The quest for legitimacy in world politics – international institutions’ legitimation strategies

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1 Introduction

Over the course of the past decades, political authority has been delegated\(^1\) to and pooled at international institutions.\(^2\) As a result, the legitimacy of this political authority beyond the nation state has not only become an issue of scholarly debates\(^3\) but international institutions themselves are taking an increasing interest in the management of their legitimacy. They employ a broad variety of \textit{legitimation strategies}, including press conferences, emphatic speeches, communication and symbolic policies, as well as institutional and organizational reforms to convince different ‘social constituenc[ies] of legitimation’\(^4\) of their right to rule. In line with this empirical observation, the Commonwealth Heads of Government consider obtaining ‘legitimacy not only [from] their member states but also [from] the wider international community in order to command confidence and commitment’ to be the first guiding principle for ‘reform and construction of new international institutions’.\(^5\) Yet, International Relations (IR) research has only recently started to take into account the causes\(^6\) and consequences of


\(^6\) The growing level of authority of international institutions may be one reason for international institutions’ increasing application of legitimation strategies. In principle, however, legitimation strategies
international institutions’ commitments to shoring up their legitimacy. Consequently, a theoretical embedding and systematic conceptualization has not yet been achieved, although international institutions’ legitimation strategies are crucial in order to fully understand legitimation processes in world politics.

To remedy this situation, this paper offers two main contributions: it, firstly, introduces a suitable theoretical perspective of legitimation processes and, secondly, provides an empirically applicable conceptualization of legitimation strategies. Theoretically, we propose a top-down perspective, which focuses on international institutions’ legitimation strategies. To develop this perspective we draw on the work by Weber, who alluded to legitimation strategies in his work on the sociology of rule. We should be considered a common feature of international institutions’ strategic behavior, because legitimacy is an important governance capability Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', International Organization, 53 (1999).


link Weber’s propositions to more recent IR research on legitimacy management\(^{10}\) and combine them with insights from organization studies\(^{11}\).

Conceptually, we deduce our definition of legitimation strategies from Easton’s work\(^ {12}\) and distinguish between three types of constituencies from which international institutions seek legitimacy. We show that, contrary to common wisdom, international institutions do not only seek legitimacy from member states but also from civil servants working in international institutions’ bureaucracies and the broader public. Our core argument is that international institutions employ different legitimation strategies depending on the addressed constituency. These three types of legitimation strategies and their interaction should be taken into account more systematically to understand why some institutions are more successful than others in generating legitimacy, and are thus more likely to generate long-term compliance and institutional viability.

The article is organized as follows: subsequent to a discussion on major themes of legitimacy research in IR, we point out that legitimacy is the result of an interactive process that relies both on the bottom-up attribution of legitimacy to international


institutions by social constituencies and on legitimacy claims made by political elites. Second, we situate legitimation strategies in the context of empirical legitimacy theory, provide a conceptualization that takes into account different addressees of legitimation strategies and succinctly summarize the existent literature on the different types of legitimation strategies in IR. Third, we probe the empirical plausibility and relevance of our approach by applying it to the analysis of legitimation strategies launched by the Group of Eight (G8) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The case studies reveal that international institutions of different institutional design need to take into account different constituencies when designing legitimation strategies. Moreover, their different types of legitimation strategies should not contradict each other. Only if international institutions develop coherent sets of legitimation strategies can they hope to generate a stable basis of political support.

2 Legitimacy and international institutions

The concept of legitimacy which denotes a key theme and perhaps even ‘one of the central issues of social science’, namely the justification of the right to rule, has carved out a rather modest existence in much of mainstream IR theorizing in the past. Over the course of the past two decades, this has been changing and research on legitimacy

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13 As we focus our analysis on the G8’s legitimacy crisis in the aftermath of 2008 when Russia was the eighth member, we will use the term G8 rather than G7.
has become pivotal in IR.\textsuperscript{16} This section reviews the central themes in the literature, ranging from its beginnings in classical IR theorizing over regime theory to recent approaches of global governance. Since we cannot do justice to all nuances and insights developed in the field, we concentrate on three central aspects: the distinction between normative and empirical research, the actors who are assumed to be of relevance, and the ways in which agency and legitimacy relationships are conceptualized (Table 1).

Similar to much of political thought on the concept of legitimacy, early IR writings\textsuperscript{17} were often characterized by the conceptual blurring of normative and empirical perspectives\textsuperscript{18} which we hope to avoid in this paper. From a normative perspective, legitimacy research is interested in the rightfulness or acceptability of political authority based on universal – e.g. democracy- or justice-centered – criteria. While the applied normative standards may vary largely, these approaches invariably presume legitimacy to be ‘a property or characteristic of regimes which satisfy criteria laid out by the observer’.\textsuperscript{19} Researchers are either concerned with the \textit{prescriptive}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Brasset and Tsingou, 'The Politics of Legitimate Global Governance', p.1; Von Staden, 'Introduction to Special Issue: Towards Greater Interdisciplinarity in Research on the Legitimacy of Global Governance', \textit{Swiss Political Science Review} 18 (2012), p. 149; Clark and Reus-Smit, 'Resolving International Crises of Legitimacy: Preface'.
\end{itemize}
formulation of criteria for the acceptability of international institutions\textsuperscript{20} or with the
diagnostic evaluation of existing institutions against the backdrop of external normative
standards.\textsuperscript{21}

By contrast, our contribution is rooted in empirical legitimacy research which
draws on Weber’s work on legitimate rule\textsuperscript{22} and is concerned with the social recognition
of international institutions by those subjected to their rule or, to be more precise, ‘with
the extent and the (reproduction) of the kind of regime support that goes by the name of
legitimacy’.\textsuperscript{23} This research assumes an observer perspective analyzing the legitimacy
claims and beliefs of rulers and ruled, as well as practices and strategies which underpin
the attribution or withdrawal of legitimacy as social facts.\textsuperscript{24} Here, an authority is
considered to be legitimate ‘if its subjects believe it to be so’.\textsuperscript{25} From this perspective,
the questions of whether international institutions are in need of legitimacy, have the

\textsuperscript{22} Weber, 'Economy and Society'.
\textsuperscript{23} Schneider, Hurrelmann, Krell-Laluhová, Nullmeier and Wiesner, Democracy's Deep Roots (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{25} Clark, 'Legitimacy in International Society', p. 79.
potential to tap sources of legitimacy, or are seen as being more or less legitimate, become purely empirical issues.²⁶

Beginning with the debates on international regimes,²⁷ IR scholars discovered the emergence of political authority beyond the state and started asking empirical questions about the legitimacy of regimes²⁸ and their democratic quality.²⁹ The common starting point for these state centric discussions on the legitimacy of international institutions³⁰ has been Henkin’s puzzle of why ‘[a]lmost all nations observe almost all principles of international law and almost all of their obligations all of the time’.³¹ These early studies on the empirical legitimacy of international institutions argue that – given the lack of an overarching coercive force – state compliance with international regulations has to rely on self-interest or legitimacy.³²

With the advent of global governance research, a widening of perspective has taken place. While empirical enquiries rooted in regime theory were mainly concerned with

²⁹ Hurd, ‘Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics’, p. 403.
³² Hurd, ‘Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics’.
the legitimacy relationship between international institutions and state governments, the growth of protests accompanying major international conferences, \(^{33}\) commencing with the NGO-led campaigns of the 1990s against the institutions of global economic governance, \(^{34}\) drew researchers’ attention to the societal level or what Clark\(^{35}\) has called world society. These studies proceed from the observation that ‘[c]omparably non-governmental actors and social movements play such a decisive role in debating and challenging the legitimacy of international governance that we are justified in regarding them as its ultimate rule addressees and judges of its legitimacy’. \(^{36}\)

Table 1: IR approaches to legitimacy

(about here)

3 Legitimation strategies: theoretical foundation and concept formation

While most of the exiting literature on the empirical legitimacy of international institutions\(^{37}\) operationalizes legitimacy as a credential attributed bottom-up to

\(^{33}\) Della Porta and Tarrow (eds.), Transnational Protest and Global Activism (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Zürn, Binder and Ecker-Erhardt, 'International Authority and its Politicization'.

\(^{34}\) O’Brien, Goetz, Scholte and Williams, Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

\(^{35}\) Clark, 'International Legitimacy and World Society'.


\(^{37}\) We define international institutions broadly to include regional and global organization, clubs of governance, regimes, and networks governed by formal international agreements.
international institutions by social constituencies, we argue that this perspective is too narrow as it misses the ‘genetic’ aspect of legitimation.\textsuperscript{38} Legitimacy is and can only be the result of an \textit{interactive} political process\textsuperscript{39} between rulers and ruled. These complex processes of legitimation culminating in the (non-)attribution of legitimacy\textsuperscript{40} comprise both the bottom-up attribution of legitimacy by social constituencies and the top-down cultivation of legitimacy by rulers. At the core of this interactive understanding of legitimation lies the observation that individuals do not attribute legitimacy to international institutions in a societal vacuum but are constantly influenced by a broad variety of legitimacy claims.\textsuperscript{41} With a view to these efforts Weber emphasized a top-down perspective on legitimation processes, when arguing that: ‘Experience shows that in no instance does domination voluntarily limit itself to the appeal to material or affectual or ideal interests as a basis for its continuance. In addition, every such system attempts to \textit{cultivate the belief in its legitimacy}.’\textsuperscript{42} These legitimacy claims are ‘the


\textsuperscript{40} Bourricaud, 'Legitimacy and Legitimization', \textit{Current Sociology} 35 (1987); Brasset and Tsingou, 'The Politics of Legitimate Global Governance'.

\textsuperscript{41} Beetham, 'The Legitimation of Power', p. Ch.4.

\textsuperscript{42} Weber, 'Economy and Society', p. 213, emphasis added.
lifeblood of politics of legitimation, and such politics is essential to the cultivation and maintenance of an actor’s or institutions legitimacy’. 43

We follow these suggestions and focus on the role of international institutions and their representatives in legitimation processes. In order to reconstruct the legitimacy evaluations and principles that prevail in different constituencies of legitimation, it is necessary to take legitimation strategies of international institutions into account. The reason why these efforts can be expected to play an import role in processes of legitimation is given by Easton, 44 who argues that a few powerful actors commanding the necessary organizational resources and skills may be able to make their legitimacy claims hold greater weight than those of the unorganized millions. Although Easton’s claims were originally limited to the competition between different constituencies of legitimation, we hold that the argument can be extended to understand the potential significance of international institutions’ legitimation strategies. Because international institutions command significant expertise and are integrated in extensive networks that provide them with access to national political elites and the broader public, their representatives are in a privileged position to feed their legitimation strategies into processes of legitimation. To be sure, this emphasis on the top-down ‘impulse of the powerful to try to legitimate their power’45 does not aim at replacing subjects of rule as

43 Reus-Smit, 'International Crisis of Legitimacy', p. 159.
45 Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', p. 388.
the crucial legitimacy constituency which ultimately lends or revokes legitimacy; it is rather an attempt to broaden the perspective on how legitimacy is constantly reproduced.

The concept of legitimation strategies aims at capturing the notion that international institutions are actively engaged in generating legitimacy. To access international institutions’ legitimation strategies empirically we propose the following definition: 

*legitimation strategies are goal-oriented activities employed to establish and maintain a reliable basis of diffuse support for a political regime by its social constituencies.* This specification of the concept of legitimation strategies makes use of a widely accepted and empirically applied definition of *legitimacy as the diffuse support for political regimes.*

The definition is premised on two distinctions: first, we differentiate between diffuse support and specific support. While reasons for supporting political regimes may range from mere apathy to individual cost-benefit calculation, diffuse support is a distinct category defined as a ‘reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effect of which

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47 Easton, 'A Systems Analysis of Political Life'; Easton, 'A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support'.
they see as damaging to their wants’.49 When a reliable basis of diffuse support is existent, neither coercion nor bribery is needed to create obedience to authority.50 Institutions commanding this diffuse support are more likely to achieve compliance with their rule, they can draw on the active support of actors who do more than simply comply, and they benefit from lower costs of coercion and bribery.51 Because we define legitimation strategies as goal-orientated activities that aim to generate diffuse support, they can be distinguished from strategies designed to win specific support, in particular those relying on onetime inducements and payments or those that try to achieve compliance by means of coercion. Legitimation strategies aim at generating a more robust and sustainable basis of favorable attitudes.

Second, legitimation strategies are connected to political regimes. This aspect of our definition relies on Easton’s52 distinction between regimes, authorities and his claim that the term legitimacy should be reserved for political regimes, i.e. political institutions establishing authority, like the nation state or international institutions.53 For Easton, diffuse support can only be directed to political institutions themselves, whereas specific support can also be extended to incumbent authorities and policies. Diffuse

50 Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', p. 387.
52 Easton, 'A Systems Analysis of Political Life', Ch. 11-12; Easton, 'A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support', p. 445.
53 Note that Easton explicitly understands even the weak international institutions of his time as political structures to which the concept of legitimacy can be applied and which are in need of legitimacy Easton, 'A Systems Analysis of Political Life'.p. 284.
support to regimes represents an enduring bond that enables subjects of rule to oppose the incumbents of offices and their policies and yet retain support to the offices and institutions themselves.\textsuperscript{54} Legitimation strategies are thus to be distinguished from other strategies which political leaders employ to win support for themselves or their particular policies. Consequently, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General (SG) Ban Ki-moon’s campaign \textit{UNiTE} to end violence against women\textsuperscript{55} is, for instance, a public relations effort which aims to generate support for a specific policy, whereas the European Union (EU) Commission’s campaign\textsuperscript{56} ‘\textit{EU Agencies: Whatever you do, we work for you}’ is clearly a legitimation strategy which aims to cultivate general support for the European system of independent agencies.

This definition does not only help to differentiate legitimation strategies from neighboring concepts such as promotion or public relations in terms of often difficult to observe objectives, but also in terms of the practical means available for cultivating diffuse support for international institutions. While public relations strategies are open to many different forms, because they have the less demanding task of creating often short lived specific support, legitimation strategies are invariably characterized by recourse to social norms and the logic of appropriateness. Legitimation strategies aim at

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\textsuperscript{54} Easton, ‘A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support’, p. 437.
\textsuperscript{55} United Nations, \textit{UNiTE to END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN} (New York: UN Departement of Public Information, 2010).
\textsuperscript{56} European Commission, \textit{EU Agencies: Whatever you do, we work for you} (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007).
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generating conformity with established social norms of legitimate authority. Only in this way is it possible to achieve the kind of social recognition that makes legitimacy an especially strong and durable resource of the authority of international institutions.

Cultivating legitimacy of international institutions, thus, implies calibrating the relationship between the institution’s principles, purposes, and practices, and the prevailing social norms that define the parameters of rightful agency and action.\textsuperscript{57} We suggest that international institutions can try to achieve this aim in two general ways: first, they can try to signal by way of purely communicative means – verbal or non-verbal – that the institution’s principles and purpose are in line with a particular set of normative expectations held by a given legitimacy constituency.\textsuperscript{58} These discursive legitimation strategies can, for instance, take the form of priming (making considerations salient), framing (connecting a consideration to a political object) and cueing (installing a bias) or what Hawkins and Jacoby\textsuperscript{59} have called ceremonialism.

Second, legitimation strategies can assume the more substantive form of behavioral adaptation and change.\textsuperscript{60} Especially in times of legitimacy crisis international institutions might find themselves forced to adapt their principles, purpose and institutional setup in order to conform to the prevailing normative expectations of

\textsuperscript{57} Reus-Smit, 'International Crisis of Legitimacy', p. 167.
\textsuperscript{60} Zaum, 'Legitimating International Organizations', p. 224.
rightful authority. These institutional legitimation strategies can take the form of generally revised targets for policy output and outcome, the introduction of new procedures or even the adaptation of the institutional design increasing for instance the permeability of the institution or giving it a multilateral form.

For conceptual clarity, we have introduced these two basic types of legitimation strategies – discursive and institutional – as stark ideal types. In practice, however, they are often mixed and blend into hybrid forms, because pure discourse without institutional adaptation is likely to result failure or rhetorical entrapment, whereas pure adaptation without communication is unlikely to yield substantial legitimacy gains. Rather than treating this distinction as categorical, it should be regarded as a continuum in which rhetorical and symbolical constructions of self-images and substantive institutional adaptation constitute the extreme points.

4 Producers and addressees of legitimation strategies

So far we have concentrated on delineating the concept of legitimation strategies and have – for the sake of clarity – treated international institutions as monolithic blocs that

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65 Scherer, Palazzo and Seidl, 'Managing Legitimacy in Complex and Heterogeneous Environments: Sustainable Development in a Globalized World'.
apply these strategies to an unspecified constituency of legitimation. However, Clark has argued rightfully that the struggle for legitimacy in a global order is a ‘multifaceted interaction of a complex array of actors’.  

Hence, this section specifies the actors involved in the production of legitimation strategies and the relevant social constituency of legitimation, i.e. the addressees of such strategies.

Given the focus of the article, we concentrate on key representatives of international institutions as producers of legitimation strategies. Ideal-typically, this group of actors encompasses top-level representatives of international institutions such as Director-Generals and Deputy Directors General. The matter is more complex in international institutions which only have a marginal or even no independent bureaucratic staff. The G8, the G20 and similar club formats do not have full-fledged secretariats comparable to other international institutions. Nonetheless, they apply legitimation strategies. Here, our own research has shown that the annually rotating chairs assume the role of central producers of legitimation strategies.

That said, the main argument of this section is that there are three general legitimacy constituencies which may hold different normative parameters on the rightful authority of international institutions and which, therefore, demand different types of legitimation strategies.  

Contrary to the common wisdom in IR, international

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institutions do not only have to bolster their legitimacy in the eyes of member states’
governments but would do well to also address the specific expectations of their
administrative staff and the wider public. The failure to do so and to establish coherence
between all three constituencies is likely to result in failure of individual strategies or
even in the emergence of legitimacy crises, which may lead to irrelevancy or even
abolished. Consequently, we differentiate three types of legitimation strategies:
intergovernmental, bureaucratic and public legitimation strategies. The following
sections, first, outlines the incentives for international institutions to address each of
them. We show that, although emphasis may vary according to concrete empirical
conditions, in theory, international institutions have strong incentives to address all
three constituencies. Secondly, we provide a review of the empirical research
addressing the three dimensions.

4.1 Intergovernmental legitimation strategies

International institutions seek to be considered legitimate by member state governments.

*Intergovernmental legitimation strategies* originate in an international institution, i.e.
within the administration, and address member state governments. In fact, most research

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68 For a critical discussion of this state-centric perspective see Steffek, 'Legitimacy in International
Relations: From State Compliance to Citizen Consensus'.
69 For a similar argument see Seabrooke, 'Legitimacy Gaps in the World Economy: Explaining the
70 Symons, 'The Legitimation of International Organisations: Examining the Identity of the Communities
that grant Legitimacy', *Review of International Studies*, 37 (2011). Potential reasons for varying emphases
include the scope and level of institutions’ authority, the area in which they operate or their public
visibility.
dealing with the legitimacy of international institutions has traditionally focused on this type of legitimation,\textsuperscript{71} because legitimacy has long been considered to be an issue between states.\textsuperscript{72}

In this conventional view, member state governments are the only relevant addressees of legitimation strategies due to two main reasons: first, member states are international institutions’ principals. They provide funding and resources and are capable of withdrawing authority.\textsuperscript{73} Albeit to a varying degree, international institutions’ fate depends on the social recognition by their members. This is not to say that national governments provide resources only because they accept an institution as legitimate. Obviously, concrete material interests and other motives play an important role but only member states’ belief in the legitimacy of institutions’ principles, purposes, practices, and institutional design provides a sufficiently reliable basis for the continued functioning of institutions.

Second, international institutions have to care about the legitimacy beliefs of governments, because these are often the main addressees of their rule. While some international institutions address individuals directly, most of the time international institutions aim to alter the behavior of their member states. And since the majority of international institutions lack the ‘carrots and sticks’ necessary to induce state

\textsuperscript{71} E.g. Hurd, 'Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics', p. 401.
\textsuperscript{72} Steffek, 'Legitimacy in International Relations: From State Compliance to Citizen Consensus', p. 175.
\textsuperscript{73} Hawkins, Lake, Nielson and Tierney, 'Delegation and Agency in International Organizations'.
compliance, they have strong incentives to constantly justify themselves vis-à-vis their member states in order to induce compliance.  

Empirical research on intergovernmental legitimation strategies traditionally focuses on international institutions’ capacity to address joint problems and generate public goods. In this research perspective effectiveness is often seen as the primary source of international institutions’ legitimacy and most research focuses, thus, on discursive and institutional legitimation strategies addressing the output dimension of international institutions.

4.2 Bureaucratic legitimation strategies

With the concept of bureaucratic legitimation strategies we draw attention to a rather neglected aspect of empirical legitimacy research, i.e. to processes of top-down legitimation within the bureaucracy of international institutions. Bureaucracies are organizationally separate from plenary assemblies – i.e. national representatives – and have a formal autonomy vis-à-vis the member states of an institution. Usually, they have a fixed location, regular meetings, are staffed with permanent personnel, and

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comprise tasks codified in staff regulations. The producers of bureaucratic legitimation strategies are top-level civil servants of international institutions’ secretariats. Their addressees are medium and low level civil servants. As mentioned above, more informal institutions such as the G8 and the G20 are intentionally not equipped with a proper secretariat. They rather ‘borrow’ their staff from their member states’ administrations. These teams of ‘borrowed’ staff members are the addressees of bureaucratic legitimation strategies of more informal institutions.

Focusing on bureaucratic legitimation strategies is in line with the ‘administrative turn’ that took place in the study of international institutions after Barnett and Finnemore’s study on the bureaucracy of international institutions. From this perspective, international bureaucracies are ‘a key engine of international organizations’ and ‘an important component of modern public administration’. Taking international bureaucracies serious also entails interrogating into the legitimation strategies taking place within them.

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80 Consequently, national civil servants being in charge for the G8 and the G20 are the addressees of legitimation strategies of both national governments and the international institution’s chairs. This multiple position has been confirmed during our interview with the head of the British G8 sherpateam in 2013.
83 Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson and Veggeland, 'Unpacking International Organizations', p. 5.
The rationale for addressing the staff as legitimacy constituencies was outlined by Weber who considered the administrative staff to play a pivotal role for political orders, because rule over a considerable number of persons requires a staff which can be trusted to execute the general policy as well as specific commands. Although this administrative staff is bound to obedience to its chief by a variety of motives, the basis of this relation of rule is the belief in its legitimacy. The quality of this mélange of legitimacy beliefs and motives of staff largely determines the way in which an institution executes its tasks. To use Weber’s terms: ‘[…] according to the kind of legitimacy which is claimed, the type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it, and the mode of exercising authority, will all differ fundamentally’. Staff members’ belief in the legitimacy of an international institution’s authority and its inner relations of rule is, thus, of vital importance for the continued functioning, behavior, and survival of international institutions. Only if the bureaucratic staff working on behalf of an institution disposes of such a pool of legitimacy beliefs, can it be expected to form a sufficiently reliable basis for the authority of the institution, making it well equipped to operate and act. If institutions build solely on short term specific support, derived from individual cost-benefit

85 Weber, ‘Economy and Society’, p. 213. Although not discussed explicitly by Easton, ‘A Systems Analysis of Political Life’, p. 154., who does not specify the relevant constituencies of legitimation, we claim that the diffuse support for international institutions by their staff member – for instance backed by the belief in the rationality and legality of bureaucracies – is an important element of their legitimacy.
86 Suchman, ‘Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches’, p. 574.
calculations, it will be short-lived and not able to fulfill its purposes. Hence, the aim of bureaucratic legitimation strategies is to cultivate positive legitimacy beliefs within the institution’s bureaucratic staff, for instance by generating conformity with virtues of formalized procedure and the abstract codification of impersonal rules.  

The literature on international institutions has only recently started to investigate the roles played by international bureaucracies and how their legitimacy concerns are addressed. Most research focuses on organizational reforms, i.e. changes of internal rules and procedures, horizontal and vertical co-ordination, planning, monitoring, transparency, professional ethics, and personnel recruitment. Schön-Quinlivan demonstrates for instance how administrative reform of the EU Commission helped to improve legitimacy perceptions between different Directorates-General within the Commission and of the Commission as a whole.

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87 Barker, 'Legitimating Identities: The Self-Presentation of Rulers and Subjects', pp. 31; 42.
88 Exceptions are Barnett and Finnemore, 'Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics'; Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson and Veggeland, 'Unpacking International Organizations'.
90 Schön-Quinlivan, 'Implementing Organizational Change -the Case of the Kinnick Reforms', ibid..
4.3 Public legitimation strategies

Finally, international institutions aim to legitimate themselves in the eyes of the wider public.92 This constituency includes the media, NGOs and private actors, but also other international institutions and non-member states. In sum, this category comprises the unstable and sometimes not easily recognizable compound of public opinions held by citizens, political movements, pressure groups, epistemic communities, etc. who feel affected by an international institution’s authority or who are constructed as an affected constituency by the international institution itself. 93 This is a very broad category encompassing different addressees with diverging normative legitimacy concerns. To address these diverse normative expectations public legitimation strategies necessarily have to be very general and broad in scope. They aim at generating conformity with widely shared norms of legitimate authority such as the promotion of the global common good or are tailored to improve democratic governance processes,94 for instance by establishing or reforming transparency and accountability measures. We refer to legitimation strategies addressing this legitimacy constituency as public legitimation strategies.

94 On widely excepted norms of legitimate authority see for instance Keohane, 'Global Governance and Legitimacy', Review of International Political Economy, 18 (2011); Buchanan and Keohane, 'The Legitimacy of Global Governance Institutions'. 
In the conventional view on international institutions, the public is rarely considered a relevant legitimacy constituency of international institution, because (a) it does not hold clear views on international politics and (b) even if it had clearly developed beliefs about the legitimacy of international institutions, these would be of no consequence, because neither its active support nor its compliance with international rules are relevant for the functioning of international institutions. Recent research has shown that both of these conventional wisdoms are no longer valid and that the public has become an important constituency of legitimation: first, international institutions have become a bone of contention in public debates and mass protests addressing for instance the G8 or the IMF are only the most visible indicators of this societal politicization of international institutions.95 Rising public opposition towards international institutions has not left political elites unaffected. In response to politicization processes, international institutions have reacted by actively launching public legitimation strategies, since the functioning of an international institution might be significantly hampered by manifest opposition within the broader public.96

Second, international institutions cannot ignore this constituency because quite frequently they compensate for their lack of means of coercion or bribery by

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96 In our understanding legitimation strategies are a ‘universal feature’ (Barker 2001: 4) of authority. In other words, international institutions constantly try to legitimize themselves. Yet, in times of rising public contestation the scope and quality of legitimation strategies might significantly intensify.
orchestrating public intermediaries to achieve state compliance. In order to mobilize these intermediaries, legitimacy is an important – although not the only – resource.

Research on public legitimation strategies has become more fashionable in the past years and focuses mostly on what Scharpf has called the input dimension of legitimacy. In Scharpf’s perspective, political choices are legitimate ‘if and because they reflect the ‘will of the people’ – that is, if they can be derived from the authentic preferences of the members of a community’. This work focuses mostly on transparency and accountability measures as well as on the participation of civil society. Although the latter may have additional beneficial effects (reduction of transaction costs and acquisition expert knowledge), tying political decisions to the preferences of their constituencies is often a central rationale behind many reform plans. Regularly, participatory measures were implemented as a direct response to charges of illegitimacy voiced by NGOs.

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100 Steffek and Nanz, 'Emergent Patterns of Civil Society Participation in Global and European Governance', in J. Steffek, C. Kissling and P. Nanz (eds.) Civil Society Participation in European and Global Governance: A Cure for the Democratic Deficit? (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito and Jönnson, 'The Opening Up of International Organizations'.
In addition, Hurd has drawn attention to more implicit and often nonverbal legitimation strategies. He argues that ‘[o]bjects (such as a flag, a uniform, a scepter), phrases (the judge saying ‘I sentence to you…’), procedures (the General Assembly making a decision by majority rule), or manners of speaking (the ‘proper-English’ speaker visiting the Colonies)’ that are similarly used by several international institutions as ‘a currency of power because enough individuals believe that others believe in them’.102

5 Empirical plausibility probe: G8 and IMF in times of legitimacy crisis

To probe the empirical plausibility and analytical utility of the concept of legitimation strategies and to explore the relationship between its three subtypes, we look at two prominent international institutions: the G8 and the IMF. We have selected these two institutions not only because they have experienced legitimacy crises and had varying success in managing them, but also because they vary substantially in terms of institutional design and purpose. Consequently, this case selection provides a high intensity of legitimation strategies and enables us to demonstrate the applicability of the concept to a broad array of international institutions, ranging from informal and less institutionalized forms of global governance (such as the G8) to highly institutionalized organizations equipped with a proper staff (such as the IMF).

Furthermore, the cases illustrate an important point concerning the interaction of international, bureaucratic, and public legitimation strategies. Following Seabrooke, we argue that legitimation strategies are interdependent. To be successful, they must be ‘singing in unison’ or at least not contradict each other. More specifically, we propose that legitimation strategies addressing one constituency, limit the set of possibly applicable strategies towards the other constituencies and vice versa. Legitimacy claims made in one arena exclude other potential claims in other arenas. An institution should, for instance, not aim at legitimizing itself as democratic and responsive towards the public and at the same time claim that it is an independent expertocratic body vis-à-vis its bureaucratic staff, because it is likely that both constituencies take note of these contradictions. While we do not expect all three constituencies to be of invariable importance to every international institution at all times, we propose that if an institution aims to address more than one constituency, it needs to harmonize its efforts in order to be successful. Contradictory strategies are not only likely to be self-defeating in the sense that they do not help to increase an institution’s legitimacy, but are even potentially harmful because they undermine the institution’s perceived normative coherency and can, thus, even trigger crises of legitimacy. To identify perceived inconsistencies and resulting failure or success of

103 Seabrooke, 'Legitimacy Gaps in the World Economy: Explaining the Sources of the IMF’s Legitimacy Crisis'.
104 Seabrooke, 'Legitimacy Gaps in the World Economy: Explaining the Sources of the IMF’s Legitimacy Crisis', p. 254.
105 Clark, 'International Legitimacy and World Society', p. 185.
legitimation strategies, we follow the established literature on empirical legitimacy and
turn to data on public protest,106 public opinion,107 and political communication.108

The remainder of the section, first, demonstrates how the G8 in the aftermath of the
financial crash in 2008 successfully recreated its legitimacy and remained politically
influential by offering a coherent set of strategies. Secondly, we juxtapose this success
story with the IMF’s approach to solve its temporal legitimacy crisis in the aftermath of
the Asian financial crisis in 1999 to illustrate the consequences of incoherent
legitimation strategies. This example shows that the Fund’s public legitimation
strategies were not only unsuccessful; they even destabilized the legitimacy beliefs of
its staff and member states.

5.1 The G8 after the financial meltdown in 2008

The G8’s legitimations strategies launched after 2008 constitute a case of success. The
institutional reform of the G8 in the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008 and the way
it has been communicated to the public demonstrates how international institutions may

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Action Frames', in A. Hurrelmann, S. Schneider and J. Steffek (eds.) Legitimacy in an Age of Global
Politics (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Della Porta and Tarrow, 'Transnational Protest and
Global Activism'.
of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries', European Journal of Political Research, 45 (2006);
Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 'Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want
108 Schneider, Hurrelmann, Krell-Laluhová, Nullmeier and Wiesner, 'Democracy's Deep Roots';
Schneider, Nullmeier and Hurrelmann, 'Exploring the Communicative Dimension of Legitimacy: Text
Analytical Approaches', in A. Hurrelmann, S. Schneider and J. Steffek (eds.) Legitimacy in an Age of
Global Politics (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Koopmans and Statham (eds.), The Making of
a European Public Sphere (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
respond to a threatening withdrawal of support by its member states and, at the same
time, cultivate legitimacy in the eyes of the public without creating inconsistencies with
the legitimacy concerns of its ‘borrowed’ staff, i.e. its sherpateam.

The G8’s already critical legitimacy was further undermined in the aftermath of the
financial crash in 2008: not only did the public perceive the G8 to be increasingly
irrelevant and undemocratic in comparison to the G20,\textsuperscript{109} but its members also began to
question the G8: Peter Mandelsohn, former trade minister of the United Kingdom,
claimed that the ‘[e]ra of the G8 is over’\textsuperscript{110} and US-president Barack Obama argued that
the G20 is better equipped to represent recent shifts within the global economy.\textsuperscript{111} With
the G20’s upgrade from a ministerial to a heads-of-states-process, the G8 was
consequently confronted with a legitimacy crisis as regards its member states and the
public, because both constituencies perceived the G8 as an outdated, weak, and
unrepresentative institution. As its Achilles’ heel has invariably been this image of an
unrepresentative and ineffective ‘circus for the rich’, the G8 responded by implementing
a set of legitimation strategies which aimed at transforming this image in the eyes of all
three constituencies from the circus into a highly committed institution working for the

\textsuperscript{109} Indicated by increasingly negative public communication and rising protest numbers Gronau and
Committee on Concepts and Methods, IPSA Working Paper Series}, 37 (2009); Gronau, Nonhoff and


\textsuperscript{111} White House, \textit{Fact Sheet: Creating a 21st Century international economic Architecture} (access date:
http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Fact-Sheet-Creating-a-21st-Century-International-
Economic-Architecture).
poor. It produced and maintained three distinct but compatible legitimation strategies referring to the broadly accepted norm of the global common good and emphasized its capacity to effectively solve global problems.

In 2012, the G8 began to devise an *intergovernmental legitimation strategy*, reviving an institutional feature which has constantly been appreciated by its members\textsuperscript{112} but has faded away over time due to an ever growing political agenda: its informality. By stressing this highly valued core feature, which cannot easily be provided by other international institutions, the G8 managed to reconnect its members to the club. One of the most hesitating members, the 2012 chair Barack Obama, brought the club back to its informal formula of summit business:

‘Despite changes in the global economy and the international economic architecture, the core insight that led to the first Summit remains as true as ever: when the G-8 governments agree on an issue, that agreement has enormous power to shape the world in which we live. As a result, the overarching objective of the United States in 2012 was to bring the G-8 back to its roots in the spirit of Rambouillet: an intimate gathering of Leaders capable of taking action together on areas of common concern’.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{112} Hajnal, 'The G8 System and the G20: Evolution, Role and Documentation', pp. 30-32.

In sum, Obama introduced a substantive shift within the institutional structure of the G8 and his successor in 2013, Gordon Brown, made the revival of informality a genuine legitimation strategy.

At the same time, G8 chairs implemented a public legitimation strategy shifting the G8’s image from merely being ‘circuses without bread’\textsuperscript{114} towards a responsible, focused, and effective manager of the global common good. The G8 devoted itself more intensively to topics connected to the global common good such as global food security and climate change (summits of 2009 and 2012), health care and maternity (summit of 2010) and democratic empowerment in the Arab region (summit of 2011). This institutional output legitimation strategy was accompanied by a discursive framing which highlighted the G8’s aspirations for a more just world and its solidarity with the world’s poor. This public legitimation strategy was further strengthened by labeling the G8 no longer as a network of states but as an ‘over three decades’-old institution that ‘has demonstrated the capacity to design credible approaches to meet the challenges of our times’.\textsuperscript{115} It did not only allow the G8 to distance itself from the younger and less experienced G20, it also helped to introduce a pronounced institutional image of an effective facilitator of the global common good.

\textsuperscript{114} Gronau, Nonhoff and Frank, ‘Spiele ohne Brot: Die Legitimitätskrise der G8’.
One might wonder whether this focus on output and the G8’s potential role as a facilitator of the global common good was sufficient to respond to the more input-related legitimacy concerns about the G8’s transparency and representativeness voiced by the public and member state representative. Since the greater informality chosen to reestablish legitimacy with member states was potentially harmful to the G8’s public legitimacy, because informality is necessarily accompanied by a lack of transparency and representativeness\footnote{Schneckener, ‘The Opportunities and Limits of Global Governance by Clubs’, \textit{German Institute for International and Security Affairs Comments}, 22 (2009).}, this strategy was potentially self-defeating. However, by linking the capability to fulfil its role as a facilitator of the global common good to the need for greater informality, the G8 proactively harmonized its intergovernmental and public legitimation strategies. To avoid public criticism evoked by its intergovernmental strategy, it communicated the substantive shift within the summit structure, its revived informality, as a design that would allow heads of states to continue their leading role in global issues ‘of common concern’ (as quoted above).

The new informal approach was also reflected in public non-verbal strategies like summit photographs: compared to earlier years, G8 summit photographs since 2012 show the leaders in informal clothing demonstrating the commitment to problem solving for instance by having their shirtsleeves rolled up. Furthermore, the G8 has reduced the use of banners and other ostentatious symbols that dominated the scenery of earlier summit photos. Thus, the G8 also used a more minimalistic and focused visual
communication to create the new image of an institution ready to work (to the benefit of all) rather than a circus for the rich.

So far, the case of the G8 illustrates how international institutions are able to address two of its constituencies by introducing an institutional reform to its members and communicating it in harmony with its public legitimation strategy. As we show next, this coherent set of two legitimation strategies did not harm the ongoing support of the G8 sherpateams. Quite the contrary: the shift towards greater informality even corresponded to the staff’s demand for rational-legal and less ostentatious procedures.

As part of the G8’s bureaucratic legitimation strategy, staff members were still praised in public by the G8 presidencies for their efforts as this did not create any mismatch to the newly created intergovernmental and public strategies. This practice is designed to value the competent work on the ground and, thus, to highlight that the G8 would not be able to fulfill its role as facilitator of the global common good without its staff working for these high aspirations. However, staff members did no longer receive presents from the G8 chairs such as stickers and pins with the respective G8 logo which they formerly valued as a ‘reward for blood, sweat and tears put into the process’.117 Although we do not interpret these memorabilia as a legitimation strategy, but rather as a supportive action fostering a sense of belonging, the reduced use of such presents was well compatible with the ‘back-to-basics-approach’ in at least two ways: first, the G8

117 Interview with German sherpateam, 3 July 2012.
was able to underline the new public image of a more focused institution by investing less time and money into symbolic practices such as the presentation of gifts to staff members. Second, this more focused way of doing politics corresponded to the sherpateams’ demand for a rational-legal proceeding as established for their work within the respective national public services. Accordingly, the head of the British sherpateam in 2013 evaluated the gifts as ‘a nice thing to have’ that ‘shows you’ve been there (…) and you’ll remember it for years and years to come’. But ‘in times of austerity’, staff members ‘just didn’t feel it necessary, and how we could then explain that to taxpayers’.118

In sum, G8’s successful reaction to its legitimacy crisis in the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008 shows that international institutions employ coherent legitimation strategies that address their three constituencies while preventing a mismatch between strategies. Today, heads of states still attend G8 summits and voice their support for the institution in public, protests against G8 summits are declining in numbers and staff members still support the G8 process.119 Moreover, the G8 example indicates that a focus on public strategies would be too narrow to, first, identify the quality of a legitimacy crisis and, second, to understand which type of crisis international institutions try to avoid or resolve by which set of legitimation strategies.

118 Interview with British sherpateam, 12 December 2013.
5.2 The IMF at the center of the Asian financial crisis

We explore the IMF’s response to its legitimacy crisis in the late 1990s as an example for an institution’s temporal failure to design a coherent set of legitimation strategies. The case study focuses on a specific period of time, when the ‘existing critiques of the IMF’s international crisis management role were given renewed political momentum and greater urgency’. Today, with the help of the G20 and only after extended governance reforms, the IMF appears to have risen ‘like a phoenix’ but the process of recovery from the legitimacy crisis of the 1990s has stretched out over more than one decade of political irrelevance.

Subsequent to the Asian financial crisis in 1999, the IMF experienced a strong public and intergovernmental legitimacy crisis: it became the target of mass protests in borrowing countries and its legitimacy became an increasingly important issue in the mass media during the late 1990s. In addition, the IMF was heavily criticized not only by borrowing countries’ governments, who began to replace their reliance on the

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120 Broome, 'The International Monetary Fund, Crisis Management and the Credit Crunch', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 64 (2010), p. 43.
123 As indicated by our own protest event data analysis for the period between 1996 and 2004. Similar to the anti-IMF riots of the 1980’s, the IMF caused a series of food riots within borrowing countries, e.g. in Jordan, Bulgaria, Mexico, South Africa, and South Korea.
124 Our analysis of news agencies coverage on the IMF shows that public attention doubles during the crisis and drops to near invisibility during the early 2000s.
Fund by self-reliance, but also by donor countries, who objected to the Fund’s overall approach to the crisis. While some of the public and governmental critics were mainly concerned with the IMF’s inappropriate solutions to the crisis, a broad coalition began to question the legitimacy of the Fund in terms of its impartiality and its role as a stabilizer of the global financial system. As a result, the IMF experienced a loss of relevancy from which it was only able to recover a decade later.

For our analysis, we draw on IMF annual reports between 1998 and 2004 and literature discussing the Fund’s legitimacy crisis during the 1990’s. The example underlines first, that legitimation strategies should not communicate conflicting messages to different constituencies, and, second, that international institutions should take the roots of concerns voiced by their staff seriously rather than only addressing the symptoms.

Considering its intergovernmental legitimation, the IMF envisaged to regain support of its borrowing members by reforming its institutional design. A restructuring of quotas and voting rights was supposed to address the critique of unfair procedures

127 Beattie, ‘Sovereign Bail-Outs: A Reach Regained’.
and give more voice to developing and emerging countries.\textsuperscript{129} Similarly, the implementation of deliberative structures was designed to make borrowing countries experience more ownership of reform programs.\textsuperscript{130} As one of the first steps addressing the intergovernmental legitimacy crisis, the IMF created the Independent Evaluation Office\textsuperscript{131} in 2001\textsuperscript{132} which was mandated to ‘[e]nhance the learning culture within the Fund, [s]trengthen the Fund’s external credibility, [p]romote greater understanding of the work of the Fund, and [s]upport institutional governance and oversight’.\textsuperscript{133}

To regain public legitimacy, the IMF engaged with civil society in borrowing countries\textsuperscript{134} and provided more public information\textsuperscript{135} via ‘new communication vehicle[s]’\textsuperscript{136} such as the Chairman’s Statement, the circulation of a ‘Code of Conduct

\begin{itemize}
  \item Seabrooke, ‘Legitimacy Gaps in the World Economy: Explaining the Sources of the IMF’s Legitimacy Crisis’, p. 262.
  \item Seabrooke, ‘Legitimacy Gaps in the World Economy: Explaining the Sources of the IMF’s Legitimacy Crisis’, p. 258.
  \item IEO, \textit{Home} (access date: http://www.ieo-imf.org/ieo/pages/ieohome.aspx).
\end{itemize}
for Executive Directors’ on ethical standards, the re-opening of its Visitor’s Center, providing a more informative website, and opening up its archives to the public. By combining institutional and discursive legitimation strategies, the Executive Board of the Fund aimed at connecting the IMF closer to the citizens. These public legitimation strategies targeted both the input and output dimension of the Fund’s legitimacy and aimed at creating the image of an open, responsive, and most importantly effective institution working for the global public good rather than the business interests of the global North. As a second order effect, the IMF hoped to orchestrate citizens of borrowing countries as intermediaries putting pressure on governments to push through reform proposals.

Finally, we turn to the IMF’s bureaucratic legitimation strategies. As Weber noted, staff members’ legitimacy beliefs are generally based on the rational-legal functioning of the institution they are working for. This was also the case for the IMF staff during

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140 Seabrooke, 'Legitimacy Gaps in the World Economy: Explaining the Sources of the IMF's Legitimacy Crisis', p. 263.
the 1990’s. However, IMF’s public legitimation strategies and especially the ‘Poverty and Growth Facility’ which focused on issues such as poverty reduction and social protection, conflicted with staff members’ legitimacy concerns because this strategy constituted an inappropriate expansion of the IMF’s technocratic mandate towards more political issues. Moreover, IMF staff was not trained to work in these areas and lacked clear guidance. Together with the immense workload in response to the Asian crisis, the stretching of the mandate led to overworked and disenchanted staff members. While the Executive Board reacted to this overload by founding a ‘Working Group on Stress’ and providing the staff with more information on how to deal with stress, it failed to address the legitimacy concerns raised by staff members, namely the widening of the Fund’s activities beyond its mandate. Although the Human Resource Department had asked for clarification and ‘more clear definition of the work of the institution of the whole’ in the context of the Fund’s

146 This reaction exemplifies our distinction between legitimation strategies and other activities tailored to create less durable specific support. In essence, the reduction of stress addresses individual cost-benefit calculations but ignores normative concerns of staff members.
intergovernmental and public legitimation strategies, IMF executive did not address these inconsistencies perceived by their staff members.

Individually, both public and intergovernmental legitimation strategies promised to mitigate the sources of the legitimacy crisis in the arenas for which they were developed. However, they were not designed to sing ‘in unison’ and the solution chosen to regain public support even deepened the legitimacy crisis in the two other dimensions. First, a cacophony between the IMF’s intergovernmental and public legitimation was perceived by members and the public, because the announced ownership for borrowing countries was violated by the Fund’s engagement with the civil society of borrowing countries, so that these would put pressure on their governments: ‘The Fund’s member states join on the principle of sovereign non-interference, so the notion that citizens should receive information to pressurize their governments to adopt Fund policies is a violation of principles of rightful membership and rightful conduct’. The intergovernmental strategy to create the image of a more representative, fair, and less interfering institution by way of quota reforms and the new Independent Evaluation Office fizzled, because it was undermined by the sovereignty challenging approach to win over the public of borrowing countries.

Second, a cacophony between public and bureaucratic legitimation strategies arose because the IMF engagement with the civil society of borrowing countries conflicted with legitimacy beliefs of the Fund’s staff members. They had already complained about a mismatch between the formal technocratic mandate of the IMF on the one hand and the Fund’s new role as manager of domestic macroeconomics and even broader political reforms on the other. This new role violated staff member’s belief in rightful conduct, because IMF widened its activities beyond its formal mandate.

In sum, this examination of the Fund’s attempt to regain its legitimacy after 1999 illustrates that an incoherent and inattentive set of strategies can even deepen legitimacy crises of international institutions and legitimation strategies need careful coordination if they are supposed to be successful. The developments after the Asian crisis and the Fund’s attempts to resolve the legitimacy crisis with all three constituencies illustrate this failure: first, many Fund members have stopped borrowing from the IMF, sought alternative regional arrangements for their financial needs, or publicly stated their intention to avoid future Fund borrowing. Second, public protests against IMF annual meetings are still the rule rather than an exception and demands for IMF reform from

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civil society groups abound. Finally, IMF staff was invariably convinced that the IMF is a bureaucratic, hierarchical and homogenous institution primarily focussing on technical and economic rather than broader political issues. Consequently, IMF staff members demanded that the Fund harmonized its ‘mission creep’ with the staff’s organizational culture built around a normative core stressing market efficiency and rationality.

6 Conclusion

The cases of the G8 and the IMF demonstrate that legitimacy is a crucial ingredient of international institutions’ political clout and that a coherent set of top-down legitimation strategies substantially increases the likelihood that not only states, but also bureaucratic staff and the public grant legitimacy to international institutions. In order to pave the way for a more systematic empirical analysis of the causes and consequences of international institutions’ attempts to appear legitimate, this article develops the concept of legitimation strategies, defines its boundaries and delimits three relevant constituencies of legitimation: member states, bureaucratic staff, and the wider public.

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Following Weber’s empirical understanding of legitimacy and its ascription or withdrawal, we suggest to understand legitimation strategies as goal-oriented activities employed to establish and maintain a reliable basis of diffuse support for a political regime by its constituencies of legitimation. Our core argument is that international institutions apply different sets of legitimation strategies – ranging from mere rhetoric to substantive institutional adaptation – according to the targeted constituency.

Three main lessons can be drawn from the application of our concept: first, the fact that international institutions engage in legitimation strategies has important implications for research on their autonomy and behavior. While most of the respective studies assume legitimacy to be a central capability of international institutions necessary to engage in activities deviating from their member states’ preferences or even to transform the behavior of member states or other governance targets,\textsuperscript{156} international institutions’ strategic attempts to create legitimacy in the eyes of different constituencies have so far received little attention. This contribution hopes to provide a first conceptual remedy and advance more specific and systematic empirical research on the question of how international institutions’ quest for legitimacy transforms their behavior and to what extent successful legitimation strategies can increase their autonomy vis-à-vis their member states.

Second, by taking into account all three types of legitimation strategies and their interaction, research on the legitimacy of international institutions is better equipped to understand how international institutions manage to position themselves as politically relevant and legitimate parts of international politics. This paper shows that the coherence of international institutions’ legitimation strategies is an important condition for success. Only if intergovernmental, bureaucratic, and public legitimation strategies do not contradict each other and communicate compatible messages, international institutions can hope to stabilize or regain diffuse support. In addition to this coherence condition, the interaction between legitimation strategies and attributes of international institutions, such as types of authority, modes of governance, membership, and mandate, can be expected to moderate the success or failure of legitimation strategies and should be instigated.

Finally, the concept can make a substantial contribution to research dealing with international institutions’ design, because their institutional set-up is not only shaped by functional demand in terms of the respective mandate but also by the quest for legitimacy in the eyes of different constituencies.\textsuperscript{157} To better understand why some international institutions assume an informal club format, while others become full blown organizations, why some institutions’ decision-making procedures are reformed substantially while others’ remain unaltered, or why some institutions open-up to civil

\textsuperscript{157} Abbott and Snidal, 'Strengthening International Regulation through Transnational New Governance: Overcoming the Orchestration Deficit'.

society while others do not, the interaction of international institutions’ constituencies of legitimation and legitimation strategies should be taken into account more systematically. Our case studies have shown that international institutions react to crises of legitimacy by – among other things – adapting their institutional design to the legitimacy demands of different constituencies. Thus, our concept might enrich ongoing research on the normative roots of institutional change of international institutions\textsuperscript{158} by specifying mechanisms and pointing out likely periods of change.

In conclusion, research on international institutions’ varying levels legitimacy, autonomy and behavior, and institutional design will profit from exploring ‘varieties of legitimation’,\textsuperscript{159} i.e. how international institutions prioritize constituencies of legitimation and what types of strategies which types of international institutions adopt to appeal to their audiences.

\textsuperscript{158} Seabrooke, 'Everyday Legitimacy and institutional Change', in A. Gofas and C. Hay (eds.) \textit{The Role of Ideas in Political Analysis} (London: Routledge, 2010); Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito and Jönsson, 'The Opening Up of International Organizations'.

\textsuperscript{159} Nullmeier, Geis and Daase, 'Der Aufstieg der Legitimationspolitik: Rechtfertigung und Kritik politischer-ökonomischer Ordnungen', p. 29.
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