

REPORT

Shortcomings of the current governance and institutional models

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1. Introduction

The idea that international governance is facing greater challenges in recent years has firmly taken hold¹. As one scholar puts it: “Each week seems to bring bad news for international cooperation” (Gray 2018). Others agree: “There is broad recognition that international governance is under stress” (Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b, 732). Indeed, much of the recent discourse on intergovernmental cooperation has been characterized by considerable pessimism, without regard to whether this discourse arises within academic, policymaking or societal circles. This also came to the fore in the COVID-19 pandemic when the World Health Organization (WHO) received a lot of criticism. Critics have questioned the WHO’s standing and legitimacy as the leading global health organization.²

Recent literature has grappled with the reasons for what appears to be a growing problem of global governance. The idea that there is a “gridlock” at the multilateral level, as described by Hale, Held and Young (2013), has only been reinforced by increasing polarization, contestation and tension between states. Emblematic of this gridlock is the increasing perception that treaty-based intergovernmental organizations (IOs) – as the traditional and most formal forms of inter-state cooperation and often the principal leaders of global governance – are stagnating, are ceding authority to other actors, or are ill-equipped to fulfill their own mandates. Though global governance is increasingly conducted through a variety of formal and informal institutions and processes and at multiple levels, IOs nevertheless retain an important role as orchestrators (Abbott and Snidal 2009), norm-setters or producers (or synthesizers) of knowledge. While research by Hooghe et al. (2017) had shown that, counterintuitively, the authority of IOs seemed to have increased from the post-war period until 2010, a recent extension of this data through 2019³ showed that their authority has flattened in the last decade. It seems that, more than ever, IOs are suffering from structural shortcomings or challenges that handicap their ability to achieve global governance goals. Understanding these shortcomings enables us to reflect on the potential role of IOs in the future.

There is a growing consensus that the challenges/shortcomings have become more detrimental in recent years (Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b) due to changes in the geopolitical context in which IOs have to operate. These shortcomings have serious implications for an IO’s ability to meet its governance goals, namely an IO’s authority, legitimacy and performance. However, although the literature presents a great variety of potential explanations for why IOs appear to be under pressure or are experiencing decline, a vast majority of the challenges put forth in recent years take the shape of external dynamics that relate to

¹ See, for example, Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Cohen 2018; Hallaert 2020.

² For an overview see Peter, M., et. al. (2020) ‘The WHO, the global governance of health and pandemic politics’, Educational Philosophy and Theory, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2020.1806187.

³ This data extension of the Measuring International Authority database carried out by Tobias Lenz and Yoram Haftel in 2020.



but are ultimately beyond the control of IOs and their member states, such as the rise of multipolarity and recent manifestations of nationalism and populism in domestic politics; and the emergence, proliferation and growth of many other global governance institutions which provide alternatives to pursue international affairs. All these external pressures affect an IOs ability to meet its governance goals especially since their mandates, internal governance process and resources are not fully able to accommodate the changes in the external environment. Many IOs were established in a very different world order. Their design, set of procedures and modus operandus were aligned with that external environment. Much of the classical organizational sociological research shows that organizations can only perform if they 'fit' with their external environment. When the external environment changes, many organizations face difficulties in adjusting. The importance of alignment and institutional fit with the external environment was recently recognized in the global governance literature by Abbott, Green and Keohane (2016). This misalignment is probably one of the reasons why we observe similar institutional shortcomings across IOs and issue-areas. Identifying and discussing these similarities are the focus of this paper.

In order to identify these shortcomings we conduct a meta-analysis of the GLOBE mapping papers. A series of mapping exercises carried out 2019 as part of the Horizon 2020 project 'Global Governance and the European Union: Future Trends and Scenarios' (GLOBE) provide a snapshot of the global governance regimes of five issue areas: trade, development, security, finance and climate change. These papers identified many of the primary challenges – both internal, institutional challenges and challenges arising from external dynamics – facing the great variety of global governance institutions, including IOs, in achieving their governance goals. While not exhaustive in terms of either the institutions considered or the challenges they face, these papers present what are widely regarded as the most pressing challenges and shortcomings faced by the leading governance institutions in each field. This paper uses these mapping papers as a primary source to identify some of the key shortcomings of IOs and compares these shortcomings across issue areas. Shortcomings in this paper are defined as structural deficiencies which inhibit IOs to reach global governance objectives or address global challenges.

The paper proposes to take stock of the existing shortcomings related to the institutional features of IOs that prevent them from achieving their governance goals by comparing the institutional challenges presented in the mapping papers, and reframing them by making IOs' institutional features the analytical unit of focus. We are primarily concerned with shortcomings that are similar across multiple issue areas, leading us to leave aside – for this paper – various challenges and dynamics that are unique to a particular issue area or which occur within a specific IO, such as internal political dynamics. Certain common shortcomings are observed across the five issue areas, which we grouped into three primary institutional shortcomings faced by IOs : (1) IOs face difficulties balancing the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders and members due to inappropriate decision-making rules or inflexibility of governance structures; (2) IOs'



mandate hampers action and policy autonomy; (3) IOs lack sufficient resources to fulfil their functions, primarily due to lack of support from their member states. Combined, these shortcomings create increased inertia (Shanks, Jacobson, and Kaplan 1996) within IOs making it difficult for them to achieve their governance goals in a changed context. The identified shortcomings have real-life implications and we illustrate this in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of the WHO to the global health crisis.

This paper proceeds as follows. A first section states the stage by engaging with recent international theory on the role and functioning of IOs in global politics. In section 4, we describe the process by which we determined the cross-cutting challenges for IOs engaged in the global governance of five different issue areas of the GLOBE mapping exercise – trade, development, security, finance, and climate change – which we then present in turn. For each challenge, we provide issue-specific examples and assess these in light of existing literature. In the fifth section, we consider the case of the WHO, in light of the shortcomings distilled from our analysis. A conclusion follows. Ultimately, this research will set the stage for future GLOBE Deliverables (namely, D8.2 – D8.4), which will explore the potential for meeting these challenges through alternative forms of governance.

2. Setting the Scene: International Organizations in Global Politics

Whereas two decades ago, Susan Strange (1998) famously asked why “international organizations never die” and functionalist approaches to international relations tend to take for granted that IOs will do their jobs (Lall 2017), recent scholarship has increasingly focused on the stagnation and deaths of international organizations (Gray 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2018; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b; Hale, Held, and Young 2013; Cohen 2018), the mounting challenges to IOs’ capacity to govern, and the variation among IOs’ performance (Lall 2017). This body of literature offers a variety of factors responsible for undermining the ability of IOs to meet their governance goals – some of which have appeared only in recent years, but many of which have been well-documented since the earliest years of international cooperation. A considerable body of research addresses the challenges faced by IOs and broader challenges in the use of institutions for multilateral cooperation. Scholarship on the purpose and design of international institutions in international cooperation – especially international organizations – spans decades. In more recent years, the existence of international organizations has been taken for granted and research has focused on questions of their legitimacy and authority. Still more recently, some rather limited attention has been paid to their performance and efficacy. Additionally, over the past few years, many scholars have focused on the impacts on IOs resulting from geopolitical global power shifts – especially declining U.S. hegemony, the rise of China and multipolarity – and global political trends of populism and nationalism.



Because the goal of this paper is to understand the shortcomings for IO's in achieving their governance goals, we make a number of assumptions. A first set of assumptions relate to the hybrid nature of IOs – at once partly autonomous and partly beholden to the interests of member states – and the conditions through which IOs are established and evolve over time. We assume IO's are set up by states to solve a global problem that is assumed to be solvable through cooperation, and that states enter into agreements with the expectation of mutual gains. However, we also assume that although states design institutions rationally (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001), they do so with imperfect knowledge about *inter alia* future events, each-others' preferences, and even the full extent of the problem or governance context (i.e. bounded rationality) and that international agreements (including those that establish international organizations) are the outcomes of bargaining and ultimately represent a compromise. Furthermore, we assume that once established, IOs develop agency and socialization independent of that of their member states (Guzman 2013), and that the interactions between member states and international organizations can have significant implications for governance processes. In other words, international organizations as both independent governance actors and as instruments for member states can and do achieve governance objectives, but because they are not perfect, the extent to which they are able to do so varies considerably and there is often room and cause for reform. Finally, we also assume that path dependency and institutional design choices limit IOs' ability to reform, and change is therefore slow and rarely substantial. The latter is illustrated by many reform initiatives by IOs which often lead to no or limited change.

A second set of assumptions relate to the changing governance context in which IOs operate. Though recent scholarship has assessed the challenges to IOs resulting from geopolitical changes – with some wondering if multilateralism can withstand a shift to multipolarity (Cohen 2018) – we assume here that the “global order” has never been static and geopolitical evolution must be assumed. Along similar lines, we assume that member states will attempt to pursue their own political interests through IOs, and that although the interests will change considerably over time, this aspect of member states' interaction with IOs must be seen as a constant. We also assume that – due to developments such as globalization and increased economic interdependency, urgent global threats like climate change, and global power shifts – global governance problems have gotten harder (Hale, Held, and Young 2013). Hence, with these dynamics as our starting point, we do not treat them as challenges in and of themselves, but rather look to understand the institutional shortcomings of IOs that reduce their capacity to effectively handle and respond to such dynamics. With our goal of understanding how and why IOs fall short in reaching their governance goals, the context in which IOs operate is relevant in so far as it exacerbates or creates institutional challenges, but is not the analytical focus of this paper.



Along these lines, we also take as a starting point that the state and formal, state-led international organizations, while important, are not the only institutions engaged in global governance; rather, global governance is increasingly conducted by a variety of institutions and actors at multiple levels, including non-governmental organizations, transnational networks and private actors in addition to the state and state-led institutions. A basic tenet of global governance scholarship is that new forms of governance have arisen, in large part to fill in various gaps of more traditional forms of intergovernmentalism led by IOs (see, for a classic example, Abbott and Snidal 2009), and that global governance takes place within governance regime complexes. These governance regime complexes differ between issue areas, with some more hierarchical and featuring stronger oversight and coordination from a leading (set of) institution(s), while others are flatter with loose interlinkages among relatively independent institutions (Alter and Raustiala 2018; Keohane and Victor 2011). The resulting interactions – occurring among institutions and actors with often differing approaches and objectives – may have a variety of effects that can both facilitate and hinder the achievement of certain governance goals, and which may or may not fill the lacunae of traditional intergovernmentalism. These interactions are likely to introduce new pressures and alter the external conditions within which IOs operate.

Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on the leading IOs and their institutional shortcomings in order to identify the shortcomings that appear across issue areas in order to gain a more thorough understanding of which structural aspects of IOs may be preventing them from meeting the new and harder challenges posed by today's evolving governance context. Through this, we hope to identify the areas in which reform may be possible as well as uncover the gaps that are unlikely to be filled through institutional reform. Identifying these more persistent governance challenges within traditional international organizations – especially as new players enter the governance field – will set the stage for the next deliverables of the GLOBE project that will assess a variety of new or alternative forms of governance and whether they may address these challenges.

Variable Institutional Dynamics

When establishing or reforming an IO, states negotiate decisions on a number of institutional features that ultimately have consequences for the way in which an IO is able to fulfil its purpose(s), including the features identified by Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal (2001) in what is now a classic work on institutional design: membership rules, scope of mandate, centralization of tasks, rules for controlling the institution, and flexibility of arrangements. Practical decisions, too, like an IOs budget, headquarters and management (see Lall 2017; Gray 2018), are a product of negotiation. Other institutional features, like an organization's culture and development of shared norms (Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019a), are partly a product of these decisions but also develop organically. Moreover, many institutional features of IOs evolve over time and IOs – to varying degrees – make autonomous decisions that impact their institutional dynamics (Gutner



and Thompson 2010; Gray 2018). How states decide to set up an institution and how states and the IOs themselves respond to changing conditions have an impact on an organization's legitimacy, authority and performance and the individual institutional make-up of IOs will in large part determine whether an IO is able to meet its governance objectives.

3. Authority, Legitimacy and Performance

Much of the discussion surrounding the shortcomings are considered ultimately to influence an IOs authority, legitimacy, and/or performance which in turn affect their ability to reach their governance goals. We briefly consider each of these concepts in turn, before we turn to our findings on the institutional shortcomings that are likely to impinge upon these conditions in the following section.

Authority

The ability of an international organization to gain compliance with the rules it sets is critical for its ability to meet its goals and is reflective of the authority it possesses (see Zürn 2018, chapter 2, for a discussion of different conceptions of authority in global governance). We utilize the definition put forth by Tallberg and Zürn and suggest that an IO has authority when it has “a recognized institutional competence to make binding decisions or interpretations in the name of the collective interest” (2019, 591). Moreover, following Zürn (2018), we understand the authority of IOs to be reflexive – member states jointly grant authority to IOs, even accepting at times decisions that are against their own interest, in order to allow IOs to fulfill their governance goals (seen to be the common good), but do not do so passively or permanently. Instead, member states monitor IOs, continuously evaluating the authority relationship. Thus, there is an ever-present potential for “instability and contestation” (Zürn 2018, 45).

The extent of an IO's authority, and in particular, its political authority (i.e. ability to make binding decisions; see Zürn 2018, p. 51), depends greatly on how the IO is designed. Here the notions of pooling and delegation, as elaborated by Hooghe and Marks (2015) and Lake (2007), are useful. With regard to the former, states often pool authority in an IO by making joint decisions. In this case, each member state is part of the decision-making process and thereby retains some control. With regard to the latter, some IOs have a secretariat or another decision-making sub-body (like a council) that has considerable autonomy and is able to make independent decisions on behalf of all members – this occurs when states (conditionally) delegate authority to the organization as an independent body (Hooghe and Marks 2015, 307).

According to Hooghe et al., the extent of an IOs authority is jointly determined by its autonomy, independence, and “capacity to bind its member states by creating legal obligations” (2017, 13). The third of these – what amounts to an IO's ability to enforce its rules – has long been debated in the literature and is an “essentially contested concept” (Walter Bryce Gallie (1956) ctd. in Hooghe et al. 2017, 8). A member



state always has the option of exit. Even if a state benefits from an international agreement and does not want to dismantle the entire institution, as Cohen puts it, “States know that they can withdraw from, violate, or cheat on the agreement without it falling apart” (Cohen 2018, 60). However, this potential is partly tempered by the “sunk costs” of establishing the IO and the potential damage to a member state’s reputation should it defy an IO’s decision or withdraw its membership (Zürn 2018, 49). The other two – autonomy and independence – relate to an IO’s ability to “make decisions without state control” (Hooghe et al. 2017, 12; see also Zürn 2018, 51). This is particularly important because, as Lall (2017) notes, the incentives that lead states to cooperate to establish an IO are not static, and can be replaced by incentives to pursue national interests after the IO’s establishment. Hence, greater levels of autonomy and independence may contribute to shielding the IO from interference by its members that is counter to the collective interest. However, too much autonomy and independence may simultaneously reduce IO’s responsiveness to its members’ interests, and in turn, be unresponsive to the interests of member states’ citizens.

Legitimacy

An IO’s legitimacy⁴ - the belief and perception that an it has “the right to rule” (Buchanan and Keohane 2006) or the “beliefs of audiences that an IO’s authority is appropriately exercised” (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 583) – is crucial for an IO in achieving its governance goals. An IO must be legitimate in the eyes of its constituents in order to sustain the necessary amount of support and compliance it needs to create and enforce rules. As Buchanan and Keohane put it: “It is not enough that the relevant actors agree that *some* institution is needed; they must agree that *this* institution is worthy of support” (Buchanan and Keohane 2006, 408 original emphasis)

Tallberg and Zürn (2019) note that legitimacy is conceptually distinct, though closely related, to authority, arguing that belief that an IO has authority is different than the belief that an IO’s authority is appropriate. At the international level, an IO’s legitimacy seems to have a two-way relationship with its authority⁵, both “determined by the beliefs and perceptions of audiences about the exercise of authority” (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 586) as well as requisite to the granting and maintaining of authority in a reflexive authority relationship – an IOs member states grant authority on the basis of their beliefs and perception of its legitimacy (Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Buchanan and Keohane 2006).

⁴ For the purposes of this paper, our understanding of legitimacy is sociological (Buchanan and Keohane 2006). We do not purport to take a normative position on whether the practices, decisions or even mandates of IOs are legitimate.

⁵ This authority-legitimacy link may not (directly) hold up at the national level – a study by Anderson, Bernauer and Kachi (2019) finds no correlation between citizens’ average perception of the legitimacy of an IO and changes in the level of an IO’s authority. They do however find a correlation between citizens’ perceptions of an IO’s legitimacy and their assessment of the IO’s procedures and performance quality (Anderson, Bernauer, and Kachi 2019, 663), which other studies have demonstrated to be affected by aspects of an IO’s authority, like autonomy and independence (Lall 2017; Gray 2018).

In democratic societies, both the legitimacy perceptions held by political leaders directly engaging with IOs as well as the citizens who hold these leaders accountable at the ballot box matter. Recognizing the importance of these perceptions of legitimacy, those wishing to contest an IO's perceived right to rule will engage in practices of delegitimation, while those wishing to bolster an IO's perceived right to rule – including the IO itself – will engage in practices of legitimation (Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b). Legitimacy perceptions may be shaped by any number of factors beyond a constituent's belief about an IO's exercise of authority and assessment of its performance, including *inter alia* political ideologies (Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b), individual interests and moral perspectives (Buchanan and Keohane 2006).

Performance

We draw upon Lall (2017) and Tallburg and Zürn (2019) in understanding performance to include not only (1) an IOs' success in achieving its goals, but also (2) its utilization of allotted resources and (3) its responsiveness to its diverse stakeholders (Lall 2017; see also Koppell 2010) / distribution of outcomes (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Including the second and third criteria helps to distinguish between the performance levels of IOs that achieve organizational goals but without adequate attention to distributional effects or IOs that achieve their goals but at excessive costs from those IOs that meet their goals with effective use of resources and an appropriate distribution of gains. Both of these criteria have important implications for an IO's perceived legitimacy and ultimately its authority. Nevertheless, despite considerable variation among IOs with regard to how well they achieve their objectives, utilize allotted resources and respond to the interests of their constituents, the performance of IOs is understudied and variation in performance between IOs is not yet well understood (Lall 2017; Gutner and Thompson 2010).

An IO's performance will be affected greatly by its institutional design – indeed, this is a long-standing and vibrant area of research. An IO's institutional design – its explicit and implicit rules of operating, including its methods of decision-making – will impinge upon its performance in all three aspects, but has additional implications. Even if an IO were to attain a high level of performance on each of the dimensions outlined above, the processes by which the IO achieves this may affect both its legitimacy and authority in various ways (Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Schmidt 2013). For example, an IO's decision-making procedures are very often a significant source of contention: on one hand, IOs often must attempt to strike a balance between ensuring representativeness for all member states and ensuring buy-in and support from the most powerful states (Hallaert 2020; Koppell 2010); on the other, IOs' decision-making procedures often determine how much control is retained by states (Hooghe and Marks 2015; Koppell 2010). However, factors beyond institutional design will also affect an IO's performance, including *inter alia* how its bureaucratic structures evolve over time, how it manages its resources, the development of its organizational culture.



All three concepts – authority, legitimacy and performance – are closely linked. In a reflexive authority relationship, an IO's legitimacy and ability to fulfil its purpose will bear directly on member states' continued acceptance of the IO's decisions and commitment to the organization (i.e. the continued granting of authority). Legitimacy, in turn, is determined both by perceptions of an IO's exercise of authority (Tallberg and Zürn 2019) and whether its performance is thought to be successful (Gutner and Thompson 2010). While IOs can claim a sort of extended – if not fully realized (Moravcsik 2004) – democratic legitimacy through the legitimacy established through the electoral democracies of their state parties (a type of input legitimacy), the accountability chains between IOs and citizens of member states are, at best, convoluted or, worse, missing. Hence, a common criticism of IOs is that they lack democratic legitimacy. This has led to several scholars focusing on IOs' performance and procedure as conduits of legitimacy (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 228; Schmidt 2013; Anderson, Bernauer, and Kachi 2019). Similarly, legitimacy has also been conceived of in terms of the “basis of policy outcomes” (output legitimacy) as well as the “efficacy, accountability and transparency” of governance processes and “inclusiveness and openness to consultation with the people”, or “throughput legitimacy” (Schmidt 2013, 2), which emphasizes the importance of procedures and performance. Both elite and citizen perceptions of legitimacy have implications for IOs' authority, affecting IOs ability to gain compliance with its rules, fend off competitors, and retain the support of states (Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Koppell 2010).

We will refer to these concepts throughout the next section as look to understand the institutional shortcomings of IOs that reduce their capacity to effectively sustain or bolster their authority, legitimacy and performance in order to achieve their governance goals.

4. Institutional Challenges for IOs in Global Governance

4.1 Approach

The GLOBE mapping papers were scoping exercises designed to outline the primary formal and informal institutions engaged in five areas of global governance: trade, development, climate change, security and finance. While the mapping papers vary somewhat in structure and depth, each presented the primary institutions engaged in the global governance of each of the issue areas before elaborating on recent developments and the primary challenges faced by each institution. The mapping papers identified many shortcomings or challenges for the leading IO in a specific issue area. Often these challenges and shortcomings seem specific for the IO under analysis. However, a closer look reveals that we can identify similar shortcomings on a higher level of aggregation. Though the challenges presented by the mapping papers were by no means exhaustive, we do believe that they allow us to identify some of the main shortcomings in IOs across the issue areas.



To arrive at the institutional shortcomings for IOs, we first identified key challenges facing IOs presented in the GLOBE mapping papers. We then arranged similar issues into three key institutional shortcomings: (1) IOs face difficulties balancing the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders and members due to inappropriate decision-making rules or inflexibility of governance structures; (2) IOs' mandates are not compatible with their scope and/or goals; (3) IOs' frequently lack the necessary resources, including funding, staff and access to information.

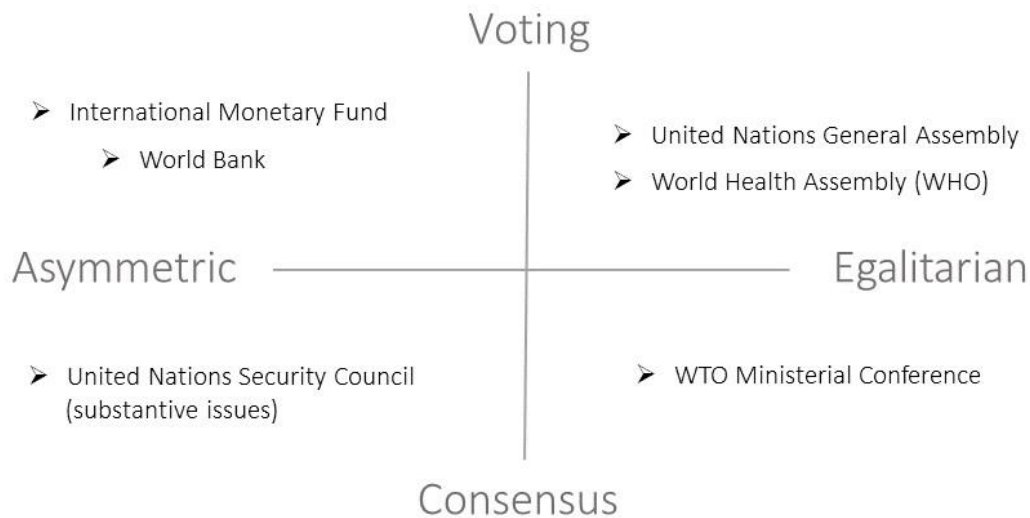
In this section, we identify and elaborate on these three key institutional shortcomings based on the mapping papers. For each, we engage with existing theory on international organizations and institutional design.

4.2 Inflexible decision-making and governance processes

Many of the most common challenges faced by the leading IOs across the five issue areas in our analysis relate to an IO's governance processes, generally embodied in an IO's decision-making procedures. Decision making can be set up in a variety of ways, from giving every member state one vote and making decisions by consensus or requiring unanimity, to majority voting, or to more or less extreme forms of weighted majority voting, whereby some states' votes count more than those of other states. Each of these systems has inherent drawbacks, which will be more or less pronounced depending on other factors, such as number of members or the IO's scope. There are two primary trade-offs (see Figure 1): First, a tension exists between ensuring responsiveness to the greatest number of member states (egalitarian) versus ensuring responsiveness to the most powerful member states (asymmetric). Second, there is a tension between ensuring all states agree on decisions made by the IO (consensus) versus ensuring that decisions are made (voting).



Figure 1: Trade-offs in Decision-Making Rules



Within trade governance, for example, the World Trade Organization (WTO) has failed to reach consensus on the Doha development agenda after nearly 20 years of negotiations. Because the WTO rules are made through consensus, decisions on important rules have been difficult to achieve, due to fundamental divisions between member states regarding core elements of the negotiation agenda, especially with regard to granting “Special and Differential Treatment” to developing countries (Marx et al. 2019). As a result, many member states have sought out bilateral and plurilateral arrangements instead, which, while not necessarily at odds with a multilateral approach, may make it less of a priority for some member states.

While making decisions by consensus may appear to offer the most equal level of representation for all members and appear to grant the IO a certain level of participatory legitimacy (Schneider and Urpelainen 2012), IOs with large memberships may struggle to reach decisions (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001; Lall 2017), as in the case of the WTO. If the IO is able to reach a decision at all, the outcome may not be as robust as some members would like – or the global governance problem at hand calls for – since it will represent a sort of lowest common denominator decision. Additionally, states may have the incentive to use their vote to extract other incentives from other members – as Ngaire Woods aptly puts it: “Even the smallest state can hold the others to ransom” (Woods 1999, 49; see also Schneider and Urpelainen 2012).

On the opposite extreme, some IOs grant greater weight to certain member states’ votes for various reasons. In some cases, an IO grants extra voting privileges (such as veto power or votes with more weight) to a particular member or set of members in order to gain their support (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001) or in light of greater financial contributions. In this case, certain member states’ share of the

weighted votes may not be (perceived to be) commensurate with the member states' perceived or actual contribution to an IO or their increasing importance (Hallaert 2020), or may be rejected by less powerful members as unrepresentative.

For example, in security governance, despite the significant increase in membership to the United Nations, the permanent members - China, France, Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States - of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have not changed since the council's establishment after the second World War. Because Article 27.3 of the UN Charter gives each of the five permanent members a veto right, in practice it "ensures that the system of collective security cannot be used against the P5 or their closest allies" (Sánchez Cobaleda et al. 2019, 31). While this veto right was established to ensure the support of these states due to their importance in the aftermath of the war, the UNSC has long been criticized for its unrepresentative decision-making structures (Sánchez Cobaleda et al. 2019; Hurd 2007). In an analysis of statements made by official representatives of various UN member states during UN General Assembly meetings held between 1991 and 2009, Binder and Heupel (2015) showed that of the negative statements made about the Security Council, 65 percent related to its procedures and were primarily focused on the fact that the UNSC lacked democratic decision making and did not get voice to all those ultimately affected by its decisions.

Similar criticisms are made of the decision-making rules of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) within the governance of finance. Because votes are based on quotas determined by financial contribution and major decisions require a super-majority of 85 percent, the US enjoys an automatic veto due to its share of 16% of votes (Eichengreen and Woods 2016). The composition of the Fund's executive board has also been criticized since only a handful of powerful members (the US, Japan, France, Germany, the UK, Russia, Saudi Arabia and China) have their own representative, while the other members of the fund must share representatives. Though quotas and criteria for board representation are updated every five years, some argue that there was a failure to reweigh quotas in favor of emerging markets and developing countries (fast-growing members of the Fund) during the 15th review (Henning 2020, 1). Importantly, this failure was a result of the US' refusal to increase the quotas of certain members (US Treasury 2019), leading to a situation in which some fast-growing economies are underrepresented within the Fund. Most important decisions are therefore made by the member states through a process that gives disproportionate voice to certain powerful members and which allows these states to shape IMF governance according to their national interests, international monetary and financial system broadly defined" (Eichengreen and Woods 2016, 31). As a result, less powerful members have begun to perceive the institution as illegitimate (ibid).

Within development governance, too, the World Bank's governance structure has been criticized for its decision-making and governance structures, which give excessive power to advanced Western economies



due to a weighted voting system based on financial contributions (Wang 2017; Wouters and Odermatt 2014; Ocampo 2016; Marx et al. 2019). Though the Bank has implemented voting reforms, these have been criticized as being incomplete (Ocampo, 2016; Wouters and Odermatt 2014, Marx et al. 2019) or deliberately misleading (Vestergaard and Wade 2015) – indeed, despite reforms, the “voting power of developing countries has changed very little, and the veto power remains with the US” (Marx et al. 2019, 19). The Bank’s slow and uneven response to some of its stakeholders’ needs – especially developing countries – during and after the 2008 financial crisis (Culpeper, Griffith-Jones, and Titelman 2016) may be indicative of these power imbalances and the limited reach of reforms.

The issue of representativeness and increasing divisions between developed economies on the one hand and emerging and developing economies on the other emerged across issue areas in our analysis. In recent scholarship, too, much attention has been paid to contestation at the multilateral level by emerging powers and developing countries, which has been linked to shifts of global power and the rise of multipolarity (Glaser 2019; Hallaert 2020; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b; Kahler 2013). As noted by Hoogh, Lenz and Marks, “[t]he predominant axis of debate hinges on whether the current international order will be undermined by rising nations as the hegemony of the United States (US) weakens” (Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b, 732). Of particular note has been the inability (or unwillingness) of many IOs to adjust to these changes or to emerging powers’ preferences. This phenomenon is not new: Glaser (2019) makes the case that some states, like China and Russia, never fully embraced the so-called “liberal international order”, within which fall most of the world’s leading international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations (UN), and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Member states that feel they do not have an appropriate level of “voice” within an institution may engage in contestation within the IO, threaten to exit, or establish new (potentially competing) institutions. Writing in 2013, Kahler argued that emerging powers – Brazil, India and China – were unlikely to seek to significantly disrupt the existing international order, explaining that these states were “circumspect in their willingness to assume global leadership roles” and would rather assume a “free-rider” role rather than take on the risk of becoming a major stakeholder in global governance institutions (Kahler 2013, 712). Less than a decade later, we now know that this prediction did not come fully true: China has proven to be eager to take on a leadership role, the clearest example of which is the 2016 establishment of the Asian Infrastructure and Invest Bank (AIIB), which is largely seen as a response to the World Bank’s insufficient attention to the needs of developing countries, especially with regard to infrastructure finance (Wang 2017). Within trade governance, incumbent powers in the WTO see bloc voting by emerging economies (namely, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as a form of contestation, but the other side of the same coin is that emerging powers see resistance to change by member states that benefit from the status quo as a lack of attention to the needs of less powerful member states. In any case, failure to reach an



agreement on the Doha Development Agenda is seen as a major set-back for the organization (Mavroidis 2011; Marx et al. 2019). As Hale, Held, and Young point out, “it is the interplay between emerging multipolarity and institutional inertia that illuminates the current shortfalls and failings of the UN system: namely that dominant powers continue to bolster their interests and resist emerging powers, resulting in deadlock in key negotiations” (228). Overall, dissatisfaction with decision-making rules may be held by both powerful and less powerful states, and is a “prominent driver for delegitimation” among IOs (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 593).

Neither changing domestic political interests nor global power shifts, in and of themselves, will necessarily lead to an IO’s failure to reach its governance goals. However, an IO’s failure to adequately adjust to the changing situation and the evolving needs of its stakeholders is likely to negatively impact its legitimacy, with attendant consequences for its authority and performance. In our analysis, an organization’s inability to reform was most often linked to inadequate decision-making procedures. Indeed, IOs have long been understood to be slow to reform or adjust to changes in global conditions, often going through long period of inertia punctuated by rare and inconsistent moments of quick reform and change (Manulak 2020). Negotiations can be slow and difficult procedures even with a small number of parties – as membership increases, negotiation processes can become increasingly complex and drawn out. Moreover, reforms, when they do materialize, rarely result in substantial or important changes within the IO.

Much of this has to do with path dependency. The initial design of the institution typically privileges the most powerful members at the time of establishment – a trade-off often seen as justified in order to gain the buy-in of a powerful state – and is not designed to be responsive to future shifts of power without damage to the institution (Hale, Held, and Young 2013). Indeed, as Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal pointed out two decades ago, “[i]nstitutions rarely adapt immediately to states’ growing (or ebbing) power” (2001, 762). Importantly, however, the extent to which IO’s internal reform is hampered by path dependency and inflexibility will have much to do with the institutional design choices made at the time of the IO’s establishment, including, and especially, the rules for decision-making described previously. Thus, the design of governance processes that were put in place to respond to the context at the time the IO was created frequently result in slow-paced and limited reform. Though these governance processes are not new for IOs, they may present new and more pressing challenges for an IO as the context within which the IO operates changes (often radically) over time, including the increasing politicization of these governance structures as well as declining support for an IO.

Indeed, IO’s cumbersome and inadequate reform in light of rapidly changing conditions is seen as a major reasons why states increasingly prefer to create an informal intergovernmental organization (Vabulas and Snidal 2013). Though in some cases, such as when it has few competitors, an IO’s inflexibility may not greatly affect its standing; in other cases, such as when other institutions or other forms of global



governance for a particular issue area are available, an IO's rigidity can be a major source of the delegitimation processes that render it obsolete (Lipsky 2017).

4.3 Misaligned Mandate

An IO's mandate was also seen to have considerable bearing on its authority, legitimacy and performance across the issues areas in our analysis. For clarity, here we refer to an IO's mandate as the activities and functions it has been granted the authority to carry out, including the degree of independence with which it is able to make decisions and set the agenda.

An IO's mandate may be too narrow and therefore not allow an IO to undertake the all of the necessary activities to meet its governance goals nor grant the IO enough independence to resist member state influence or flexibly respond to changing global conditions. On the other hand, it might be seen as too broad, giving rise to questions of its legitimacy or an inability to meet performance targets, particularly when it lacks the means to meet its mandate (Lawrence 2008; Heldt and Schmidtke 2017).

In climate change governance, inadequate mandates have been a significant challenge for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC). The mandates of all three IOs are narrow and/or vague, significantly reducing their scope of action and independence. The mandate of the UNFCCC secretariat, which limits the body's role to that of negotiation facilitator and information hub, is thought to be purposively narrow and "a reflection of the politically sensitive nature of the climate change regime" in that it preserves the autonomy of states (Coen, Kreienkamp, and Pegram 2019, 22). In fact, the proliferation of private actors in certain areas of climate governance has been attributed to the weakness of the UNFCCC secretariat (Coen, Kreienkamp and Pegram 2019). Similarly, despite its intended purpose of being a leading international authority in environmental governance, the UNEP is criticized for its vague and weak mandate that does not grant the body sufficient competences to meet its governance goals (ibid). With regard to the IPCC, Coen, Kreienkamp and Pegram note that the organization's design as a bridge between scientists and policy makers has reduced its role to one that is "purely advisory, and not focused on producing original science" (Coen, Kreienkamp, and Pegram 2019, 24). The IPCC does not carry out independent research and its outputs require approval from member state governments, which prevents the IO from producing politically unpopular outputs and severely limits its ability to generate useful knowledge or suggest necessary, politically unpopular, policy (Haas and Stevens 2011, ctd. in Coen, Kreienkamp, and Pegram 2019), thereby considerably undermining its policy autonomy and authority.

Indeed, as is pointed out in the literature, some IO's mandates are designed to be deliberately narrow – states often and deliberately avoid granting too much authority or too expansive of a mandate in order to



ensure the IO's future activities and decisions will not encroach upon the member states' sovereignty (Guzman 2013). However, our analysis showed that IOs across issue areas frequently engage in activities beyond those articulated in their mandates. This finding has been confirmed in the broader literature. As Guzman and others have pointed out, overtime IOs rarely stick within the confines their mandate but rather expand their missions and take on new activities – a process sometimes referred to as “mission creep”. This too can undermine an IOs legitimacy, though in some cases it may be seen as necessary for responding to evolving global contexts.

In the intersection of finance and development governance, for example, the World Bank and the IMF have been criticized as suffering from legitimacy deficits for having acquired too many competences beyond their original mandates, without a sufficient parallel reform of decision-making procedures. As Stiglitz explains with regard to the IMF: “Given the wide impact of IMF programs and the steady expansion of its operations into the areas of development and poverty alleviation, it does not seem appropriate that the IMF should just reflect the views of representatives from finance ministries and central banks. The views of development and planning ministries should be better integrated” (Stiglitz 2011, 208). Similarly, in security governance, NATO is regularly accused of exceeding its mandate, leading its critics to argue that the organization has “outlived its purpose” (Sánchez Cobaleda et al. 2019, 45).

Often, however, the perception that an IO is overstepping its mandate does not stop at criticism. Our analysis demonstrated that cases of perceived overreach often result in a form of reprisal that may further impede an IO in carrying out its activities. For example, in trade governance, the US increasingly finds its interests to be at odds with WTO rules and the decisions of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism, the Appellate Body (AB) (Marx et al. 2019), which it has accused of overstepping its mandate by engaging in “judicial overreach” (Ihara 2018). As a result, the member state has unilaterally sought to undermine the WTO by blocking appointments and renewals of AB members and thereby bringing the dispute settlement system to a halt (Marx et al. 2019), disrupting the performance and authority of the IO.

A similar situation can be observed within security governance. The UNSC was perceived by many of its own members to be overstepping its mandate related to “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) set by Resolution 1973 when special forces were deployed on the ground in Libya in order to prevent mass killings after peaceful options failed, leading to perceptions of illegitimacy and the accusation that the R2P might be used as “Trojan horse for Western interventionism” (Sánchez Cobaleda et al. 2019, 32-33). As a result, some members, namely Russia and China, blocked the decisions that would have given the UNSC the mandate to take meaningful action to protect Syrian civilians when the Syrian conflict broke out (ibid), leading to the UNSC's inability to meet its governance goals.



Additionally, in the governance of global finance, the perception that the IMF lacks legitimacy (see section 4.2) has led to reluctance of member states to give the IMF secretariat more autonomy in designing programs and selecting strategies for achieving governance goals. This reluctance to grant more autonomy to the IMF secretariat, however, may actually bolster the influence of the more powerful member states. This is because, as we discussed in section 3, we assume, like many others, that IOs have power independent from their member states and are capable of acting for interests that are not necessarily reflective of those of its member states – that is, IOs are, to varying degrees, autonomous (see Barnett and Finnemore 1999 for a classic discussion). The degree to which an IO is autonomous is (at least initially) determined by its mandate and the degree matters: An IO's lack of policy autonomy appears to be a primary cause of poor performance (Lall 2017) and loss of vitality (Gray 2018). An IO that subordinates its mandate in favour of responding to a (set of) member state's interests will suffer from performance, legitimacy and authority deficits – a sufficient degree of independence from member states is seen as a necessary safeguard against undue influence.

This is important due to the “time inconsistency” problem (Lall 2017): when an IO is first established, its rules and legal structure usually represent “equilibrium expectations” (Stone 2011, 12), though these are undoubtedly tipped in favour of the most powerful members. But after establishment, the global context and member states' interests might change and states may seek to influence outcomes in favour of their national interests, even at the expense of the IO's ability to achieve its goals (Lall 2017, 253). An IO's ability to withstand such influence through a sufficient degree of policy autonomy is likely to impact its ability to achieve its goals.

Certain factors seem likely to lead to greater policy autonomy of IOs and their secretariats. Lall (2017) argues that policy autonomy stems from a combination of factors including majoritarian voting decision-making procedures, information asymmetries between the IO (its staff) and member state officials, more numerous and deeper partnerships with ideologically aligned non-state groups such as NGOs, and access to independent funding sources (outside of state contributions). Indeed, how the IO is funded (not just the amount of resources available to an IO) also matters. For example, when an IO is less financially secure – often reliant on voluntary contributions earmarked for specific purposes – it is likely to have fewer permanent staff, which is likely to negatively impact its autonomy and performance (Ege and Bauer 2017). Additionally, many IOs often depend heavily on member state contributions which makes them susceptible to influence by these states to pursue their narrow national interests (Lall 2017).



Therefore, even when an IO has de jure policy autonomy over a given set of activities, this is not always translated into de facto policy autonomy, due to states retaining control over other certain other activities. For example, Lall's (2017) case study on the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization showed that despite being formally granted considerable policy autonomy by the organization's constitution, the FAO is dependent on financial contributions from member states. As a result, powerful member states were able to craft rules in their favour that were ultimately antithetical to the FAO's mandate and governance goals, and attempts by less powerful member states to reform these rules have been met with threats of exit, withholding contributions, and other tactics that have negatively impacted the FAO's ability to meet its goals (Lall 2017, 269–72). As he puts it, the FAO “has made few inroads into the core problem that motivated its creation: the number of undernourished people in the world has barely changed over the past forty years, even as the number of people living in extreme poverty has sharply declined” (Lall 2017, 270–71).

However, as we noted above, when IOs are seen as operating too independently or make decisions that are seen as going beyond their mandate, they may be seen as lacking legitimacy or overstepping their authority. Indeed, as we saw in section three, what little democratic (input) legitimacy IOs have is predicated on the agreements forged or retained by democratically legitimate member state governments (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 228; Schmidt 2013; Anderson, Bernauer, and Kachi 2019). Member states that perceive an IO to overstep its bounds are likely to reduce support for an IO, renegotiate its commitments, threaten withdrawal or engage in another form of contestation.

4.4 Lack of resources

Finally, a lack of resources – including funding, staff, information and feedback from member states – was cited as a major challenge for IOs across issue areas.

Lack of access to both funding and information is a major challenge for both the UNEP and the UNFCCC in climate governance. The UNEP is hampered by severe budget and human resource constraints primarily due to its reliance on voluntary state contributions, which make up 95% of its income (U.N. Environment n.d.). These serious resource limitations have given rise to doubts as to whether the organization is capable of meeting its governance goals (Nanda and Pring 2012; Esty 2009). The UNFCCC, too, despite its position as a leading body in climate change governance, has been affected by the system-wide decrease of US financial support for international cooperation on climate change (Coen, Kreienkamp and Pegram 2019, 22). As a result, the IO is more dependent on funding from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) which is external to the UNFCCC and which is not overseen by any IO (Coen, Kreienkamp, and Pegram 2019). Importantly, state influence on the GEF as well as a lack of “in-house scientific expertise” has limited its capabilities and the facility is seen by some developing countries as



unrepresentative and therefore suffering from a legitimacy deficit (Graham and Thompson 2015, 129), with implications for its independence, as we discussed in the previous section.

An IO's access to resources has obvious and immediate impacts on its ability to function, and by extension, on its performance, legitimacy and authority (Heldt and Schmidtke 2017; Ege and Bauer 2017; Gray 2018). Nevertheless, many IOs "simply lack adequate personnel and resources to perform well" (Gutner and Thompson 2010, 238). The level of expertise and experience of the IO's staff also matters and an IO's ability to provide competitive compensation and attractive career opportunities will have an impact on its ability to attract and retain high-quality staff. Moreover, the ability to attract top staff is not solely dependent on an IO's financial resources. Gray (2018) shows that something as seemingly innocuous as the choice of location for an IO's headquarters is a key determining factor for the quality of IO's permanent staff and the organization's overall vitality. Within the mapping papers, we also noted that choice of headquarters' location away from major policy centers may also give the impression that an IO has been sidelined within the global debate on a particular issue area. For instance, the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, away from the centers of international political activity, have limited the IO's capacity "to assert itself as the central actor in global environmental issues and to attract and retain the most high quality policy staff" (Ivanova 2008, 161). As a result, the UNEP has been marginalized and lacks political support (Coen, Kreienkamp and Pegram 2019).

Moreover, lack of support is likely to be self-perpetuating. In security governance, the lack of financial support from some member states to NATO has led the biggest funder – the US – to reconsider its own support (Sánchez Cobaleda et al. 2019, 44). The US has voiced increasing discontent that some NATO member states – especially European member states – who have not met their commitments to increase their defense budgets, and, accordingly, announced in 2019 that it would reduce US contributions to joint NATO projects (The Guardian 2019). As states limit the resources available to an IO, it is increasingly unable to fulfil its roles and is likely to face further difficulties in garnering sufficient support.

There are several – many of them obvious – reasons why member states would reduce support for an IO. As we saw above in section 4.2, states may choose to reduce their support for IOs over frustration with existing decision-making structures, or may do so due to the imposition of rules that adversely affect them, or because the IO is simply seen to not be doing its job. Even when a member is not meeting its commitments, IOs often lack the enforcement capacity to ensure a member state complies with its own commitments. Additionally, there may be several social factors in play: One member states' lack of (or reduction of) support for an IO may trigger other member states to reconsider their own support, for political or practical reasons, as we just saw in the case of the US' plan to reduce support for NATO. In other cases, a member state may find that it can enjoy the benefits of the membership without making financial commitments (this is commonly referred to as "freeriding").



In addition, an IO's scope, by which we refer to its governance objectives and the issue area(s) within which it operates, can play a major role in the support it is able to garner (and sustain) from its member states. An IO's scope may be broad – covering many issue areas, such as the United Nations – or very narrowly confined to specific topic. Moreover, an IO's issue areas may be technical or specialized, usually engendering less public awareness, or they might be more general and of which citizens are well aware. As the scope of international governance has increased, an increasing number of governance challenges addressed at the international level have political salience at the national level, resulting in the politicization of these issues – and by extension, the IOs engaged in the governance of the issues – by domestic political parties (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2014). This is especially true of issues that are well understood and already politicized at the domestic level. IOs with a more politicized scope are more susceptible to challenges posed by worldwide trends of nationalism and populism, which may result in declining support for these IOs at the international level. In fact, one of the most common arguments in the literature in recent years is that IOs are suffering from a loss of legitimacy due to contestation from increasingly nationalist and populist domestic political parties within member states (Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b; Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019). Eilstrup-Sangiovanni finds that IOs engaged in issue areas that are more politicized at the domestic level, such as security and economic cooperation, are less able to endure long-term than those with more technical and less-politicized scope (2018, 363). Though domestic populist or nationalist backlash does not always lead to a country withdrawing from an IO (though it sometimes does), it can nevertheless result in other challenges resulting from a member state's declining support for the IO, such as a member state's reduction of its financial contribution, with ramifications for an IO's performance and authority, or when a member state attempts to renegotiate commitments or reject certain rules, thereby undermining an IO's legitimacy or authority (see Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019, 177–78). Moreover, loss of support is more likely when an IO is engaged in a policy area that is more competitive and, therefore, for which states have more options to choose from – this is less likely to occur when IOs involved in more technical or specialized issue areas (Lipsky 2017). An IO's scope may also simply become obsolete or irrelevant over time, focused on an issue area that no longer requires international cooperation.

Relatedly, in recent decades, some IOs have been perceived by many member state citizens as unresponsive to their needs or, worse, as culpable for the uneven distributional effects of economic globalization (Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019b). Accordingly, support for IOs has diminished among some groups of citizens over time – especially those who feel that their state's participation in an IO has a negative impact on their own interests (Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019) – resulting in political cleavages among electorates and domestic political contestation of state involvement in IOs. Several scholars argue that this contestation at the domestic level can translate to contestation within the IO by the member state and its leaders (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Buisseret and Bernhardt 2018). Indeed, Hooghe, Lenz and Marks (2019b, 733) contend that “the most acute threat to international



governance stems not from its inability to serve non-Western countries, but from its perceived failure to help large numbers of voters at home”.

5. Shortcomings, WHO and COVID19

The shortcomings of IOs identified in this paper such as limitations on mandate, limited resources (budget and personnel), lack of political support and limited analytical capacity which might hamper legitimacy also came to the fore during the COVID19 pandemic and were particularly in evidence in the reaction to the pandemic by the main international organization within the global governance of health, the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN). As the UN’s health agency, the WHO has a membership of 194 countries, with its headquarters in Geneva and a global reach through 150 country offices and six regional offices. Its Constitution, in force since April 1948, sets the organizational goal of the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health, linking health – physical, social and well-being – to traditional UN’s objectives of security, peace, harmonious relations between peoples (World Health Organization 2020). It also strongly links health and development, and is part of the UN Sustainable Development Group.

With a broad understanding of health and its social implications, the WHO directs and coordinates actions in global health in partnership with national governments, private actors, and civil society organizations. Its actions touch upon three broad areas, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable populations: promotion of health and well-being, promotion of universal health coverage, and actions addressing health emergencies – including preparedness, prevention, detection, response, and support to fragile settings (World Health Organization n.d.). It is under this last dimension, health emergencies, that the WHO has become a high-profile organization in the public’s eyes. Most of the WHO’s role in global outbreak alerts and addressing public health crises is framed by the *International Health Regulations* (IHR) (World Health Organization 2005), which date back to 1969 and were last revised in 2005. A legally binding instrument, the IHR requires countries to notify and work together on public health emergencies such as a new disease, and establishes the criteria for the event to be considered a ‘public health emergency of international concern’.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the WHO to the forefront of the debate on global governance and its institutions, and provides an opportunity to assess whether the institutional shortcomings outlined above played a role in the WHO’s response. Its initial actions date back to 31 December 2019, when its Chinese country office gathered information regarding a ‘viral pneumonia of unknown source’. From that moment onwards, the WHO’s role in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic has been comprised of a variety of efforts: technical guidance to governments, including scientific advice to national health services and local administrations on how to address the pandemic; supply of equipment to health workers in need; direct



guidance to the population and health workers with, notably, the knowledge transfer platform <https://openwho.org/> offering open-access, self-paced training on a variety of topics; provide aggregate data and sources of information, including regular reports, for a variety of media, social and political groups; and act as a depository on scientific information and coordination of joint scientific efforts such as large-scale trials for drugs and vaccines. In addition, in an increasingly polarized and politicized context, the WHO has also worked on fighting misinformation and busting myths about the new coronavirus, its spread, and its treatment. Simply put, the WHO's role typically encompasses providing scientific guidelines, training, support, and information rather than offering direct grants or *in loco* medical assistance.

However, the WHO has been criticized throughout the COVID19 pandemic. Each of the institutional shortcomings described in section 4 – unsuitable governance processes, misaligned mandate, and lack of resources – appear to have contributed to the WHO's unsatisfactory response, leading critics to question the WHO's standing and legitimacy as the major global health organization.

First, with regard to **governance processes**, decisions made by the World Health Assembly are made through egalitarian majority voting (see Fig. 1 in section 4.2), with each of the 194 members receiving one vote and important resolutions requiring a two-thirds majority. As a result, member states may try to link various issue areas and put political pressure on other members in order to influence the outcome of the vote or retaliate against another member in other areas of foreign policy. For example, in response to Australia sponsoring a resolution at the WHA calling for an independent investigation into the outbreak and early handling of the virus, China threatened to move forward with a plan to impose high tariffs on imports of barley from Australia, despite the resolution text not specifically mentioning China (Hurst 2020). Moreover, the text that was ultimately passed by the WHA was criticized by some vocal proponents of an investigation as being “watered down” (ibid). While the agency sustains that it is committed to “serve all people of the world with equity, objectivity and neutrality” (United Nations 2020), the highly politicized voting dynamics prompted some countries to accuse it of bias. Most notably, the (perceived) reluctance to act decisively against China including its hesitation to act decisively when facing opposition from China (Peters et al. 2020) resulted in the current US administration accusing the WHO of a “pro-China bias”. These tensions are illustrative of some of the challenges posed by egalitarian majority voting for IOs in making important decisions, especially when the circumstances require strong and immediate action.

Second, various elements of the WHO's **mandate** are seen to be incompatible with one another and constitute a major impediment to both serving as the foremost provider of knowledge and expertise on COVID19 as well as playing an important role in stopping or slowing the spread of the disease. First, the organization's lack of mandated political autonomy combined with the highly politicized nature of the COVID19 crisis made the organization highly susceptible to the interests of its member states (see section 4.3). The organization was criticized for a delay in declaring 'a public health emergency of international



concern' and doing it with hesitation, therefore slowing the actions of many governments around the world and not effectively conveying a sense of urgency (see Peters et al. 2020). Critics often argue that more decisive actions should have been taken as soon as the new disease was identified in order to radically stop its spread before it became global (ibid.). Critics also pointed to WHO's lack of action in relation to human rights abuses referring to harsh government responses, mandatory quarantine and isolation (Fidler 2020). Further, as the WHO does not have the authority to impose measures, restrict mobility or enter countries without permission, it relies heavily on its ability to persuade governments to follow its recommendations and guidelines. Various governments have attacked and scapegoated the WHO for, amongst others things, not endorsing government-backed treatments before they are proven safe and efficient and for not imposing stricter measures on global travel, even though these activities are those which fall outside of the WHO's mandate and for which the WHO can only provide guidelines.

Additionally, a crucial component of an organization's ability to serve as a knowledge leader is access to state of the art knowledge and information. Here too, the WHO's mandate played a role in preventing the organization from being able to acquire new data and evidence through site-visits and forced the organization to rely on second-hand knowledge provided from member states. Due to the highly political nature of the COVID19 response, the organization's inability to acquire information independently seriously curtailed its ability to be a knowledge leader in this regard or to fulfil its purpose of providing well-informed guidelines, training and support. The description of the WHO above highlights its role as an epistemic community in dealing with the crisis. Doubts have been raised regarding the leadership of the WHO on providing key science-based insights on how to tackle the crisis.

Third, and relatedly, the WHO's ability to fulfill its mandate seems to have been further hampered by **limited resources**, and especially the WHO's leadership and access to information. Moreover, the WHO's access to financial resources became politicized as the US – the organization's largest financial donor – attempted to use its leverage to influence the outcomes of the decision-making processes as we noted earlier, withholding funds and ultimately submitting its withdrawal notice from the organization in July 2020. Here, the voluntary nature of financial support from its members sits uncomfortably with the highly politicized issue, and financial resources were used as a bargaining chip, which creates uncertainty for the organization and also demonstrates the difficulty for an organization to retain independence while reliant on voluntary contributions from member states.

Overall, these institutional shortcomings appear to have contributed to the WHO's ability to assume its role as global health leader and orchestrate or facilitate an effective response to the COVID19 outbreak. Subsequent criticism towards the WHO's efficiency and legitimacy has impacted this ability further in a politicized, yet crucial moment for global health. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic comes at a critical



juncture for the WHO, its internal governance, structure, decision-making processes, and more generally for global health governance.

6. Conclusion

The global context we assumed at the start – one that is constantly evolving and is shaped by unexpected events and geopolitical changes – presents obvious challenges for research. The rapidity of change means that the subject is often a moving target – an election such as that which took place in the United States in 2016 can have direct and sometimes immediate consequences on global governance. These dynamics underscore the value in looking past particular geopolitical evolutions or political trends to the institutional features that condition an institution's ability to navigate evolving global contexts. Our analysis showed that IOs across issue areas frequently share three primary institutional shortcomings: (1) IOs face difficulties balancing the needs of a diverse set of stakeholders and members due to inappropriate decision-making rules or inflexibility of governance structures; (2) IOs' mandates often do not grant the IO sufficient policy autonomy or scope of action to meet its goals; (3) IOs' frequently lack the necessary resources, including funding, staff and access to information. These shortcomings create a 'friction' between developments in the external environment of IO and their capacity to govern in this changed external environment.

By distilling the major institutional shortcomings of the traditional leaders of global governance, we have the opportunity to assess which might be addressed through reform pathways and which might be resolved through the inclusion of or interactions with other institutions, especially the alternative forms of governance – informal lawmaking, experimentalist governance and multistakeholder initiatives – that will be the subjects of subsequent GLOBE research. Additionally, by considering these institutional shortcomings, it may give us an opportunity to consider whether IOs are the right type of institution to look to for leadership and rule-making within global governance regimes.

Ultimately, our analysis affirmed some of the arguments put forth in theories on new governance that posit that certain institutional shortcomings of "old governance", largely led by IOs, triggered the rise of new governance. However, our analysis also demonstrated that the shortcomings may not necessarily be inherent, but rather a result of a combination of incompatible institutional features or institutional design decisions that are inappropriate for a particular issue area or type of decision, such as a high degree of political salience combined with decisions by consensus, or when an IO with a primary function of providing knowledge is required to get the information it generates approved by its member states. However, our analysis also showed that these shortcomings are structural, and therefore likely to require significant reforms or perhaps a new institution entirely. Indeed, when reform depends on the very decision-making structures that are at a standstill (such as in the WTO) or that require the consent of a member with veto



power (such as in the IMF), the way out may require a geopolitical shock that triggers rapid change or looking elsewhere for governance.



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