

# **The Performance of International Organizations: Institutional Design and Policy Output in Global Governance**

## **Purpose and Aim**

Many problems confronting today's societies are transnational in character, leading states to increasingly rely on international organizations (IOs) for policy solutions. Yet the performance of IOs varies extensively. While some IOs are highly successful in developing, adopting, and enforcing policy, others are less successful. Whereas the European Court of Human Rights is famous for its strong record, for example, the UN Human Rights Commission was abolished because of its poor performance. While the EU Council of Ministers sustains a high decision-making speed even after Eastern enlargement, the UN Security Council is notorious for its inability to reach agreement.

How can we account for this mixed record in IO performance? Are there identifiable factors that make IOs work better or worse? While existing research points to a multitude of factors that are beyond the control of IOs themselves, we focus instead on the importance of *institutional design*. For instance, does IO decision-making involve high institutional hurdles, such as unanimity requirements, or can new policy be adopted by a majority? Do states have exclusive control over policy-making, or is the IO open to non-state actors as well?

The project explores this topic guided by the overarching question of *when, how, and why the institutional design of IOs shapes their performance*. The project adopts a mixed-method design, combining a statistical analysis of performance in a large number of IOs with in-depth case studies of select IOs. It spans IOs in multiple policy areas and world regions over the time period 1950 to 2010. This design allows for a comprehensive description of IO performance across multiple dimensions, a systematic analysis of the institutional determinants of IO performance, and an in-depth perspective on the causal mechanisms through which design affects performance. The design also permits an assessment of whether IOs learn from each other, by emulating the design of their best-performing peers.

We conceptualize IO performance as the capacity of IO bodies to produce policy output, in terms of rules, policies and programs in a given area. Adequate performance is a necessary condition for IOs to make a difference in world politics. Unless IOs are capable of developing and adopting new policy, they will be unable to solve the problems that motivated their creation. In addition, the performance of IOs is likely to have a bearing on their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Only IOs that deliver are likely to sustain popular support in the long run.

The project promises three central contributions to research and policy. First, it will offer the most systematic and comprehensive analysis so far of how institutional design shapes the performance of IOs. Second, it will generate a unique dataset on the policy output of IOs of extensive value to the research community. Third, it will be policy relevant, by providing policy-makers with evidence on the effects of design choices that can help them to systematically improve global governance.

## **Survey of the Field**

This project speaks to three bodies of research, none of which has systematically explored the performance of IOs.

First, there is a growing literature on the institutional design of IOs. However, this research is so far mostly concerned with the sources and patterns of institutional design – not its

consequences. Central contributions to this literature explore the difference between hard and soft law (Abbott and Snidal 2000), the rational logic of IO design (Koremenos et al. 2001), the delegation of authority to IOs (Hawkins et al. 2006), the transnational design of IOs (Tallberg et al. forthcoming), and the diffusion of institutional features across IOs (Börzel and Risse 2011). To the extent that studies have traced the effects of institutional variation, they have been restricted to a single aspect of IO design, such as dispute settlement (Tallberg and Smith 2012).

Second, there is an extensive body of research on the effectiveness of international environmental regimes (e.g., Haas et al. 1993; Miles et al. 2002; Young et al. 2008). However, this literature does not systematically explore IO performance as a condition for effectiveness or engage in comparisons across policy domains. Research in this area has developed over the past two decades, covering a broad set of environmental regimes, exploring a multitude of explanations, and deploying a rich portfolio of methodological tools (for an overview, see Young 2011). Yet this literature has primarily been concerned with the implementation and impact of environmental treaties, rather than the performance of IOs, measured as policy output. Moreover, it is not matched by similar research on other policy fields.

Third, there is an impressive comparative literature on the performance and output of political institutions at the national level. However, this research has not yet examined the performance of IOs (Gutner and Thomson 2010). In a seminal study, Lijphart (1999) analyses the performance of democracies, measured as policy programs and other governmental efforts (see also Roller 2005). Since then, the research agenda has broadened to include the analysis of policy performance in various subfields and regions (e.g., Jahn and Müller-Rommel 2010; Daugberg and Sønderskov 2011). Moreover, comparative analysis of policy output is common in research on policy diffusion and convergence in economic, social, and environmental politics (e.g., Simmons and Elkins 2005; Holzinger et al. 2008; Gilardi 2010).

This project is designed to move beyond these limits in existing research by (1) systematically assessing the effects of institutional design, (2) comparing IO performance across and within multiple policy domains, and (3) extending the study of organizational performance and policy output to global governance.

## **Project Description**

### *Theoretical Framework: Institutional Determinants of Policy Output*

This project starts with the widely held assumption that institutions matter. How actors behave tends to be shaped by the institutional structure within which they interact (March and Olsen 1989; North 1990). Institutional theory suggests that institutional design matters either by shaping actors' incentives and strategic calculations, and/or by shaping actor perceptions of appropriate behavior.

We focus on five central dimensions of the institutional design of IOs: access, autonomy, scope, agenda-setting, and decision-making (cf. Koremenos et al. 2001; Hawkins et al. 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2012). These dimensions are generic and thus apply to all forms of IO bodies, from ministerial councils and committees to courts and secretariats. *Access* captures the extent to which IO bodies are open or closed to participation by non-state actors. *Autonomy* refers to the degree of independence of an IO body from member-state control. *Scope* indicates the policy remit of an IO body, and ranges from narrow to broad. *Agenda-setting* expresses whether policy proposals in an IO body can be presented by all, some or

only one privileged agenda-setting actor. *Decision-making* captures the degree of formal support required for policy to be adopted, normally ranging from a simple majority to unanimous consent.

For each institutional dimension, we formulate competing hypotheses on how design matters for the performance of IO bodies:

- On *access*, we will examine whether the involvement of non-state actors improves IO performance by contributing resources (Raustiala 1997), or if non-state actors reduce efficiency by hindering effective decision-making (Golub 1999).
- On *autonomy*, we will assess whether independence from member-state control makes IO bodies more able to avoid political deadlock and advance policy (Pollack 2003), or more prone to dysfunctional organizational behavior (Barnett and Finnemore 2004).
- On *scope*, we will evaluate whether IOs perform better when only focused on a narrow range of policy issues, or when they have a broad policy agenda (Siebenhüner 2008).
- On *agenda-setting*, we will test the competing claims that a privileged agenda-setter is conducive to stable and efficient policy adoption (Fiorina and Shepsle 1989), and that multiple agenda-setters lead to richer policy output.
- On *decision-making*, we will contrast the hypothesis that less demanding voting rules lead to more efficient decision-making (Tsebelis 2002), and the alternative hypothesis that decision-making tends to be governed by a consensus norm irrespective of formal rules (Heisenberg 2005).

Building on insights in existing research, we also control for a set of alternative, non-design factors on IO performance, including problem structure (Miles et al. 2002), power distribution (Krasner 1983), and heterogeneity of state preferences (Scharpf 1997).

The dependent variable in the project is the performance of IOs, conceptualized as policy output. By policy output we mean the acts that IO bodies adopt when developing policy within a particular issue area, such as decisions, declarations, rulings, recommendations, or guidelines (cf. Easton 1965). We will assess five generic features of the policy output of IO bodies. These features cover the most substantive aspects of policy output (cf. Rittberger et al. 2012), and are of theoretical interest in the field.

- *Number of acts*: the yearly level of output. Establishing over-time variation in the volume of policy output permits an assessment of whether individual IO bodies, entire IOs, or global governance as a whole have become more or less productive over time.
- *Policy instrument*: whether policies are developed through hard or soft law. Identifying policy instruments allows for an evaluation of when and where IOs opt for hard policies with a high level of bindingness or rely on soft recommendations (Abbott and Snidal 2000).
- *Policy activity*: whether policies consist of regulation, distribution, redistribution, symbolic measures, or information activities. Mapping the policy activities of IOs in categories common to the study of policy output in domestic political systems (Almond and Powell 1966; Lowi 1972) permits an assessment of variation within global governance and across the global-national divide.
- *Policy target*: whether policies are directed at state or societal actors. Isolating the targets of policy makes it possible to evaluate whether IOs increasingly aim their actions at societal actors directly, rather than work through governments, as implied in the conventional model of international public law (Moravcsik 2012).

- *Audience*: whether policies are aimed at actors internal or external to the IO. Establishing if policies exclusively target state and societal actors within the IO, or actors outside as well, sheds light on the reach of IO policy in world politics.

### *A Mixed-Method Design*

The project employs a mixed-method approach, combining a statistical analysis of performance in a large number of IOs with in-depth case studies of the operation of causal mechanisms in select IOs. Empirically, the project includes IOs in multiple policy areas and world regions over the time period 1950 to 2010.

The choice of a mixed-method approach heeds calls in recent evaluations of the field. Young (2011: 19858) concludes that “finding ways to combine quantitative and qualitative methods is a priority in studies of effectiveness,” while Gutner and Thomson (2010: 244-245) emphasize: “Because they add value to the study of IO performance, qualitative and quantitative studies should work in tandem according to their comparative advantage.”

In both the quantitative and the qualitative parts of the project, we operate with IO bodies as the unit of analysis. A focus on IO bodies makes it possible to disaggregate international organizations into their constituent parts and thereby get a more fine-grained assessment of their design and performance. It is never entire IOs such as “the EU” or “the UN” that produce policy, but specific bodies within these organizations that differ in terms of design, purpose, and output. We distinguish between nine types of IO bodies, from summits and ministerial councils to committees, secretariats, and courts.

In the *quantitative* part of the project, we will descriptively map the policy output of IOs and analyze the effects of institutional design on IO output. The basis of the quantitative analysis will be the extension of an existing dataset from a project in the phase of conclusion (Tallberg et al. forthcoming), focused on the design dimension of access. The dataset covers 298 bodies of 50 IOs from 1950 to 2010. The selected IOs comprise a stratified random sample from the universe of IOs, and include IOs from a large variety of policy areas and world regions.

For the purpose of this project, we will expand the dataset in two ways. First, we will collect data on the other four design dimensions, next to access (independent variable). This will take place in cooperation with two other groups, based at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and at Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin. Owing to prior coordination, the three groups have the same unit of analysis and extensive overlap in IO coverage. While we will be able to draw on data collected by the partner groups for 36 out of 50 IOs, we will have to collect new data on the outstanding design dimensions for 14 IOs.

Second, we will independently collect data on the policy output of all 50 IOs for the full time period (dependent variable). The data collection will cover the five policy features previously identified: number of acts, policy instrument, policy activity, policy target, and audience. The data will be gathered on the basis of annual reviews of activities in IO bodies and actual policy output in terms of documents. Prior to this application, the project team conducted a pilot coding of policy output in the World Trade Organization, verifying the feasibility of the data strategy.

On the basis of the dataset, we will engage in three forms of statistical analysis. First, we will provide a comprehensive descriptive statistical analysis of what IOs actually do. This will allow us to address widespread assumptions about the nature of global governance with systematic evidence. What types of policy output do IOs actually produce? Have IOs become

more or less productive over the past sixty years? Is IO policy aimed at state or societal actors, internal or external in its reach, and hard or soft in nature? Are there distinct differences in IO performance across policy areas and world regions?

Second, we will conduct time series cross-sectional analyses of the effects of design changes on policy output. We will use multivariate regression analysis to determine if and how changes in institutional design affect IO performance. Which factors – design changes and competing explanations – explain the longitudinal and cross-sectional variation in IO output? Do institutional changes of a particular nature have the same types of effects across different policy domains, types of IO bodies, and world regions? Where the material allows for it, we will integrate information on the direction and degree of changes in IO output over time into our dependent variable. Moreover, we will apply event-count analysis, such as Poisson regression, where we use the annual number of policy outputs as the dependent variable.

Third, we will assess whether IOs learn from each other's design successes and failures, based on diffusion analysis. To what extent do IO bodies emulate the design choices of their most successful peers in terms of policy output? Do we over time see a convergence on the institutional design of the best performing IO bodies? Specifying a particular element of the institutional design as the dependent variable, we will use spatial models to explore the effect of different mechanisms of diffusion (Gilardi 2010; Franzese and Hays 2008).

The *qualitative* part of the project will focus on the causal mechanisms through which design changes affect IO performance. Using longitudinal comparison, we will trace the effects of design changes within single IOs over time, thus holding the organizational and political context constant.

In conformance with a nested design in mixed-method analysis, five cases will be drawn from the sample of IOs in the dataset, based on preliminary statistical results. We will select one case to explore each of the five dimensions of institutional design: access, autonomy, scope, agenda-setting, and decision-making. We will ensure to have cases that both conform to and deviate from the general pattern of observed effects of institutional design, which will help us identify the scope conditions of design effects. In addition, the case selection will be informed by the ambition of having cases speak to different policy areas and world regions.

Two historical examples may serve to illustrate such over-time dynamics within single IOs. When the European Court of Human Rights in 1998 abolished the Commission, which previously had screened all complaints to the court, the number of cases and decisions increased dramatically. While the Court delivered 837 judgments throughout the entire period 1959-1998, it nowadays delivers more than 1,000 judgments in a single year. Similarly, when the EU from 1987 onwards shifted from unanimity to qualified majority voting as adoption principle in the Council, legislation became considerably easier to pass, with clear effects on the speed and volume of decision-making. This process of institutional reform has continued, with the effect that the Council nowadays adopts decisions more easily than a decade ago, despite having to accommodate the interests of twelve new member states.

## **Preliminary Results**

Earlier research by the project team has informed the design of the proposed project. Collectively, the team has successfully concluded a mixed-method project on the transnational design of IOs, which included the development of an original dataset on the access dimension of institutional design (Tallberg et al. forthcoming). As part of the earlier project, the team also established cooperation with partner groups in Chapel Hill and Berlin

for purposes of merging data into a more comprehensive dataset on the institutional design of IOs. The proposed collection of data on the policy output of IOs will form a third step in this process, enabling the project team to further develop an already exceptional international dataset, and to perform the first systematic assessment of design effects on IO performance.

In addition, the project members individually have engaged in research that points to the promise of the proposed project. Tallberg has explored the effects of the institutional design of dispute-settlement systems for state compliance (e.g., Tallberg 2002; Tallberg and Smith 2012). Sommerer has explained diffusion and convergence of public policy (e.g., Sommerer 2010; Holzinger et al. 2008). Squatrito has traced the policy effects of two international legal systems in three policy fields across three European countries (e.g., Squatrito 2008, 2012).

## **Significance**

This project will have implications for four areas in the study and practice of global governance. First, this project will offer a unique assessment of the *effects of institutional design* on organizational performance across a broad range of IOs over a sixty-year period. While existing literature has explored the sources and patterns of international institutional design, there is so far limited systematic knowledge about the consequences of alternative institutional designs for the way that IOs work.

Second, this project will open up a new frontier in the study of global governance through its novel and systematic attention to *organizational performance*, including a new and comprehensive dataset on policy output. While political performance at the national level has been comprehensively explored, there has so far been no parallel effort in relation to IOs.

Third, the results of the project will significantly expand our understanding of the sources of *effectiveness in global governance*. Performance (output) is a necessary condition for effectiveness, which also encompasses the extent to which policies are complied with (outcomes) and affect the severity of the problems that IOs seek to address (impact).

Fourth, the project will offer new and systematic knowledge about one of the principal sources of *legitimacy in global governance*. Public support for IOs is typically rooted in their systems for interest aggregation (input-oriented legitimacy) and their organizational performance (output-legitimacy).

## **Project Organization**

### *Time Plan*

The project will be conducted in three phases of equal length over a period of four years. The *first phase* will be devoted to theory development and quantitative data collection. More specifically, the goals for the first phase are: (a) further development of theoretical hypotheses about the effects of institutional design on IO performance; (b) gathering of outstanding data on the institutional design of the 50 IOs in the sample, in cooperation with the partner groups in Chapel Hill and Berlin; (c) refinement of the categorization of policy output in preparation for data collection; and (d) collection of data on the policy output of the 50 IOs.

In the *second phase*, the project moves from preparation to execution of its quantitative and qualitative research strategies. More specifically, the goals for the second phase are: (a) completion of the dataset on the institutional design and organizational performance of the 50 IOs; (b) descriptive and explanatory statistical analysis on the basis of the new dataset; (c)

identification of cases for qualitative analysis, based on statistical results; and (d) execution of five diachronic case studies of specifically selected IOs.

The *third phase* of the project will be devoted to the synthesis of the results from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, as well as the dissemination of results to the research and policy communities. This includes the organization of an international research workshop and a workshop with policy-makers from governments and IOs. This third phase will also involve the identification of new promising areas of research on the basis of the project's results, and the associated formulation of research proposals to Swedish and European funding agencies.

### *Deliverables, Impact, and Communication Strategy*

The principal deliverables of the project will be *scholarly publications*, in the shape of articles in international peer-review journals, a co-written monograph with a leading academic press, an edited volume with the two partner groups, and a Ph.D. dissertation. The publication records of the project members vouch for the dissemination and impact of the results.

Another important deliverable will be a *novel dataset* on the policy output of IOs. In a second step, this dataset will be merged with a more comprehensive dataset on IOs, prepared jointly by the research groups in Stockholm, Chapel Hill, and Berlin. Both datasets will be made available to the scholarly community following publication of the principal results.

A central channel for disseminating results and exchanging ideas will be *participation in conferences, workshops and networks*. Project members will arrange panels and present papers at conferences organized by the American Political Science Association, the International Studies Association, and the European Consortium for Political Research. In addition, the project team will organize a research workshop devoted to the topic of IO performance.

For purposes of reaching policy-makers within governments and IOs, the project team will *contribute popular science articles, organize a practitioner workshop, and be available for the media*. The team already has established cooperation with the Graduate Institute, Geneva, for the organization of practitioner workshops with participants from IOs. The principal investigator has extensive experience of popular-science contributions and well-developed media contacts through his previous work on the EU.

To enhance the potential for effective dissemination of the results to the research and policy communities, the project will set up a *project web page*, reporting on activities and output. When completed, the datasets will be made available through this web page.

### *Project Team*

The project team will consist of three researchers and a research assistant:

Jonas Tallberg (Ph.D. Lund University 1999) is Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University, where he directs the research group on global and regional governance. His primary research interests are global governance, European Union politics, and institutional theory. He has extensive experience of successful project management, has received numerous research awards, and has won competitive grants from, e.g., the European Research Council. Tallberg will direct the work of the group and carry the main responsibility for research design, theory development, and synthesis of results. Salary in project: 40 percent.

Thomas Sommerer (Ph.D. University of Konstanz 2009) is Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Political Science, Stockholm University. He specializes in global

governance, policy analysis, and quantitative methods. Sommerer will carry the main responsibility for the quantitative analysis and assist in other components of the project. Salary in project: 70 percent.

Theresa Squatrito (Ph.D., University of Washington 2008) is Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Department of Political Science, Stockholm University. She specializes in global governance, human rights, and qualitative methods. Squatrito will carry the main responsibility for the qualitative analysis and assist in other components of the project. Salary in project: 70 percent.

The team members have successfully cooperated on a mixed-method project, resulting in the co-authored monograph *The Opening Up of International Organizations: Transnational Access in Global Governance* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

A research assistant will be employed on a full-time basis during the first 18 months of the project, devoted to comprehensive quantitative data collection.

The project team is part of the research group on Global and Regional Governance at Stockholm University, selected in 2011 as a leading area at the university and internationally recognized as one of the foremost in the field.

### **International Collaboration**

The research team has very well-developed networks in the areas of global governance and public policy, and participates regularly in international conferences and workshops.

As explained under “Project Description,” the project will specifically involve cooperation with two partner groups – one based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, led by Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe, and one based at Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB), led by Michael Zürn. This collaboration, established under a prior project, will facilitate the collection of data on the design of IOs, and ensure that the data on policy output produced in this project can be added to the comprehensive dataset on IOs built jointly by the groups.

An international advisory board will provide feedback throughout the project. We plan frequent interaction, including biennial meetings in association with international conferences. The following prominent scholars have accepted invitations to serve in this capacity:

- Liesbet Hooghe, W. R. Kenan Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Chair in Multilevel Governance at Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.
- Christoph Knill, Professor of Political Science and Chair of Comparative Public Policy and Administration, University of Konstanz.
- Barbara Koremenos, Associate Professor Political Science, University of Michigan.
- Duncan Snidal, Professor of International Relations, Nuffield College, University of Oxford.
- Michael Zürn, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Research Unit “Global Governance” at Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin.

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