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CONCEPTUALIZING AND MEASURING BUREAUCRATIC AUTONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

1. Introduction

This paper gives a detailed account of the conceptualization and measurement of the bureaucratic autonomy of International Public Administrations (IPAs). More specifically, it provides relevant conceptual background information which complement our empirical chapter in an edited volume published by Palgrave (Bauer and Ege 2016).

The paper is structured as follows. First, we start with an overview of scholarship on the concept of 'autonomy' in International Relations, Regulatory Agency Study and Public Administration. We then present a multi-dimensional concept of bureaucratic autonomy that is suitable for the comparative analysis of international public administrations. Finally, we suggest a number of indicators that allow us to compare varying degrees of autonomy at different conceptual levels across administrations.

2. State of the art: Approaching autonomy in International Relations, Regulatory Agency Study and Public Administration

International governmental organizations (IGOs) and their secretariats have been studied as forums of transnational policy-making—in particular in the area of environmental policy (Bauer 2006; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009), treaty reforms (Beach 2004) and management change (Bauer and Knill 2007; Geri 2001). Moreover, scholars have applied an actor-centered perspective and studied international bureaucrats as teachers of norms (Finnemore 1993), as orchestrators of international regulation (Abbott and Snidal 2010), or a crucially important individuals during the creation of new organizations (Johnson 2013). This research has found that international bureaucracies can be powerful actors. It describes under which conditions non-elected bureaucrats can use their central position, privileged access to information, technical expertise and professional authority to influence the course of things (Vibert 2007). In terms of theory development the dominant theme has been how to best conceptualize the relationship between the bureaucracy and their political principals. Using internal bureaucratic structures to systematically study under which conditions and to what extent international bureaucratic influence emerges autonomously from political superiors has rarely been studied so far. As demonstrated before, it is exactly these intra-bureaucratic features that constitute an important research focus with the discipline of PA. Since this perspective was only sporadically extended to international bureaucracies (for recent exceptions see Bohne 2010; Kim, Ashley, and Lambright 2014; Stone and Ladi 2015), a key concern of public administration research, i.e. the question of whether and through which mechanisms administrations are able to act autonomously from politics and to what degree they can influence the formulation and implementation of political programs, remained largely unanswered at the international level (see Ege and Bauer 2013; Heady 1998; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Ness and Brechin 1988). Thus, we now review the pertinent literature from the fields of International Relations (IR), 'regulatory agency studies' (RAS) and Public Administration (PA) to get to the bottom of how bureaucratic autonomy can be systematically studied in the international context.

Within these debates, two basic approaches on how to study the concept of autonomy can be identified. The first could be called the *relational approach*; it is firmly rooted in principal-agent theory and most common among rational-institutionalist IR. The second approach – resembling the traditional understanding of autonomy in PA – could be called *sociological*, as the prime focus is the characteristics of bureaucratic actors and structures as well as their working environments.

The *relational approach* focuses on the delegation problem as the distinguishing feature of a constellation in which a group of political masters (as principals) mandate a third party (an organization as their agent) to fulfil certain tasks (Hawkins et al. 2006). As self-serving behaviour by the agent is assumed, the situation becomes – from the perspective of the principals – essentially a control problem. Agency autonomy is thus conceived as *discretion* and as such it is seen as the product of

delegated powers minus control mechanisms (da Conceição-Heldt 2010; Pollack 1997; Thatcher and Sweet 2002).

Seen from the perspective of the agent, the question of whether it is able to exert discretion in view of the principals' control desires is determined by at least two sets of factors. The first set relates to the substance of the actual competences or statutory powers originally delegated to the agent. Examples of such competence might be to what extent the agent can formally influence the decision-making agenda of the organization (Haftel and Thompson 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2015; Pollack 1997) or whether the agent has the right to sanction non-compliance during the execution of its tasks (Cox and Jacobson 1973; Elsig 2011; Nielson and Tierney 2003). The second set of factors relates to crucial operational resources—and in particular to the agent's capacity to receive and dispose of its own resources (Brown 2010; da Conceição-Heldt 2013). In this context it is important whether the agent has access to finance and personnel independent of transfers by its principals.

Scholars combining the relational perspective with a systematic empirical approach, as exemplified by Haftel and Thompson, focus on 'independence' and define the concept as the 'ability to operate in a manner that is insulated from the influence of other political actors—especially states' (2006: 256). However, they measure the bureaucratic capability of an IGO only by the absence or presence of a permanent secretariat and its agenda-setting capacity. Hooghe and Marks (2015) conceptualize delegation more comprehensively, collecting data on seventy-two IGOs in order to explain variation in the delegation (and pooling) of authority. In contrast to previous studies their approach focuses more explicitly on the IGO secretariats. The indicators they use to operationalize delegation capture, inter alia, the degree to which the secretariat can exercise executive powers, set the agenda, draft the budget and monitor member states. Again, however, the internal characteristics of the secretariat remain outside the empirical scope of their research.

In sum, the central puzzles tackled by the relational approach concern the questions of why states delegate competences to IGOs and how these organizations are to be controlled. The review of prominent empirical-analytical studies shows that conceptually, and also with respect to empirical data collection, relational aspects have been studied intensively. Having said this, rarely do these studies distinguish clearly between the IGO as a whole and its subordinate bureaucratic components. Moreover, the motivation of the agent remains astonishingly simple, as does the analytical consideration of its internal features. Scholars rely on fairly similar empirical specifications, concentrating mainly on two sets of factors: the delegated competences of the organization and the amount of, and independent access to resources. Internal structures or capacities of bureaucracies are rarely given systematic attention.

In contrast, works emerging from what could be called the sociological approach display more interest in these blind spots. Hence, this emerging 'international organizations as organizations' perspective (Ness and Brechin 1988) gives bureaucratic structures as well as the skills and attitudes of administrative personnel greater prominence in explanations of organizational behavior (Brechin and Ness 2013). Inspired by Weber, Barnett and Finnemore (2004) put bureaucratic behavior on the agenda of IR debates of IGOs – interpreting the autonomous influence of their bureaucratic apparatus with a particular constructivist spin. Interest in intra-organizational factors in the study of IGOs has remained high ever since.

Taking up the debate, Xu and Weller (2008) highlight the role of international civil servants in global governance. They found that civil servants' policy influence depends on organizational structure, organizational competences, control of information, permanence of office, technical expertise and bureaucratic leadership. In their study of international secretariats in the field of international environmental policy-making, Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) emphasize configurations, organizational competences and, above all, administrative resources and intra-organizational structures as crucial determinants of international secretariats' policy influence. How organizational

structures shape distinctive behavioral logics of international civil servants has also been studied (Ellinas and Suleiman 2011; Marcussen and Trondal 2011).

In essence, the sociological approach conceives of 'bureaucratization' as a form of organizational 'autonomization' as outlined above, i.e. the tendency towards ever greater insulation of the bureaucracy from political control. That the organization, once established, is likely to gain in autonomy is seen as a natural trend that is fueled by organizational size, division of labor and accumulation of task specific expertise, one related to but not entirely determined by formal competence endowment.

While these works acknowledge the importance of intra-organizational factors, systematic accounts of *which concrete* bureaucratic features of IGOs are important and *how these features* might be related to explaining specific organizational decisions are rare. If the aim is to focus on such bureaucratic structures, thereby allowing for comparisons between greater numbers of organizations, recourse to studies of national public administrations seems a sensible option. Especially the mentioned work of Schnapp (2004) is useful here, which points to bureaucratic characteristics of internal cohesion (among staff) as well as internal capacities to gather and process policy-relevant information. Despite the fact that he relies heavily on variables pertaining to markedly national politics, the differences between NPA and IPA outlined above emphasizes that this study offers avenues for a systematic operationalization also in IGO contexts.

A middle ground between the relational and the sociological approaches to organizational autonomy is occupied by works about regulatory and executive agencies (for a recent overview see Maggetti and Verhoest 2014). In RAS, where the research interest clearly lies in gaining empirical insights, relational and sociological aspects of autonomy are employed. Verhoest *et al.* (2004b), for example, distinguish between various sub-concepts of organizational autonomy, these being structural, managerial, policy, financial and interventional autonomy. While at the margins of these sub-concepts much depends on definitional consistency, the emphasis arguably lies on the scope of decision-making competences delegated to an agency with regard to both its own human resources and financial management on the one hand and policy implementation on the other (Verhoest et al. 2004a). Inspired by the use of the concept in related fields of research (see Carpenter 2001; Nordlinger 1981, 361; Skocpol 1985, 9), a broader definition of autonomy has recently been applied, wherein the concept is divided into two principal components: the self-determination of agency preferences and the lack of restrictions during their regulatory activity (Maggetti and Verhoest 2014, 242–43). This conceptualization highlights how challenging it is to compare the ability of regulatory organizations to independently form policy preferences. Taking up this challenge, Gilardi (2008) has suggested a number of empirical indicators. He uses formal characteristics to capture independence, including the status of the agency head and of the members of the management board, the formal relationship of the agency with government and parliament, the autonomy of the budget and of internal operations, and the agency's regulatory competences (see also Hanretty and Koop 2012; Wonka and Rittberger 2010). In view of our interest in bureaucratic autonomy, developments in the study of regulatory agencies offer ways to empirically discern various types of organizational autonomy, without requiring a further theoretical specification of the concept in either the relational or sociological direction.

In conclusion, one can summarize relational accounts of bureaucratic autonomy as highlighting the delegation logic behind what is conceived of as agency discretion, focus on the interaction mode between principals and agents. Organizational resources and the supervision relationship between agent and principal are put center stage and thus – perhaps unsurprisingly – research so far has focused upon individual bureaucratic agency rather than on organizational bureaucratic structures. The major question raised by the relational approach is how to control the bureaucratic power to act.

The sociological approach, in contrast, offers a more sophisticated inside perspective of bureaucratic capacities for collective decision-making and independent information processing. However, comparing greater numbers of international secretariats along those lines has not yet been

undertaken. Research has remained either strictly at the national level or, if international secretariats have been the focus, mostly limited to small-n comparisons using case study designs. The sociological approach's main concern is clarifying the organizational preconditions of independent bureaucratic action, seen as laying in capacities to handle information and to collectively put forward particular programmatic options.

Lastly, students of regulatory agency have combined relational and sociological views and developed a variety of empirical measurement options, though their applicability to international secretariats has yet to be proven. Against this background, having the means to act, as well as the freedom to develop its own positions, appear to be the two key factors underpinning the relational and sociological dimensions of bureaucratic autonomy.

3. Conceptualizing international bureaucratic autonomy

Based on the conclusions of the literature review, we suggest conceiving of the bureaucratic autonomy of international secretariats as the combination of the (in our terms 'sociologically' grounded) capacity to develop independent preferences ('autonomy of will') and the ('relationally' grounded) ability to translate these preferences into action ('autonomy of action') (see also Caughey, Cohon, and Chatfield 2009; Ege 2016; Maggetti 2007).

In order to develop autonomy of will, an administration first requires the 'administrative cohesion' to overcome obstacles to collective action and to interact with political actors as a unified organizational entity (see Mayntz 1978, 68). Cohesion enables the bureaucracy to develop a 'single set of corporate goals', which allows its members to work toward the same cause (Caughey, Cohon, and Chatfield 2009, 3). If such an ability is missing, 'pockets of autonomy' within the lower echelons of the bureaucracy—at the unit or departmental level—are likely to emerge (Cortell and Peterson 2006, 263; Trondal et al. 2012). This restricts the administration's ability to construct and maintain a common identity and to function as a unified entity working toward the fulfillment of its mandate (see Selznick 1949). The development of an autonomous will also requires what we call 'administrative differentiation', which refers to the bureaucratic capacity to develop preferences that can potentially differ from those of the political principals.

'Autonomy of action' refers to the ability of an administration to translate these preferences into action. Within the nation state, this aspect of autonomy is highest if an administration has 'a monopoly jurisdiction (that is, they have few or no bureaucratic rivals and a minimum of political constraints imposed on them by superiors)' (Wilson 1989, 182). Even though IGOs compete with other IGOs over competences and resources (Busch 2007), the main power cleavage at the international level is not so much a matter of bureaucratic rivalries but emerges between the secretariat and the member states. Thus, autonomy of action crucially depends on statutory powers (i.e. formal secretarial competences vis-à-vis political principals throughout the policy cycle) and independent administrative resources (Brown 2010; Hooghe and Marks 2015). Figure 1 provides an overview of our conceptualization of bureaucratic autonomy.

Figure 1: The different dimensions of structural bureaucratic autonomy
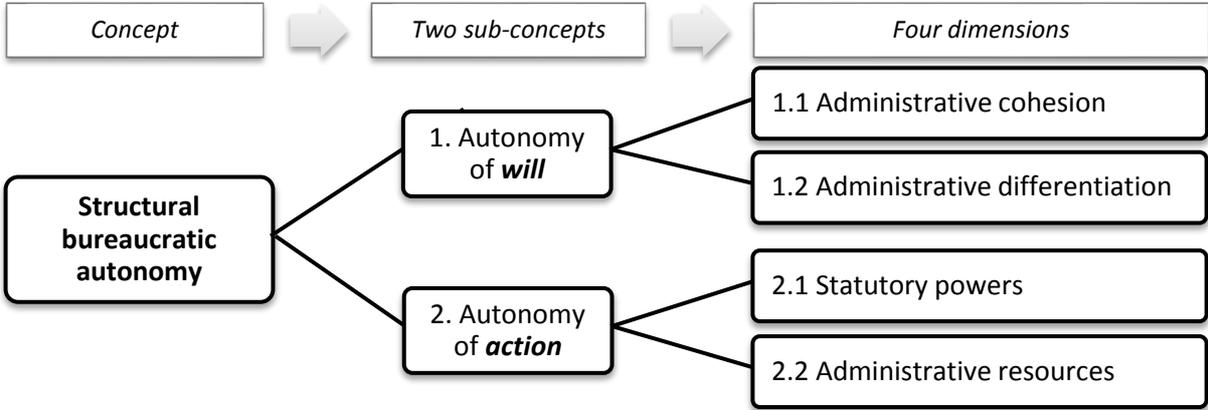
Source: Authors' compilation based on Carpenter 2001, Caughey, Cohon, and Chatfield 2009 and Verhoest et al. 2004b.

This specification of autonomy as an at least partly relational concept raises the question from whom the international secretariat is considered to be autonomous. We are interested in determining the potential impact of international bureaucracies on policy-making. Thus, we study the bureaucracy's autonomy from political actors and, more generally, politics, throughout the policy-making process. The political actors in question are the member states of the organization and their representatives within the different political bodies of the IGOs.

4. Measurement and indicators

Next, we propose a number of indicators that allow for collecting systematic information on levels and intensities of autonomy. While for 'autonomy of action' the choices of indicators can rely on a well-developed body of literature, operationalizing 'autonomous will' is more challenging. This is perhaps no coincidence, as the factors focused on here have been more prominent in qualitative works and the empirical basis of 'cohesion' and 'differentiation' is arguably – unlike competencies and resources – more difficult to observe. We therefore take as point of departure the observation that administrative structures allow bureaucrats to operate jointly as unified actors to varying degrees and draw on characteristics of the international secretariat's structure and staff for operationalizing 'autonomy of will'.

Administrative cohesion

In order to capture administrative cohesion we use four indicators. Firstly, we take a geographical interpretation of organizational centralization, measuring it as the share of staff working at IGO headquarters (as compared to those working in field or country offices). This indicator is based on the reasoning that geographically dispersed administrations are less cohesive, given that increasing dispersion makes it more difficult for the secretariat to act as one collective entity. The secretariats of the ECB and the WTO, for instance, are conceived as completely cohesive (coded 1) because their staff is almost exclusively located at their headquarters in Frankfurt and Geneva respectively. The OSCE is on the other end of the scale. Only 20 percent of OSCE staff are part of the core administration in Vienna (coded 0.2).

Secondly, previous research suggests that despite some evidence of international socialization, national cleavages matter within international secretariats (Beigbeder 1988, 6; Hooghe 2005). Thus, as a further indicator of administrative cohesion the ratio of the ten largest nationality groups together

compared to the total personnel within the secretariat is used to measure the homogeneity of international bureaucracies. With a share of only 35 percent coming from the ten most important staff-contributing member states, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for instance, has the secretariat with the highest national diversity of staff.

Third, we argue that staff mobility schemes that force staff to change regularly from one unit to another harm internal cohesion. The effects of staff mobility are controversial. While mandatory staff rotation schemes are often praised as a management tool to increase the experience and knowledge of staff (see e.g. United Nations 2012, 89–90), we follow the argument that '[l]ow mobility […] provides time for the process of interaction to manifest itself in a bureaucratic culture of binding norms and values' (McGregor Jr 1974, 26), facilitating the emergence of internal cohesion. In order to quantify this aspect of cohesion, the degree to which organizational rules enforce internal staff mobility is coded. In about half of the secretariats studied, mobility schemes are completely absent (coded 1). In the OSCE, however, people are required to change posts after five to seven years (coded 0).

The last indicator of administrative cohesion considers administrative longevity, the classic resource of bureaucratic power (Weber 1978), to be relevant also for international bureaucracies (Langrod 1963, 63). More specifically, our measurement rests on the argument that longer terms of employment facilitate greater administrative cohesion, because frequent interaction among the same staff members is a precondition for them to act as one (cohesive) entity. At the indicator level, bureaucratic longevity is measured by coding the ratio of staff with open-ended contracts to the total number of staff.

Administrative differentiation

To have autonomy of will the administration also needs to be able to develop preferences that can (potentially) differ from those of its political principals. Two indicators are used to measure such a capacity to differentiate. With respect to the first indicator, RAS and IGO scholarship regularly find that strong leadership at the organizational top indicates greater potential for administrative differentiation (Cox 1969; Gilardi 2008, 57). Hence, the share of Secretary Generals (SGs) who previously worked as civil servants in the organization is utilized to measure differentiation capacities at the top of the secretariat. Such internal SGs have themselves experienced the life of an international civil servant and have become familiar with the administrative esprit de corps. Thus, even in their new role as executive head, they can be expected to defend the secretariat's position against political pressure more firmly than external incumbents would. In about half of the secretariats, SGs are generally not recruited internally. Instead, member states nominate former politicians or high-ranking diplomats to represent the organization and lead the secretariat.

Secondly, we consider the capacity of the secretariat to collect and process independent information. Especially in global governance, where problems are highly interdependent and cause-effect relationships particularly complex, independent research capacities are an important means for an administration's ability to develop (and defend) policy options that are different from those of the political actors of the IGO (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Haas 1990). Accordingly, we use the location of research bodies within the organizational structure of the secretariat as a second indicator of administrative differentiation. Particularly high research capacities, for instance, can be observed in the secretariats of the WHO, the ECB, and the IMF. These organizations have at least one centralized research body at the departmental level. In contrast, research bodies in the secretariats of ASEAN and the IMO are less prominent in the organizational hierarchy (coded 0).

Statutory powers

Statutory powers concern the authority that member states have delegated to an organization. The authority of the IGO at large is not restricted to the administration but also concern the powers of executive and legislative bodies such as voting procedures and the bindingness of organizational decisions (see Hooghe and Marks 2015, 307). Owing to our focus on bureaucratic autonomy, we focus on the competences of the administration vis-à-vis the political organs of the organization and its

member states. More specifically, we take into account the powers of the secretariat during the agenda-setting and implementation phases, two particularly important channels of administrative influence.

To measure the agenda-setting power of an international bureaucracy, we code the degree to which the administrative head is involved in setting the agenda for legislative meetings of the IGO. If the SG alone is responsible for the preparation of the agenda (and proposals cannot be removed prior to the actual legislative meeting), the administration is particularly autonomous (coded 1). If, however, the executive board (or its functional equivalent) is in charge, the administration is less able to realize its preferences (coded 0 or 0.33 depending on whether or not members can remove items from the agenda). In the WHO, the OECD and the UN the respective treaties give the SG undisputed agenda-setting power, as he or she can put topics on the agenda of legislative meetings independent of whether or not member states agree.

Within the implementation phase, the administration's sanctioning capacities vis-à-vis its members, which the secretariat exercises in close cooperation with and under the guidance of the political bodies, are crucial. Sanctioning powers are coded highest if the administration's options exceed informal means such as naming and shaming and include the autonomous capacity to impose sanctions on its members (coded 1). This is, for instance, the case in the UN, where the secretariat, after a resolution of the Security Council, can, for example, plan and implement peacekeeping missions in order to maintain or restore international peace and security. The OECD, in contrast, may only use critical reports to publicize non-compliant behaviour; it has no formal means to change it (coded 0).

Administrative resources

Public personnel and finances are important resources of both national and international administrations. In RAS, for instance, the relevance of independent resources is studied as 'management autonomy', which concerns the degree to which an organization can make decisions regarding its human and financial resources (Verhoest et al. 2004a, 104). In IGOs, the independence of administrative staff from the interests of single member states is codified in the organization's treaties. Aside from the requirement for balanced geographical representation within the professional staff, matters of human resource management are independently decided within the secretariat. Moreover, only a few organizations rely on seconded personnel from member state administrations. Thus, while there is little doubt that some secretariats suffer from a lack of independent access to personnel more than others, the formal staffing rules leave little room for comparatively assessing the independence of staff.

In the context of ministerial bureaucracies, it is argued that the more staff working in an administration, the more it is able to follow its own agenda and act autonomous from its political principals (Mayntz 1978; Schnapp 2004, 212). With respect to international bureaucracies, Brown, for instance, uses the number of secretarial staff as one important variable to measure delegation to IGOs (2010: 153). While staff size might be a suitable measure for the independent availability of personnel resources, one has to take into account that the demand for personnel generally increases with the number of policy responsibilities of an IGO. Thus, we combine these two considerations and measure the size of administrative resources as the number of staff per policy field. To this end, the total number of IGO staff is divided by the number of its policy responsibilities. This number is transformed into a four category indicator that increases by 0.33 with every additional five hundred staff per policy field.

To measure the independence of financial resources, we take into account the source of the organization's budget by coding whether the IGO is self-financing (coded 1, as with most economic organizations such as the IMF or World Bank), dependent on mandatory contributions (coded 0.5, constituting the majority of organizations in the sample) or dependent on voluntary contributions with the donors earmarking a substantial portion of the budget for specific purposes, as is the case for the UN and the WHO (coded 0).

Table 1 provides an overview of how the ten indicators are related to the different dimensions and sub-dimensions of bureaucratic autonomy (including the assumed link between theoretical dimensions and observations).

Table 1: Dimensions, sub-dimensions and operationalization of bureaucratic autonomy

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Name of indicator and description
1. Autonomy of will		
1.1. Administrative cohesion (to overcome problems of collective action)	Organizational centralization *More centralization indicates greater administrative cohesion.*	staff_hqratio: Ratio of staff (to total staff) working at IGO headquarters.
	Homogeneity of personnel *Greater homogeneity in the national origin of staff indicates greater administrative cohesion.*	staff_homogen: Ratio of ten largest nationalities (in terms of staff) to total organizational personnel.
	Mandatory internal mobility of personnel *High personnel mobility indicates weaker administrative cohesion.*	staff_mobility: Degree to which organizational rules enforce internal staff mobility. 1: no mobility rules; 0.5: mobility is voluntary, but explicitly encouraged; 0: mobility is mandatory.
	Length of employment *Longer terms of employment indicate greater administrative cohesion.*	staff_permratio: Ratio of staff with open-ended contracts to total number of staff.
1.2. Administrative differentiation (potential to develop distinct preferences)	Independence of administrative leadership *Independent administrative leadership indicates greater administrative differentiation from political principals.*	sg_internal: Share of heads of administration recruited from within the organization. Only the last five SGs are considered.
	Capacity to provide, collect and process independent information *The capacity to access and process information that does not come from member states indicates greater administrative differentiation.*	research: Centrality of research bodies at different hierarchical levels: 1: existence of a research body at the *department* level (directly below the SG); 0.66: existence of two or more research bodies at the *division* level (two hierarchical levels below the SG); 0.33: existence of one research body at the *division* level (two hierarchical levels below the SG); 0: no research body at division level or above.

2. Autonomy of action		
2.1. Statutory powers (to realize autonomous preferences)	Agenda-setting competences of the SG *More agenda-setting power for the SG indicates greater potential to realize autonomous administrative preferences.*	sg_agenda: Degree to which the administrative head is involved in setting the (provisional) agenda for legislative meetings. 1: SG is responsible for preparation of the draft agenda and items cannot be removed prior to the actual legislative meeting; 0.66: SG is responsible for preparation of the draft agenda, but items can be removed (through objection by a single member state, or decision of the executive body) prior to the actual meeting; 0.33: the executive body, not the SG, is responsible for preparation of the draft agenda and items cannot be removed prior to the actual meeting; 0: the executive body, not the SG, is responsible for preparation of the draft agenda and items can be removed prior to the actual meeting.
	Sanctioning competence *More competence for the organization regarding the sanctioning of non-compliant member states indicates greater potential to realize autonomous administrative preferences.*	sanctioning: Sanctioning powers of the organization vis-à-vis its members (see Brown 2010 for a similar measure): 1: autonomous capacity to impose sanctions 0.66: power to call for sanctions against noncompliant members; 0.33: denial of membership benefits (e.g. voting rights and IGO services); 0: only naming and shaming by issuing reports or admonitions; (sanctions related to the failure to pay mandatory contributions are not included).
2.2. Administrative resources (to realize autonomous preferences)	Size of human resources *More administrative personnel indicates greater potential to realize autonomous administrative preferences.*	staff_perpolicy: Number of total secretarial staff per policy field. 1: the organization employs 1500 staff or more per policy field; 0.66: the organization employs between 1000 and 1499 staff per policy field; 0.33: the organization employs between 500 and 999 staff per policy field; 0: the organization employs less than 500 staff per policy field.
	Independence of financial resources *More independent sources of revenue indicate greater potential to realize autonomous administrative preferences.*	income: Degree to which the organization can rely on independent sources of income. 1: self-financing; 0.5: mandatory contributions; 0: voluntary contributions. In case an organization relies on several financial resources, we use the source with the highest share of the budget.

Source: Authors' compilation.

In order to allow for comparison across dimensions and sub-dimensions the values of each indicator range from 0 to 1. Because an additive approach would increase the weight of those dimensions that consist of several sub-levels, we used averaged values to combine sub-level scores.

5. Conclusion and way forward

This paper has explored the classical concept of bureaucratic autonomy and adapted it in order to investigate and compare the autonomy of international bureaucracies. We have distinguished between two crucial components of bureaucratic autonomy—autonomy of will and autonomy of action—and proposed a set of indicators to measure both empirically.

Even though the empirical results are presented elsewhere (see Bauer and Ege 2016), it can be argued that the concept of bureaucratic autonomy captures a potentially relevant component of the empirical reality of global policy-making. It can thus help to inform expectations about bureaucratic behaviour in concrete policy-making situations. Structural bureaucratic autonomy levels cannot be equated with bureaucratic influence; however, capturing bureaucratic autonomy in the way suggested offers a solid starting point for engaging in disciplined comparisons of large numbers of international bureaucracies and their respective (potential) ability to exercise such bureaucratic influence.

Beyond improving our analytical toolbox for reconstructing global policy processes, there are at least three areas in which structural bureaucratic autonomy research can further contribute to current debates. Firstly, questions of organizational efficiency and effectiveness can be linked to differential intra-bureaucratic potentials and thus bureaucratic impact in global policy-making can be more systematically studied. Secondly, assessments of structural bureaucratic autonomy are relevant for designing appropriate democratic legitimation and control strategies for international bureaucracies operating beyond states and transcending national borders. For example, for international bureaucracies with relatively low scores on either the 'will' or 'action' component, less sophisticated control and responsivity mechanisms will probably suffice than those needed for bureaucracies displaying medium or high levels in both autonomy components. Hence, important implications for practical study design can be gleaned from our analysis. Thirdly, studying the structural autonomy of international bureaucracies contributes to the emerging Public Administration perspective on current internationalization processes and demonstrates how to adapt PA theory for international contexts. Given the current trend towards internationalization, it seems both justified and appropriate to put bureaucratic autonomy in the international governance arena on the research agenda. In addition, as highlighted by public protests in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 or the recent decision of the majority of UK citizens to leave the European Union, the policy involvement of IOs has become increasingly controversial. Questions about accountability, legitimacy, and democratic control of international institutions are being raised with new vigor. Owing to its long-standing interest in and attention to questions of bureaucratic autonomy, we see particular potential within PA scholarship, whose proponents could and should participate more actively in these practically and academically relevant debates (see Eckhard and Ege 2016).

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