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Introduction

The familiar litany of Africa's marginality to world politics and global markets makes it almost ridiculous to speak of African influence or power. But that is the wrong view to take. In 2003, four of the poorest countries in the world asked the most powerful countries in the world to change their support for domestic cotton producers. That year, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali ranked 159, 173, 165, and 172 of the 177 nations listed on the UN Human Development Index.¹ They are not even powerful states in their own subregion, yet their requests placed cotton at the center of the Doha Round of international trade negotiations. The so-called Cotton 4's initiative became an important part of the agenda for the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Cancún ministerial meeting that September. And for the first time, the WTO created a sector-specific committee. Within two years, the European Union and the United States agreed to important concessions. The ultimate outcome of these efforts is still uncertain, but it is clear that African actions had consequences.

Two things are important to note about this story. First, African states did not act individually but as part of a coalition. They recognized that working together increased their chance of success. The second thing to note is that their activities focused on a single international organization, the WTO. As this book discusses, there are many areas of global governance where it may be necessary to focus on more than one international organization. That has important implications for coalitions.

Using coalitions – groups of states that number from two to well over 100 – African states and other developing countries have consistently

¹ UNDP 2003.

worked to transform global governance. My puzzle is why are coalitions more prevalent and active in the governance of some issue areas and not others? In the cotton case just mentioned, four resource-poor states organized themselves and effectively acted to protect interests worth an estimated \$300 million per year. Yet, at other times, such collective action often fails to materialize. When the European Union announced new food safety measures regulating peanuts, measures widely expected to cost African states as much as \$670 million in lost revenues per year, no coalition formed. African states failed to act in a meaningful way, and the governance outcome went against their interests. Both were issues that generally affected the same group of states. Many peanut exporters are cotton exporters, and vice versa. African states with the greatest interests in the peanuts case – such as Senegal – have, if anything, more resources for participating in global governance than the Cotton 4 (C-4) countries that banded together. And states like Senegal did lend their support to the C-4 cause. But why did no coalition for peanuts form?

THE ARGUMENT

My answer to this puzzle is that the formation of effective coalitions is affected by how individual international institutions and, more important, *institutional systems* vary across issue areas. Institutions, for the purposes of this study, are primarily international organizations and treaties. We already know that the norms and decision-making procedures of individual international institutions may affect coalitions. For instance, we might expect the strategic roles of coalitions to vary between an institution where rule-making is by consensus and one where it is majoritarian.² But the notion that “institutional systems” – collections of institutions that overlap in the governance of an issue area – affect coalitional behavior is something that has mostly gone unnoticed. Yet many different international institutions often matter in determining governance outcomes for an issue area. Global governance today is often messy and fragmented. A 2010 Finish government study, for example, identified at least 150 multilateral environmental agreements related to biodiversity alone. Six are considered “central” to the issue.³ This has profound implications both for the individual states and for coalitions of states that seek to act strategically.

² Narlikar 2003, 24.

³ Cited in Gomar *et al.* 2013, 5.

Coalitions tend to face two major coordination challenges when faced with a multi-institutional environment. The first is domestic. Active participation in global governance frequently requires coordination across government ministries and agencies at the domestic level. Agricultural trade issues, for instance, might require the involvement of the ministries of foreign affairs, commerce, and agriculture. As we will see later in this book, effective coordination at this level is often absent among many African countries. The second coordination challenge is the institutional system itself. Many coalitions in global governance form to deal with single institutions (such as the C-4 at the WTO). Managing coalition activities across multiple institutions requires linking multiple state's activities across multiple institutions. Thus, the ability of African states to form, join, maintain, and use coalitions often depends on solving both coordination problems.

Not all institutional systems are the same, and their variations can make a difference. I focus on three key characteristics of “institutional systems” (ISs) in this book. The first is *thickness*, indicated by the number of institutions, the extent of their overlap in scope, and the extent of overlap in membership. It should be no surprise that increasing thickness may increase the strategic challenges faced by states. But what if just one or two of those institutions are clearly more important than the rest? This is why the second characteristic, *hierarchy*, may matter. It refers to the degree to which decisions in one institution take precedence over the decisions of other institutions within an issue area. Finally, *institutional integration* is the formal participation of institutions in each other's activities. Institutions that are integrated with each other may require a coordinated response from states. These IS characteristics often interact with the characteristics of individual institutions. I find that African governments are more likely to form *effective* coalitions to influence global governance when (1) an IS is hierarchically organized around an important international organization and (2) that international organization has decision-making rules, such as consensus-based decision making, that are conducive to coalition formation. Conversely, in areas of global governance where (1) ISs are organized nonhierarchically and (2) there are multiple international organizations with competing claims to governance of an issue, African governments are much less likely to form or join *effective* coalitions.

My notion of an “institutional system” is similar to what other scholars call a “regime complex.”⁴ I favor the term “institutional system” for

⁴ Raustiala and Victor 2004.

several reasons. First, “regime” can be used simultaneously to denote a single institution or multiple institutions or organizations. Second, the term “regime complex” is unclear. Raustiala and Victor originally coined the term to describe a specific set of relationships that were explicitly nonhierarchical.⁵ Since that time, however, a number of other scholars have attempted to redefine and repurpose their concept.⁶ Most of these formulations have kept the conception narrow or narrowed it even further (by stipulating a minimum number of “regimes” that must interact, for instance).⁷ But this book explores both hierarchical and nonhierarchical relationships between institutions, as well as other types of relations. As Gehring and Faude suggest, a regime complex might best be described as a particular *type* of IS, one that combines a particular set of characteristics.⁸ My concept of institutional systems is purposefully more expansive and comprehensive. Finally, the term “institutional system” fits in well with the terminology used to discuss the relationships between international organizations (a primary theme in this book). In that literature, the focus is more specifically on “institutional interplay” and “institutional interactions,” on how one “institution” has an impact on another.⁹

Work by Vinod Aggarwal, David Victor, Dan Drezner, Kenneth Abbott, Duncan Snidal, Karen Alter, Sophie Meunier, and others suggests growing popularity for the idea that overlapping or nested institutions can act as a driving force for political outcomes. Almost all this work, however, concentrates on the activities of the most powerful states in the international system. Only very recently have scholars begun to focus on the relevance for weaker countries. It is true that African states have played only minor roles in creating these institutional systems. But there are profound implications for their ability to participate in global governance and international affairs. African states are typically rule takers. As Gruber, Steinberg, and others have argued, powerful states frequently create institutions biased toward their interests.¹⁰ Even institutional neutrality can hurt weaker participants when that neutrality locks in the

⁵ *Ibid.* Orsini *et al.* (2013, 29) recently redefined regime complexes according to six different elements.

⁶ The January 2013 issue of *Global Governance* and March 2009 issue of *Perspectives on Politics* each featured a number of articles on regime complexes.

⁷ Orsini *et al.* 2013.

⁸ Gehring and Faude 2013, 120.

⁹ King 1997; Young *et al.* 2008.

¹⁰ Gruber 2000; Steinberg 2002.

The View from Below

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status quo. However, powerful states never have total control, and unintended consequences of institution creation frequently emerge. Indeed, I find that some institutional systems can create strategic opportunities for the weak to band together and affect the actions of others, enabling African states and their coalitions to sometimes accomplish the unexpected.

This research matters because global governance matters. International regulations regularly coordinate the behavior of individuals, corporations, and states. UN Security Council Resolutions and decisions by the WTO's dispute-settlement body regularly require states to take actions they would not otherwise take.¹¹ While enforcement is weak and rare, it does occur; compliance with international rules is the norm rather than the exception.¹² Many question the legitimacy of international institutions such as the WTO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank precisely because the rules they make do matter.

THE VIEW FROM BELOW

*The turn of the century is probably the safest moment in history for small states in terms of their physical security. International law, a more interventionist United Nations, and an almost completed decolonization process have all contributed to small state security.*¹³

– Jeane A. K. Hey, *Small States in World Politics*

This brings me to an important claim underpinning my argument. African states – and other weak states in the international system – are relevant to global governance. Viewing governance from their position provides an important point of view. As the preceding quotation suggests, international institutions can act as a layer of protection for weaker states in the international system. Some go even further than claiming mere protection for weaker states. Common in the international law and international relations literature is the argument that the very existence of international rules and institutions should level the playing field for weaker (less powerful) countries in the system.¹⁴ Important here is whether the formal equality granted to all

¹¹ On the WTO, for instance, see Wilson 2007.

¹² Henkin 1979, 47.

¹³ Hey 2003, 8.

¹⁴ Weil 1983, 442; Cassese 1986, 187; Abbott and Snidal 2001, 447; Davis 2006. Such views are not constrained to academics and lawyers. Lutz and Sikkink (2000, 639) mention how Latin American countries thought international human rights law would protect them from US interventions.

states by the international legal system translates into an equal ability to influence outcomes in global governance.¹⁵ Rules-based systems are thought to favor weaker countries. Working within multilateral settings also makes it easier for states with limited resources to monitor what other states are doing.

However, such views about the promise of institutions are contested. Indeed, the broader legal literature has much to say about how, even in an unbiased legal system, weaker parties (those less powerful) may be at a disadvantage. Powerful actors attain expertise through frequent interactions with international institutions.¹⁶ Worse for weaker countries is the likelihood that they face institutions created by and for the interests of powerful countries. Realists typically argue that global governance merely reflects the distribution of power in the international system. States, in this view, should not expect outcomes through the international legal system other than what they could receive through more political (less legal) means.¹⁷ For many globalization critics, it is the flaws within international institutions that allow the powerful to mask self-interested actions. Criticisms of international institutions often refer to standards of fairness, transparency, inclusiveness, democracy, and accountability. Examples of such claims are many: that the UN Security Council favors the interests of the powerful and lacks adequate power sharing among the regions of the world, that quota-based voting rights at the IMF are flawed, or that the WTO's informal "green room" meetings fail to adequately take into account all members' interests. As a further example, Jawara and Kwa's 2003 book, *Behind the Scenes at the WTO: The Real World of International Trade Negotiations*, was a kind of exposé of the ways that developing country delegates were pressured by more powerful players, especially the United States and the European Union.

It is easy to see the argument for dismissing weak and, particularly, African states. Notions of Africa's limitations dominate the literature on Africa's international relations.¹⁸ Concerns with state capabilities and

¹⁵ Article 2(1) of the UN Charter states that "the Organization is based on the sovereign equality of all its Members." Additionally a 1979 General Assembly resolution on the "Inadmissibility of the Policy of Hegemonism in International Relations" reinforced that idea. See Vagts 2001.

¹⁶ Galanter 1974; Gruber 2000.

¹⁷ Mearsheimer 1994.

¹⁸ Lemke (2003) provides this perspective when he cites a range of international relations theorists willing to simply dismiss developing countries for their inability to make a difference.

The View from Below

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power politics underpin the ways that many academics, activists, and policy makers have engaged the general question of developing-country participation in international organizations. Many identify African states as weak because, relative to other states, they appear to have less power (as measured in terms of resources and capabilities). Their economies are smaller, they do not have nuclear weapons, and most of their navies consist of fewer than ten vessels. For African states, extraversion, the tendency for leaders to look outside their own countries and (in recent history) to the West for the resources and legitimacy they need to hold onto power, has additional ramifications for their foreign policy behavior.¹⁹ Many African leaders lack the practice of ascertaining how domestic interests can be best served through diplomacy, although there are signs that this might be changing, as Peter Schraeder's work on the impact of democratization on African foreign policy demonstrates.²⁰

Imagine the demands placed on those responsible for a country's foreign affairs. First, there are the important bilateral relationships that you have with neighboring countries, with major trading partners, and with major global powers. Second, you may belong to important regional organizations. Some of these, such as the South African Customs Union, are primarily about your country's finance and trade. But there are a range of other organizations dealing with issues as diverse as shared natural resources (the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the Nile Basin Initiative), intellectual property (the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization), and health (The West African Health Organization). Finally, there are more than 200 major international organizations. The WTO alone can average more than 50 meetings per week.²¹ All of this may pose little challenge to a large, developed state. The US State Department, for instance, has approximately 30,000 employees, and that underestimates American capacity for diplomacy given that many agencies within the US bureaucracy regularly send delegates to meetings. But consider Cape Verde, which has an entire population of less than 500,000. Does it make sense to assign 6 percent of one's population to match US diplomatic efforts?

A number of early studies on the WTO set about the important task of quantifying levels of participation. An example is the 1998 study by Constantine Michalapolous, which relied on the WTO Directory to

¹⁹ Bayart 1993.

²⁰ Schraeder 2001, 55.

²¹ Ostry 2008, 61.

identify how many country delegates were present in Geneva. Not surprisingly, very few were African. However, even this failed to capture that many of those developing-country delegates, as few as they were, also were responsible for representing their country's interests at the many UN institutions in Geneva. A number of political economists pushed things further by examining WTO rules, how developing countries engaged the WTO's new dispute-settlement mechanisms, and applying theoretical frameworks for understanding bargaining and negotiation to the situation of developing countries.²²

Despite all these concerns, there remain at least two major reasons why we should care to examine African state interactions in global governance. One is that they give us a unique take on the architecture of global governance. As actors that mostly have to take the system and its design as a given, who have limited ability to act outside the system on their own, their behavior can help us to better understand how the institutions themselves are designed and interact with each other. They are less likely than the dominant powers in the international system, such as the United States, to attempt to exit institutions or create new ones.

But the other major reason we should care is that African states actually do have their own impacts on global governance, despite, and sometimes perhaps even because of, their limitations. The story of the C-4 is but one example. As William Brown put it recently, we often see Africa portrayed as an actor that is *acted on* rather than one that *acts*.²³ So this book fits within that narrow set of literature that seeks to explore the agency of African states (and small states more generally).²⁴ So how can such weak states get what they want out of the international system? For African states, the answer to this “structural paradox” lies in the strategic environment they act within, the resources they have, and the coalitions they make with other states.

COALITIONS

This brings us to a second key claim underpinning this book, which is that coalitions are the primary vehicle that African states and other weak states

²² Richard Mshomba (2009) describes some of this research in his recent comprehensive study, *Africa and the World Trade Organization*.

²³ Brown 2012. Take, for instance, Ian Taylor's recent book, *The International Relations of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Each chapter focuses primarily on how other countries approach Africa.

²⁴ For instance, Neumann and Gstöhl 2004; Katzenstein 1985; Fox 1959.

use to influence global governance. The topic of coalitions is a general subject for Chapter 4. I use the term in its broadest sense, to refer to groups of countries that form for a wide range of purposes (from information gathering to bargaining), whose memberships are based on a wide range of criteria (from geographic to strategic), and whose longevity may be brief (a single joint statement at a single meeting of an international organization) or long (enduring regional blocs such as the Africa Group). A common approach to looking at the role of coalitions in global governance is the one that Vickers and Narlikar take, as an intervening variable between individual countries and an institution.²⁵ However, my approach differs from this. Like them, I am also concerned with *state resources and capabilities*, the qualities and characteristics states possess – such as wealth, institutional capacity, and technical knowledge – and that enable their participation in global governance. However, I also am interested in understanding coalitions as an outcome. Institutions – and especially institutional *systems* – are a key driving force for determining whether and how coalitions form, are used, and have an effect.

In global economic governance, states are using coalitions more than ever. Some of these are long-standing regional blocs, such as the Africa Group. But many others are smaller and appear to have eclectic memberships targeted on specific issues. For instance, Mauritius joined Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Taiwan, and six other countries to support special exceptions for agricultural trade.²⁶ Others have a far grander scope, such as the alliance between Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (the BRICS), where it can be difficult to disentangle the political and economic motivations for both the individual members and the coalition as a whole. Developed countries are reacting to these coalitions. ActionAid's 2004 report entitled, *Divide and Rule: The US and EU Response to Developing Country Alliances in the WTO*, is a clear example of how many activists and some policy makers saw those power dynamics in the first phases of the Doha Round.

African states have a long history of coalitional behavior. This is tied to their collective work against colonization and apartheid, as well as ideas of continental unity that predate that independence era. This is not to say that unity comes easy. The divide between Francophone and Anglophone Africa is another familiar challenge that is relevant to this book. That colonial legacy not only shapes the challenge of communications between

²⁵ Vickers and Narlikar 2009, 231.

²⁶ "Groups in the agriculture negotiations," WTO, July 24, 2015.

delegates at the meetings of international organizations, and in those organizations’ hallways, but also their coalition-building practices. As will be demonstrated later, these two groups of countries each have their own regional intellectual property organizations, threatening to undermine attempt to build a continental agenda for intellectual property rights. Nevertheless, that dream for regional (and subregional) unity lives on in much of the coalitional behavior of African states across these areas of global economic governance.

CASE SELECTION

My unit of analysis is interactions within an institutional system. For each IS, I assess the ability of African states to form, join, and use coalitions. The cases I selected for this study are strategic interactions within three institutional systems: agricultural trade, food safety, and intellectual property. Within each, I make multiple observations of African state successes and failures in forming and using coalitions. I also explore temporal variation in each IS, examining whether such changes affect the creation and use of coalitions. Admittedly, separating these into distinct institutional systems gives lie to the fact that a single issue can lead to them all being intertwined. A relevant example would be genetically modified foods. Rule-making, rule-settling, and rule-enforcing efforts by states are taking place in institutions relevant to all three of those issue areas and include an entirely different range of institutions dedicated to environmental concerns.

Table 1.1 compares these issue areas in terms of their IS characteristics and the relative success African states have had at forming and using coalitions (“Coalition success” in the table). The measures used to compare the IS characteristics are not based on an absolute standard but on relative and categorical differences between the issue areas.²⁷ One characteristic often dominates an institutional system’s politics. For agriculture, it is hierarchical relationships. For food safety, it is how the institutions integrate their functional roles in governance. For intellectual property, it is the horizontal relationships between well-established international organizations and, in particular, the static integration that occurred when the WTO’s TRIPS Agreement imported WIPO rules wholesale. These characteristics define the primary pathways for interaction among states in that issue area.

²⁷ Chapter 2 provides greater detail.