

Prof. Dr. Michael W. Bauer  
Jean Monnet Professor  
Chair of Comparative Public Administration and Policy Analysis  
michael.bauer@uni-speyer.de

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**CHRISTOPH KNILL**

**MICHAEL W. BAUER**

**Policy-making by international public  
administrations: concepts, causes and  
consequences**

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**Abstract:**

Alongside with rising needs for greater international and transnational cooperation, the bureaucratic bodies of international organizations do receive ever more scholarly attention. Yet neither empirically nor theoretically is the relevance of International Public Administrations (IPAs) for global policy-making well understood. By linking considerations of policy scope and policy type a heuristic is provided how to differentiate between aims and levels of potential IPA influence. Combining such a distinction with a taxonomy of administrative resources—namely nodality, authority, treasure, and organization—prepares the ground for developing concepts to systematically study patterns, constellations and conditions of IPA influence.

Key words: International governmental organisations, international public administration, global governance, bureaucratic influence

## 1. Introduction

'Wicked' problems like 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 need to be ever more intensively coordinated and prepared with the help of international governmental organizations (IGOs). Conceptualizations of IGOs as platforms for power struggles or vehicles for projecting national interests at the international level dominated for decades. With the shift towards analysing IGOs as actors in their own rights, more attention is paid to what constitutes and conditions independent influence of IGOs when providing global public policy (Stone 2008). Moreover, if the 'actorhood' of IGOs is at stake and questions arise as to under which conditions these institutions can operate with at least some degree of detachment from the preferences of their members, the bureaucratic bodies and apparatus of IGOs come into focus. 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. In view to the precise degree of organizational independence and autonomous room for manoeuvre much depends upon the quality and strength of the bureaucracies, usually embodied in a secretariat, on which the IGOs rely in their day-to-day operations.

As a result of processes of internationalization, it has been argued that the administrative bodies of IGOs; i.e. 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 increasingly attracted scholarly attention (Cerny 2010: 111; Beiermann and Siebenhüner 2009; 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 <THIS ISSUE>), 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 so far have no 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 still 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 on the extent to which the policy-making influence of IPAs reaches beyond their organizational boundaries. It is, for instance, well conceivable that IPAs try to spread information of their policy approaches in transnational administrative networks thus attempting to surpass internal blockage or alternatives; hence seeking to extend the support for their concepts in their institutional environment might be the means of choice also in international bureaucratic politics. Such activities, in turn, might have internal repercussions: The more particular bureaucratic ideas are supported by other administrations, the greater the chances to get policy proposals accepted “at home”.

The second dimension of policy type refers to the question 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 aspect covers the question if 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? On the external dimension, institutional influence is linked to the capacities of IPAs in setting up transnational administrative network structures and the establishment of exchange relationships with other IPAs and national administrative units operating in their domain.

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: own compilation.

So far, the scholarly interest has primarily been on the *internal* dimension of IPA influence. There is a growing body of studies investigating the role of 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; Johnson and Urpelainen 2014; Hanrieder 2014). Yet, by contrast, systematic accounts of the external influence of IPAs (both in substantive and institutional terms) have been fairly 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 well conceivable that IPAs try to increase their substantive policy influence by trying to strengthen their institutional position in the first place. On the other hand, trade-offs between the internal and external influence of IPAs constitute a plausible scenario. In particular, IPAs with a rather weak internal status (low autonomy, low resources) might try to concentrate on networking activities in their own domain in the first place. 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 whose boundaries seem to be delineated much more clearly (Bauer 2015). Yet, we have not even begun to understand these trade-offs that 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 if 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.

#### *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 becomes their nodality in transnational communication networks. Typically, the policy influence emerging from nodality is based on the publication of data, information, recommendations, and advice.

As shown by Jörgens et al. (2016<THIS ISSUE>), 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. analyze one of the smallest units of international bureaucracies, i.e. 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 can show a striking centrality of bureaucratic actors in the communication network. Yet the influence of nodality need not be restricted to substantive policies, but might also be related to the structuring of policy networks in so-called multilevel administration settings. Along these lines, Benz et al. (2016<THIS ISSUE>) 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.

#### *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 the government the ability to force societal actors to follow legal rules. This

definition, of course, needs to be modified when the focus is on 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. It is hence the relationship between politics and administration that is of central analytical interest in this context (Weber 1978; Page 1992). In a world where the economy and the society display an ever growing demand for rationalization, efficiency and planning, technocratic expertise how to execute effectively 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). To design structures giving bureaucrats the needed autonomy to do their jobs effectively but keeping them committed to the priorities set by the elected politicians is a permanent challenge in the reality of government and its analysis constitutes a classical topic of public administration research.

Before this background Bauer and Ege (2016<THIS ISSUE>) conceive of bureaucratic autonomy as a prerequisite of influence administrative actors can wield. With a view of making comparisons between IGOs possible, they suggest a conceptualization of 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 “of action” within a sample of fifteen international secretariats. The resulting benchmark can be used as the basis for independent or dependent variables. Beyond adding to policy-analytical tool boxes the results are relevant for assessing questions of efficiency and legitimacy of international bureaucracies in global governance.

#### *Treasure: The Budget of IPAs*

While authority defines the political resources of IPAs, treasure refers to their monetary tools. Whereas for the context of governments, treasure means the extent to which governance objectives are achieved by reliance on economic incentives, like subsidies or grants, for public administration the crucial question is on the size and specification of their budgets. To what extent can IPAs dispose of a sufficient budget in order to fulfill 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<THIS ISSUE>) focus on these questions by analyzing bureaucratic power in the area of international budget politics. Important questions arise in this area. Are executives at international level more influential than national counterparts in terms of budget powers—given weaker parliamentary scrutiny and

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 analyze change and persistence in EU budget processes in the context of the adoption of the multiannual financial planning. They find that—especially due to the increased powers of the European Parliament and the newly consolidated powers of the Council—the Commission is coming under more pressure. But even under such adversarial conditions the Commission has managed to retain its budgetary centrality by maintain most of the established routines and by incorporating demands by other actors into new routines. The power of the supranational bureaucracy with respect to the managing the budget process remains thus essentially unchallenged—and thus a source of international administrative influence.

### *Organization: Administrative Styles*

With regard to organization, the focus is on the 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 behavior. The central question is on 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 described basic features of administrative behaviour in the interaction between public authorities and society. The central argument behind this literature has been, that policy-making in terms of both policy outputs and policy effects cannot be fully understood by merely studying formal institutions and party politics. Rather, informal features of national administrations constitute a further independent variable that has to be seriously taken into account in this regard. 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<THIS ISSUE>) can be seen as a first step to address this research gap. They compare administrative styles in the OSCE-Secretariat and the EU-Commission, based on distinction between two ideal typical administrative styles – entrepreneurial and servant. They find astonishing similarities between the two selected bureaucracies with respect to patterns of policy initiation, policy formulation and policy implementation. These similarities in styles lead however—depending on contextual factors—to quite different influence capacities of the respective bureaucracies which 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 on IPA influence on public policies beyond the nation state, we still lack a broader understanding of the consequences of international bureaucratic involvement. The central question in this regard concerns the extent to which IPA influence affects 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 IGOs develop policies that seek to address important transnational problems, that they will generate broader public and political support.

Against this backdrop the central question regards the extent to which IPAs affect the performance of their IGO. The analytical challenge here is not only on connecting systematically bureaucratic characteristics and behavior with policy outputs and impacts, but also – and in the first place – on the development of sound concepts for measuring IGO performance. Tallberg et al. (2016<THIS ISSUE>) address the latter aspect. They develop a typology of policy aspects that is based on volume, orientation, type, instrument, and target—and 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 them are themselves public administrations.

## **5. Outlook**

IPAs are the bureaucratic layer of a transnational governance order in the making. In itself there is nothing new about international bureaucracies—they are present in international politics at least since the foundation of the League of Nations in the first quarter of the 20th century. However, their tasks have changed, their portfolios expanded and in accordance to 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 wicked policy problems that transcend national borders IGOs have become all but indispensable—and that means de facto that the bureaucracies on whom IGOs rely have become ever more central, too. IPAs are hence an essential feature for understanding 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 behavior of international bureaucratic elites with the results of the transnationalized policy-processes.

**Biographical notes:** Christoph Knill holds the Chair of Empirical Theories of Politics at the University of Munich and is the speaker of the research unit “International Public Administration”. Michael W. Bauer holds the Jean Monnet Chair for Comparative Public Administration and Policy Analysis at the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer.

**Addresses of correspondence:** Christoph Knill (corresponding author), Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Geschwister-Scholl-Institut für Politikwissenschaft, Oettingenstraße 67, 80538 München, Germany, email: christoph.knill@gsi.lmu.de. Michael W. Bauer, German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer, Freiherr-vom-Stein-Str. 2, 67346 Speyer, Germany, email: michael.bauer@uni-speyer.de

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