


ANALYTICAL ESSAY

Improving Generalizability in Transnational Bureaucratic Influence Research: A (Modest) Proposal

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An impressive amount of evidence has been collected underpinning the importance of international public administrations (i.e., the secretariats of international governmental organizations) in a variety of policy areas, actor configurations, and multilevel political contexts. However, the problem of how to systematically observe and explain bureaucratic influence still lies at the core of the research puzzles that scholars presently attempt to solve. While acknowledging the achievements of recent research efforts, we argue that it is no coincidence that the results remain rather scattered and disconnected—as no consensus has been reached about how bureaucratic influence beyond nation states might be reasonably defined or reliably observed and how the individual insights gained could feed into the construction of a more general theory of bureaucratic influence in transnational governance. Based on a review of the literature, the essay describes what we see as the characteristic pitfalls of current research and presents two modest proposals on how the underlying challenges can be addressed. We first suggest defining the target of influence in terms of a particular policy and second advocate the inclusion of bureaucratic policy preferences into the influence concept. In order to help researchers to observe and compare policy influence across IPAs, we present a simple heuristic measurement scheme, which, if systematically applied, may help overcome the central ailment of recent influence studies. We demonstrate the applicability of the scheme by means of two empirical illustrations. The argument is that in the absence of a comprehensive descriptive, let alone analytical, theory of bureaucratic influence in transnational policymaking, our proposal may help to boost the accumulative potential of current research in the area.

Keywords: bureaucratic influence, global public policy, international organizations

Introduction

International public administrations (IPAs), epitomized in the secretariats of international organizations (IOs), have become the focus of a lively debate among scholars of international relations (IR), (comparative) public administration, and organizational sociology (Davies 2002; Dijkzeul and Beigbeder 2003; Barnett and

Finnemore 2004; Liese and Weinlich 2006; Weaver 2008; Avant, Finnemore, and Sell 2010; Ege and Bauer 2013). These discussions cover a broad variety of topics, ranging from moral suasion, expert authority, and administrative styles to autonomy, policy transfer, and resource mobilization—to pick just a few examples (Finnemore 1993; Ervik, Kildal, and Nilssen 2009; Bauer and Ege 2017; Busch and Liese 2017; Goetz and Patz 2017; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018). While the focus on international organizations' secretariats was initially defended with the claim "that IPAs matter" (Keohane and Martin 1995; Reinalda and Verbeek 1998; Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Bauer 2006), research interest quickly moved on to analyze empirical examples of "how IPAs actually matter" (Xu and Weller 2004; Lang and Scott 2009; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009a; Trondal et al. 2010; Eckhard and Dijkstra 2017; Littoz-Monnet 2017). By now an impressive amount of evidence has been collected underlining the importance of IPAs in a variety of policy areas, actor configurations, and multilevel political contexts (Busch 2014; Benz, Corcaci, and Doser 2016; Eckhard and Ege 2016). In other words, questions about how IPAs influence policy-making, in general, and how they affect policy outputs, in particular, dominate current research agendas (see Knill and Bauer 2016). Observing and explaining international bureaucratic influence in a comparative and disciplined manner thus lies at the core of the research puzzles that scholars presently attempt to solve. This research also speaks to the broader debate about the role of transnational actors in global (public) policy (Diprose, Kurniawan, and Macdonald 2018; Stone and Moloney 2019).

This is where our essay comes in. While we acknowledge the achievements of the debate about the autonomous "actorness" of IOs and IPAs so far, we argue that it is no coincidence that the results remain rather scattered and disconnected (see Eckhard and Ege 2016, 973). Despite all the efforts, no consensus has been reached about how bureaucratic influence beyond nation states might be reasonably defined and reliably observed and how individual insights gained might feed into the construction of a more general theory of bureaucratic influence in emerging international and transnational governance. The main reasons for this failure are—in our view—the fuzzy conceptualization of bureaucratic influence and disregard for the relevance of carefully establishing bureaucratic policy preferences prior to process analysis in order to gauge their eventual attainment.

Against this background, this essay has two aims. First, on the basis of a review of the state of the art of IPA influence studies, we explicate what we see as the characteristic pitfalls of current research and subsequently present two proposals for how the underlying challenges can be addressed. We suggest focusing on IPAs' influence on policy outputs as the empirically most challenging but also the most relevant type of influence. To do so, we define IPA policy influence as the particular aspect of a policy output that can be attributed to the presence and specific behavior of the IPA. We also encourage researchers to include IPAs' policy-related preferences in their conceptualization of influence in order to provide for a more realistic and conservative estimation of the secretariats influence in IO policy-making. Second, in order to help researchers to observe and compare policy influence across IPAs, we develop a simple heuristic measurement scheme, which, if systematically applied, may help overcome the central ailment of recent influence studies. We demonstrate the applicability of the scheme by means of two empirical illustrations. The point here is that, one way or another, the research community needs to go beyond the individual case study focus and come up with a descriptive, and eventually explanatory, theory of IPA influence in transnational affairs. The scheme we suggest will not overcome all analytical challenges haunting influence research of IPAs. However, it provides a pragmatic approach to advance in the right direction, that is, to improve the generalizability of IPA influence research—no more but also no less.

Setting the Stage: International Bureaucracies' Influence on Policy-Making

"Influence" is commonly defined as "the bringing about of an effect . . . by a gradual process; controlling power quietly exerted; agency . . . of any kind which affects, modifies, or sways" (*Webster's Dictionary*, quoted in [Biermann et al. 2009](#), 40). Following [Biermann et al. \(2009, 41\)](#), IPA influence is thus viewed as "the sum of all effects observable for, and attributable to, an international bureaucracy" ([Weinlich 2014](#), 60–61; see also [Busch 2014](#)). Generally speaking, this effect can be related to changes in actor behavior or changes in the political status quo (mainly the content of political decisions). While these two subjects of influence are often closely intertwined (because it is actors who make political decisions), the focus of this essay is on the impact of the IPA on political content during IO policy-making, that is, influence that changes the political status quo.

Influence, like power, is sociologically amorphous. Patterns of influence cannot be determined exhaustively a priori. They can only be studied in their empirical appearances. Moreover, the influence individual or corporate actors can realize in a specific situation always depends on the contexts and constellations. Influence in politics is also relative, as modern policy-making outcomes are never mono causal and results are complex. A certain resource of an actor might be instrumentally effective in one case but inefficacious in another. This elusive character of influence thus constitutes a challenge for any empirical research on the topic.

An actor's influence usually hinges on the realization or attainment of their preferred outcome. What this preferred outcome is for international bureaucracies, however, is not always clear in the literature. One view is that IPAs do not have policy preferences at all. Instead, they are impartial and neutral (corporate) actors, who do not favor one policy option over another. For IPAs, so the argument goes, the preferred outcome is just the achievement of any cooperative arrangement that member states could not have been able to realize alone. From this perspective, an IPA is expected to assume the role of an impartial broker and facilitator that supports negotiations, aims to increase the win-set, and persuades skeptical decision makers to reach an agreement (see e.g., [Jinnah 2011](#); [Johnstone 2011](#); [Saz-Carranza 2015](#)). Behind this conception lies the assumption that an IPA benefits in organizational terms (for example via increased resources and competences) from intensifying international cooperation per se. The specific nature of the agreement, however, is largely irrelevant for the IPA. This view is in accordance with empirical reality but does not comprise the full picture.

By contrast, it has been convincingly argued that bureaucratic impartiality is actually a myth that the IPA needs to uphold vis-à-vis members. In practice, however, it is often impossible to maintain neutrality ([Barnett and Finnemore 2004](#), 20), especially in a polarized environment where even "universal" values are highly contested ([Pouliot and Thérien 2018](#)). Research on national public administration has also long refuted the idea of the neutral and apolitical bureaucracy that acts merely as the servant of politics ([Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981](#); [Sager and Rosser 2009](#)). Bureaucracies consist of human beings who inevitably pursue interests and follow roles ([March and Olsen 1998](#)). Furthermore, especially international bureaucrats are highly interested in a successful fulfillment of the organization's mandate in order to legitimize their work ([Allen and Yuen 2014](#), 623). In delicate areas, such as peacekeeping, it is often impossible for IPAs to remain neutral. For instance, an international intervention can become a highly political issue, conflicting with the IO's general claim of impartiality. One prominent case in point is Bosnia, where the UN had to provide humanitarian aid and protect civilians without taking sides in the conflict, which was virtually impossible. This not only led to a series of contradictory UN policies and internal measures but also resulted in the UN and the West standing by and doing nothing to intervene in the massacre of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in July 1995 ([Rieff 1996](#); [Barnett and Finnemore 1999](#), 724).

There is a bulk of studies that finds evidence for strong policy entrepreneurship among IPAs. In her seminal study, [Finnemore \(1993\)](#) describes how the UNESCO secretariat favored a particular way of organizing national science bureaucracies and became the essential force behind its spread among member states. [Beach \(2004\)](#) identifies strong and very specific interests of the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, which allowed it to influence the outcome of the EU treaty reforms in 1996 and 1997. And [Nay \(2011\)](#) shows that during the creation of UNAIDS, some UN agencies had a common interest in shifting institutional arrangements to expand their bureaucratic authority. It should also be noted that much of the debate about their autonomy, independence, and authority (delegated, moral, and expert authority) rests on the insight that international bureaucracies must not be equated with IO members and act according to their own role, understanding, and goals ([Reinalda and Verbeek 1998](#); [Strange 1998](#); [Barnett and Finnemore 2004](#); [Haftel and Thompson 2006](#); [Hawkins et al. 2006b](#); [Brown 2010](#); [Chwieroth 2012](#); [Ellinas and Suleiman 2012](#); [Bauer and Ege 2017](#)). Thus, including IPA interests and preferences in the study of policy influence is only the logical continuation of attributing IOs with autonomous actorness. Based on this research, it is easy to argue that while IPAs cannot always be expected to favor a particular policy solution, the expression of such preferences and their eventual realization is the most significant manifestation of its autonomous influence. In other words, we acknowledge that brokering and negotiation facilitation are important functions of IPAs and need to be studied in their own right. However, explicitly including preferences in the conceptualization of influence (and thus setting the bar for its study intentionally high) will help to provide a conservative interpretation and will increase the chances of answering some of the most controversial questions in the literature. This is not to say, however, that observing IPA preferences and tracing the process of how they are achieved is easy—quite the opposite, as preference observation remains a central challenge. Yet, considering the high relevance of the influence concept in the study of decision-making ([March 1955](#)), not engaging in the question of bureaucratic preferences because of these observational difficulties would be unsatisfactory.

A useful point of departure for studying IPA influence is the conception of IOs as systems of collective decision-making ([Cox and Jacobson 1973](#); see also [Gehring, Dorsch, and Dörfler 2017](#)). Most IOs have a tripartite structure—featuring one or more legislative assemblies, an executive board, and a secretariat with the secretary-general (SG) at its top ([Rittberger et al. 2019](#)). Even though this type of organization varies greatly in size and competences, it is wide-spread in international politics. According to the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, there are around 1,892 IOs that have a permanent secretariat and show the basic characteristics of such a tripartite decision-making structure. This includes 276 intergovernmental “conventional international bodies” but also a substantial number of “emanations” (901) and organizations “having a special form” (715) ([Union of International Associations 2017](#), figure 2.1). The secretariat (including its regional branches and country offices) constitutes the IPA, and there is a broad agreement in the literature that its central position within the IO makes it an important and influential actor ([Xu and Weller 2004](#); [Bauer and Weinlich 2011](#); [Ege 2017](#)). At the same time, however, the member state representatives, which are represented in the executive board and the assembly, are the prime decision makers of the organization and significantly contain the influence of IPAs.

An IPA has many responsibilities: for example, it gives legal advice to government representatives, it provides translation services, it prepares meetings, it writes reports, it prepares the draft budget, and it handles working relationships with organizational stakeholders. Thus, not all international bureaucrats are concerned with policy-related matters. Whether or not they are depends on their organizational unit and hierarchical position. Some staff are primarily clerical (such as drivers and

Table 1. Bureaucratic influence in IOs: exemplary actors and strategies

	Policy initiation	Policy drafting	Policy implementation
Primary venue	Policy sector	Sessions of IO bodies	Policy sector
Actors involved	Member states Other IOs, TNAs IPA/SG	Member states IPA/SG	Member states TNA IPA/SG
Potential influence strategies of the IPA	Defining the problem Creating awareness Framing the discourse Mobilizing support	Making an explicit policy proposal to be discussed during the session Influencing procedural issues of session	Specifying details of a policy when putting it into practice Exercising discretion Managing evaluation, monitoring and enforcement of policy

Abbreviations: TNA: transnational actors such as nongovernmental organizations, social movements, and advocacy groups. SG: secretary-general or functional equivalent.

protocol staff) or support the coordination efforts of IO members in the sense of a passive conference service (such as translators and IT staff). We know from classical PA research, however, that a clear separation between the political and the administrative realm is impossible in practical politics (Appleby 1949; Svava 2001). Instead, it is conventional wisdom that an intimate involvement in the internal functioning of a public organization is never of a purely administrative nature but comes with power and policy influence (Simon 1947; Aberbach et al. 1981; Page and Jenkins 2005). Moreover, it has been shown empirically that IPAs are delegated some important policy competences and that these competences vary considerably between IOs (Hooghe and Marks 2015). The question, then, is not *if* IPAs influence policy-making but rather *how*, *to what degree*, and *when* this influence occurs.

In contrast to the implications of the power concept (see Dahl 1957), influence does not require force or coercion. Thus, in practice, IPA influence is often overshadowed by the interests of other actors, especially member states.¹ This is because IPAs may provide expertise, make strategic policy proposals, and implement decisions, but they are rarely able to use coercion or push for their supposed preferences without support from at least some states (Cox and Jacobson 1973). Nonetheless, opportunities for IPAs to exert influence exist during almost all stages of the policy cycle (see table 1). Except for the actual act of voting, which is exclusively reserved for member state representatives, the stages of policy initiation, policy drafting, and policy implementation all offer access points for IPA influence (Weinlich 2014; Knill et al. 2019).² Throughout these stages, IPA influence can be exerted both directly (e.g., by using room for administrative discretion, see Hinterleitner, Sager, and Thomann 2016; Lang and Presbitero 2018) and indirectly (e.g., by lobbying member states and transnational actors). Influence can be targeted at both content-related and procedural aspects of policy-making (Weinlich 2014; Knill and Bauer 2016), and it may occur in core areas of an IPA's mandate (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009a) or in new fields by means of "mission creep" (Littoz-Monnet 2017). Table 1 illustrates the various strategies IPAs may use to exert influence

¹ As Barnett and Finnemore (2004) remind us, the opposite is also true. State influence can be overshadowed by IPA interest. This is because, owing to various forms of authority, IPAs are found to have the ability to change state's preferences. Thus, a policy decision that a certain state favors may well be caused by the moral or expert-based persuasion strategy of the secretariat (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012).

² In reality, of course, these phases are often not clearly distinguishably; some phases are simply irrelevant, and policy-making is not always a circular and rational process (see e.g., Kingdon 1984). Differentiating between these phases is, however, a useful descriptive heuristic here.

during the different phases of the policy cycle (and more might be added here). Two reference points appear particularly useful to eventually assess bureaucratic influence. This is the process leading to policy adoption (initiation and drafting), on the one hand, and the process that takes place during policy implementation (application and specification), on the other (see also [Rittberger et al. 2019](#)). IPA influence strategies include, for example, advocacy-building efforts within the broader policy sector during the definition of the initial problem (framing the discourse and creating awareness), organizational-procedural strategies that aim at influencing the agenda of legislative sessions during the negotiation process, and the specification of previously adopted policies during their implementation.

Reviewing the Literature on International Bureaucratic Influence

How is influence studied in IPA research, and what do we know about its determinants? While IR research was initially concerned with the influence of IOs on politics within and between states ([Martin and Simmons 1998](#)), more specific questions about the influence of international secretariats (as truly transnational bodies) on IO policy-making became more urgent over time. [Cox and Jacobson \(1973\)](#) were among the first to study patterns of IO decision-making from a comparative perspective. In their study of eight IOs, the authors found that international bureaucrats do exert some influence and that this influence is primarily dependent on the kind of decisional output under scrutiny. More recently, [Weinlich \(2014\)](#) came to a similar conclusion when studying the influence of the UN secretariat on three crucial decisions during the evolution of peacekeeping. In her analysis, she found that especially during policy initiation, bureaucratic influence is strong (but less so during policy adoption). [Biermann and Siebenhüner \(2009a\)](#) have conducted an insightful comparative study, which is limited, however, to the field of environmental governance. The authors focus on nine secretariats to identify the reasons for autonomous bureaucratic influence in this field. Their results suggest that a secretariat is particularly influential if the solution to the problem at hand is inexpensive or of minor political salience for national decision makers. While formally delegated competences seem less important, Biermann and Siebenhüner's team found evidence that intra-organizational (i.e., administrative) factors related to staff characteristics and organizational structure are more decisive ([Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b](#), 337–44). Building upon this work, [Widerberg and van Laerhoven \(2014\)](#) have made further advances toward the development of a systematic measurement strategy for IPA influence. These works differentiate between three types of influence ([Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009a](#); [Nay 2012](#); [Widerberg and van Laerhoven 2014](#)). They use the notion of *cognitive influence* to capture the capacity of the bureaucracy to gather, shape, and disseminate information. *Prescriptive* or *normative influence*, by contrast, describes bureaucratic influence on actual policies within and beyond the administrative mandate, such as influence on the process and outcome of negotiations. Finally, *technical or executive influence* refers to the bureaucratic footprint during policy implementation—often in direct contact with member states. Even though their distinction between three types of influence recognizes that the policy cycle in IOs provides different access points for the IPA (see [table 1](#)), it remains unclear how the different types of influence (and the respective target of influence such as the use of bureaucratic information, the outcome of negotiation, and the management of its implementation) are related.

Most importantly, however, it conflates characteristics of the individual bureaucrat (such as their discretion or autonomy)³ and the administration (i.e., its capacity to disseminate information) with the result of its intervention, which, in

³ Carpenter, for instance, states that “[b]ureaucratic autonomy occurs when bureaucrats take actions consistent with their own wishes, actions to which politicians and organized interests defer even though they would prefer that other

turn, hinders the establishment of an *empirical* relationship between bureaucratic characteristics and actual influence. Of course, it depends on the exact definition of influence, but even if IPAs disseminate information and member states use this information, this does not (yet) constitute an actual instance of IPA influence.

When leaving the individual level—and assuming a collective action perspective on influence—bureaucratic autonomy and the empirical implications behind the concept become analytically more relevant. For instance, viewing bureaucratic features as parts of more abstract concepts such as autonomy (which in turn constitute a precondition for influence) is sometimes found to be helpful in dealing with this problem analytically (Maggetti and Verhoest 2014). In global governance research, there are some studies that have made this important separation. For instance, Weinlich acknowledges that autonomy and policy influence are two different concepts that must be kept analytically distinct (see Weinlich 2014, 57). This allows her to study the influence of the UN administration in three policy instances. A similar argument is made by Haftel and Thompson, who point out that “even if an actor has autonomy . . . , it may still have very little influence” (2006, 256; see also Jörgens, Kolleck, and Saerbeck 2016, 980). Aiming to fill this gap, a group of scholars have recently made advances to IPA research by approaching these questions from various conceptual angles (see Knill and Bauer 2016; Trondal 2016; Bauer et al. 2017). So far, however, these authors have not gone the full way to observe influence by actually disentangling intra-organizational interactions in order to isolate the share of IPA influence on policy outputs. Instead, influence is still approximated by using IPA-level concepts such as administrative styles (Knill et al. 2019), autonomy (Bauer and Ege 2014; Ege 2016), or centrality within communication networks (Jörgens, Kolleck, Saerbeck 2016).

Because of the general trade-off between analytic depth and breadth, empirical research on IPAs’ policy influence can be generally distinguished by considering whether it focuses primarily on the *conditions* or on the *mechanisms* of influence.⁴ With regard to *conditions*, the literature identifies different explanatory factors that affect the capacity of an IPA to influence policy-making, among which functional factors, power-related factors, and organizational factors figure as most relevant. Functional factors are related to the underlying policy (or the initial problem). It is argued, for instance, that a bureaucracy wields *more* influence where complex technical problems are concerned (Xu and Weller 2004; Bohne 2010), and states depend on bureaucratic expertise to solve them (Johnson and Urpelainen 2014). Power-related factors, by contrast, concern the policy preferences of the most important member states and stakeholders (Copelovitch 2010; Steinberg 2010; Urpelainen 2012). While some scholars study power-related factors under the term “politicization” (see Elsig 2010), others frame them as a major aspect of “political salience” (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b, 334). Overall, however, there is a general consensus that strong political preferences are associated with *less* bureaucratic influence and that the administration cannot exert influence against the clearly articulated will of the states that make up an IO’s “governing coalition.”⁵ Finally, some studies suggest that organizational features related to IO design and competences (such as executive structures, administrative resources, and organizational competences) are relevant explanatory factors for IPA influence. In particular, scholars studying (potential) bureaucratic influence across

actions (or no action at all) be taken” (2001, 4). In the instance of such a specific individual action, autonomy and influence are virtually the same thing.

⁴There are various meanings and definitions of (causal) mechanisms in political science and in research on international institutions in particular (Checkel 2014). Here we use the term broadly, referring to process-based explanations that highlight the causal relevance of specific (usually) administrative characteristics for the occurrence of IPA influence.

⁵“Governing coalition” refers to the group of those member states that together meet the threshold necessary to pass a decision in an IO’s legislative body (see Bayram and Graham 2015, 3).

organizations, and thus focusing on the IPA as central unit of analysis, have identified certain organizational prerequisites as relevant for the explanation of IO outputs and behavior (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b; Trondal 2011; Weinlich 2014; Kassim et al. 2016). For instance, autonomy and independence are often conceptualized and operationalized by means of bureaucratic characteristics that are argued to allow IPAs to act independently from member states (Haftel and Thompson 2006; Brown 2010; Bauer and Ege 2016; da Conceição-Heldt 2017). Overall, however, studying systematically the impact of (formal and informal) organizational factors on IPA influence across cases is not very prominent in contemporary empirical works. By contrast, organizational features are more commonly the focus of in-depth policy studies, where such features are conceptualized as causal mechanisms through which IPA influence operates during the policy process.

In these case studies, the *mechanisms* behind successful IPA influence constitute the center of scholarly interest. Successful influence is often attributed to the characteristics of the administration itself (Xu and Weller 2008, 39–43; Nay 2011; see also Mayntz 1978, 82). Scholars emphasize that IPAs are able to classify information, fix meanings, and diffuse norms (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999, 2004). It is especially their superior moral authority and expertise that bestow IPAs' power. According to this perspective, bureaucratic authority—such as the perceived expert status of the IPA, its professional experience, control over information, and neutrality—are considered the most important mechanisms through which IPAs influence policy output (see Busch and Liese 2017). A prominent research strategy is to trace influence back to crucial individuals within the organization who are able to promote change by acting as policy entrepreneurs, eventually changing the content of the final output (Haas 1964; Kamradt-Scott 2010; Nay 2011; Knill and Bauer 2016; Jörgens et al. 2017; Skovgaard 2017).

Since IPAs usually lack coercive means to exert influence, they must resort to their knowledge-brokering, capacity-building, and negotiation-facilitation capacities (Biermann et al. 2009, 47; see also Jinnah 2010; Nay 2012, 59) to develop appropriate strategies for influence. Four influence strategies seem particularly relevant: (1) persuading decision makers of the benefits or appropriateness of the policy option favored by the IPA (Johnstone 2003; Hanrieder 2011), (2) offering expertise in exchange for influence or discretion when decision makers lack this expertise themselves (Johnson 2014; Hardt 2016), (3) supporting particular groups of decision makers to strengthen their position in the negotiations to achieve the policy option favored by the IPA (Margulis 2018), and (4) making use of their (moral and expert) authority as recognized by decision makers (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Busch and Liese 2017). This last strategy is important to distinguish here because, in contrast to the three others, it is based on unquestioned recognition and voluntary compliance rather than active deliberation. Even though recent research has contributed to this debate by taking stock of formal and informal administrative patterns (see e.g., Trondal et al. 2012; Bauer et al. 2017; Knill et al. 2019), a systematic empirical analysis that links administrative patterns to IO policy-making and IPA influence is still missing.

What is more, findings of different case studies are often contradictory and biased toward one end of the influence continuum. As a consequence, “[m]any current accounts either dismiss secretariats as faceless clerks, concerned chiefly with convening debates among states, or lionize them through empirical descriptions of influence” (Manulak 2016, 2). One of the main reasons for these contradictory findings is that most of IPA research is characterized by a focus on single instances of influence and by a bias toward “revealing that IPAs are successful in achieving influence but do not contrast these successes with failures” (Busch 2014, 57). This not only makes the occurrence of IPA influence appear more common than it actually is

but also biases the empirical assessment of a theory of IPA influence (see Mahoney and Goertz 2004). In one of the few studies that considers a negative case of influence, Eckhard, Patz, and Schmidt (2018, 2) highlight “the dysfunctional effects of an absence of bureaucratic influence.”

In sum, scholars have collected evidence for the claim that international bureaucracies *can* be powerful actors who are able to use their central position within the organization, their informational advantage, and their authority vis-à-vis member states to influence IO actions and decisions. However, while the causal *mechanisms* through which IPAs have influenced policy-making in particular cases are relatively well understood, the *conditions* under which this influence occurs (and their relative importance in terms of explanatory power) are still a matter of academic controversy (Widerberg and van Laerhoven 2014, 304). Previous studies have—often inductively—identified several factors that might enable influence to occur (see e.g., Liese and Weinlich 2006, 515). Yet, neither a more consistent theory of IPA influence nor an integrative approach that allows for the analysis of several explanatory factors under a common theoretical framework has yet emerged. Of course, gaining systematic, and thereby more generalizable, insights is a challenging task—and even if resources for empirical research were abundant, a long way lies ahead of the researcher committed to solving the underlying puzzles. Given, then, that optimal solutions appear out of reach for the time being, the question is what can be done in the short- and medium-term to improve the status quo and to enhance our understanding of IPA influence. Thus, before such a comprehensive analytical framework can be established that allows us to test different explanatory factors, the literature review has raised four issues that can be resolved more instantaneously.

First, it has been critically observed that cases where influence is low or absent are rarely included in the analysis of bureaucratic influence. From a research-design perspective, however, truncating the property space of the phenomenon of influence is problematic (Mahoney and Goertz 2004). It makes it difficult to test the explanatory power of the different potential causes of influence and to take into account the possibility of asymmetric causality (i.e., that the explanation of the occurrence of influence may differ from the explanation of its absence). To advance the state of the art in IPA research, more comparative research designs that pay attention to including variation in the explanandum (i.e., bureaucratic influence) are needed. Second, some studies seem to equate administrative characteristics with subsequent influential behavior. This makes it difficult to study the explanatory relevance of bureaucratic features for actual influence. When conceptualizing influence, it thus seems justified to more clearly distinguish between the characteristics of the IPA and its behavior, on the one hand, and its actual influence, on the other. Third, the literature review has shown that research on influence is fragmented. This fragmentation not only concerns the explanation of influence that is exacerbated by scholars’ preferences for positive cases but is also a reflection of varying definitions and reference points for influence that are common in the literature. Fourth, we have argued that even when scholars focus their influence concepts on IO policy-making, influence can still mean many different things. A particularly disputed question concerns IPA’s policy preferences. To be sure, influence can be studied in terms of IPA’s brokering role, and one does not necessarily need to assume the existence of administrative policy preferences. Many studies suggest, however, that IPAs do indeed show independent preferences, and the whole debate on IO actorness would seem strange if scholars did not at least provide for the possibility that policy preferences exist among IPAs and reflect this in their conceptualizations.

Table 2. Proposals for addressing the challenges in current influence research

Pitfall in current research	Proposal to overcome the challenge
Imprecision regarding what the influence concept refers to	Proposal 1: Defining the target/object of influence in terms of a particular policy
Diverging views about relevance of policy preferences of IPAs and their attainment in the specification of influence	Proposal 2: Including bureaucratic policy preferences in the influence concept

Two Proposals for How to Improve Empirical Research about the Policy Influence of IPAs

In view of these deficiencies, scholars interested in the consequences of IPAs' formal and informal influence face some crucial challenges. For instance, how can research on the internal functioning of IPAs and their policy influence be fruitfully integrated? What kind of research design is conducive to a systematic analysis of IPA influence that can improve our cumulative knowledge? How can IPA influence be systematically captured and compared across cases? These are only some of the questions that arise. In our view, however, they represent the most pressing challenges within the current debate. In order to work toward the resolution of these challenges, we start from the deficiencies that have surfaced during the review and present two proposals which, if followed, may help to improve the state of the art and enhance the basis for research with the aim of accumulating systematic knowledge on IPA influence. The two proposals are summarized in [table 2](#). Detailed explanations follow below.

Defining the Object of Influence in Terms of Policy Output

In contrast to organization-specific concepts such as bureaucratic autonomy, influence cannot be assessed at the abstract level. Instead, the study of actual influence requires a definition of the subject matter because influence without a concrete object remains an empty category. Thus, the first conceptual proposal is concerned with the question “influence on what?” It holds that the object of influence should be defined as clearly as possible. Given the current state of research, studying influence on “policy output” (focusing on two reference points: the *adoption* and *application* of policies) seems a sensible option.

For scholars of (world) politics, influence on political decisions is of paramount relevance—not least because these decisions have important repercussions on the people living within the jurisdictions of the institutions under study. While some influence studies take an outspokenly procedural perspective ([Jinnah 2010](#)), scholars interested in IPA influence could be generally more explicit in their conceptualizations of the subject matter of influence. In order to help bring together the currently fragmented findings, our proposal is to concentrate specifically on influence over particular decisions. As we have seen in [table 1](#), two reference points appear particularly useful to assess bureaucratic influence: the process leading to the adoption of a policy and the process that takes place during policy application.

Before the actual vote in the IO decisional body (usually the legislative assembly, the executive board, or a subcommittee), bureaucratic influence may happen directly and indirectly. Direct influence may occur, for example, when the IPA, via the SG, prepares the agenda for legislative sessions and limits or extends the number of options that member state representatives can vote on in order to increase the likelihood that the result of the vote is in line with, or closer to, its desired outcome. Forms of indirect influence include situations in which the IPA uses reports,

expertise, or evaluations to frame the discourse in a certain way, eventually resulting in a different policy option being adopted.

Limiting the analysis of bureaucratic influence to the phase prior to the adoption of a policy, however, would not only disregard the influential role that international bureaucrats play during policy application (Joachim, Reinalda, and Verbeek 2008) but also assume the automatic translation of agreed-upon rules into practice, which stands in stark contrast to the established understanding in policy studies and implementation research (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Bondarouk and Mastenbroek 2017). Schaffrin and colleagues, for instance, argue that “a conceptualization of policy output should focus on the dimension of policy means including all three components, the ‘instrument logic,’ ‘mechanisms,’ and ‘calibrations’ as the tools to reach objectives and general goals on the dimension of ends or aims” (2015, 259; see also Bauer and Knill 2012). Thus, in order to capture the phenomenon of bureaucratic influence more comprehensively, particular attention needs to be paid to the way a decision is specified (i.e., put into practice). This secondary step is referred to as policy *application*.⁶ Such a broad but differentiated reading of the output concept has not only proved useful for the study of domestic policy change (see, e.g., Hall 1993; Knill, Tosun, and Bauer 2009) but also builds on earlier attempts to take the study of policy instrument choice to the transnational level (Wolff 2015), as well as on definitions of policy output in the IO literature. In this latter debate it is again Weinlich, who argues that “the output of an international organisation comprises their policies and the activities that result from these policies” (2014, 59).⁷

In addition to the differentiation between influence on policy adoption and influence on policy application, Cox and Jacobson (1973) have reminded us that not all decisions made by IOs are directly related to their mandate and that the decision type matters for the ability of the IPA to influence its content. Alongside “substantive policies” that affect the behavior of actors within the IO’s membership, many important decisions are “institutional.” They concern the competences and functioning of the administration itself or aims to alter the formal relationship between member states and the IPA (Nay 2011; Tallberg et al. 2016; Eckhard, Patz, Schmidt 2018; Ege 2018). As bureaucratic self-interest varies between institutional policies and substantive policies (Egeberg 1995), neglecting one type or the other will distort the results of the analysis. Thus, in order to yield general explanations of influence, institutional policies need to be included in the analysis.

To sum up, we suggest conceptualizing policy output as the sum of instruments and actions adopted and specified within a formal IO decision that establishes or changes a regulatory status quo within the issue area or institutional set-up of this organization. An IPA’s *bureaucratic influence* can thus be defined as that particular aspect of a policy output that can be attributed to the presence and specific behavior of the IPA.

⁶ To be sure, this is not the same as considering outcomes in the sense of the “consequences of a decision” (Schmitt 2013, 30–31) but only a decision’s specification into concrete measures. What we suggest including in the output concept is also described as “practical implementation,” consisting of *final policy formation on the ground* and *actual policy delivery* (Bondarouk and Mastenbroek 2017). Thus, it should be noted that the focus on international policy outputs advocated here is less suitable to detecting IPA influence in specific countries. While it is possible to capture country effects of IO decisions as part of the implementation process, the analytic lens proposed here is less focused on these phenomena as for instance applied in the study of international norm diffusion or nonhierarchical policy transfer (Ervik, Kildal, and Nilssen 2009; Busch 2015; Stone 2004; Jakobi 2009).

⁷ There are also studies that subsume decisions and actions of the *secretariat* under the output concept (Freitas 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b). For instance, Biermann et al. refer to “the output of the international bureaucracy” as an IPA’s “actual activity and productivity such as laws and standards enacted, publications and scientific findings disseminated, money spent, or advisors dispatched” (2009, 42). It is important, however, to distinguish here between the output of IOs and the output of IPAs. For research on IPA influence, the reference point needs to be IO output because it would make no sense to capture the influence of the IPA on its own output, which—by definition—is always present.

Including Bureaucratic Policy Preferences in the Influence Concept

As we have seen, the literature is unclear about whether the policy preferences of IPAs should play a role in the specification and measurement of influence. In fact, scholars are even divided over the question of whether international bureaucrats have policy-related preferences and what these preferences are. Considering the arguments brought forward in this debate, we argue that a realistic and conservative estimation of influence should include the policy preference and goals of the IPA—which sometimes may be embodied by a subunit of a greater IPA—and the degree to which such bureaucratic goals have been de facto achieved in the policy under investigation. Thus, instead of ignoring bureaucratic preferences all together or simply assuming them ex ante, the study of bureaucratic influence invites their consideration in conceptualization and operationalization.

The method of preference attainment is an established approach to measuring interest-group influence (Dür 2008; Klüver 2009). When applying it to public servants, it needs to be emphasized that bureaucratic self-interest during policy-making cannot be assumed a priori but needs to be carefully assessed as an empirical and context-dependent phenomenon (Lewin and Lavery 1991; Egeberg 1995). The same holds for international bureaucrats (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 27–29). In the study of international organizations, a lot has been written about the interests of states, whereas the preferences of IPAs are often assumed but remain surprisingly underspecified (for a summary of this discussion, see Finnemore 1996).⁸ As we have seen, in some situations, IPA actions may not be directed toward defending a specific policy position. In other situations, the administration may simply be interested in facilitating compromise—following the reasoning that any agreement (even a weak one) is better than no agreement (Eccleston and Woodward 2014; Jörgens, Kolleck, Saerbeck 2016, 983). From a conceptual perspective, this raises the question of whether the presence of explicit administrative preferences for a concrete policy option and its eventual attainment is a constitutive element of influence or whether efforts to facilitate an agreement should already be conceived of as influence. Following the argument of Biermann et al. (2009, 41), for instance, one would not view administrative preferences as constitutive elements of influence. The authors consider brokering activities by the administration as indicative of IPA influence because they argue that had the administrations not been there, a decision would not have been reached.

On the other hand, research on the European Commission provides clear evidence that the defense of independent administrative preferences for a particular policy option are perceived as highly important among EU civil servants (Bauer and Ege 2012). This is not surprising given the commission's monopoly on initiatives for EU policies. However, this finding is not only corroborated by research on the policy preferences of domestic agencies (Clinton et al. 2012) but also by many IPA studies in which the administration has shown independent policy preferences (see e.g., Finnemore 1993; Beach 2004; Cortell and Peterson 2006, 266–67; Martin 2006, 142; Nay 2012). These studies even indicate that while the policy ambitions of commission bureaucrats are indeed among the strongest, formally weak IPAs such as the OSCE secretariat show surprisingly strong policy preferences (Knill, Eckhard, and Grohs 2016). The authors argue that OSCE staff have developed an entrepreneurial style in policy initiation and a strategic approach to policy formulation that is observable as a general pattern across different policies. Being entrepreneurial and strategic clearly requires a particular preference order regarding possible policy options. Of course, the articulation and strength of these

⁸This assumption is a central aspect of both rationalist and social constructivist theories in IR. It is most evident, however, in the rationalist notion of agency slack as used in the IO literature (Hawkins et al. 2006a). The concept of slack is based on the existence of distinct administrative preferences (deviating from the preferences of the member states), which can lead to bureaucratic drift or policy drift (McCubbins, Noll, and Weingast 1989; Kam 2000).

preferences may vary between policies and IPAs, but this is precisely what one would expect regarding bureaucratic influence. For these reasons, we suggest that a specification of influence that is both realistic and conservative should include the degree of administrative preference attainment as it is used, for example, in interest group research.

To sum up, we pointed to two endemic pitfalls that are particularly detrimental for making progress in current influence research in IPA studies—and we make two suggestions on how these problems may be overcome in a pragmatic way. Of course, any particular research endeavor targeting IPA influence will face a high number of challenges. We do not claim that following our proposals would solve all conceivable problems. Bureaucratic influence remains, after all, a demanding concept to pin down empirically. If researchers follow the pragmatic recipes presented here, comparability and generalizability of findings will improve and so will the chances of gaining the momentum needed to produce a more comprehensive theory of the bureaucratic influence of IPAs.

Operationalizing Influence

We suggested conceiving of *bureaucratic influence* as that particular aspect of a policy output that can be attributed to the presence and specific behavior of the IPA. This definition rests on the counterfactual reasoning that if the administration had not been there (or had not acted the way it did), the result would have been different (see [Busch 2014](#)). In order to specify influence beyond this prominent but general definition, we start from the assumption that successful IPA influence has three constitutive elements: (1) the involvement of the IPA in the (negotiation) process leading to the policy output; (2) the existence of explicit administrative preferences in favor of a particular policy option and efforts on the part of the IPA to justify or defend this option; and (3) the congruence between IPA preferences and the final policy output, which provides an assessment of the “degree of preference attainment” ([Dür 2008](#), 566). If all of these three elements are present, the case at hand can be considered an instance of successful bureaucratic influence. Adding analytical depth, we build on the previous proposals and suggest distinguishing between partial preference attainment and full preference attainment in order to differentiate “rather successful” from “fully successful influence.” [Table 3](#) summarizes how this reasoning can be used to design a measure of IPA influence that is applicable across policies and IOs.

These elements not only provide us with observable implications for successful influence (i.e., all elements need to be present) but also allow for a more nuanced assessment of different degrees of influence. For an explanatory analysis, researchers can assign numerical scores to the different categories (see [Adcock and Collier 2001](#), 531). If one decides, for example, to use qualitative comparative analysis and assign fuzzy-set membership scores ([Ragin 2000](#)), a scale with four categories ranging from 0 to 1 seems appropriate (see [table 3](#)). For other purposes, different scores are of course possible.

In order to investigate individual cases of IPA influence on the selected policy output, scholars may first want to screen existing academic and popular publications, as well as available official organizational documents related to a particular decision. These official documents include, for instance, the provisional agenda, minutes of meetings, and the final decision, as well as subsequent specifications and amendments. In a second step, documentary analysis can be complemented by face-to-face interviews at the IOs’ headquarters and the permanent representations of selected member countries. Combining the information from documentary analysis and interviews allows researchers to assess, for each policy case, the involvement of the IPA in policy-making, the nature of its preferences and the congruence with policy output, and eventually the degree of IPA influence. While these three

Table 3. Measuring IPA influence

Constitutive element	Description	Influence	Possible indicator scores
Involvement (but no policy preferences)	The IPA was involved, but its policy-related preferences remain unclear or unspecified.	No influence	0
Involvement + preferences	The IPA was involved and expressed clear preferences in favor of a specific policy option, and there are visible efforts to defend this option.	Rather unsuccessful influence	0.33
Involvement + preferences + Congruence (partly)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect, but only parts of its preferences are reflected in the policy output.	Rather successful influence	0.66
Involvement + preferences + congruence (fully)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect, and its preferences are reflected in the policy output to a major degree.	Fully successful influence	1

elements provide a good orientation for the comparative study of influence, they are difficult to determine in concrete instances of policy output. To provide more guidance for scholars applying this measurement heuristic, and to show how the three elements can be assessed empirically, each element is discussed in more detail.

Involvement

Member states involve the IPA in policy-making in order to make full use of the benefits of multilateral cooperation (Hawkins et al. 2006b). IPAs are especially active in the preparation and the implementation of policies. IPAs are also being delegated substantial authority (Hooghe and Marks 2015) and involved in decision-making primarily in exchange for their expertise (Johnson 2014; Hardt 2016). IO policy-making includes many different actors (Cox and Jacobson 1973, see e.g., table 1). When decisions are taken within one organization only, delimitating the involvement of the secretariat from that of political actors (member states) and civil society groups is less problematic. When several IOs work together on joint programs or initiatives (e.g., in the context of UNAIDS), identifying the involvement (and contribution) of individual IPAs can become more difficult.

Undoubtedly, the involvement of the administration is a crucial prerequisite for IPA influence to occur. It is less clear, however, whether IPA involvement in policy-making should be seen as a scope condition for the occurrence of influence or as part of its conceptualization. Far from being a petty technical issue, this decision is related to the more general question of how to choose negative cases in comparative research (Mahoney and Goertz 2004) and has important consequences for testing theories of administrative influence. If “involvement” is seen as a scope condition, then cases where the administration is not involved are irrelevant for testing influence theories. By contrast, if IPA involvement is seen as an element of the actual measure of influence, all cases should be relevant for testing influence, whether the administration was actually involved or not. One way or the other, however, researchers need to assess the involvement of the secretariat empirically and then decide whether or not the case is relevant or irrelevant. While researchers’ choices depend on their underlying theory, we tend to view “IPA involvement” as a scope condition. Thus, the second row of table 3 covers negative cases of influence

(“involvement but no policy preferences”), while cases with no involvement at all are considered irrelevant cases. We will discuss the implications of this decision when we elaborate on the issue of case selection.

Preferences

In IO policy-making, the open expression of bureaucratic preferences is argued to undermine the *appearance* of impartiality that underpins much of IPAs' authority (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 23). Thus, IPAs are generally found to be more comfortable acting behind the scenes and exercising influence in an “informal” fashion (Bauer 2006, 43; Bohne 2010). While this is true for some policy issues, it has also been shown that IPAs—even international treaty secretariats, which are particularly hard cases for observing administrative preferences (Jørgens, Kolleck, Saerbeck 2016, 980)—act as “attention-seeking policy advocates who actively feed their policy-relevant information into the multilateral decision-making process” (Jørgens et al. 2017). Recent experiences with expert interviews in IOs also give reason to be more optimistic about the willingness of international civil servants to express their policy preferences during interview situations—at least as long as anonymity is guaranteed (Kassim et al. 2013; Hanrieder 2015, 20; Drejack and Niederberger 2018). To uncover the underlying motivation and goals of IPA staff and limit social desirability bias, scholars have suggested different strategies for empirical research and, in particular, interviews. A first strategy to counter biased responses is to complement information from IPA staff interviews with the responses of other actors (staff of member's permanent representations and TNA) and the findings from documentary analysis. Moreover, two other strategies can be used during interviews to increase the validity of the responses. First, instead of asking interviewees about their preferred policy output, one can frame the questions with regard to the most desirable output from the perspective of the organization. Since the documentary analysis already provides some background knowledge of the underlying cleavages within an IO's governing coalition, one can make sure that the questions are not understood as being related to what these members prefer but to what would be in the best interest of the organization as a whole. Second, in order to allow for a *relative* assessment of influence during interviews—that is, to make sure the effect was in fact caused by the IPA and not by other actors—one may apply a previously successful interview strategy that uses counterfactual questions “to assess an improvement in relation to the hypothetical state of affairs that would most likely not have occurred in the absence of activity of the bureaucracy in question” (Biermann et al. 2009, 45).

Another important question is how individual bureaucratic preferences are best aggregated in order to infer the (dominant or average) preferences of the secretariat. This question becomes particularly relevant if—as suggested here—interviews are used to capture IPA influence (for a possible solution to the aggregation problem in the context of policy preferences of national agencies, see Clinton et al. 2012, 347–49). Research shows that “[c]ivil servants in international secretariats are exposed to numerous, crosscutting and, at times, conflicting pressures and expectations” (Marcussen and Trondal 2011, 592). Thus, it is not surprising that bureaucratic preferences and behavioral logics vary across IPA divisions and departments (Trondal et al. 2012; Enkler et al. 2017). For influence research, however, not all of these staff members and their respective preferences are important. The preferences of the people directly involved in the decision and its specification are the most relevant here. Thus, knowing who within the IPA was involved (see previous element) already provides important information about whose preferences deserve particular attention. For high-level decisions, the executive head of the IO (the SG) is particularly important (Cox 1969; Kille and Scully 2003; Hall and Woods 2017), but we also know that senior managers or a group of midlevel civil servants at the

right position can make a difference (Hartlapp, Metz, and Rauh 2014; Oksamytna 2018). While these issues are less problematic conceptually, the real challenge for the interview phase is to identify relevant individuals, speak to them about their policy preferences, and ideally triangulate this view by also getting the opinions of other stakeholders.

Congruence

If IPA preferences (i.e., their preferred policy option) have been determined, the identification of congruence with the final outcome appears relatively easy. As far as possible, however, the assessment of (full or partial) congruence should not only be based on a simple pre-post comparison but also be backed by process evidence. It is a well-known problem that in order to establish a relationship “between the preferences of an actor regarding an outcome and the outcome itself” (Nagel 1975, 29), one can never be sure that this relationship is causal. We simply cannot know what would have happened without IPA involvement. As we have argued, IPA preferences are often overshadowed by the interests of other actors. IPAs can, for instance, be expected to choose their preferred policy options by considering more realistic expectations of what is actually politically feasible. This may go as far as to situations in which IPAs’ interests are the same as the interests of (some) powerful member states (Barnett and Finnemore 2004, 27–28). Thus, if the WTO secretariat favors the same solution as the United States, scholars need to ask themselves if this solution would have been selected if the secretariat had not intervened as it did.

Case Selection

After having described the three elements that we deem important to the advancement of current IPA influence research, the issue of case selection is also in need of some more elaboration. The reason is simple. To study IPA influence in a comparative manner and to avoid biased conclusions, suitable cases of policy output will have to be carefully selected. In order to systematically sample such policy cases, a two-step selection procedure that starts at the IO level and then narrows down to individual policies seems more promising than sampling policy cases directly. This is because case selection that is based on a “most similar systems design” (Przeworski and Teune 1982, 32) at the IO level would allow us to hold a number of organizational factors constant and focus the analysis on selected explanatory factors (see literature review). In a next step, suitable policy cases can be identified. To this end, one could ask IO staff, the staff of the diplomatic missions of member states, and relevant TNA about important IO policies. By asking about these policies without referring to the role of the administration, it becomes possible to select cases with both positive and negative instances of IPA influence. Alternatively, one could also draw on repositories of IO decisions to select policies for further analysis. Irrespective of the particular source for selecting potential cases, the question is (again) whether a policy constitutes a negative case (and should be included in the analysis) or whether it should rather be seen as an irrelevant case (and should be excluded from the analysis).⁹ In order to help scholars decide which (negative) cases to include and which cases should be seen as irrelevant, Mahoney and Goertz suggest using what they call the “possibility principle.” In short, this principle states that one should only choose those negative cases where the outcome of interest is possible. Applied to the question at hand, it can be easily seen that bureaucratic influence can only occur if the administration is involved in policy development and application. Thus, all cases where the administration was not involved should be excluded from

⁹ Defining irrelevant cases is important because if one includes all policies as relevant, this comes with three major problems. First, it wastes valuable resources on cases that do not teach us anything about the determinants of influence; second, it inflates the number of confirmatory cases, which can make a weak theory appear stronger; and third it can lead to erroneous causal inferences (Mahoney and Goertz 2004, 655–56).

the analysis. Since there are many situations, however, in which the administration can become involved on its own initiative, the exclusion criteria of noninvolvement should be defined rather narrowly. An example of a policy output where the IPA was not and could not get involved are highly political issues such as of the decision of the Permanent Council of the OSCE to change the scales of financial contributions of member states (OSCE 2011). Because this decision is made exclusively by member state representatives without involvement of the OSCE secretariat, this policy constitutes an *irrelevant case* that should be excluded from the analysis. By contrast, the involvement of the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change surrounding the Kyoto climate negotiation can be viewed a *negative case* that should be included in a comparative analysis of IPA influence. Despite the fact that the secretariat was involved and facilitated negotiations between parties, it did not show substantial entrepreneurial behavior itself (Busch 2009).¹⁰ Thus, the case should be part of the analysis because a comparative investigation into why the climate secretariat was so passive increases our knowledge about the conditions explaining the nonoccurrence of influence (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b).

In sum, selecting both positive and negative cases of influence (and excluding irrelevant ones) will allow researchers to overcome an important shortcoming in the literature and increase the generalizability of analytical findings. It should also be clear, however, that excluding irrelevant cases limits the applicability of the analytical results by introducing further scope conditions—that is, explanations of influence identified in the empirical analysis only apply in situations where the administration was not excluded in the first place.

Empirical Illustration: How to Systematically Capture IPA Influence?

After presenting our proposed measurement scheme for IPA influence, we now illustrate its potential usefulness by applying it to two positive cases of IPA influence; the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) administration during the Uruguay round, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) secretariat's role in the reintroduction of permanent contracts for OECD staff. To be sure, these two anecdotes are based on secondary literature only and have the mere purpose of illustrating how the suggested perspective on influence can be applied to concrete decisions.

The Influence of the FAO during the Uruguay Round

The first case to illustrate the usefulness of our measurement strategy of IPAs' influence concerns the role of the FAO during the Uruguay Round negotiations on agricultural liberalization and the related rise of world prices for basic food conducted within the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). As shown by Margulis (2018), the FAO secretariat was able to substantially influence the outcome of the GATT negotiations (i.e., exert *fully successful influence*). FAO officials not only supported developing countries in promoting food security concerns but actively shaped the content of the final declaration.

FAO regarded the Uruguay negotiations as crucial for global food security, which is one of the central pillars of their mandate. On the initiative of FAO Director General Edouard Saouma, FAO staff *got involved in the negotiation process* by successfully demanding observer status (Margulis 2018, 372). The negotiations were characterized by antagonistic preferences of net food-importing developing countries (NFIDC) and food-exporting developed countries. While NFIDC were concerned about the increase of food prices and food security, developed food-exporting countries had a clear preference for further agricultural liberalization and were not

¹⁰This has changed in later negotiations, however (Kolleck et al. 2017).

willing to commit themselves to additional financial aid to safeguard the global food supply. In accordance with their mandate, *FAO expressed clear preferences* in favor of the position of the NFIDC. FAO officials supported NFIDC in developing a negotiation strategy by reframing the food-security discourse from an emphasis on the humanitarian problem of hunger to the economic problem of balance of payments difficulties resulting from higher food prices (Margulis 2018, 372–73). Despite their ostensibly passive observer status, *FAO officials used different opportunities to promote their own preferences*. They were mostly acting via informal channels and coordinated efforts of the developing countries. What is more, FAO officials drafted the text of the final agreement—which contains several measures to protect global food security. It included, for example, the assurance that NFIDCs would gain additional international food aid, as well as financial and technical assistance and the establishment of new funding facilities. The agreement can thus be considered *fully congruent with the IPA's policy preferences*.

The Influence of the OECD Administration on the Reintroduction of Permanent Contracts

In order to cover both types of policy outputs as proposed above, the second illustration concerns an institutional policy. As shown by Balint (2017, 272–73), the OECD secretariat was able to partially influence the reintroduction of permanent contracts in the human resource management of the organization (i.e., exert *rather successful influence*). While regular staff—under specific circumstances—became eligible again for permanent employment, the duration of contracts of the organization's senior management (i.e., directors) continued to be highly restricted.

At the end of the 1990s, substantial reductions in member state contributions lead to a severe budget crisis for the OECD. This brought about budget cuts of 10 percent and a reduction of the total OECD workforce by 15 percent. In the course of these cuts, member states imposed a moratorium in 1999, which stated that fixed-term contracts could not be converted into permanent contracts until a new regulation has been decided on. The aim was to avoid the higher costs caused by indemnities for loss of employment that may result from the termination of permanent contracts. In the following process, the OECD secretariat *was actively involved* in negotiations with member states about future contractual arrangements in the OECD. While member states in the council were in favor of more flexible forms of employment, the secretariat preferred to continue the previously existing arrangements, which has made OECD staff generally eligible for permanent employment. Negotiations between the secretariat and the council resulted in a compromise. An agreement was reached that—under strict conditions—employees could get permanent contracts again, but this regulation did not apply to directors. The policy output was thus *only partly congruent* with the secretariat's policy preferences because there were still various restrictions on the conclusion of permanent contracts, and the regulations did not apply to all staff categories (Balint 2017, 271–72).

Our brief description of the FAO example illustrates *fully successful IPA influence* because all of the constitutive elements outlined above have been present. Owing to its observer status, the FAO secretariat was involved in the negotiations. It also expressed clear policy preferences for a solution that would guarantee food security, which it realized through its support to developing countries during the negotiations. Looking at the outcome of the negotiations, it can be concluded that the IPA's preferences are substantially reflected in the compromise between developing and developed countries. The example of the OECD, on the contrary, illustrates *rather successful IPA influence*. The secretariat was actively involved in the negotiation process with the council. It expressed policy preferences in favor of the reintroduction of permanent contracts for all staff categories. Due to the decision-making authority of the council in these matters, however, the secretariat's preferences were only partially reflected in the final decision. While these examples may not provide fully conclusive evidence of the causal effect of the two IPAs, they are well suited to

illustrate the general applicability of the measurement scheme to facilitate comparative observation.

Conclusion

This essay started from the observation that theoretically integrative and empirically comparative approaches are rare in the study of bureaucratic influence at the international level and that, consequently, we lack systematic knowledge of how international administrative bodies affect the policy-making processes of IOs. This essay should be seen in a line with other recent calls to move into similar directions, such as that “to encourage IR scholars to study the influence of executive heads more systematically and comparatively” (Hall and Woods 2017). In order to help overcome the challenges in current influence research, we have put forward two hands-on proposals that together sketch the contours of a suitable approach to conceptualize, specify, and measure IPA influence on IO policy-making in a comparative manner. Based on these suggestions, we have presented a measurement scheme for IPA influence that can be applied to identify the bureaucratic influence in individual cases of policy change. With this measurement heuristic, it becomes possible to integrate process-tracing elements into a comparative perspective on IPA influence. On the one hand, we draw on process-oriented strategies where scholars scrutinize influence attempts and individual preferences, access to decision makers, decision makers’ responses, and the degree to which preferences are reflected in outcomes. On the other hand, the approach of comparing preferences with the content of policy outputs draws on the idea that a conservative and realistic observation should, by definition and irrespective of the underlying mechanisms, manifest itself in the outcome (for these two approaches, see Dür 2008, 562–69).

Many empirical challenges remain. First, influence research using interviews relies heavily on self-selection and on individual replies. These replies are subject to conscious and unconscious misrepresentations of individuals’ own roles, not to mention the well-known problems of individuals in the recollection of past events. Second, it is somewhat arbitrary to differentiate between full congruence and partial congruence of preferences because no ready-made yardstick exists, and decisions are rarely unidimensional. Third, untangling the effects of all relevant actors involved and finding enough evidence to convincingly show that IPA preferences and outcomes are in fact related is ambitious. Fourth, even if several cases are studied and the case selection and scope (at IO and policy level) are well justified (Goertz and Mahoney 2009), problems of generalizability still remain.

Considering James G. March’s argument that “influence is to the study of decision-making what force is to the study of motion—a generic explanation for the basic observable phenomena” (March 1955, 432), trying to address the pitfalls in IPA influence research highlighted in this essay is certainly a worthwhile endeavor. Our proposals are a pragmatic and modest attempt in this direction. Explicating programmatic options about how to increase our knowledge of IPA influence is of course only a first step, offered with the intent to spark discussion. Whether or not these suggestions have the potential to actually improve current research needs to be shown by future empirical applications.

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