested that ‘minilateral’ clubs could bolster effective action (Eckersley 2012; Falkner et al. 2021).

Efforts to advance higher procedural standards are confronted with similar tensions. As already noted, stronger provisions on transparency and accountability may discourage states to use official negotiation channels or encourage pushback in some other form. For example, assessing the impact of the World Bank Inspection Panel, Fox (2002, p. 162) finds that the Panel has had an important legitimation effect by strengthening accountability but also “prompted somewhat perverse effects,” such as the dilution of social and environmental safeguards in order to make the Bank less vulnerable to complaints. There may also be limits to the desirability of full transparency in some issue areas, as a degree of confidentiality is considered important to facilitate flexibility and compromise in negotiations (Kelbel et al. 2012).

As these observations suggest, there are no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solutions for enhancing the legitimacy of IOs. In practice, issue-, institutions-, and situation-specific circumstances may prompt governance participants to prioritize certain aspects of legitimacy over others. Moreover, as we explore in the next section, while legitimacy is always anchored in normative understandings, these underpinnings are not static. Indeed, different logics of legitimacy often uncomfortably coexist. For example, although it does not quite fit into the liberal democratic narrative that dominates normative discussions of IO legitimacy, great power management remains an important element of global governance, reflecting a normative expectation that powerful countries have extraordinary responsibilities as well as special rights in the international order (Shunji and Buzan 2016). Thus, rather than striving for a fixed ideal, IOs might need to constantly renegotiate their legitimacy in dialogue with their various audiences.

4.2. Sociological Accounts: Contestation

The previous sections have aimed to provide a normative assessment of IO legitimacy across issue areas. Building on this assessment – and informed by the qualitative second part of the



GLOBE expert survey – the following two sections explore the sociological consequences of real or perceived IO legitimacy deficits. While global governance has always been a site of contestation, over recent decades, IOs have faced increasing pressure from both state and non-state actors (Fioretus and Tallberg 2021). The drivers for this are manifold, from changing global power dynamics (Stephen 2017) to domestic polarization (Hooghe et al. 2019) to disillusionment with post-Cold War liberal democratic ideals (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). On a deeper level, as global governance institutions have become more authoritative and involved in an ever-more complex menu of tasks, they appear to have outgrown their legitimation basis (Zürn 2018). Against this general background, however, strategic attempts to de- or relegitimize specific IOs play out differently across issue areas. While some IOs have been stuck in a legitimacy crisis for decades, others have seen contestation increase more recently, and a few have stayed mostly under the radar. And whereas some IOs have proactively responded to criticism, for instance, by pursuing institutional reform or adapting operational procedures, others have found it difficult or unnecessary to do so.

4.2.1. Manifestation of Contestation across GLOBE Issue Areas

This section provides a brief overview of the landscape of contestation faced by the IOs included in the GLOBE expert survey. Not surprisingly, the evaluation of the qualitative survey results suggests that IOs that deal with issues of high political salience face more acute legitimacy challenges, in particular if they include institutionalized mechanisms that privilege some state parties over others. The latter include the UNSC and the World Bank, both of which have highly contested decision-making structures. The WTO has also long been subject to intense delegitimation efforts, with public protests against trade liberalization in the late 1990s often seen as the “birth of the anti-globalisation movement” (Ismail 2019). The UNHCR has experienced growing contestation over time, as the scope of its activities has been successively expanded and the political salience of refugee issues has increased. The UNFCCC process has come into the public limelight comparatively recently, reflecting the growing politicization of climate change and the widening gap between global climate targets and political reality. Only the ICSID and the BIS have received comparatively little public, political, and academic attention, although they, too, are not immune to legitimacy challenges. In the case of the **UNSC**, contestation has become chronic, as civil society, middle powers



and smaller state parties from underrepresented regions have grown “increasingly frustrated with the lack of inclusiveness and excessive influence of the P5” (Survey VI). Discontent with the Council’s decision-making procedures is regularly voiced in evaluative statements made by states in UN General Assembly debates (Binder and Heupel 2015) and it is also evident in the decade-long struggle for UNSC reform. While long-standing, contestation has fluctuated over time, reaching a high point, for example, in the early 2000s, when the “inability of the Security Council to either endorse or prevent military action in Iraq resulted in a crisis of relevance” (Müller 2006, p. vii), and more recently, in light of the Council’s failure to produce consensus responses to the crises in Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and elsewhere. Overall, the UNSC’s output legitimacy has suffered in the context of renewed great power rivalry but also the growing complexity of security concerns it finds itself confronted with. That said, the UNSC appears to still hold political authority in the eyes of states and the global public, reflected, for example, in the intense competition for non-permanent seats (Ekengren et al. 2020) and studies suggesting that domestic constituencies tend to be more supportive of military actions that have been sanctioned by the Council (e.g., Grieco et al. 2011; Tingley and Tomz 2012).

Criticism of the **World Bank** has focused primarily on the disproportionate influence of advanced economies in decision-making structures and their ability to advance preferred policy agendas through loan conditionality. The promotion of neoliberal growth strategies under the so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ – focused on deregulation and fiscal austerity – has come under intense scrutiny in the context of rising income inequality and reduced progress on social indicators. In particular, “the sanctity of the Washington Consensus was seriously damaged by the global financial crisis, casting doubt on the Bank’s legitimacy” (Survey II). Long-standing dissatisfaction with the market-led development approaches, as advanced by the World Bank, has resulted in the emergence of influential alternative models, such as the human development approach (Sen 1999), as well as counter-institutionalization by emerging powers, as illustrated by the establishment of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB), founded by the BRICS states, which has put significant competitive pressure on the World Bank (Dann and Riegner 2019).

As another high-profile economic IO, the **WTO** also faces legitimacy crises at several fronts, making it “one of the publicly most contested international organizations” (Dingwerth 2019,



p. 63). Popular backlash is long-standing, with much of the criticism levelled at the WTO grounded in the perception that trade liberalization is inappropriately prioritized over other values, such as sustainable development, social justice, or environmental protection, and serves primarily the interests of multinational corporations and rich countries (Survey VII). Public protests found their most dramatic expression during the 1999 WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, which had to be abandoned as tens of thousands of anti-globalization activists took to the street (Clarke 2000). Beyond public contestation, state parties have also sought to delegitimize certain WTO practices and institutions. Most consequentially, this has included the United States, which has blocked the appointment of new judges to the Appellate Body since the Trump administration, rendering the WTO dispute resolution mechanism effectively dysfunctional. Notably, despite a change of rhetoric, this position has not been reversed under President Biden (Aarup 2021). Moreover, trade negotiations under the WTO have been deadlocked for over two decades, further undermining the WTO's output legitimacy and shifting the locus of trade policy making to the bilateral and regional level (Rauh and Zürn 2019).

Contestation of the **UNHCR** has intensified in recent years as global refugee protection has become an increasingly urgent and divisive issue. Over the past decade, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide has doubled (UNHCR 2021b). At the same time, the legal and socio-political environment in many host countries, including in Europe, has become more hostile towards refugees (van der Brug and Harteveld 2021). In this context, UNHCR finds itself in an awkward position as it aims to provide explicitly 'non-political' support to an increasingly politicized population, whilst remaining dependent on state support and funding. The adoption of the UNHCR-led Global Compact on Refugees sparked protests and political turmoil in several countries, prompting many to withdraw from the non-binding agreement and, in the case of Belgium, even leading to the collapse of the governing coalition (Guild 2019). Beyond backlash from some refugee-hosting countries, UNHCR has also faced delegitimation challenges coming from vulnerable populations themselves, including closed-file and non-status refugees contesting the terms of their care and protection under the UNHCR regime (Moulin and Nyers 2007). However, as Reichel (2019, p. 231) notes, "the silence of refugee voices in the official legitimization discourse is striking," highlighting how the most directly affected populations often end up being marginalized in debates on global governance legitimacy.



Like refugee protection, climate change has seen increasing politicization in recent years, especially as the scale of changes needed and their wider distributive consequences – both on the global and on the domestic level – have become clearer. Moreover, with global climate governance under the **UNFCCC** bringing together an increasingly broad range of diverse stakeholders, new divisions and conflicts of interest have arisen (Bäckstrand et al. 2021). That said, given the limited autonomy of the UNFCCC secretariat and the non-prescriptive nature of the Convention and the Paris Agreement, recent delegitimization attempts have been directed mostly at specific states, interest groups, and other governance actors rather than the UNFCCC itself. In a multi-country study, Verhaegen et al. 2021 (p. 633) find that, among elites, confidence in the UNFCCC process remains relatively high. However, among climate activists and those most vulnerable to global warming, there is “growing frustration with the slow pace of negotiations and the ineffectiveness of measures agreed” (Survey I), with many wishing for a *more* intrusive global framework (e.g., FoE 2015).

In contrast to the IOs discussed above, the lesser known and more specialized ICSID and BIS have seen lower levels of contestation. Although the settlement of investor-state disputes can have important implications for third parties, including ordinary citizens, the **ICSID** has received comparatively little attention, with a tendency of public debates to frame these disputes “as technocratic disagreements about the objectives and efficacy of regulatory measures” (Bonnita and Williams 2019). Among those more familiar with the institution, the ICSID itself “is relatively respected in its operation” (Survey IV), although – as discussed in section 4.1 – there is a range of concerns over the arbitrators who work under its rules. In a broader context, some states have become more reluctant to embrace investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms, with growing apprehension over potential sovereignty costs (Thompson et al. 2019) and some reform proposals have been put forward that could amount to counter-institutionalization. Notably, the European Commission has advanced proposals for a Multilateral Investment Court (EC 2016) which, if it came to fruition and was administered outside the ICSID, could “eventually rival ICSID for investment arbitration dominance” (Bjorklund and Druzin 2018, p. 749).

Finally, the **BIS** and its committees have managed to stay mostly “below the radar” in debates on global governance legitimacy (Survey II). While the financial crisis of 2008 heightened concerns over the flaws of international regulation of banking and finance (Becker and Linder 2020) and concerns persist over the legitimacy, effectiveness, and patchy implementation of



post-crisis regulatory standards (Lall 2012; Mitchell 2021), the technical complexity of global standards – and a lack of institutional alternatives – makes it difficult for non-experts to contest them.

4.2.2. Institutional Responses

As the previous section has shown, with few exceptions, all IOs under investigation have faced some form of contestation by state and non-state constituencies. In this section, we explore, what kind of institutional responses this has prompted. There are a range of strategies IOs and their supporters can engage in to bolster their perceived legitimacy in the face of criticism and opposition. For instance, IOs can institute meaningful institutional or operational reform, they can step up their public relations and communications efforts, and/or they can implement symbolic changes and enhance discursive commitments to normative legitimacy standards (Zürn 2018; Stephen 2018). In some instances, they may choose to simply ignore delegitimation attempts, whether strategically or as a result of bureaucratic inertia (Hirschmann 2021). The seven IOs discussed here have responded quite differently to the legitimacy challenges they face, with some engaging in more or less sincere reform efforts while others have relied primarily on discursive legitimation claims. Few of these efforts have been unequivocally successful, often confronting IOs with new predicaments, such as the difficulty of reconciling conflicting state and civil society demands. While some IOs enjoy more leeway than others, substantial responses to legitimacy challenges always require the consent of (powerful) states and are thus unlikely to completely upend existing hierarchies.

This observation is especially pertinent in the area of international security, where reform of the heavily contested **UNSC** has proven elusive. This is not for a lack of reform proposals. For example, the so-called G4 nations (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan) have pushed for an expansion of the number of seats on the Council, both permanent and non-permanent, “in order to make it more legitimate, effective and representative” (FFO 2021). However, these and other reform efforts have failed to garner sufficient support from the P5 and the wider UN membership. With substantial reform not on the cards, the Council has implemented more incremental adjustments in response to legitimacy challenges. This has included, for instance, adapting its working methods in a way that allows for more transparency, dialogue, and consultation with non-member states and other stakeholders, creatively interpreting or



ignoring anachronistic provisions in the Charter, discursive reframing of great power politics, and signaling commitment, in principle, to reform (Stephen 2018). While some of these efforts “have not been wholly symbolic,” they have not addressed the main area of contention, namely the exclusive prerogatives of the P5 (ibid, p. 112).

In contrast, the **World Bank** has engaged in various reform efforts since the 1990s, ranging from institutional design changes – e.g., adjustments to the weighted voting system – to ideological and operative shifts. Recognizant of the limits of purely ‘neoliberal’ development approaches, the Bank has softened its position on the role of the state in economic and social development, “allowing recipient states greater regulatory leeway and not forcing as many governance structural reforms as a condition for loans and grants” (Survey II). The World Bank has also engaged in active ‘rebranding,’ from seeking to establish itself as the world’s ‘Knowledge Bank,’ initiated in the mid-1990s (Enns 2014), to more recent efforts to frame itself as an explicitly *multilateral* institution (Development Committee 2010). While these shifts have not been insubstantial, critics maintain that they have changed little in practice. For example, the voting system reform has been shown to only marginally enhance the voice of low-income countries within the Bank (Vestergaard and Wade 2015; Strand and Retzl 2016) and some observers maintain that “[c]ontrary to the rhetoric, conditionalities continue to advance a neoliberal conception of economic development” (Thomson et al. 2017, p. 4).

In contrast to the World Bank, the **WTO** has not engaged in institutional reform, although it found itself compelled to respond to a variety of concerns raised by civil society actors in the aftermath of the 1999 ‘Battle of Seattle.’ One line of criticism, focused on democratic deficits and concerns that WTO rules unduly restrict national sovereignty, has been empathetically rejected by the WTO and its supporters (Dingwerth 2019). Indeed, pointing to the principle of consensus as the basis for all major decision-making, former WTO Director General Mike Moore referred to the organization as “the most democratic international body in existence today” (Moore 2002). This logic has also been extended to the dispute settlement system. In a post-Seattle ‘fact-checking’ feature on its website, the WTO contests claims that its dispute settlement undermines national sovereignty, given that “rulings are based on agreements that all parties in a dispute have agreed to” and neither initiated nor enforced by the WTO itself (WTO n.d.b). Another line of criticism relates to concerns over a lack of sensitivity to ‘non-trade values’ such as environmental sustainability or labor rights. While the WTO has, in principle accepted “these new values as a part of its legitimation basis,” the degree to which



non-trade related goals should be pursued within the WTO itself, remains highly contested (Dingwerth 2019). Overall, the WTO's (re-)legitimation approach, based on emphasizing its democratic underpinnings and selectively engaging with other concerns, have allowed to avoid substantial reform but also contributed to further stagnation of negotiations, thereby affecting WTO output legitimacy.

The **UNHCR**, uncomfortably positioned between the need to serve the interests of states and the need to promote the rights of refugees, has engaged in several (re-)legitimation strategies. This has included discursive shifts, such as an "increasing rhetorical emphasis on individuals as the primary beneficiaries of [its] activities" (Reichel 2019, p. 196). The UNHCR has also sought to enhance its public profile by stepping up its marketing and communications efforts and enlisting the support of high-profile celebrities (Crisp 2020). In parallel, it has embarked on managerial reforms, focused on enhancing effectiveness and financial accountability, aimed primarily at boosting state (and especially donor) support. Overall, the UNHCR has been quite successful at 'normalizing' the informal extension of its legal mandate and effectively separating engagement with its various audiences, although it has not been able to resolve the underlying tensions and competing demands that have arisen from the successive expansion of its activities (Reichel 2019).

In the case of the **UNFCCC**, the most successful re-legitimation effort took place in the aftermath of the 2009 Copenhagen Summit, which had undermined trust in the negotiation process both in terms of procedure (transparency and participation) and outcome (delivering a new treaty). At the 2010 COP, the Mexican presidency explicitly vowed to enable an "open, inclusive and transparent" negotiation process and largely succeeded to rebuild trust (Monheim 2016). Following the adoption of the Paris Agreement, UNFCCC (output) legitimacy reached a new height. However, with accelerating global warming and limited progress at recent COPs, confidence in the UNFCCC process is waning again. It is important to stress, though, that the UNFCCC itself has very limited agency in the state-led negotiation process. One area in which the UNFCCC as an institution has been able to engage in strategic legitimation efforts is the orchestration of non-state action (Saerbeck et al. 2020). However, while this has arguably enhanced the relevance of the UNFCCC in an increasingly polycentric governance context, it has also opened up new legitimacy challenges regarding power imbalances and equal representation, with orchestrated initiatives dominated by businesses and cities from the Global North (Bäckstrand and Kuyper 2017; Thew et al. 2021).



ICSID has demonstrated credible commitment to reform. Since its establishment, it has engaged in several rounds of amendments to its rules and regulations, many of which have sought to increase the openness and transparency of proceedings. Another extensive revision is currently underway, with proposed changes including commitments to greater transparency and broader access as well as the mandatory disclosure third-party funding received by parties (ICSID 2021a). ICSID has also recently collaborated with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) on a Code of Conduct for ISDS arbitrators, aimed at ensuring that proceedings are conducted in a fair and impartial manner – although this is arguably more a case of symbolic reform (Schaugg 2021). Finally, ICSID has discursively committed to enhancing diversity. ICSID has self-reported “sustained progress in enhancing diversity of arbitrators, conciliators and ad hoc committee members,” (ICSID 2021b, p. 20), although a closer look at the statistics suggests that, despite notable progress, the pool of arbitrators is still overwhelmingly white and male (ICSID 2021c)

Finally, the **BIS** has largely been able to ignore challenges to its legitimacy. While its membership has expanded significantly over time – making it a somewhat less exclusive club – much of its work is still guided the agendas of its founding members (Levi-Faur and Blumsack 2020). As Westermeier (2018, p. 178) finds, the BIS is deliberately presenting itself as a non-political institutions, with staff seeing and presenting themselves, first and foremost, “as providers of technical and evidence-based expertise.” As such, legitimacy-enhancing changes have focused primarily on output, including efforts to respond to accelerating technological innovation in finance and banking (BIS n.d.).

5. Conclusion

This report has sought to shed light on the current state of IO legitimacy across all major issue areas included in the GLOBE project. Drawing on the combined expertise of GLOBE team members, it has explored two distinct but related dimensions of legitimacy, namely, the degree to which IOs live up to normative expectations – specifically those related to participation and equitable representation, transparency, accountability, and quality of output – as well as the way in which contestation of perceived legitimacy deficits plays out in an increasingly politicized landscape. As such, it has responded to a gap in the existing research on global governance legitimacy, with few existing studies empirically reviewing both normative and sociological aspects of legitimacy across a range of diverse issue areas.



Above all, this review has highlighted that assessing the legitimacy of IOs, whether from a normative or from a sociological perspective, is fraught with definitional and methodological difficulties. From a **normative** perspective, IOs find themselves in need to respond to a growing array of expectations, as attention has increasingly shifted to the input and throughput aspects of institutional legitimacy. Many of these expectations are rooted in liberal democratic norms that first emerged in domestic contexts and their application to the global level is far from uncontested or straightforward, sometimes creating conflicting or confusing expectations (Krisch 2006). For example, as noted above, many IOs are highly accountable to member states but much less responsive to concerns voiced by the globally governed. Similarly, what exactly constitutes ‘inclusive’ civil society participation or ‘equal’ state representation is open to interpretation. Moreover, while attending to different normative demands promises to deliver synergetic progress in some cases, in others, IOs might be compelled to prioritize certain aspects of legitimacy over others, especially where gains in input and throughput legitimacy threaten to compromise their ability to deliver effective outcomes. At the same time, valid concerns over output legitimacy could easily be exploited by powerful states in an effort to stall reform efforts in other areas.

Overall, IOs seeking to enhance their normative legitimacy are confronted with several dilemmas, resulting from (1) incongruences of the different constituencies they serve (e.g., states and the ‘global public’), (2) incongruences between the different normative expectations directed at them, (3) and, of course, the fact that any reform must be sanctioned by states, in particular powerful states who often have a stake in status quo arrangements. Nevertheless, survey results suggest that many IOs have managed to improve compatibility with democratic norms, such as participation and equal representation, transparency, and accountability. However, as has also been highlighted in this report, some reform efforts appear more genuine on paper than in reality and are geared primarily towards ‘check-list’ compliance with good governance standards. Thus, a key question for further research is whether such ‘fig leaf’ improvements lock in normatively problematic path dependencies or whether they might still deliver tangible legitimacy benefits.

In some ways, **sociological** accounts of IO legitimacy promise to deliver an empirically cleaner picture, since perceived legitimacy can be coded and observed on the basis of evaluative statements and/or surveys. However, as noted in Section 2.2., here too, several methodological challenges raise their heads. Moreover, most of the available data is unlikely



to tell us much about the everyday life of the most vulnerable globally governed, such as displaced populations, who often have little opportunity to engage in discursive evaluations of IO legitimacy (Weiss and Wilkinson 2018). For our purposes, we have focused on providing a comparative overview, guided by qualitative survey responses, of how legitimacy conflicts play out across different issue areas. We find that, with few exceptions, contestation of IO legitimacy has increased across the board. However, we also observe varying levels of contestation intensity, which appear to correlate roughly with the degree of authority exercised by IOs and issue area salience, supporting previous research findings that have highlighted the need to explore the nexus between IO authority and perceived legitimacy (Tallberg and Zürn 2019).

Finally, we have also provided a brief comparison of the different (re-)legitimation strategies that IOs have adopted in response to growing contestation. We find significant differences across issue areas, with some engaging in far-reaching reform while others rely primarily on the above-mentioned ‘fig leaf’ approaches or discursive legitimation efforts. In a constantly evolving contestation landscape, few of these strategies have been unequivocally successful. IOs increasingly find themselves having to cater simultaneously to different audiences, including member states, civil society organizations and other non-state groups, as well as ordinary citizens. As such, IO legitimacy can best be understood as ongoing process rather than a finite state.



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Appendix

Appendix I: GLOBE IO Legitimacy Questionnaire

This is a template of the survey that was distributed to GLOBE work package leaders.

Conceptualizing Legitimacy in Global Governance

A distinction is commonly made between normative and sociological conceptualizations of legitimacy. Normative approaches are concerned with the general principles that underpin the right to exercise power on the global level, often derived from domestic democratic standards, whereas sociological approaches are primarily interested in the empirical study of legitimacy beliefs held by the various audiences (e.g. elites, citizens, transnational observers) of global governance institutions. While these conceptions of legitimacy are analytically distinct, they are not unrelated, given that legitimacy beliefs are usually grounded in normative expectations regarding procedure (*input*) and performance (*output*) of authority-wielding institutions. For this reason, this survey focuses on both, the normative standards that may enhance the legitimacy of international organizations (IOs) and the processes of legitimization and delegitimization that shape legitimacy beliefs about these IOs.

Normative Accounts of IO Legitimacy

A central concern of the literature on legitimacy in international relations, international law, and related disciplines has been whether and to which degree domestic democratic principles can be extended to the international realm. The primary logics of legitimacy that have traditionally underpinned global governance, namely state consent and output legitimacy, have become increasingly overwhelmed in light of the growing scope, reach, and diversity of global regulation and the need to address ever more complex problems. In the absence of a global polity, much attention has centered on procedural standards and mechanisms that promise to enhance the democratic legitimacy of IOs and other global governance institutions, including:

- **Transparency:** The degree to which timely and relevant information about the IO's activities and intentions is easily accessible and understandable to outsiders.
- **Participation and equitable representation:** The degree to which relevant stakeholders (state and non-state) are able to influence the development, adoption, and implementation of IO decisions that affect them.
- **Accountability:** The degree to which stakeholders are able to contest decisions and hold the IO to account, for example through review, evaluation, and complaint mechanisms or reporting obligations.

Sociological Accounts of IO Legitimacy

Sociological accounts of global governance legitimacy have sought to explore and explain how IOs are perceived by their various audiences and constituencies. A central



question is whether an IO's authority is seen to be "appropriately exercised" (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, p. 581). Scholars are also interested in how such beliefs are shaped through processes of **legitimation** and **delegitimizing**, that is, how various global governance participants strategically seek to establish, maintain, enhance, or undermine the legitimacy of supranational institutions. Over the past two decades, many IOs have been subject to increasing contestation by states and non-state actors – manifest, for example, in societal backlash and efforts by rising powers to challenge post-war institutions. IOs and their proponents have sought to respond in various ways, and with varying success, to these challenges, including by pursuing reform and/or by employing "the language of democracy" to defend legitimacy claims (Dingwerth, Schmidtke and Weise 2020).

Before you begin the survey, please specify your issue area:

- Climate change
- Development
- Finance
- Investment
- Migration
- Security
- Trade

Please identify the IO that you consider most authoritative in your issue area:

The questions below all refer to this IO. However, please feel free to provide additional comments on other relevant IOs and global governance mechanisms in your issue area.

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, how is the IO performing with regard to **transparency** (1 = very poor; 10 = very well)? Choose an item.

Additional comments:

2. On a scale from 1 to 10, how is the IO performing with regard to **participation** (1 = very poor; 10 = very well)? Choose an item.

Additional comments (e.g. is the main concern equitable representation of member states or participation of other stakeholders, including non-state actors?):



3. On a scale from 1 to 10, how is the IO performing with regard to **accountability** (1 = very poor; 10 = very well)? Choose an item.

Additional comments (e.g. are there any specific complaint or review mechanisms or other ways through which the IO must justify the exercise of its authority?):

4. On a scale from 1 to 10, how is the IO performing with regard to **output legitimacy**, i.e. effectiveness and fairness of policy outcomes (1 = very poor; 10 = very well)? Choose an item.

Additional comments:

5. Of the procedural principles above (transparency, participation, and accountability), which one do you consider most salient in discussions on the IO's legitimacy?

6. How does the IO's performance affect discussions on legitimacy?

7. How contested is the legitimacy of the IO (if you are aware of any surveys/studies, please feel free to provide links)? Are there any strategic attempts to delegitimize it?

8. How has the IO (or its proponents) sought to (re-)legitimize itself? How effective have these attempts been?

9. If you have any recommended readings/secondary sources relating to legitimacy challenges in your issue area, please list them here:



