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March 2018

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Bureaucratic autonomy of international organizations' secretariats

Publication Details:

Michael W. Bauer and Jörn Ege, 2016: Bureaucratic autonomy of international organizations' secretariats, in: Journal of European Public Policy, Vol. 23, No. 7, 1019-1037.

ABSTRACT

The authors of this paper advance a theoretical conceptualization of the bureaucratic autonomy of international secretariats and suggest an empirical yardstick for its measurement. The proposed concept of bureaucratic autonomy focuses on administrative structures and provides an indicator-based approximation for the bureaucratic capacities of international organizations in order to systematically reveal variation in intra-organizational potential for autonomous bureaucratic behaviour. The usefulness and limitations of the concept are discussed in light of an empirical examination of fifteen international secretariats.

KEYWORDS

Global governance, international administration, international secretariats, organizational independence

INTRODUCTION

As international governmental organizations (IGOs) become ever more important for global governance, their bureaucratic features are receiving ever more scholarly attention (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009). This paper contributes to these emerging public administration and organizational theory perspectives on IGOs (for recent overviews, see e.g., Kim *et al.* 2014; Brechin and Ness 2013). It suggests a conceptualization of the bureaucratic autonomy of international secretariats and develops a yardstick for its empirical measurement. Compared to existing research focused primarily on individual bureaucratic agency – namely, the role of international bureaucrats (Johnson 2014) – or on bureaucratic influence in particular policy constellations (see e.g., Jörgens *et al.* 2016), the concept of bureaucratic autonomy places the internal organization of IGO secretariats centre stage. By focusing on intra-organizational structures and conceiving of relationships between the secretariat and its member state principals primarily from the perspective of the former, it becomes possible to analyse potential for bureaucratic action. More precisely, the concept we have developed distinguishes between the ability of international secretariats to develop autonomous bureaucratic preferences (autonomy of will) and their capacity to transform these preferences into action (autonomy of action). Our concept of bureaucratic autonomy is concerned with formal executive characteristics, administrative resources and organizational competences empowering international bureaucracies. The concept is thus rooted in structural features and formal relationships of and within IGO secretariats.

The concept provides an indicator-based approximation of the bureaucratic capacities of IGOs, making variation in intra-organizational potential among their secretariats systematically comparable. The respective empirical data constitute the basis for further comparative research, which may help answer existing research questions and allow theoretically meaningful new questions to be asked. The insights gained from studying bureaucratic autonomy in the way suggested can improve, for instance, our knowledge about the systematic sources and context conditions of secretarial influence on IGO policy-making (see Eckhard and Ege 2016). Moreover, empirical information on internal bureaucratic capacities may also prove useful in answering questions about the organizational performance (Tallberg *et al.* 2016) as well as the democratic legitimation of IGOs and control strategies for international bureaucracies.

The study of organizational autonomy has a long tradition and rests on the assumption that a greater level of bureaucratic autonomy facilitates bureaucratic influence (Verhoest *et al.* 2004; Weber 1978). In this paper we systematically gauge such bureaucratic influence by focusing on intra-organizational structures and render it comparable across cases. Naturally, the actual materialization of such influence in real situations and constellations follows a more complex equation and depends upon factors other than just bureaucratic structures. However, we argue that our method of capturing bureaucratic autonomy offers a solid starting point and enables disciplined comparisons between large numbers of international bureaucracies with respect to their likely abilities to exercise bureaucratic influence. Our goal is to provide a generalizable, multidimensional description of the autonomy of

international secretariats. We offer, justify and apply a strategy for systematic comparison, but do not engage in a causal analysis of the theory developed here.

We proceed as follows. The next section reviews the relevant literature in order to conceptualize structural bureaucratic autonomy and its components. The subsequent section develops an indicator-based measurement strategy in order to empirically capture bureaucratic autonomy. On the basis of data collected from fifteen IGO secretariats, initial empirical results are presented and critically discussed in the penultimate section. We conclude by highlighting the potential merits of the proposed concept as well as important questions that remain open and avenues for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT OF A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

International bureaucracies have been variously conceived; they orchestrate international regulation (Abbott and Snidal 2010) and play a critical role in the management of regime overlap (Jinnah 2010) as well as during the creation of new organizations (Johnson 2014). Moreover, these bodies have been studied as actors in transnational policy-making – in particular in the areas of environmental policy (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009), treaty reforms (Beach 2004) and management change (Bauer and Knill 2007). 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.

In terms of theory development, the dominant theme has been how to best conceptualize the relationship between bureaucrats and bureaucratic structure on the one hand and their political principals on the other. However, the debate here is not whether international bureaucracies wield influence; they certainly do. The question is under which conditions and to what extent bureaucratic influence emerges autonomously from political superiors.

In the pertinent literature from the fields of International Relations (IR) and Public Administration (PA), two basic approaches to the role of bureaucratic factors can be identified.¹ The first could be called the ‘relational approach’; it is rooted in principal–agent theory and most common in (rationalist) IR. The second approach – more current in PA and constructivist IR – could be called ‘sociological’, as the prime focus is the characteristics of bureaucratic actors and their working environments.

The relational approach focuses on the delegation problem as the distinguishing feature of a constellation in which a group of political principals (the member states) mandate an agent (the IGO or the secretariat, more specifically) to fulfil certain tasks. 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 of as *discretion*, and as such it is seen as the product of delegated powers minus control mechanisms (Hawkins *et al.* 2006: 8).

Seen from the perspective of the agent, the question of whether the agent is able to exert discretion despite 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 delegated to the agent (Johnson and Urpelainen 2014). Examples of such competence might be whether the secretariat can formally influence the decision-making agenda of the organization or whether the secretariat (together with the IGO’s political bodies) has the right to sanction non-compliant

members (Cox and Jacobson 1973; Pollack 1997; Tallberg 2000). The second set of factors relates to crucial operational resources (Brown 2010; Conceição-Heldt 2013). An important consideration in this context is whether the organization has access to finance and personnel independent of transfers by its members.

Scholars applying the relational perspective to systematic empirical research, as exemplified by Haftel and Thompson, focus on 'independence' 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 72 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 used 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 the research.

In sum, the central questions tackled by the relational approach concern why states delegate competences to IGOs and how these organizations are controlled. Both conceptually and empirically, relational aspects have been intensively studied. Nonetheless, 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. Scholars rely on fairly similar empirical specifications, concentrating on the delegated competences of the organization and the amount of, and independent access to, resources. The internal structures or capacities of bureaucracies are rarely given systematic attention.

In contrast, works emerging from what could be called the sociological approach take greater interest in these blind spots.² Hence, this emerging 'international organizations as organizations' perspective (Brechin and Ness 2013) assigns bureaucratic structures as well as the skills and attitudes of administrative personnel a greater role in explanations of organizational behaviour. Inspired by Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy (1978), Barnett and Finnemore (2004) put bureaucratic behaviour on the agenda of IR debates with respect to IGOs, interpreting the autonomous influence of their bureaucratic apparatus with a particularly 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 environmental policy-making, Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009) emphasize organizational competences and, above all, administrative resources and intra-organizational structures as crucial determinants of international secretariats' policy influence. The way in which organizational structures shape distinctive behavioural 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' – in other words, 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 fuelled by organizational size, division of labour and accumulation of task-specific expertise, one related to but not entirely determined by formal competence endowment.

Although 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 help explain 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 (see e.g., Page 1992). In this context, the work of Schnapp (2004) offers inspiration, as it constitutes a comprehensive comparative study of the preconditions for influence of national ministerial bureaucracies, which are found in bureaucratic characteristics of internal cohesion (among staff) as well as internal capacities to gather and process policy-relevant information. Schnapp thus provides a measurement framework that enables a large-n comparison of the (structurally defined) bureaucratic potential to influence policy-making. However, he relies heavily on variables pertaining to markedly national politics and focuses on the bureaucratic oversight of policy implementation. In other words, the chosen empirical observations make it difficult to directly apply this approach to international bureaucracies and transnational contexts, where implementation plays only a secondary role and actor relationships are not fixed to the same extent as in national settings.

A middle ground between the relational and the sociological approaches to organizational autonomy is occupied by works about regulatory and executive agencies. Verhoest *et al.* (2004), for example, distinguish between various sub-concepts of 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.* 2004: 104). Inspired by the use of the concept in related fields of research (see e.g., Carpenter 2001), 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: 242–3). 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 the sociological direction.

While it is impossible in the scope of this paper to do justice to the full theoretical and conceptual debate, one can summarize relational accounts of bureaucratic autonomy as highlighting the delegation logic behind what is conceived of as agency discretion. Organizational resources and the supervision relationship between agent and principal are put centre stage, and thus – perhaps unsurprisingly – research so far has focused on individual bureaucratic agency rather than on organizational bureaucratic structures. The major question raised by the relational approach is therefore how to understand the bureaucratic power to act.

The sociological approach, by contrast, offers a more sophisticated inside perspective on bureaucratic capacities for collective decision-making and independent information processing. However, comparing greater numbers of

international secretariats along these 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. The main concern of the sociological approach is to clarify the organizational preconditions of independent bureaucratic action, building on capacities to handle information and to collectively put forward particular programmatic options.

We thus suggest, in a way similar to the perspective of regulatory agency research, a synthesis of relational and sociological approaches for the study of international secretariats, one that conceives of bureaucratic autonomy as the combination of the capacity to develop independent preferences within the bureaucracy ('autonomy of will') and the ability to translate these preferences into action ('autonomy of action') (see also Caughey *et al.* 2009). 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 bureaucratic entity (see Mayntz 1978: 68). Cohesion enables the bureaucracy to develop a 'single set of corporate goals', which allows its members to work towards the same cause (Caughey *et al.* 2009: 3). If such an ability is missing, 'pockets of autonomy' within the lower echelons of the bureaucracy are likely to emerge (Cortell and Peterson 2006: 263; Trondal *et al.* 2012). Such a development restricts the administration's ability to construct and maintain a common identity and to function as a unified entity working towards the fulfilment of its mandate (see Selznick 1949). The development of an autonomous will also requires 'administrative differentiation', which refers to the bureaucratic capacity to develop preferences that can potentially differ from those of the political principals. If such capacities were absent, bureaucratic action would be completely in line with the preferences of the member states. From a conceptual point of view, treating autonomy of will as a separate component of autonomy (one that is allowed to vary independently from autonomy of action) is thus an important step towards a better understanding of bureaucratic behaviour.

'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 greatest when 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, the main power cleavage at the international level 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) and independent administrative resources. Table 1 provides an overview of our conceptualization of bureaucratic autonomy.

In this view of bureaucratic autonomy, the international secretariat (including the Secretary-General as well as any regional offices and field missions) is the bearer of autonomy. Distinguishing between internal administrative features and external political dependencies in the form of resources and competences broadens the usual perspective of principal-agent approaches. The conception takes into account not only the delegation contract but also the features of the agent itself.

Table 1. The different dimensions of structural bureaucratic autonomy.

Concept	Two sub-concepts	Four dimensions
Structural bureaucratic autonomy	1. Autonomy of will	1.1. Administrative cohesion
		1.2. Administrative differentiation
	2. Autonomy of action	2.1. Statutory powers
		2.2. Administrative resources

Source: Authors' conceptualization based on Caughey *et al.* (2009) and Verhoest *et al.* (2004).

MEASURING BUREAUCRATIC AUTONOMY

In this section we propose empirical indicators for collecting systematic information on varying levels of autonomy. Whereas for 'autonomy of action' the choice of indicators can draw from a well-developed body of literature, the operationalization of 'autonomous will' is more challenging. The different starting points are 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 'competences' and 'resources' – more difficult to observe. We therefore take as our point of departure the observation that administrative structures allow bureaucrats to operate jointly as unified actors to varying degrees (Mayntz 1978), 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 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 secretariat of the World Trade Organization (WTO) for instance, is assessed as completely cohesive (coded 1) because its staff is almost exclusively located at the headquarters in Geneva. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is on the other end of the scale, as only 20 per cent 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 (Hooghe 2005). Thus, 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 per cent 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 lowest staff homogeneity.

Thirdly, 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. Although mandatory staff rotation is often praised as a management tool that increases the experience and knowledge of staff, we also

recognize that '[l]ow mobility [...] provides time for the process of interaction to manifest itself in a bureaucratic "culture" of binding norms and values' (McGregor 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). However, in the OSCE, for example, people are required to change posts after five to seven years (coded 0).

The last indicator of administrative cohesion postulates that administrative longevity, the classic resource of bureaucratic power (Weber 1978), is relevant also for international bureaucracies. More specifically, our measurement reflects 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 the capacity to differentiate. With respect to the first indicator, scholars regularly find that strong bureaucratic leadership indicates greater potential for administrative differentiation (Gilardi 2008: 57; see also Kassim and Connolly). Hence, the share of Secretary-Generals (SGs) who previously worked as civil servants in their organization is used to measure differentiation capacities. Such internal SGs have themselves experienced the life of a 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. In contrast, three of the four Directors-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), for example, have an internal employment history (coded 0.75).

Secondly, we consider the capacity of the secretariat to collect and process information independently. In global governance, where problems are highly interdependent and complex, independent research capacities are an important means for an administration to develop (and defend) their own policy options. Accordingly, we use the centrality of research bodies within the organizational structure of the secretariat as a second indicator of administrative differentiation. Particularly strong research capacities, for instance, can be observed in the secretariats of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These organizations have at least one centralized research body at the departmental level (coded 1). In contrast, the research bodies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) are less prominent in the organizational hierarchy (coded 0).

Statutory powers

The authority that member states have delegated to an organization is referred to as their statutory powers. This authority is not restricted to the administration but also concerns the powers of executive and legislative bodies (see Hooghe and Marks 2015: 307). Owing to our focus on bureaucratic autonomy, we concentrate on the competences of the administration *vis-à-vis* the political organs of the organization and its member states during the agenda-setting and implementation phases.

To measure the agenda-setting power, we code the degree to which the SG 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 members cannot remove items prior to the actual meeting), the administration is particularly autonomous. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN), the respective treaties give the SG undisputed agenda-setting power (coded 1). If, however, the executive body 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).

Within the implementation phase, the administration's sanctioning capacities *vis-à-vis* its stakeholders, which the secretariat exercises in close co-operation with 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 capacity is, for instance, the case in the UN, where the secretariat, after a resolution of the Security Council, is mandated to establish peacekeeping missions. The OECD, in contrast, may only publish its critical reports on non-compliant behaviour; it has no formal means to change it (coded 0).

Administrative resources

Personnel and finances are important resources of public administrations. 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 of balanced geographical representation, matters of human resource management are independently decided within the secretariat. Thus, the staffing rules leave little room for comparatively assessing the independence of staff. In the context of ministerial bureaucracies, it is argued that the greater the number of staff working in an administration, the more it is able to follow its own agenda and act autonomously from its political principals (Mayntz 1978; Schnapp 2004: 212). With respect to international bureaucracies, Brown uses the number of secretarial staff as one important variable to measure delegation to IGOs (2010: 153). Although we agree that staff size is a suitable measure for the availability of personnel resources, one must take into account that the demand for personnel increases with the number of policy responsibilities of an IGO. Thus, we 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 500 staff per policy field.

To measure the independence of financial resources, we take into account the source of the organization's budget (see Goetz and Patz) by coding whether the IGO is primarily self-financing (coded 1, as with the IMF or the World Bank [WB]), dependent on mandatory contributions (coded 0.5, as with most organizations in the sample) or dependent on voluntary contributions with donors earmarking a

substantial portion of the budget for specific purposes (coded 0, as with the UN and the WHO).

Table 2 provides an overview of how the ten indicators are related to the different dimensions and sub-dimensions of bureaucratic autonomy. The coding details are available as supplemental material on the journal's website.

Table 2. Dimensions, sub-dimensions and operationalization of bureaucratic autonomy.

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Indicator
1. Autonomy of will		
1.1. Administrative cohesion	Organizational centralization	Ratio of staff (to total staff) working at IGO headquarters
	Homogeneity of personnel	Ratio of ten largest nationalities (in terms of staff) to total organizational personnel
	Mandatory internal mobility of personnel	Degree to which organizational rules enforce internal staff mobility
	Length of employment	Ratio of staff with open-ended contracts to total number of staff
1.2. Administrative differentiation	Independence of administrative leadership	Share of heads of administration recruited from within the organization
	Capacity to collect and process independent information	Centrality of research bodies at different hierarchical levels
2. Autonomy of action		
2.1. Statutory powers	Agenda-setting competences of the SG	Degree to which the SG is involved in setting the agenda for legislative meetings
	Sanctioning competence	Sanctioning powers of the organization <i>vis-à-vis</i> its members
2.2. Administrative resources	Size of human resources	Number of total secretarial staff per policy field
	Independence of financial resources	Degree to which the organization relies on independent sources of income

Source: Authors' compilation.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

Sampling

To assess whether the measurement strategy introduced above is able to reveal variation within the four dimensions of autonomy, we selected the secretariats of fifteen organizations for a first application of the concept. Three criteria guided our case selection. Firstly, the secretariats needed to be of a certain size in terms of personnel (≥ 250), because mechanisms of internal co-ordination captured under 'autonomy of will' play a role only in larger secretariats. Secondly, we chose IGOs that operate in different policy fields (or that have a different mix of prime policy activities) in order to cover cross-sector variation. Thirdly, in order to safeguard the wider applicability of the concept, we included not only secretariats that have been regularly studied but also ones that have received less scholarly attention (see Eckhard and Ege 2016). Although our sampling will not allow for the generalization of findings to secretariats not included, by applying the multilayered concept to

empirical cases at this stage we can evaluate whether the concept is capable of identifying potentially meaningful empirical variation and learn about the concept's internal empirical structure. Table 3 lists the fifteen secretariats and summarizes some of the properties that have been used for their selection.

Table 3. Properties of the selected IGO secretariats.

Secretariat of	Staff	Policy field			Policy scope
		SEC	ECO	SOC	
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)	260		x	x	18
European Central Bank (ECB)	1,600		x		1
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)	2,300	x			4
Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)	1,900		x		3
International Labour Organization (ILO)	2,300			x	2
International Monetary Fund (IMF)	2,400		x		4
International Maritime Organization (IMO)	300			x	1
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	2,800		x	x	4
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)	2,600	x		x	8
United Nations (UN)	32,400	x		x	12
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)	2,100			x	6
World Bank Group (WB/IBRD)	11,400		x		2
World Health Organization (WHO)	5,500			x	5
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)	1,000		x		1
World Trade Organization (WTO)	640		x		2

Source: Authors' compilation. *Note:* Three types of policy field are distinguished: security (SEC), economic regulation (ECO) and social and environmental regulation (SOC). 'Policy scope' refers to the breadth of an organization's policy engagement and ranges from 1 to 25 (see Hooghe and Marks 2015). The values of the IDB's and the ECB's scope are missing in the original data set and were coded separately by the authors.

Data collection

Data was collected between 2012 and 2014. We relied on publicly available documents and statistics that were either retrieved from the websites of the organizations or requested directly from the secretariats. This data includes official documents such as treaties, budget reports, staff rules and minutes of meetings of different organizational bodies. Owing to a time lag of approximately one year between the publication of these documents and the information cited, some observations (especially budget and personnel statistics) date back as far as 2011. Comparing some of the information from 2011 with more recent numbers, however, showed only incremental changes.

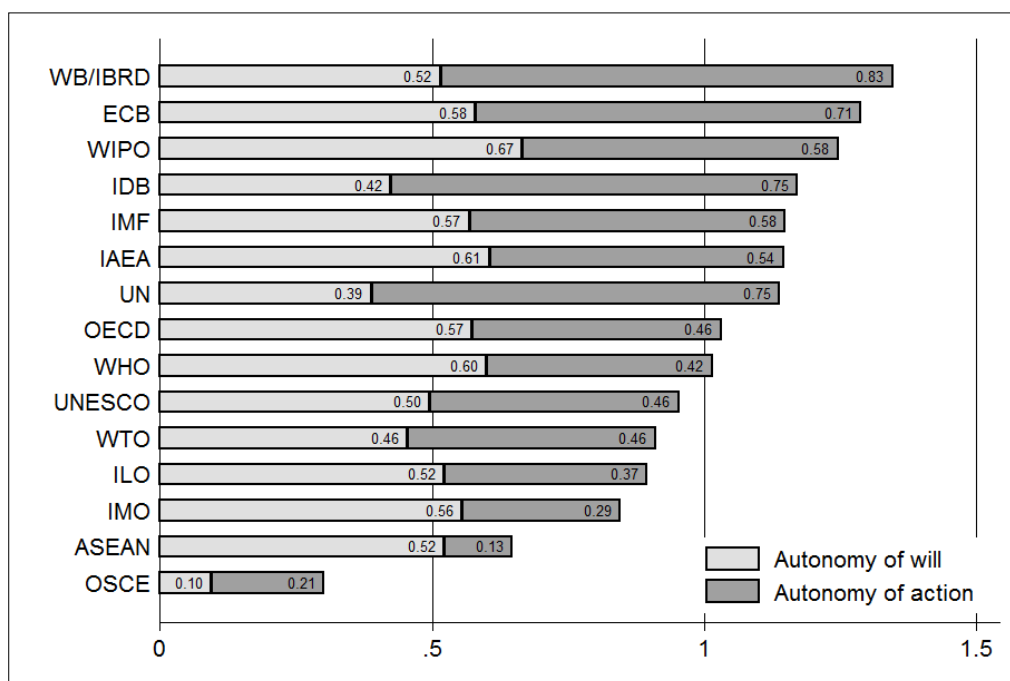
In order to allow for comparison across dimensions and sub-dimensions, the values of each indicator were coded to range from 0 to 1.³ Another important question was how to combine the different conceptual components in order to allow

comparison at higher levels of aggregation. 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.

Empirical insights

Figure 1 presents the empirical results at the concept and sub-concept level by showing the structural autonomy of each administration in descending order.

Figure 1. Aggregated values of bureaucratic autonomy in fifteen IGOs.



Source: Authors' calculations. Note: The maximum autonomy value is 2.

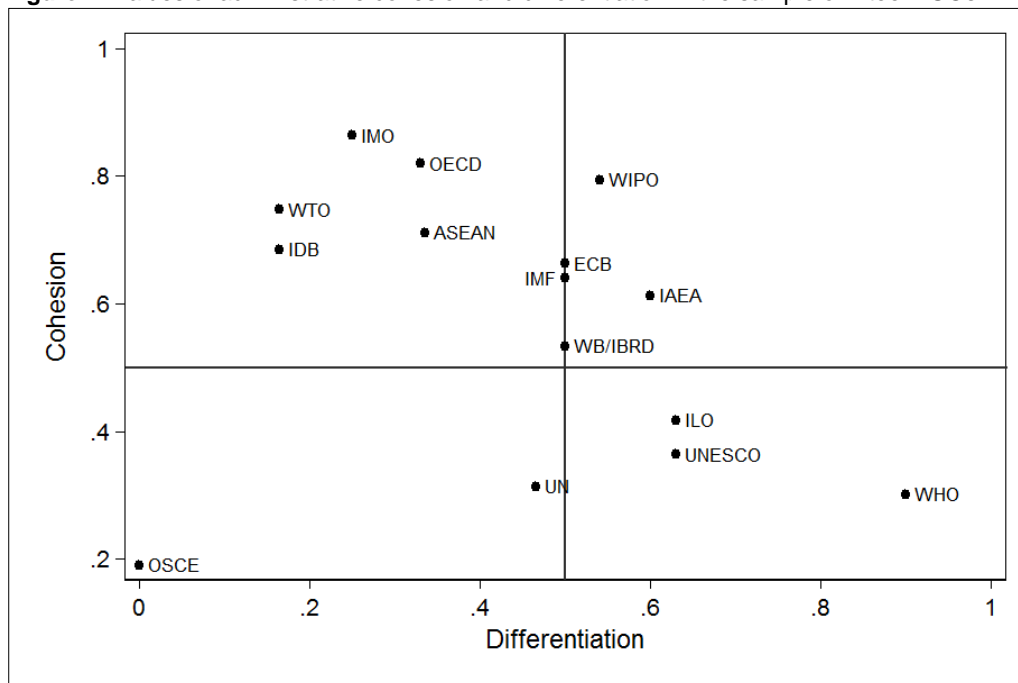
Overall, the WB has the most autonomous administration, followed by the secretariats of the European Central Bank (ECB), the WIPO and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Although the IDB secretariat's capacity to develop autonomous will is comparatively low (0.42), it is equipped with particularly high autonomy of action. One should recall, however, that to a considerable degree the 'autonomy of action' scores of the WB and the IDB reflect their strong positions *vis-à-vis* particular development projects and operations (and not member states as a whole). When we consider that the next case in the ranking – the secretariat of the IMF – is also an economic organization, the results seem to suggest that secretariats active in the field of economic regulation are particularly autonomous. The middle of the table includes the secretariats of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN, the OECD and the WHO. At the bottom of the ranking, the administrations of UNESCO and the WTO are followed by the secretariats of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the IMO. ASEAN's and the OSCE's secretariats complete our autonomy ranking as the least autonomous bureaucracies.

These results show that the aggregated empirical values of bureaucratic autonomy which we attained by applying the proposed measurement strategy are generally in line with the results of similar concepts. For instance, the correlation between the total autonomy score and an additive combination of Hooghe and

Marks's (2015) measures of pooling and delegation is 0.77 and significant ($p < 0.05$). Moreover, the correlation between autonomy and the two individual concepts is weaker and partially not significant, indicating that bureaucratic autonomy differs from these two concepts not only along conceptual but also along empirical lines.

But what do the empirical results tell us about the internal structure of the concept? An important question in this regard is how the respective dimensions specified to capture autonomous will and autonomous action are related to each other. The two dimensions measuring autonomy of action are weakly but positively correlated ($r = 0.16$). Thus, aggregating the values of these two dimensions into a common sub-concept appears to be unproblematic. The correlation coefficient between administrative cohesion and administrative differentiation, however, is negative ($r = -0.25$).⁴ In order to scrutinize more closely the empirical relationship between administrative cohesion and administrative differentiation, it is useful to plot the two dimensions against each other (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Values of administrative cohesion and differentiation in the sample of fifteen IGOs.



Source: Authors' calculations. Note: Because the number of indicators varies between cohesion (four indicators) and differentiation (two indicators), average values have been used to aggregate the data.

Aside from the OSCE, which is characterized by low cohesion and low differentiation, the values of the remaining cases indicate that structurally cohesive secretariats are less able to develop differentiated policy options. Looking at the scores of individual administrations, one might argue that this apparent trade-off between administrative cohesion and administrative differentiation can be explained by the diverging functional requirements of the administrations under study. Whereas secretariats of 'programme organizations' (see Rittberger *et al.* 2013: 23), which mostly fulfil norm-setting functions (such as the WHO, ILO or UN), cluster in the bottom-right quadrant (low cohesion, high differentiation), secretariats of 'service organizations' (such as the IAEA, WB, IMF or IDB), which are more actively involved in project implementation and service-delivery, tend to show the opposite

configuration (high cohesion, low differentiation). Thus, being able to provide independent and innovative policy solutions in order to assist member states during policy-making can be considered an important requirement of secretariats in programme organizations. Service organizations, in contrast, seem to be in need of less administrative differentiation but greater internal cohesion in order to deliver services to its members and to manage projects successfully.

Moreover, the negative correlation also points to a more general detriment of using average values to aggregate scores to a higher conceptual level: it may conceal potentially relevant empirical variation at the aggregate level. While this well-known disadvantage of the average-based aggregation procedure cannot be avoided, one must carefully check for negative internal relationships when increasing the number of cases. If the goal is to use the aggregate scores as a composite index of autonomy, then alternative methods of aggregation might also be considered (see e.g., Goertz 2006: 27–68). Improving the accuracy of the developed measurement and identifying suitable ways for aggregating data in accordance with the underlying research interest is, however, best achieved in dialogue with more empirical research.

CONCLUSION

In advancing a conceptualization of the bureaucratic autonomy of international secretariats, this paper has distinguished between autonomy of will and autonomy of action, and proposed a set of carefully selected empirical indicators. The results reveal differential patterns in autonomy intensities. Structural bureaucratic autonomy levels are obviously not the same as bureaucratic influence; however, capturing bureaucratic autonomy as we do offers a solid starting point for engaging in the disciplined comparison of large numbers of international bureaucracies with respect to their (potential) ability to exercise such bureaucratic influence. Scholars interested in international bureaucracies or in explaining particular policy decisions may find the information about varying bureaucratic autonomy levels helpful as dependent or independent variables, especially should the data for more international secretariats be collected. Moreover, the multilayered structure of autonomy offers empirical insights into components of autonomy at different conceptual levels. Depending on the specific research interest, the respective data will be useful for case selection, as conceptual 'lenses' highlighting particularly important aspects or as standalone variables or analytical conditions. 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 potential, and thus bureaucratic impact in global policy-making can be studied more systematically. Secondly, assessments of structural bureaucratic autonomy are relevant in 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 the 'action' component, it will probably suffice to have control and responsivity mechanisms that are less sophisticated than those needed for bureaucracies with medium or high scores in both in both autonomy components. Hence, for practical design questions, too, there are important implications that might 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 points to avenues for adapting public administration theory to international contexts. We are well aware that the suggested measurement strategy requires further validation and possibly adaption, which would be best carried out through the iterative application of empirical testing and conceptual reformulation. We hope that our approach elicits fruitful controversy and further research in this direction.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by the German Research Foundation under Grant FOR # 1745 TP 02 BA 3658/5-1. We are grateful for Jesse Lehrke's language editing and for comments on previous versions of this paper by Jonas Tallberg, Stefan Becker, Emmanuelle Mathieu and our colleagues in the Research Unit, as well as three referees and the editors of JEPP.

NOTES

¹ The literature on bureaucratic autonomy, organizational independence and agency discretion is very extensive (see e.g., Ege forthcoming). We therefore focus on those themes and studies that were most promising for the objective of this project, which is to conceptualize bureaucratic autonomy – in particular with a view to helping develop means of empirical measurement.

² See Bauer *et al.* (2015) for a detailed account of the different sociological conceptions of IGO autonomy.

³ Data availability was a problem in three instances. In order to aggregate the data despite these missing values, imputed values were used (see supplemental material).

⁴ We also checked for negative relationships at the variable level. There is only one negative correlation between the two variables measuring differentiation ($r = -0.21$; see supplemental material), pointing to a potential substitution effect between research capacities and independent leadership. In the case of administrative cohesion, which is operationalized by four indicators, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.71 (with no indication of reversed items) also suggests sufficient internal consistency.

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Supplemental material

Appendix 1. Coding of indicators.

<i>1. Autonomy of will</i>
staff_hqratio: Ratio of staff (to total staff) working at international governmental organization (IGO) headquarters.
staff_homogen: Ratio of ten largest nationalities (in terms of staff) to total organizational personnel.
staff_mobility: Indicator takes into account the organizational rules governing internal mobility: 1: no mobility rules; 0.5: mobility is voluntary, but explicitly encouraged; 0: mobility is mandatory.
staff_permratio: The ratio of staff with open-ended contracts to total number of staff.
sg_internal: Share of Secretary-Generals (SGs) who previously worked as civil servants in the organization under consideration (only the last five SGs are considered).
research: The research capacity of the international bureaucracy is coded as follows: 1: existence of a research body at the <i>department</i> level (directly below the SG); 0.66: existence of two or more research bodies at the <i>division</i> level (two hierarchical levels below the SG); 0.33: existence of one research body at the <i>division</i> level (two hierarchical levels below the SG); 0: no research body at division level or above.
<i>2. Autonomy of action</i>
sg_agenda: The agenda-setting competences of the SG are coded as follows: 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 [MS], or by 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: Sanctioning powers (see Brown 2010 for a similar measure):

1: autonomous capacity to impose sanctions (sanctions related to the failure to pay mandatory MS contributions are not included).

0.66: power to call for sanctions against non-compliant members;

0.33: denial of membership benefits (e.g., voting rights and IGO services);

0: only naming and shaming by issuing reports or admonitions;

staff_perpolicy: The size of human resources is coded as follows:

1: the organization employs 1,500 staff or more per policy field;

0.66: the organization employs between 1,000 and 1,499 staff per policy field;

0.33: the organization employs between 500 and 999 staff per policy field;

0: the organization employs fewer than 500 staff per policy field.

The number of policy fields is based on Hooghe and Marks 2015; the respective values are listed in Table 3.

income: Independence of financial resources:

1: self-financing;

0.5: mandatory contributions;

0: voluntary contributions.

In case an organization relies on several financial resources, we use the source providing the highest share of the budget. The budget of the OECD, for instance, consists of 70.3% mandatory contributions and 25.6 % voluntary contributions (with the rest coming from other sources). Thus, the organization is coded with 0.5, indicating that the majority of its revenues comes from mandatory contributions.

Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics of variables.

Variable name	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
staff_hqratio	15	.73	.29	.20	1
staff_homogen*	14	.54	.19	.35	1
staff_mobility	15	.72	.34	0	1
staff_permratio*	13	.31	.34	0	.93
sg_internal	15	.31	.33	0	.8
research	15	.55	.39	0	1
sg_agenda	15	.64	.34	0	1
sanctioning	15	.34	.36	0	1
staff_perpolicy	15	.42	.39	0	1
income	15	.6	.34	0	1

Source: Authors' calculations. *Note:* For the variables marked with an asterisk, we estimated the values for staff homogeneity for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB: 0.68) and permanent contracts for the IDB (0.33) and the World Trade Organization (0.36) by considering the values of IGOs that are similar with regard to membership and staff size. For this procedure, the *impute* command in Stata 12.1 was used.

Appendix 3. Pairwise correlations of variables measuring autonomy of will.

	staff_hqratio	staff_homogen	staff_mobility	staff_permratio	sg_internal	research
staff_hqratio	1.0000					
staff_homogen	0.3479	1.0000				
staff_mobility	0.7090	0.5344	1.0000			
staff_permratio	0.5699	-0.0718	0.1831	1.0000		
sg_internal	-0.2743	-0.1492	-0.0717	-0.1197	1.0000	
research	0.0961	-0.5242	-0.0300	-0.0787	-0.2059	1.0000

Source: Authors' calculations. *Note:* Relevant values in bold. In the case of the four variables measuring administrative cohesion (staff_hqratio, staff_homogen, staff_mobility, staff_permratio), we used Cronbach's alpha instead of pairwise correlations. The substantial value of this measure ($\alpha = 0.71$) with no indication of reversed items suggests sufficient internal consistency.

Appendix 4. Pairwise correlations of variables measuring autonomy of action.

	sg_agenda	sanctioning	staff_perpolicy	income
sg_agenda	1.0000			
sanctioning	0.1607	1.0000		
staff_perpolicy	0.1921	0.2830	1.0000	
income	-0.2925	0.1363	0.1092	1.0000

Source: Authors' calculations. *Note:* Relevant values in bold.

Appendix 5. Pairwise correlations of the four dimensions.

	admincohe_score	admindiff_score	statpower_score	adminres_score
admincohe_score	1.0000			
admindiff_score	-0.2503	1.0000		
statpower_score	-0.1095	0.1055	1.0000	
adminres_score	0.1632	0.2262	0.1632	1.0000

Source: Authors' calculations. *Note:* Relevant values in bold.