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Introduction: "Democratic" Intergovernmental Organizations

The Question Driving This Book

There is general agreement that, over the past two centuries, democratic norms[1] have become increasingly powerful. This trend has produced pressures on states to embrace democratic rules and practices domestically. However, national governments are not the only entities affected by democratic norms. Decision-making in organizations and among groups of individuals at all levels involves procedures that we often describe as "democratic." Fair voting procedures, fair representation, and access to information have come to be expected from decisions in forums as diverse as company boards of directors and student organizations. The pressures to adopt such practices are often present even in organizations from countries that are not themselves democratic.

I argue that such pervasive democratic norms have influenced even decision-making at the highest level of human interaction, that of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), where billions of people are being represented by a small number of decision-makers. The main question driving this study is, *how* have democratic norms shaped IGO decision-making rules?

This book shows that, for democratic norms to influence IGO rules, it is not sufficient for them to be "strong" – that is, to be broadly accepted. In addition, the rules that are in place need to be perceived as departing substantially from the norm prescriptions. When both such conditions

[1] Throughout this book I refer to "norms" based on the broad understanding of the term in international relations as "shared expectations about appropriate behavior held by a community of actors" (Finnemore 1996, 22).

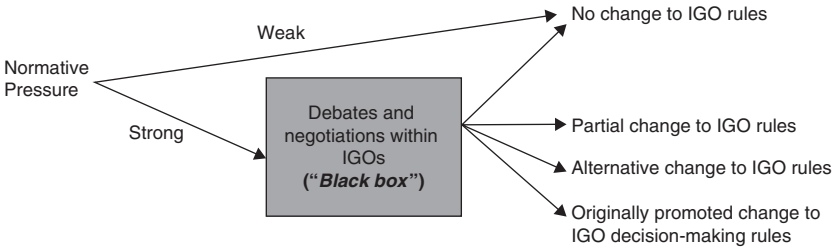

FIGURE 1.1. Variance in the Impact of Normative Pressure on IGO Decision-Making Rules.

are in place, actors are under "normative pressure" to change the rules. Furthermore, as Figure 1.1 illustrates, even when such pressures are strong, there is variance in outcomes. In other words, there have been some instances when strong normative pressures have led to changes to IGO rules but also other instances when they led to only partial changes, alternative changes, or even no changes.

To explain this variance this book proceeds to open up the "black box" of debates and negotiations in IGOs of Figure 1.1. I show that, when IGO member-states are under normative pressure to make rules more similar to democratic models from the domestic realm, it is rare for them to simply accept the proposed changes. In most cases, some states (usually the most powerful ones that want to maintain control of the IGO) seek to alleviate the pressure by attempting to alter (1) the interpretation of the democratic norm itself or (2) its implementation to IGOs. Each of these two broad approaches to reducing normative pressures can be broken down further into three more specific ones: (a) "challenging," (b) "narrowing," (c) "broadening" the interpretation of the norm or its implementation. Together, these approaches generate six possible strategies of defusing normative pressures: challenging the norm (CN), narrowing the norm (NN), broadening the norm (BN), challenging application of norm (CA), narrowing the application of the norm (NA), and broadening the application of the norm (BA).

I find that the choices of strategies are in great part dictated by the strength of the norm and the degree to which the status quo departs from the prescription of the norm. In turn, the strategies chosen to defuse normative pressures greatly determine the outcomes (illustrated on the right side of Figure 1.1). Specifically, they determine whether changes to the rules will be the ones originally proposed by those seeking reforms or whether we will see partial or alternative changes. It is through such indirect processes that democratic norms come to shape IGO rules.

As I will show in Chapter 2, the main question of this book is of great importance for ongoing debates in the broader international relations (IR) literature. Most important, an approach incorporating the role of democratic norms can account for some changes to IGO rules that existing scholarship has difficulties explaining. There are, indeed, other important factors besides norms that shape IGO rules. Previous research has convincingly shown that power considerations (e.g., Mearsheimer 1994) and effectiveness (e.g., Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2004) underlie the design of IGOs. This book asks whether these two approaches can fully account for the establishment and changes of many important IGO rules (Wendt 2001a). For example, such approaches have difficulties explaining the inclusion of non-permanent members in the League Council (after initial plans envisioned the body to include only five permanent members) or even in the United Nations (UN) Security Council. They also offer incomplete explanations for the compromises underlying the voting procedures developed in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in which each country was originally allotted a number of votes proportional to its quota contributions as well as 250 basic votes. These approaches also have little to say about the changes in access to information rules that followed important crises of legitimacy in some IGOs, such as the resignation of the entire European Commission amid corruption charges or the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO), both in 1999. I argue that many such rules can only be understood fully by complementing arguments related to power and effectiveness with those considering the impact of normative pressures deriving from domestic democratic analogies.

The main question of this book also has become increasingly important for practical reasons. Many of the world's biggest problems – from wars to major environmental threats and from economic crises to fast-spreading diseases – can best (and sometimes only) be addressed in global or regional intergovernmental forums. Decisions of IGOs can affect billions of lives and, therefore, need to be done "right." But what does that actually mean? Some may claim that the effectiveness of IGOs' decision-making and their eventual actions and policies is more important than the way such decisions are made. However, most agree that there is no real choice between effectiveness and appropriateness. Both are necessary, being sometimes referred to as the "output" and "input" facets of an organization's legitimacy, respectively (Scharpf 1997; Zürn 2000 and 2004). Decisions that are not perceived to be legitimated by a "fair" decision-making process are less likely to be accepted by those who

need to implement them, whether these are states or non-state actors. This is especially true in a world that increasingly expects democratic procedures at all decision-making levels (Woods 1999).

The current ubiquity of the term "democratic deficit" is a reflection of such increased expectations that IGOs adopt decisions in a democratic fashion. Although the term was first coined in the 1970s to characterize, narrowly, the irrelevance of the European Parliament in decisions of the European Economic Community (Mény 2003; Featherstone 1994), it is now applied to express the lack of democratic mechanisms in almost every existing IGO, from the International Whaling Commission (e.g., Kuyper 2013) to the International Monetary Fund (e.g., Nye et al. 2003). By addressing the question of how democratic norms have impacted rules in IGOs, this book will implicitly contribute to the rich literature on the democratic deficit by assessing the changes in the democratic character of international institutions and sparking more research on ways to reduce this deficit.

The most important practical implication of this book derives from its finding that democratic norms indeed can alter IGO rules that, in turn, affect international relations. For example, the use of democratic norms to include small- and medium-sized states such as Belgium and Spain in the influential League of Nations Council exacerbated international tensions in the years leading to World War II. The establishment and later empowerment of the European Parliament by those promoting a more democratic organization spurred European integration over the past half century. Democratic pressures to give labor and employer representatives an independent role in the International Labor Organization (ILO) facilitated important international agreements and constrained the adoption of others. The World Bank and WTO have accepted public information policies under pressures from those invoking democratic norms. These changes, in turn, have empowered some states and nongovernmental groups and weakened others. Currently, regional power struggles are being shaped by the use of democratic norms to promote the admission of countries such as Brazil and India as permanent members in the UN Security Council. In sum, democratic norms matter. They play a significant role in IGOs and, more broadly, in international relations.

Placing the Study in the Broader International Relations Literature

A study of the influence of democratic norms on the functioning of intergovernmental organizations necessarily speaks to at least two broad bodies of IR literature: one on norms and their impact on actions in

the international realm and a second on the applicability of democratic principles to international relations. The literature on norms (and the study's connection to it) will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Here I only mention the main contribution of the present research to that literature.

Rather than simply discussing how some actors promote norms and others are either convinced of their appropriateness or shamed into action without any "fight" on their part (as much of the early literature on norms has suggested), this book emphasizes actors' multiple possible reactions to normative pressures. I suggest that states have seldom accepted the application of democratic norms to IGOs as originally promoted by those seeking reforms. Conversely, they seldom withstood the normative pressures without taking any actions. In the vast majority of cases, they have reacted to such pressures by attempting to alter the interpretation of the norm or the actions prescribed by the norm. The relative success of these strategies for defusing normative pressures has resulted in different degrees of acceptance of the original norms and, implicitly, of the decision-making rules. The strategies have also led to changes in other IGO rules and/or other organizations as "side-payments" to those responsible for the pressures.

This section primarily focuses on the second body of literature mentioned earlier – global democracy. I consider the arguments of this scholarship here, in an introductory chapter, as it places this book's main question in a broader context. More importantly, I use the following literature to tease out five main types of democratic rules that are considered to be the most significant ones applicable to decision-making in IGOs.

The vast majority of IR literature has taken one of the four following positions regarding the relationship between democracy and IGOs, the topic of this book:

1. It dismissed the question altogether as one that does not merit attention (e.g., Wight 1960).
2. It explained why we should be skeptical of any meaningful relationship between democracy and interactions in the international realm (e.g., Dahl 2001).
3. It sought to identify a set of fairly narrow democratic mechanisms (especially focusing on accountability) that are applicable to IGOs and called for their improved implementation (e.g., Keohane and Nye 2000b; Florini 2003).
4. It discussed IGOs as essential elements in moving toward a comprehensive system of "global democracy" and therefore elaborated

a broad set of democratic expectations for such organizations (e.g., Held 1995; Holden 2000; McGrew 2002; Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi, and Marchetti 2012).

The last two bodies of literature offer important starting points for the present research and are further discussed in the following sections.

The Literature on IGO Accountability

Most of the IR literature acknowledges the current lack of democratic character of IGOs (often referred to as their "democratic deficit"). However, the third body of literature mentioned earlier suggests that we should not hold international institutions to domestic democratic standards but rather seek the kinds of mechanisms that would make them more legitimate and/or effective (e.g., Woods 1999; Keohane and Nye 2000b). It therefore tends to focus on the decision-making processes in IGOs that are seen as those in which the domestic democratic analogy has the most to offer and leaves out broader discussions involving important aspects of a democratic polity, such as those about human rights.[2]

This third body of literature primarily emphasizes accountability as the key democratic characteristic that is relevant to the functioning of IGOs (e.g., Keohane 2001; Florini 2003; Kahler 2004; Grant and Keohane 2005). It begins from the argument that states have always collectively held IGOs accountable and that such governmental links between IGOs and the general public need to be improved (Keohane 2005; Grant and Keohane 2005). In addition, some scholars have emphasized the role of the European Parliament holding the other European institutions accountable (Caporaso 2003; Moravcsik 2004), and others have sought to extend the parliamentary model of accountability from the European Union (EU) to other international institutions (Nye et al. 2003, 33–46; Slaughter 2004b; Held 1995). Many authors have highlighted the important role that nongovernmental actors (primarily transnational nongovernmental organizations) have played as transmission belts through which the general public can hold IGOs accountable (e.g., Benner, Reinicke, and Witte, 2004; Scholte 2004; Tallberg and Uhlin 2012; Tallberg et al. 2013, 19). Still others have discussed the development of additional mechanisms of "horizontal accountability" such as

[2] For an exception, see Caporaso 2003. The reason Caporaso is able to incorporate a discussion of human rights (alongside accountability) into an assessment of IGO democracy is that he focuses on the European Union, one of the only IGOs that has a truly functional judiciary system in which individuals rather than states can file cases.

IGO ethics offices, internal and external oversight bodies, or ombudsmen (Woods and Narlikar 2001; Woods 2003; Grigorescu 2008).

Virtually all of this literature has underscored the importance of IGO transparency for accountability. Transparency – the ability of outside actors to access information about decision-making processes and actions – is generally seen as a precondition for all types of accountability and, more broadly, for the effective functioning of such organizations (e.g., Keohane and Nye 2000b; Florini 2002; Grigorescu 2007). It allows governments, transnational parliamentary assemblies, nongovernmental actors, and even the general public to determine whether IGOs are performing their duties in effective and appropriate ways.

All of these arguments suggest that multiple actors are involved in a struggle for holding IGOs accountable and, implicitly, for controlling such organizations. Such main actors are governments of member states, transnational nongovernmental actors, parliamentary assemblies, and the general public. Their abilities to control IGOs both shape and are shaped by the decision-making rules. Not surprisingly, each of the existing struggles over who holds the IGO accountable corresponds to one or more democratic norms discussed at the domestic and international levels: (1) fair representation in decision-making, (2) fair voting, (3) participation of representatives of civil society in decision-making and implementation of decisions, (4) parliamentary oversight of the executive, and (5) public access to information.

The Global Democracy Literature

The idea of any type of global government is generally perceived as utopian.[3] One of the most common reasons cited for the difficulties in achieving democratic global governance is the lack of a global (or even regional) political community. It is often argued that the heterogeneity of the world's (or even a region's) population makes it difficult to determine the "general good" or common interest of such a polity, something without which democracy simply is not possible (Dahl 2001, 26).

To counter this statement, David Held has argued that political communities have changed over the ages. For centuries, democracy implied the physical gathering of individuals in public spaces. It was only toward the end of the eighteenth century that representative democracy replaced

[3] Several surveys among both policy makers and the general public found that more than two-thirds of respondents considered a world government (whether democratic or not) either a bad idea or implausible. See, for example, Chase-Dunn et al. 2008 and Koenig-Archibugi 2011.

the initial paradigm of direct democracy (1995). Held contends that we are currently moving to a form of "cosmopolitan democracy" that associates the political community with not only the national one but also a global one (2001).

Cosmopolitan democracy is not a utopian system for future global governance, according to Held. It is a necessary model – and the only viable one – as the locus of power has shifted from the national level to the regional and global levels and as individuals' lives are increasingly affected by international forces (Held 2000, 26). He argues that such global changes have led to five major "disjunctions" between the formal domain of political authority and the actual practices and structures of the state and economic system (Held 1995, 99). These disjunctions derive, on the one hand, from the continued emphasis of state sovereignty as the main principle of international relations and, on the other hand, from five international trends that are eroding such sovereignty: (1) the development of international law, (2) the increased role of IGOs entrusted with collective policy problems, (3) the ability of great powers and military blocs to impose their will on others, (4) the development of individual loyalties that transcend nation-states, and (5) the globalization of production and financial systems (Held 1995, 99–140).

To resolve these disjunctions, Held proposes a set of short- and long-term objectives that will allow us to attain the cosmopolitan model of democracy. They derive from his broader definition of democracy as "rule by the people" which implies that all individuals need to be represented and involved in decision-making and that rulers need to justify their actions to the ruled (implicitly, to offer information about decisions) and be held responsible for their actions by representatives of the people (Held 1996, 3).

The short-term objectives deriving from such an understanding of democracy are especially relevant for the study of democratic decision-making in IGOs. They include the reform of the UN to alter the veto system and to give smaller states greater representation and voice, the establishment of a UN second chamber modeled after the European Parliament and of more regional parliaments (with a goal to establish a global parliament in the long run), and the establishment of "broad avenues of civic participation in decision-making at regional and global levels" (Held 1996, 353–359).

This cosmopolitan model of democracy stands in contrast to the communitarian one. Although both models take the individual (rather than the state) as a point of departure for understanding democracy,

communitarianism emphasizes social ties among individuals. The communities that form on the basis of such ties deserve respect and protection. Communitarians therefore see states (which often, but not always, overlap with such communities) as important entities that need to be represented in a global democracy just as much as individuals need to be represented (Bienen, Rittberger, and Wagner 1998, 301–302).

The two models of democracy are often seen as complementary. Indeed, Held's proposed objectives for the cosmopolitan model do not do away with existing state representation mechanisms in IGOs; they add to them. However, as some of the cases in the following chapters show, when states had different interests in shaping IGO rules (whether they debated fair representation, fair voting, or the role of transnational parliamentary assemblies), their arguments often pitted one democratic model against the other.

We should point out that Held's model also includes other short-term objectives such as the creation of an international human rights court, the establishment of an international military force, "experimentation with different organizational forms in the economy," and provision of resources to those "in the most vulnerable social positions" (1995, 279–280). Yet these innovations involve the establishment of new institutions that have not yet been truly discussed and negotiated by practitioners. Therefore, we have very little indication of the ways in which states interpreted such additional democratic norms and their implementation to alter decision-making rules in ways that benefit them, the topic of this book.

Building on Held's arguments, Mathias Koenig-Archibugi shows that there are even more possible "paths" toward achieving global democracy besides Held's intergovernmental one (which involves changing existing IGOs and establishing new ones). There is also a "global movements" path (involving transnational networks of nongovernmental organizations), a "laborist" path (based on the transnational organization of labor unions), a capitalist path (driven by transnational business interests), a "functionalist" path (involving networks of specialized bureaucracies), and an imperialist path (in which the dominant power takes the initiative to achieve a global democratic system) (2012, 177–178). Yet, Koenig-Archibugi, like virtually all authors writing on the advancement of global democracy, considers the democratization of IGOs a necessary part of this process.

While acknowledging the importance of these additional democratic norms and mechanisms for future developments, the present study

nevertheless limits itself only to those within IGOs, the focus of this book. Additionally, I limit my discussion only to norms and mechanisms discussed by Held that have already been applied to IGOs and, more importantly, that have already been shaped by the debates and negotiations in IGOs – that is, within the "black box" of Figure 1.1. The book's approach is therefore primarily an empirical one, seeking to identify past long-term trends. It only derives some brief conclusions regarding possible future developments. Yet, even in such cases, I do not seek to advance a normative agenda (even though I examine norms) by promoting one particular democratic model over another. In fact, one of the main arguments of this book is that the dynamics of rule changes in IGOs have been so complex and interesting precisely because there are multiple plausible understandings of what democratic global governance entails.

How the Book Complements Existing Literature

The aforementioned literature on IGO accountability and global democracy are primarily relevant for this book because they help us identify the specific elements we need to focus on when assessing the evolution of democratic norms in IGOs. Indeed, the concept of democracy, especially as applied to IGOs, is not a self-evident one (Caporaso 2003, 365). The literature has offered many different definitions of democracy and even more conditions for achieving it. In fact, as this book shows, it is precisely because of the complex nature of this concept that actors have been able to alter its interpretations to fit their goals. At best, we can only identify the main components of democracy from existing studies.

Although, as this book shows, some such components sometimes clash with each other, overall, it is generally assumed that they are all important for moving closer to democratic standards. This is especially pertinent as recent literature on democracy at the domestic level has shown that in this third wave of democracy there is a danger that polities become "illiberal democracies" by embracing only elections and a handful of other democratic components and leaving out others such as civil society participation in the political process and access to government-held information (Zakaria 1997).

As mentioned, the IGO accountability literature emphasizes five important democratic norms that need to be applied to such organizations: (1) fair representation in decision-making, (2) fair voting, (3) participation of representatives from civil society in decision-making and in implementation of decisions, (4) parliamentary oversight of the executive, and (5) public access to information. While the global