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**POLICY-MAKING BY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATIONS: CONCEPTS, CAUSES AND
CONSEQUENCES**

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1. Introduction

Issues such as climate change, turmoil in financial markets, threatening infectious diseases, migration and fundamentalist terrorism can be read as ciphers for the challenges posed by the internationalization of our economies and societies. Collective political responses to such problems require ever higher levels of co-ordination and preparation on the part of international governmental organizations (IGOs). Conceptualizations of IGOs as platforms for power struggles or vehicles for projecting national interests at the international level have long dominated the scholarly literature. With the shift towards analysing IGOs as actors in their own right, however, more attention is now being paid to what constitutes and conditions the independent influence of IGOs when providing global public policy (Stone 2008). Moreover, the bureaucratic bodies and apparatuses of IGOs come into focus when the very 'actorness' of IGOs is at stake, and questions arise regarding the conditions under which these institutions can operate with at least some degree of

detachment from the preferences of their members. After all, as a prerequisite for doing a delegated job effectively and efficiently, the agent needs to enjoy some degree of organizational independence and some room for manoeuvre. The precise degree of organizational independence and autonomy depends upon the quality and strength of the bureaucracies, usually embodied in a secretariat, on which IGOs rely in their day-to-day operations.

It has been argued that, as a result of processes of internationalization, the administrative bodies of IGOs – that is, international public administrations (IPAs) – have become an important feature of global governance, with some observers even speaking of a ‘bureaucratization of world politics’ (Barnett and Finnemore 2004: 165). Yet, while international bureaucracies have attracted increasing scholarly attention (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Cerny 2010: 111; Lenz *et al.* 2015; Zürn *et al.* 2012), the empirical and theoretical relevance of studying IPAs still needs further clarification. First, although there seems to be an emerging consensus in the relevant literature that IPAs matter when it comes to policy-making beyond the nation-state (see Eckhard and Ege 2016), we still lack systematic concepts for mapping this influence. For instance, to what extent is this influence related to policies, administrative patterns or decisions within the IGO and when do intra-organizational interactions and arrangements reach beyond the organization in question? And to what extent is influence restricted to distinctive areas or policy types – i.e., are some policy areas more or less prone to bureaucratization? Second, we are interested in the sources of bureaucratic influence on the initiation, formulation and implementation of public policies. Under which conditions and in which contexts are IPAs more or less influential? Finally, we still lack a clear understanding of the consequences of policy-making by IPAs. What are the effects of IPA involvement on the performance of IGOs, in terms of their legitimacy and effectiveness? In the following, each of these issues will be addressed in more detail, with the basic purpose of highlighting issues of particular theoretical interest and stimulating further research.

2. The influence of IPAs on policy-making: conceptualizing the ‘dependent variable’

While the policy influence of IPAs without doubt constitutes the most urgent and important question driving studies of international bureaucracies, we lack systematic concepts that allow us to properly map this influence with regard to different dimensions. In this regard, we suggest a differentiation along two dimensions, namely, policy scope and policy type.

The dimension of policy scope is linked to the question whether our analytical interest is on policy decisions at the level of the IGO in question (internal influence) or on IPA influences on policy decisions in their

organizational environment, i.e., other IPAs and IGOs in their domain, as well as member state governments and administrations (external influence). While most studies so far have concentrated on the internal dimension, there is still very limited knowledge regarding the extent to which the policy-making influence of IPAs reaches beyond their organizational boundaries. It is, for instance, conceivable that IPAs try to spread information of their policy approaches in transnational administrative networks, thus attempting to surpass internal blockage or alternatives. As such, seeking to extend support for their concepts in their institutional environment might similarly be IPAs' means of choice in relation to international bureaucratic politics. Such activities, in turn, might have internal benefits: the more support particular bureaucratic ideas receive from other administrations, the greater the chances that policy proposals will be accepted 'at home'.

The second dimension of policy type refers to the question of whether IPA influence is related to substantive policies, like environmental, security or economic policies (substantive influence), or whether IPAs might also affect the institutional conditions and constellations in which they operate. The latter question pertains to whether and to what extent IPAs are able to strategically change their institutional opportunities and constraints when interacting with their environment and their principals. Any change in these opportunity structures, in turn, can strongly increase or decrease the chances of IPAs of exerting substantive influence on policy-making. Internally, changes in bureaucratic opportunity structures are related to organizational change. For instance, to what extent do reforms and changes in institutional arrangements within the IGO alter the autonomy, resources or competences of their administration? And to what extent are IPAs actually able to shape internal reforms in line with their interests? With regard to the external dimension, institutional influence is linked to the capacities of IPAs to set up transnational administrative network structures and establish exchange relationships with other IPAs and national administrative units operating in their domain.

Thus far, scholarly interest has focused primarily on the *internal* dimension of IPA influence. There is a growing body of studies investigating the role of

Table 1. Mapping policy influence of IPAs.

		Policy type	
		Substantive	Institutional
Policy scope	Internal	Substantive policies developed by an IGO	Institutional policies adopted at IGO level (change of organizational structures and procedures)
	External	Substantive policies adopted by other administrations and/or organizations in a policy domain	Institutional structures of a policy domain and its population

Source: Authors' compilation.

IPAs in shaping the content and implementation of substantive IGO policies (see, for instance, Joachim *et al.* 2008). In addition to substantive policies, IPAs have also been found to matter in the development and implementation of institutional policies affecting the design and change of IGOs (e.g., Bauer and Knill 2007; Hanrieder 2014; Johnson and Urpelainen 2014). Yet, systematic accounts of the external influence of IPAs (both in substantive and institutional terms) have been comparatively rare (but see Stone and Ladi 2015). Moreover, systematic accounts of potential trade-offs between IPA influence across the different dimensions suggested above are still lacking. On the one hand, it is conceivable that IPAs try to increase their substantive policy influence by seeking to strengthen their institutional position. On the other hand, trade-offs between the internal and external influence of IPAs constitute a plausible scenario. In particular, IPAs with relatively weak internal status (low autonomy, low resources) might focus first on networking activities within their own domain. Growing external influence, in turn, could help them to strengthen their internal position. We expect that dynamics of this kind might be much more pronounced for IPAs than for national administrations, given that the latter are typically more concerned with internal rather than external affairs and enjoy more clearly delineated boundaries (Bauer 2015). Nonetheless, we have yet to understand these trade-offs, even though they seem crucial for properly assessing the influence of IPAs on policy-making beyond the nation-state.

3. Causes of bureaucratic influence: four basic tools of IPAs

Which factors can account for variation in policy influence along the above dimensions across IPAs and over time? We argue that the answer to this question primarily depends on the tools IPAs have at their disposal. These administrative tools can be classified along Hood's (1986) taxonomy of governmental resources – namely, nodality, authority, treasure and organization (NATO) (see also Hood and Margetts 2007). Although this scheme requires some adjustments when transposed to transnational contexts in light of the distinctive features of IPAs, it nevertheless constitutes a useful starting point for identifying basic sources of IPA influence.

3.1. Nodality: IPAs as information brokers

Nodality refers to the central role of IPAs with regard to the use and distribution of information both within and beyond their organizational boundaries. In many instances, IPAs constitute relatively large bodies that are involved in a wide range of activities. Therefore, they dispose of considerable substantive and procedural expertise and information with regard to the design and implementation of public policies. This property places IPAs in a

strategic position from which to spread information to their political principals and to their organizational environment, as well as to detect and use information provided by actors within their domain. The higher the extent to which an IPA disposes of information and expertise that can be considered as essential both within and beyond its organization, the greater their nodality in transnational communication networks. Typically, the policy influence emerging from nodality is based on the publication of data, information, recommendations and advice. Influence based on nodality is further enhanced by the fact that in many instances IPAs form part-epistemic communities understood as transnational networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain (Haas 1992). Within such communities in which experts frequently interact and develop joint problem definitions and solutions, new policy ideas can spread like viruses across policy communities (Dudley and Richardson 2000; Holzinger and Knill 2005; Helgadóttir 2016).

As shown by Jörgens *et al.* (2016), nodality can constitute an important resource for IPAs to influence substantive policy decisions in their domain, particularly in constellations in which their position within their IGO is relatively weak. Jörgens *et al.* analyse one of the smallest units of international bureaucracies, i.e., the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) treaty secretariat. In response to the 'hidden' character of bureaucratic influence, they use social network analysis to infer influence from the secretariat's relative position in the Twitter communication exchanges during recent conference negotiations. They find a striking centrality of bureaucratic actors in the communication network. Yet, the influence of nodality need not be restricted to substantive policies; it might also be related to the structuring of policy networks in so-called multilevel administration settings. Along these lines, Benz *et al.* (2016) develop an analytical framework for conceptualizing the relationships between administrations across different territorial levels. They argue that multilevel co-ordination in administration is based on co-operation and persuasion rather than on coercive modes, and reveals particular dynamics of inter-administrative governance.

3.2. Authority: the nexus between politics and administration

For governments, authority is defined by the use of the law as the central resource for public intervention. Authority implies the legitimacy of legal or official power and gives to governments the ability to force societal actors to follow legal rules. This definition, of course, needs to be modified when considering the tools and resources of public administrations rather than political executives. For public administrations, authority is primarily defined by their space of autonomy from political intervention and control. As such, it is the relationship between politics and administration that is of central

analytical interest in this context (Page 1992; Weber 1978). In a world where both economy and society display an ever-growing demand for rationalization, efficiency and planning, technocratic expertise in the effective execution of political priorities in an increasingly complex world becomes crucial. This constitutes a permanent tension between politicians (who are supposed to govern and have a mandate of limited duration) and bureaucrats (who have the expertise needed to govern and hold a permanent office). Designing structures that give bureaucrats the autonomy needed to do their jobs effectively, while also keeping them committed to the priorities set by elected politicians, is a permanent challenge for governments and constitutes a classical topic of public administration research.

Bauer and Ege (2016) conceive of bureaucratic autonomy as a prerequisite of the influence administrative actors can wield. With a view to making comparisons between IGOs possible, they suggest a conceptualization of the bureaucratic autonomy of international secretariats, as well as an empirical yardstick to measure it, based on a number of carefully selected indicators. They identify empirical variation between what they conceive as bureaucratic 'autonomy of will' and 'autonomy of action' within a sample of 15 international secretariats. The resulting benchmark can be used as the basis for independent or dependent variables. Beyond adding to policy-analytical toolboxes, the results are relevant for assessing questions of efficiency and legitimacy of international bureaucracies in global governance.

3.3. Treasure: the budget of IPAs

While authority defines the political resources of IPAs, treasure refers to their monetary tools. In the context of governments, treasure means the extent to which governance objectives are achieved by reliance on economic incentives, like subsidies or grants; in the context of public administrations, however, the crucial question concerns the size and specification of their budgets. To what extent can IPAs dispose of a sufficient budget in order to fulfil their tasks? Are budgets based on long-term or short-term commitments of the member states (Knill and Balint 2008)? To what extent are IPAs engaged in activities of fund-raising beyond their regular budgets and what are the consequences of such activities – e.g., in terms of potential resource dependencies from individual member states or private organizations? It seems obvious that the budgetary resource basis of IPAs has far-reaching effects on their chances to influence policy-making within and beyond their organization – e.g., by hiring policy experts, setting-up specialized units, or engaging in activities of monitoring and control.

Goetz and Patz (2016) focus on these questions by analysing bureaucratic power in the area of international budget politics. Important questions arise here. For example, are executives at the international level more influential

than their national counterparts in terms of budget powers, given weaker parliamentary scrutiny and the different logic between spending and taxing citizens coined by the struggle between net-payer and net-receiver among member states? Goetz and Patz take on this challenge and analyse change and persistence in EU budget processes in the context of the adoption of multiannual financial planning. They find that the European Commission is coming under more pressure, especially owing to the increased powers of the European Parliament and the newly consolidated powers of the Council of Ministers. But even under such adversarial conditions, the Commission has managed to retain its budgetary centrality by maintaining most of its established routines and incorporating the demands of other actors into new routines. In this way, the power of the supranational bureaucracy with respect to the management of the budget process has remained essentially unchallenged – and thus a source of international administrative influence.

3.4. Organization: administrative styles

With regard to organization, questions focus around dominant administrative routines and standard operating procedures that define specific patterns or the ‘culture’ of administrative policy-making within and beyond an organization. While the analysis of the nexus between politics and administration primarily focuses upon formal structures and institutional arrangements, the concept of administrative styles shifts the analytical attention to informal procedures and routines shaping administrative behaviour. The central question concerns the ways in which administrations try to achieve their objectives against the backdrop of the opportunities and constraints provided by the structural and institutional context in which they operate.

For national administrations (Knill 2001; Richardson *et al.* 1982), these standard operating procedures basically describe the basic features of administrative behaviour in the interaction between public authorities and society. The central argument of this literature has been that policy-making, in terms of both policy outputs and policy effects, cannot be fully understood by studying formal institutions and party politics. Rather, the informal features of national administrations constitute a further independent variable that has to be taken into consideration. Yet, this kind of discussion is completely absent when it comes to administrative styles at the level of IGOs.

The contribution of Knill *et al.* (2016) can be seen as a first step to address this research gap. Distinguishing between two ideal typical administrative styles – entrepreneurial and servant – they compare the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Secretariat and the EU Commission. They find astonishing similarities between the two selected bureaucracies with respect to patterns of policy initiation, policy formulation and policy implementation. Depending on contextual factors, however, these

similarities in styles lead to quite different influence capacities of the respective bureaucracies – a difference the authors explain in terms of a paradox of weakness in the case of the OSCE Secretariat and a paradox of strength in the case of the EU Commission.

4. Consequences of bureaucratic influence: the performance of IOs

While the above factors may account for different degrees of IPA influence on public policies beyond the nation-state, we still lack a broader understanding of the consequences of international bureaucratic involvement. In short, to what extent do IPAs influence affect the performance of IGOs? On the one hand, performance is related to policy effectiveness and hence the problem-solving capacity of IGOs. On the other hand, it can be assumed that performance is strongly associated with the legitimacy of IGOs. It is only as long as they develop policies that seek to address important transnational problems that IGOs will generate broader public and political support. The analytical challenge here is not only to systematically connect bureaucratic characteristics and behaviour with policy outputs and impacts, but also to develop sound concepts for measuring IGO performance in the first place. Tallberg *et al.* (2016) address this latter issue by offering a typology of policy aspects based on volume, orientation, type, instrument and target. They then seek to explain how these dimensions may be used to map the output and assess the performance of IGOs. Although bureaucratic factors are not explicitly conceptualized, the output perspective points to the important interconnection of IGOs to transnational or national actors – many of which are, themselves, public administrations.

5. Outlook

IPAs are the bureaucratic layer of a transnational governance order in the making. There is nothing new about international bureaucracies *per se*; they have been a part of international politics at least since the foundation of the League of Nations in the first quarter of the twentieth century. However, their tasks have changed, their portfolios expanded and, in accordance with a changing environment of ever more private and public actors seeking involvement in global policy-making, international bureaucracies have become pivotal actors. In other words, for tackling enduring policy problems that transcend national borders IGOs have become all but indispensable. And that means, in turn, that the bureaucracies on which IGOs rely have become ever more central, too. IPAs must be understood in order to make sense of current trends and changes in the provision of global governance. The following contributions can be seen as part of an emerging next

generation of studies of international bureaucracies that will connect patterns of international bureaucracy and the behaviour of international bureaucratic élites with the results of the trans-nationalized policy processes.

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