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Debate

Just an Illusion? Democratization in the International Realm¹

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Democracy is traditionally associated with the nation-state. It hinges on the idea of a delimited demos characterized by a shared sense of identity, a common public sphere, and political institutions like parties and other intermediary organisations that ensure its participation in the political process. Globalization has led to a debordering of political processes, and a reorganization of political authority in the international realm. International governance bodies, such as international organizations (IOs) and transgovernmental networks (TGNs), created to address cross-border challenges have expanded in number, form, and scope. They contribute to “a great increase in the scale of the political system” beyond the nation-state (Dahl 1994: 21, see Schimmelfennig 2010; Zürn 2000). While responding to the changing geography of political problems, this rescaling of the political space poses challenges to the democratic making of political decisions. It constitutes a fundamental dilemma between effectiveness and participation, or between “the ability of the citizens to exercise democratic control over the decisions of the polity versus the capacity of the system to respond satisfactorily to the collective preferences of its citizens” (Dahl 1994: 21). How far can we observe the introduction of democratic principles and institutions in international governance bodies, what explains their adoption – and do these democratic features resonate with citizens’ support of international politics?

Our contribution summarizes key results from several research projects within the National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) Democracy with a focus on “processes of upwards de-nationalisation” (Kübler and Kriesi 2017). We start with a theoretical discussion of the drivers and models of democratization in the international realm. We then focus on two features of international democratization: parliamentarization of IOs and democratic governance in TGNs, and present findings on citizens’ preferences of international politics.

Drivers and Models of Democratization Beyond the State

Models of democracy can take more republican, liberal, and deliberative traits (Coppedge et al. 2011) and distinguish themselves from “non-democratic” sources of legitimacy

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primarily based on technical expertise (Majone 1998). These models differ with regard to whether they emphasize democracy at the level of input – the responsiveness to citizen concerns as a result of participation by the people, be it directly or representatively through parliaments or stakeholders; throughput – the efficacy, accountability, and transparency of the governance processes to the people; and output – the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy outcomes for the people, which is at the center of technocratic approaches to legitimacy (Scharpf 1999; Schmidt 2013; see Freyburg et al. 2017a, 2017b).

When do we expect international governance to be more democratic? The democratization of international institutions can be favoured by the composition of their members; features of the institutions themselves; or international diffusion processes. First, international institutions, which are predominantly composed of developed democracies, should be more likely to develop democratic features. Based on the premise that member states' preferences regarding the design of international institutions are rooted in their respective domestic political systems, it has been argued that democratic members prefer extending the constitutive principles of (liberal) democracy to global governance (Pevehouse 2005: 46; Tallberg et al. 2015: 9).

Second, demand for democratization can result from an institution's authority towards its members. Here we start from the assumption that there is a "correlation between the integration level of an [...] institution and the public discourse about the lack of democracy and legitimacy in the institution's structure and functioning" (Stein 2001: 489). The extent to which international governance exhibits democratic features should be linked to the extent to which the respective international institutions develop authority vis-à-vis the participating states, especially if the latter are democratic. The more encompassing and compelling an international institution is with regard to the participating states, the more we can expect it to seek legitimacy through democratic features that responds to citizens' "demand for democratic control" (see Dahl 1994). A similar argument should also apply to non-democratic countries that have agreed delegating certain sovereign powers to the international level. As an analysis of legitimacy statements on the Security Council within UN General Assembly debates suggests, also autocratic members may call for more democratic decision-making not because they generally appreciate democratic values; rather, because "they seek to increase their influence" (Binder and Heupel 2015: 245) on the international institution. Hence we expect that international governance bodies, be it IOs or TGNs, are more likely to democratize if they have competences for authoritative policy-making.

Both propositions –the effects of membership composition and of an institution's authority– presuppose the generation of an active demand for democratization to compensate for losses over domestic decision-making control. As international relations studies show, however, international norms and practices may also spread due to non-intentional forces linked to processes of policy diffusion and emulation (Börzel and Risse 2012). In this sense, we should observe a similar trend to democratization regardless of membership or authority but due to international institutions' shared exposure to roles and norms that shape their behaviour.

Empirical Illustrations of International Democratization

We consider the effects of membership composition, institutional authority, and diffusion processes for democratization in two different types of international institutions: parliaments linked to IOs, which can be viewed as projection of the liberal model of

representative participation to the international level; and TGNs, which tend to be seen as technocratic bodies insulating themselves from democratically legitimated institutions. Finally, we discuss citizens' preferences of how decisions ought to be made in the international realm.

Parliamentarization of International Organizations

Parliaments are the core institutions of representative democracy –the dominant form of democracy in the modern nation-state. Ideally, parliaments are elected by universal and equal suffrage and provide a forum for deliberating the public good across a wide range of issues. These features distinguish parliaments from other actors and arenas of representation and interest aggregation, which are issue-specific, cater to special interests, or privilege expertise and material resources (Zürn and Walter-Drop 2011: 272-276). These features also justify the mandate of parliaments to make laws binding for the citizenship and to authorize redistributive and coercive policies. Parliaments are the democratic institutions that have suffered most from the shift of authority from states to IOs. IOs are formally dominated by state executives and offer venues of influence to interest groups and NGOs capable of organizing transnationally. By contrast, the strong link of parliaments to the *demos* and the general public good makes it difficult for them to travel to IOs, which are not based on a single *demos* and often specialize in a narrow range of issues. Consequently, parliamentary representation has traditionally been rare and weak at the international level; parliaments are regarded as the big institutional losers of globalization; and the “decline of parliament” is a major component of the standard account of IOs’ “democratic deficit” (Føllesdal and Hix 2006). Strengthening parliaments in global governance is the core strategy of democratization according to the republican model.

NCCR Democracy research shows, indeed, that the parliamentarization of IOs has made important progress – both in the global and the European context. Until the 1990s, only around 10 percent of the world’s most important organizations have had International Parliamentary Institutions (IPIs); since then, the share has increased to over 30 percent (Rocabert et al. 2017). During the same time period, the European Parliament (EP), the world’s most powerful IPI, has developed from a largely consultative organ to a directly elected parliament with codecision powers over most of the legislation of the European Union (EU), the EU budget, and the appointment of the European Commission. In addition, the national parliaments of the EU member states have acquired significant oversight powers in EU affairs since the 1990s –including the obligatory discussion of EU legislative proposals and binding mandates for governments in some cases (Winzen 2017).

We find support for both the authority and the diffusion hypotheses in the European context. The empowerment of the EP is an exemplary case (Rittberger 2005; Schimmelfennig 2010). The move from consultation to codecision in the legislative powers of the EP came when intergovernmental decision-making shifted from the unanimity rule to qualified majority voting (QMV) in EU internal market policy. Supporters of parliamentarization argued persuasively that QMV violated the principle of indirect democratic legitimacy, on which the EU had relied before, and required the direct democratic legitimation of EU legislation by the EP. Further moves to QMV in other policy areas were accompanied by further EP empowerment accordingly (Roederer-Rynning and Schimmelfennig 2012).

The major increase in EU policy-making authority since the 1990s has also been driving the general strengthening of *national* oversight powers. National parliamentarians are

especially keen to gain information, monitoring, and mandating rights in more Eurosceptic member states and if the governing parties are divided over European integration. Under these conditions, even parliamentary groups that support the government have an incentive to keep its European policy under control (Winzen 2017). Moreover, national parliamentarians react to the empowerment of the EP. Those with anti-integration attitudes are likely to see the EP as a competitor and favor national parliamentary empowerment in spite of the EP's competence gains, whereas those with pro-integration attitudes regard the EP's powers as true compensation for the loss of national parliamentary powers (Roederer-Rynning et al. 2015).

Beyond the EU, the creation of IPIs responds in particular to the establishment or task expansion of general-purpose IOs (Rocabert et al. 2017). In contrast, the increase of authority in task-specific organizations specialized in a narrow policy area does not systematically trigger parliamentarization. This is a matter of institutional fit: as parliaments are general-purpose bodies representing territorially constituted *demos*, they are best suited to legitimate the authority of IOs that share these features. In line with our "authority hypothesis", democratic membership is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for IPI creation. In the absence of democratic pressure for parliamentarization from below, several IPIs have emulated the EU and the EP since the 1990s.

Finally, Bormann and Winzen (2016) find support for the diffusion mechanism as well. They argue that demand arises among young democracies and new member states of the EU primarily, and that they look towards culturally similar and old democracies to adopt national parliamentary oversight institutions.

Democratic Governance in Transgovernmental Networks

Transgovernmental networks bring together non-elected state officials from specialised ministerial departments or independent domestic regulatory agencies, who, acting below the level of central government, establish institutionalized links to exchange information, develop common regulatory standards, and assist one another in enforcing such standards in their respective jurisdictions (Raustiala 2002; Slaughter 2004). Critics argue that TGNs extend the chain of political delegation from potentially legitimate nation-state governments to non-elected state officials, so that the link to the domestic citizenry is even lengthier than in the case of IOs (Papadopoulos 2010). Are transgovernmental networks therefore technocratic bodies shielded from democratically legitimated institutions, or do they develop and institutionalize elements of democratic governance within their own structures?

NCCR Democracy research reveals that, overall, TGNs bear more elements of input and throughput democratic legitimation than is commonly assumed –and are therefore not merely technocratic bodies (Freyburg et al. 2017a). Yet, our institutional analysis of three prominent international TGNs in three policy areas (banking, competition, environment) plus their European equivalents shows considerable variance in democratic governance across the selected TGNs.

We find the strongest support for the hypothesis that democratization correlates with authority, i.e. if a network has high competencies of authoritative rule-making, it also shows high level of democratic governance. This general relationship appears to hold only true if the network is composed of predominantly established democracies. We find no support for the hypothesis that a network's democratic composition alone drives democratic governance. Apart from the European Banking Authority, the international

TGN in environment (IMPEL) scores higher on democratic governance than its European counterpart (INECE), while there is hardly any difference between the International and the European Competition Networks. While at first surprising, this finding may stem from the ‘pragmatic’ position that TGN are only delegated functional bodies enhancing the problem-solving capacity of the states (Moravcsik 2002). From this point of view, “there is no normative need for distinct mechanisms of legitimation” (Offe and Preuss 2006:176).

Citizens’ Evaluations of International (Democratic) Governance

The studies presented so far evaluate democratic legitimacy based on a set of theoretically derived standards; recently scholars started to explore the democratic legitimacy of global politics based on citizens’ own empirical assessments. How are global rules to be agreed so that citizens do accept them?

NCCR Democracy research analyzed whether citizens condition their overall support for global governance efforts on how international policies are decided. We asked which decision-making procedures citizens prefer, depending on the degree of political authority that has been delegated to the international level (Freyburg et al. 2017b). Our choice-based conjoint experiment embedded in a large-scale national representative survey in four European democracies (France, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom, with ca. 1’000 respondents each) shows that citizens support liberal, republican, or deliberative global governance about equally, but that they are skeptical towards instances of global governance characterized by strong involvement of private business. There is no clear pattern in which preferences with respect to the individual governance models change when delegation of authority becomes stronger.

These results hold for citizens with different knowledge of and interest in politics, meaning that the results are probably no artefact of citizens being unable to understand the differences between the procedures. This also means that our findings, arguably, provide a realistic picture of what citizens would tend to prefer if an international governance issue, about which they have not thought much and thus do not currently know much, became politically salient. Covering only democracies, our survey did not allow to investigate whether procedural preferences differ across regime types.

Conclusion

Our research on the parliamentarization of IOs and democratic governance in TGN identified two “democratic enclaves” (Gilley 2010) in global politics, the European Parliament, and for the TGNs, the European Banking Authority. What can we learn from these illustrative examples about democratization of global governance in general?

As the notion of “democratic enclaves” suggests, parliamentary representations of IOs as well as democratic institutions of TGNs might present durable pockets of democratic practice at odds with the dominant norms and rules of the political game at the international level. Indeed, there is reason to be skeptical about the effects of parliamentarization on global governance. In contrast to the EP, IPIs generally have no power to keep intergovernmental decision-making in check. And the EP, while gaining considerable powers, has remained weakly legitimized because of the lack of a common European demos (Cheneval et al. 2014). TGN, on the other hand, have tended to introduce rules on transparency and accountability, and increasingly opened up to consultative mechanisms with stakeholders., While mirroring an aspiration to more

democratic governance, these developments need to be better coupled to the democratic constituency of these institutions' member states (Lavenex 2013: 132). In the absence of such deeper anchoring, the procedural reforms miss their potential for democratic control – and remain little more than just an illusion.

Results from our citizen survey, however, may yield a positive note. In contrast to what the prevailing discourse might suggest, we find that public support for international governance efforts is quite high. If decisions follow procedures that enjoy citizens' support, the democratic dilemma of international politics may become alleviated, ultimately reducing the gap between citizens' desire for international solutions, on the one hand, and their demand for political control, on the other.

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