

# Delegation and pooling in international organizations

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**Abstract** We conceive authority of an international organization as latent in two independent dimensions: delegation by states to international agents and pooling in collective decision making bodies. We theorize that delegation and pooling are empirically as well as conceptually different. Delegation is an effort to deal with the transaction costs of cooperation which are greater in larger, broader, and correspondingly more complex organizations. Pooling reflects the tension between protecting or surrendering the national veto. This paper theorizes that delegation and pooling are constrained by two basic design features: a) the scope of an IO's policy portfolio and b) the scale of its membership. We test these hypotheses with a new cross-sectional dataset that provides detailed and reliable information on IO decision making. Our major finding is that the design of international organizations is framed by stark and intelligible choices, but in surprising ways. Large membership organizations tend to have both more delegation and more pooling. The broader the policy scope of an IO, the more willing are its members to delegate, but the less willing they are to pool authority.

**Keywords** International organization · Delegation · Pooling · Scale · Policy scope · International authority

## 1 Introduction

To what extent and why do international organizations exert authority independent of their member states? We propose that the authority of an international organization is conditioned by two basic facts of its existence: the scale of its membership and the scope of its policy portfolio.

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International organizations are the principal vehicles for producing public goods beyond the national state and their design is a core area of inquiry in political science. Prior explanations have focused on the heterogeneity of preferences among member states, the extent of democratic norms, the relative power of the member states, and the type of cooperation problem. These are plausible sources of variation, but they take as given two fundamental features that frame the structure of the organization:

- The scale of the IO's membership. Is the IO designed to encompass a small handful of states, or does it encompass as many as 200?
- The scope of the IO's policy portfolio. Is the IO designed around a particular task or does it have a broad policy portfolio?

Our core claim is that an IO's membership and policy portfolio are strongly associated with its authoritative design. First, there is the logic of sheer numbers. The larger the number of veto players in an organization, the higher the barrier to reform. Hence, the incentive to relax the national veto and formalize supermajority decision rules is particularly sharp in IOs that have very large memberships.

The breadth of an IO's policy portfolio can be expected to have the opposite effect. The broader the interface of an IO with domestic politics, the greater the danger that an IO decision will have political repercussions for a government, and this may make member states less willing to give up the national veto. However, an independent general secretariat that can structure the agenda may be all the more useful in an IO with broad policy competences.

To make headway in examining the causal effects of membership scale and policy scope for IO authority we need to distinguish between the pooling of authority by member states in majoritarian decision making and the delegation of authority by member states to one or more independent bodies. There is no reason to believe that the two exist in tandem. An IO that has a strong and independent general secretariat may retain the national veto and one that relaxes the national veto in some form of majoritarian voting may have a weak general secretariat. Delegation is an effort to deal with the transaction costs of cooperation which are greater in larger, broader, and correspondingly more complex organizations. Pooling reflects the tension between protecting or surrendering the national veto. It is responsive to the challenge of cooperation in large member organizations and to the anticipated consequences of IO decisions for the domestic standing of member state governments.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction between pooling and delegation is the basis for our empirics as well as our theory. The principal challenge in understanding IO design has been lack of appropriate data rather than paucity of expectation. The concepts of pooling and delegation summarize the substantive meaning of authority and allow one to press the abstract concept into qualities that can be reliably estimated. We provide estimates for 72 international organizations for 2010.

We first conceptualize IO authority and set out expectations concerning scope and scale. We then set out our measurement strategy and impose statistical controls, consider potentially omitted variables, and test for endogeneity. In a final step we

<sup>1</sup> General purpose IOs tend to have more delegation, while task specific IOs tend to have higher pooling (Hooghe et al. [forthcoming](#); Lenz et al. 2014).

examine outliers to diagnose some limitations of our model. We conclude by summarizing our findings and considering ways forward in the study of international organization.

## 2 Conceptualizing international authority

The concept of authority has been deployed chiefly to justify the state, but authority, abstractly conceived, is not bound to the state. Lake (2010: 587) defines authority as a “social contract in which a governor provides a political order of value to a community in exchange for compliance by the governed with the rules necessary to produce that order.” This can take place in the international arena as well as within states. The fact that states do not always comply does not invalidate the wide application of the concept: speed limits on roads are also broken. What matters then is a general acceptance of the rules concerning non-compliance (Lake 2010: 592).

Our focus is on legal authority which is distinguished from charismatic and traditional authority in being a) institutionalized, i.e., codified in a set of formal rules; b) circumscribed, i.e., specified with respect to who has authority over whom for what; and c) impersonal, i.e., it applies to roles, not persons.

We specify this abstract concept by distinguishing between delegation and pooling. We define delegation as a conditional grant of authority by member states to an independent body. Delegation is designed to overcome issue cycling, sustain credible commitments, provide information that states might not otherwise share and, in general, reduce the transaction costs of decision making (Lake 2007: 231; Brown 2010; Hawkins et al. 2006; Koremenos 2008; Pollack 2003; Tallberg 2002). The IO secretariat is the key non-state body that is tasked with delegation in decision making (Pollack 1997).

We define pooling as joint decision making among the principals themselves (Keohane and Hoffmann 1991: 7; Lake 2007: 220; Marks et al. 1996; Moravcsik 1998). It consists of three elements: the rules under which member states make decisions, the procedure by which those decisions are ratified, and the extent to which they are binding.

The distinction between delegation and pooling has been kicking around for some time. The first reference we can find is Keohane and Hoffmann (1991: 16) who observe that the European Community (EC) is an example of “supranationality without supranational institutions” because member states pool, but do not delegate, authority: “the EC has recently been continuing, even accelerating, its practice of ‘pooling sovereignty’ through incremental change: sharing the capability to make decisions among governments, through a process of qualified majority rule. ... Yet authority is not transferred to a supranational body because the crucial decisionmaking role is taken by an interstate body (the EC Council of Ministers).” Moravcsik (1993: 509) refers to the concepts “delegation and pooling” to encompass the authority exercised by the European Community: “The EC differs from nearly all other international regimes in at least two salient ways: by pooling national sovereignty through qualified majority voting rules and by delegating sovereign powers to semi-autonomous central institutions. These two forms of transferring national sovereignty are closely related. Qualified majority voting, for example, not only makes the formal decision-making

of any single government more dependent on the votes of its foreign counterparts, but also more dependent on agenda-setting by the Commission.”

Subsequent uses of the terms implicitly followed Moravcsik by employing them in tandem to encompass the ways in which the European Union exercises authority (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2007; Schimmelfennig et al. 2006). The assumption that they are closely related was explicitly questioned by Lake (2007: 220): “[A]lthough the term ‘delegation’ is often used to refer to both, delegating sovereignty to an IO agent and pooling sovereignty in an IO are analytically different activities. At the very least, delegating and pooling sovereignty pose distinct strategic problems for states and require different institutional solutions. In delegating to IOs, states grant an organization contingent authority to perform certain limited tasks. In pooling authority within IOs, states transfer the authority to make binding decisions from themselves to a collective body of states within which they may exercise more or less influence. Much of the concern with IOs is really about pooling rather than delegating, but the distinction is often lost in popular debate and even academic analysis.”<sup>2</sup>

Lake did not seek to assess the conditions under which pooling or delegation take place, but explained that they are conceptually distinct and that they involve contrasting strategic imperatives. Whereas the strategic problem in delegating authority to an independent body is shirking in which the agent pursues its own agenda, the strategic problem in pooling authority is that of collective decision making where a member state may be outvoted under majoritarian decision making. However, as Lake noted, the distinction is by-passed in analyses which extend the concept of delegation to include pooling or which view international organization through the lens of the principal-agent perspective. The upshot is that our understanding of the contrasting logics of delegation and pooling is embryonic.

We place delegation and pooling front and center of our theory for three reasons. First, we surmise that the distinction is as apparent empirically as it is conceptually. Delegation and pooling of authority involve dissimilar trade-offs for states and this produces different combinations in the institutional structure of international organizations. Hence, we need to distinguish the dynamics of delegation and pooling to detect the effects of membership scale and policy scope for IO authority. Second, while the concepts have been applied to the European Union, they appear to be substantively useful for generalizing across the entire population of international organizations.<sup>3</sup> Finally, as we explain in the next section, the distinction provides the backbone of our measure of IO authority because it allows us

<sup>2</sup> The distinction is foreshadowed by the legalization (Abbott et al. 2000) and rational design projects (Koremenos et al. 2001). Abbott and Snidal (1998: 8f) use the concept of centralization to refer to “a concrete and stable organizational structure and a supportive administrative apparatus” while independence refers to “the authority to act with a degree of autonomy, and often with neutrality, in defined spheres.” These attributes have an affinity with our concept of delegation. Koremenos et al. (2001) identify five elements of institutional design: membership rules, scope of issues, flexibility, centralization of tasks, and rules for controlling the institution. The final two overlap with delegation and pooling. Centralization refers to activities “to disseminate information, to reduce bargaining and transaction costs, and to enhance enforcement . . . The least intrusive form of centralization is information collection” (Koremenos et al. 2001: 771–72). Control “focus[es] on voting arrangements as one important and observable aspect of control” (Koremenos et al. 2001: 772).

<sup>3</sup> Recent studies that distinguish pooling and delegation beyond the European Union include Rittberger and Zangl (2006), Brown (2010), and Lenz et al. (2014).

to comprehend IO institutions, which we estimate using up to 70 items, on a limited number of conceptually coherent dimensions.

Figure 1 maps 72 IOs on pooling and delegation in 2010 using summated rating scales for indicators described below. These variables are orthogonal ( $r=0.02$ ). Interestingly, the most studied IOs are the exceptional ones—the European Union, which has the most delegation, and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which have the most pooling. One advantage of a larger-N approach is that the selection of cases is divorced from their values on the dependent variable.

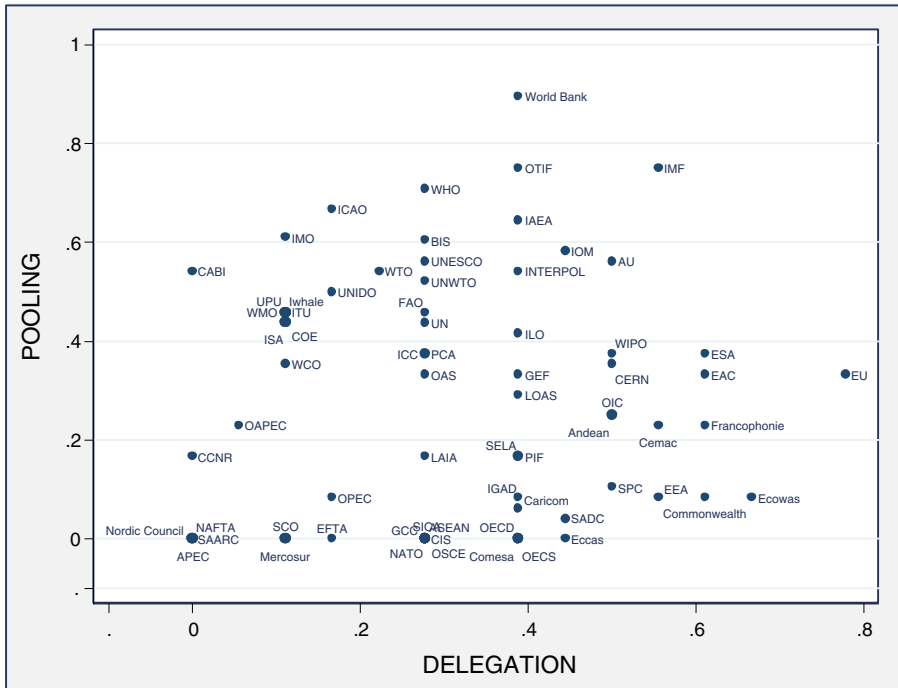
Let us take a closer look at three less exceptional IOs to illustrate that pooling and delegation can vary independently.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has extensive pooling and weak delegation. It was established in 1958 as a UN special agency for maritime safety and following the Torrey Canyon disaster of 1967 was tasked also with marine environmental standard setting (Nordquist and Moore 1999). Its main purpose is to provide a venue for negotiating conventions and international regulations (Van Leeuwen and Kern 2013). These become binding once two-thirds of the members have ratified.<sup>4</sup> Simple non-weighted majority voting is the decision rule in its intergovernmental Assembly and Council for regulations and conventions, the budget, and suspension of nonpaying members. This places the IMO in the top ten percent of our sample on pooling. However, delegation to independent non-state bodies is minimal. Aside from co-drafting the budget as a junior partner to the Council, the IMO's 300 strong staff provides secretarial support for the organization's technical intergovernmental committees.

By contrast, the Andean Community has extensive delegation, but little pooling. The Community was created in 1968 by five Latin American countries (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) to promote a common market, and has since diversified in related policy fields, including social policy and the environment (Adkisson 2003). The general secretariat of the organization is constitutionally designated as its sole executive body (Art. 29, Trujillo Protocol). It is chiefly responsible for drafting legislation and is entirely responsible for preparing the annual budget. It handles relations with the Andean Parliament and Andean Advisory councils for labor, business, local government, and indigenous peoples. Not least, the General Secretariat can take member states to the Andean Court (Alter and Helfer 2010). However, the member states have preserved the national veto in final decision making. The state-dominated Andean Summit and Coordinating Council operate by consensus with a heavy emphasis on ratification (Prada and Espinoza 2008). The Andean Community is located in the top-quartile of our sample on delegation and the bottom quartile on pooling.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) scores zero on delegation and pooling. SAARC was founded in 1985 by Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan and four neighboring countries to promote trust and cooperation in some technical areas, and in 2006 was tasked with trade liberalization (Tavares 2008). All decisions are taken by consensus, usually by the intergovernmental Council of

<sup>4</sup> Even ratification has been made less restrictive. Since 1972 the IMO routinely uses the tacit consent procedure whereby a member state is presumed to have ratified unless it objects within a set time period. The new rule was introduced because reaching the two-thirds hurdle became increasingly difficult as membership expanded beyond the initial group of shipping nations (Rosenne 1999).



**Fig. 1** Delegation and pooling in international organizations. *Note:* Some IOs are not visible because they are clustered at a single location (0.28 on Delegation and 0 on Pooling). They are ASEAN, Benelux, Central American Integration System (SICA), Commonwealth of States (CIS), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), NATO, Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU)

Ministers or its Standing Committee. Common projects are not binding and conventions signed by SAARC members bind only those that subsequently ratify. The SAARC Secretariat has no formal agenda setting role in any of the areas we monitor. As one commentator observes, the Secretariat “hardly exercises even the modest role assigned to it by the Charter. It has only occasionally been involved in the preparation of documentation for important meetings” (Ashan 2006: 146).

These organizations make the point that delegation and pooling can vary independently. Our theory, which we set out in the next section, is that delegation and pooling are constrained by the scope and scale of an IO, but in contrasting ways.

### 3 Theoretical argument

Policy scope and membership scale are fundamental characteristics of an international organization and have been seen as such (Hasenclever et al. 1997; Koremenos et al. 2001; Shanks et al. 1996). However, the connection between the scope of an IO’s policy portfolio and its authority has played second fiddle to hypotheses that link particular kinds of policy to institutional outcomes. Exceptions are Shanks et al. (1996) who examine whether the policy scope of an IO affects its survival rate, and Haftel (2013) who investigates the effect of broad economic scope on the authority of regional organizations.

There are fairly strong expectations about the effects of scale on the incidence of international organization stemming from cooperation theory, which concludes that large numbers impede cooperation (Keohane and Ostrom 1995). The notion that “the larger the group, the farther it will fall short of providing an optimal amount of a collective good” underpins discussion of the obstacles arising from multilateralism (Olson 1968: 4; Kahler 1992). However, the effect of scale for IO authority has rarely been theorized. One exception, the rational design project (2001), hypothesizes that a large number of members encourages centralization and reduces individual control over voting, but this finds little confirmation in the project’s empirical chapters.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.1 Policy scope

An international organization can specialize in a single task, such as maritime safety or regulating navigation in the Rhine, or it can take on a plethora of tasks, such as the Andean Community, or it may do something in-between, like SAARC. An IO with a broad policy portfolio is the international approximation to a general purpose government, a government that handles an unspecified range of policies for a given population (Hooghe and Marks 2003, 2009a). On the one hand, this produces complexity because there are likely to be many possible ways to frame policies and many possible bargains that can be made among the member states. The complexity of decision making in general purpose government provides a functional rationale for delegation to independent bodies. But a broad policy portfolio has stark political implications as well for it extends the interface between international and domestic politics, making states more, not less, intent on sustaining the national veto.

There are strong functional reasons for states to delegate in organizations that handle a swath of policies. The broader the scope, the greater the likelihood that an IO contract does not specify “the full array of responsibilities and obligations of the contracting parties, as well as anticipate every possible future contingency” (Cooley and Spruyt 2009: 8). Agenda setting is particularly complex, and so there is a correspondingly greater benefit for principals in establishing independent bodies to fill in the details of incomplete contracts, generate expert policy-relevant information, or monitor compliance (Pollack 2003: 378; Bradley and Kelley 2008; Marks et al. 2014). A general secretariat with the authority to sequence votes can also limit the opportunities for states to defect from a winning coalition by making a more attractive offer centered on a different proposal (Tallberg 2010). This, in a nutshell, is the notion that incomplete contracting induces states to delegate authority to non-state actors to reduce uncertainty and limit issue-cycling (Hawkins et al. 2006; Mueller 2003; Pollack 2003).

It is one thing for states to facilitate agenda setting by empowering international agents, but it is quite another to give up individual control over an IO with broad-ranging policy competences. Pooling authority has the virtue of reducing decisional

<sup>5</sup> Two case studies speak to the issue. Pahre (2004: 128) finds that the more players involved in trade negotiation, the more they cluster in groups, and interprets this as support for the hypothesis that larger membership leads to centralization. However, clustering, defined as “a state’s simultaneous negotiations with two or more countries on the same issue” (Pahre 2004: 101), is at best a weak form of centralization and one would be hard-pressed to conceive it as a form of delegation. Richards’ study of the air-traffic regime in the same volume observes that growth in membership has led to *less* centralization and more “unanimity voting rules govern[ing] annual IATA fare conferences” (Richards 2004: 235, 240–1, 255–6).”

blockage, but threatens each member state with being outvoted on an issue it regards as important. We can expect a national government to resist pooling authority in an IO when it fears “politicization,” decision making that generates domestic contestation, alienates a strategic constituency or undermines the government’s electoral support (Zürn et al. 2012; Rixen and Zangl 2013).

Governments are intensely aware that latent politicization cannot be estimated with precision. Politicization is a matter of uncertainty, not risk. However, there are some rules of thumb that may allow us to estimate aversion to pooling. The broader the reach of an IO, the greater its potential to touch a domestic nerve and produce domestic contestation. Moreover, IOs that approximate general purpose governments handle problems that cannot be clearly specified in advance and which, as a consequence, harbor considerable uncertainty regarding their domestic impact (Hooghe and Marks 2003, 2009b; Zürn et al. 2012).

Conflict over majority voting in the European Union reveals that fear of domestic damage can motivate resistance to pooling. President de Gaulle brought the organization to a standstill in 1965 because he feared that majority voting would isolate France on the common agricultural policy which transferred income to French farmers. In the run up to the Single European Act (1986) Prime Minister Thatcher commissioned a Whitehall study of the consequences of majority voting in the Council of Ministers which concluded that the UK had most to fear in social policy and the environment, but that it should go along with the extension of majority voting because veto blockage of market reform was the greater danger.

Kleine (2013: 89) points out that even when majority decision-making procedures are in place, “governments frequently need to mitigate the rules’ effects when a decision threatens to stir up strong distributive conflict at the domestic level.” EU governments seek to finesse formal rules for pooling authority when a decision threatens a government’s domestic standing. Here we argue that the same concern may shape the willingness of states to institutionalize majority voting in the first place.

International trade and banking are fertile ground for politicization, but they do not appear to be sufficient or necessary. The experience of the EU suggests that the resistance of member states to majority voting is not limited to trade issues. Several general purpose IOs, including SADC and ECOWAS, are not primarily trade organizations, yet they handle security and immigration policies that can produce domestic winners and losers. The same applies to ASEAN which has focused as much on security and allaying internal subversion as on trade and investment (Solingen 2008: 270). Our expectation is that such organizations are subject to the same policy scope effect on pooling as IOs that are primarily concerned with trade. Hence our hypotheses distinguish general purpose IOs, whatever their primary mission, from task-specific IOs that focus on trade and finance. The World Bank and the IMF pool authority in their key policy decisions, including lending to countries in trouble. The effects, which can destabilize national governments, are felt chiefly in the countries that receive the loans, not in the states that decide by weighted majority to make the loans (Dreher 2004; Dreher and Gassebner 2012).

We know of only one large-N study that examines the effect of policy scope on international authority. Haftel (2013) finds that regional international organizations that implement broad regional policies are more likely to have independent secretariats and strong dispute settlement.



### 3.2 Number of member states

Multilateralism in the post-World War II era involves almost 200 sovereign states. The problems this generates for collective decision making have a major impact on the design of IOs, but the direction of those effects is contested (Downs et al. 1998; Kahler 1992; Osieke 1984; Riches 1940; Zamora 1980).

On the one side, smaller IOs should be more amenable to majority voting. IOs with smaller memberships are likely to be more homogenous with respect to culture, religion, and per capita GDP than large-N IOs, particularly if the member states are located in the same region. In an article published in the *American Economic Review*, Maggi and Morelli (2006: 1138) develop a model of voting in IOs that comes to the conclusion that “a nonunanimous rule is more likely to be adopted in more homogeneous organizations.” One might also argue that defending national sovereignty by maintaining the national veto is of less concern in an IO with just a handful of members than in one with scores of members.

However, there are countervailing factors that arise from the effects of the number of member states for the production of public goods. The problem of social choice is compounded when the number of veto players increases (Shubik 1982). Unanimity or consensus can work quite well for a small group, but as the size of the group increases this can result in decisional delay and blockage. The larger the number of veto players, holding their ideological distance constant, the smaller the size of the winset and the more difficult it is to depart from the status quo (Tsebelis 2002).

In designing an international organization, states may wish to encompass all those that are affected in the provision of the public good. But they face a quandary. On the one hand, the control of any single state will be smaller in an organization that encompasses many states. On the other, the consequence of retaining the national veto in a large-N organization is particularly severe. Multilateralism among formally sovereign states can be regarded as a recipe for deadlock, and it is plausible to believe that states are acutely aware of this when they design IOs (Kahler 1992; Martin 1995: 91; Snidal 1995: 57). If costs stemming from a large number of member states threaten future joint gains, rational state actors have an incentive to relinquish individual state control to facilitate collective decision making.

Large member organizations also have a greater functional need for delegation. The greater the number of member states, the more difficult it is for any one member state to gather information on the preferences of all relevant actors (Hawkins et al. 2006; Pollack 2003). In addition, the number of possible coalitions is an exponential function of the number of member states. Secretariats may supply and process information that is not readily accessible to national governments and which may be vital in framing a feasible policy agenda.

Empirical studies are inconclusive. Blake and Lockwood Payton (2014) find that majority voting is more likely as membership grows. The history of voting rules in the European Union suggests that increasing the number of member states produces pressure for majoritarian voting. Carrubba and Volden (2001: 23) note that “as the size of the EU increases, voting rules must be made less inclusive to sustain vote trades.” However, for a sample of 30 regional IOs, Haftel and Thompson (2006) find no support for the hypothesis that large-scale IOs are more independent.

## 4 A dataset for international organizations

To test these expectations we analyze 72 international organizations. For the purpose of this study, we define an IO as an international organization composed of three or more states having an explicit and continuous institutional framework. In selecting the sample we consulted the Correlates of War dataset and identified organizations having a distinct physical location or website, a formal structure (i.e., a legislative body, executive, and administration), at least 50 permanent staff (*Yearbook of International Organizations*, multiple years, and IO websites), a written constitution or convention, and a decision body that meets at least once a year. Seventy-two IOs that are not emanations from other IOs fit all or all but one of these criteria. In contrast to organizations lacking a formal structure, permanent staff, or that meet irregularly, the IOs in our sample can be more reliably researched using public documents. The sample, listed in the [online appendix](#), encompasses a wide range of both regional and global organizations and includes organizations with competences in one or more of 25 policy areas that we code.

We see two reasons for limiting the sample to IOs that have standing in international politics. The first is practical. Our theory requires us to evaluate IOs using much more information than available in any prior dataset. Given time and financial constraints it makes sense to estimate IOs that have a more detectable footprint in the primary and secondary records. Hence our decision to exclude IOs that have no website, address, or are poorly staffed. Second, while we think our theory might apply very broadly, we suspect that states may be more likely to pay attention to IOs that have some minimal level of resources.

Two challenges confront the researcher who wishes to estimate delegation and pooling of IO authority (Marks et al. 2008). The first is to navigate from the abstract to the particular. Delegation and pooling cannot be observed directly. We seek to specify these concepts so that their variation can be reliably evaluated while preserving their meaning. A second, related, challenge is to “seek a middle ground between a universalizing tendency, which is inattentive to contextual differences, and a particularizing approach, which is skeptical about the feasibility of constructing measures that transcend specific contexts” (Adcock and Collier 2001: 530). Each IO is, in certain respects, unique, yet our purpose is to evaluate them on a common conceptual frame (Sartori 1970). Hence, our challenge is to specify institutional possibilities that have similar connotations across diverse organizations.

Our focus is on formal rules that can be observed in treaties, constitutions, conventions, special statutes, protocols, and rules of procedure.<sup>6</sup> Formal rules can be specified independently of behavior and impose explicit, public, commitments on states. Changing or eliding a formal international commitment can be costly (Johnson 2013). If formal international authority mattered only marginally or not at all, then one would not expect to find systematic, intelligible, variation. Nor would one expect states to negotiate intensely about their content.

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<sup>6</sup> We investigate the formal rules and then determine whether these are translated into institutions in order to narrow the gap in coding between unrealized intention and actual practice (Gray and Slapin 2012; Hafel 2013). However, we do not code practices that have only an informal basis.

Delegation is a grant of authority to a third party. Our chief concern is with the general secretariat because it is recognized to be the principal agent of delegation in IO decision making (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Bradley and Kelley 2008; Brown 2010; Hawkins et al. 2006; Johnson 2013; Pollack 2003).<sup>7</sup> Every IO in our dataset has a secretariat with infrastructural functions, but the extent to which the secretariat carries out executive functions, monitors compliance, and facilitates member state bargaining varies considerably. In the domain of accession, for example, a secretariat may be charged with soliciting or vetting candidates, evaluating whether a prospective member meets accession criteria, or negotiating the conditions of accession. We assess whether a general secretariat can take the initiative in nine domains: executive functions, executive monopoly, policy initiation, monopoly of policy initiative, budget drafting, financial non-compliance, member state accession, suspension of a member state, and constitutional revision.<sup>8</sup>

Pooling refers to the transfer of authority from individual member states to a collective IO member state body in which individual states cede their capacity to block decisions (Keohane and Hoffmann 1991; Moravcsik 1998; Rittberger 2005). We evaluate pooling at the most consequential stage—final decision making. The extent of pooling in an IO depends on three conditions: whether the decision rule departs from unanimity to some form of majoritarianism; whether the decision requires ratification; whether the decision is binding rather than voluntary. We assess the extent to which member states pool authority across six domains: policy making, budgetary allocation, financial non-compliance, member state accession, suspension, and constitutional revision.<sup>9</sup>

*Delegation* and *Pooling* can be estimated as latent factors or as summated rating scales. Factor analysis uses the available information more efficiently by weighting each indicator according to its contribution to the score for a given IO, whereas summated rating scores are not affected by the composition of the sample. Scores from these methods are strongly associated for both delegation ( $r=0.97$ ) and pooling ( $r=0.96$ ). All analyses in this paper use summated rating scales, but using latent factor scores produces the same results.

## 5 Operationalizing independent variables

We estimate *Policy scope* as the number of policies for which an IO is responsible. This is assessed by two independent coders employing a list of 25 non-exclusive policies

<sup>7</sup> As distinct from delegation in dispute settlement, which requires separate treatment.

<sup>8</sup> *Delegation* is calculated as a summated rating scale ranging from 0 (no delegation) to 9 (maximum delegation) by adding scores across these items, then rescaled from 0 to 1. Please see the [online appendix](#) on the webpage of *Review of International Organizations* for details.

<sup>9</sup> *Pooling* is calculated for each domain as a function of the decision rule, bindingness, and ratification. The “weakest link”—the most intergovernmental option—prevails. The maximum score is majority voting over a binding decision that does not require ratification. The minimum score is unanimous decision making. Discounts are applied to non-unanimous decisions that are partially binding or non-binding or require partial or full ratification. Super-majoritarian decision rules, partial ratification, and partial bindingness produce intermediate scores. Scores are calculated for each domain and summated on a scale from 0 (no pooling) to 6 (maximum pooling), then rescaled to 0 to 1.

(online appendix). The Krippendorff's alpha is 0.70, which indicates reasonably high intercoder reliability.<sup>10</sup>

We measure *Members* as the log of the number of member states on the intuition that the marginal effect of an additional member declines as the absolute number of members increases. To test for endogeneity we calculate the average number of member states in an IO in the 2006–2010 period and at an earlier period: 1950–1954 or, if the IO is established later, over the first 5 years of its existence. We calculate all independent variables in a similar way.

We include three controls in the baseline model. Democracies are hypothesized to be less reluctant than autocracies to establish authoritative IOs because they can make more credible commitments, because democratic transparency makes cheating more costly, or more generally, because they are more attuned to the rule of law (Acharya and Johnston 2007; Mansfield et al. 2000; Martin 2000). *Democracy* is the mean score for the member states of an IO on the Freedom House indices for Political Rights and Civil Liberties (2006–2010) with high values for more democratic countries.<sup>11</sup>

IOs dominated by a single member state are expected to be less authoritative because hegemons suffer the greatest loss of freedom of action under rule-based cooperation, and consequently prefer loose informal arrangements (Drezner 2007; Krasner 1991).<sup>12</sup> Small states may also oppose delegation if they fear big power influence within the organization (Urpelainen 2012). *Power asymmetry* is operationalized as the ratio in material capabilities of the largest member state to the average of all members in the organization. We use the *Composite Index of National Material Capabilities* (CINC) version 4.0 which summarizes military expenditure, military personnel, energy consumption, iron and steel production, urban population, and total population, averaged for the 2003–2007 period (Singer 1987).

Reserved seats on executive bodies and weighted voting are expected to increase the incidence of pooling because they accommodate powerful players (Abbott and Snidal 1998; Lockwood Payton 2010; Solingen 2008). There are strong grounds for believing that aggregation technology facilitates decision making in large-N settings (Sandler 2004). *Weighted voting* is a dichotomous measure where an IO receives a value of unity a) if there is weighted voting in a legislative or executive interstate body or b) if a subset of member states have reserved seats in an executive body.<sup>13</sup>

## 6 Estimation

We begin by estimating a baseline model in cross-sectional ordinary least squares regression. The first column in Table 1 takes *Delegation* as the dependent variable and

<sup>10</sup> Krippendorff's (2013) alpha measures agreement among coders and ranges from zero, which indicates no agreement beyond chance, to one, which indicates agreement without exceptions.

<sup>11</sup> The commonly used POLITY2 measure from the Polity IV dataset, which subtracts the autocracy score from the democracy score, is highly correlated at the IO level ( $r=0.95$ ) and produces similar results.

<sup>12</sup> A counterargument focuses on major powers as suppliers of international institutions (Hancock 2009; Mattli 1999; Mearsheimer 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Examples of the former are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Union. Examples of the latter are the International Atomic Energy Agency (where the ten largest nuclear powers have reserved seats), the United Nations (with reserved seats for the five big powers) and the International Maritime Organization (with reserved seats for the countries with the largest shipping interests).

**Table 1** Explanatory model for delegation and pooling

	Delegation	Pooling
Policy scope	0.079*** (0.024)	-0.045** (0.022)
Members	0.146*** (0.044)	0.169*** (0.040)
Democracy	-0.003 (0.020)	0.014 (0.018)
Power asymmetry	-0.121*** (0.044)	-0.016 (0.040)
Weighted voting	0.017 (0.022)	0.037* (0.020)
Constant	0.311*** (0.020)	0.280*** (0.018)
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	<b>0.243</b> <b>(0.185)</b>	<b>0.652</b> <b>(0.625)</b>

*N*=72. OLS regression with two-tailed significance for estimates: \*\*\* sign <0.01 \*\* sign <0.05 \*sign <0.10. Standardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

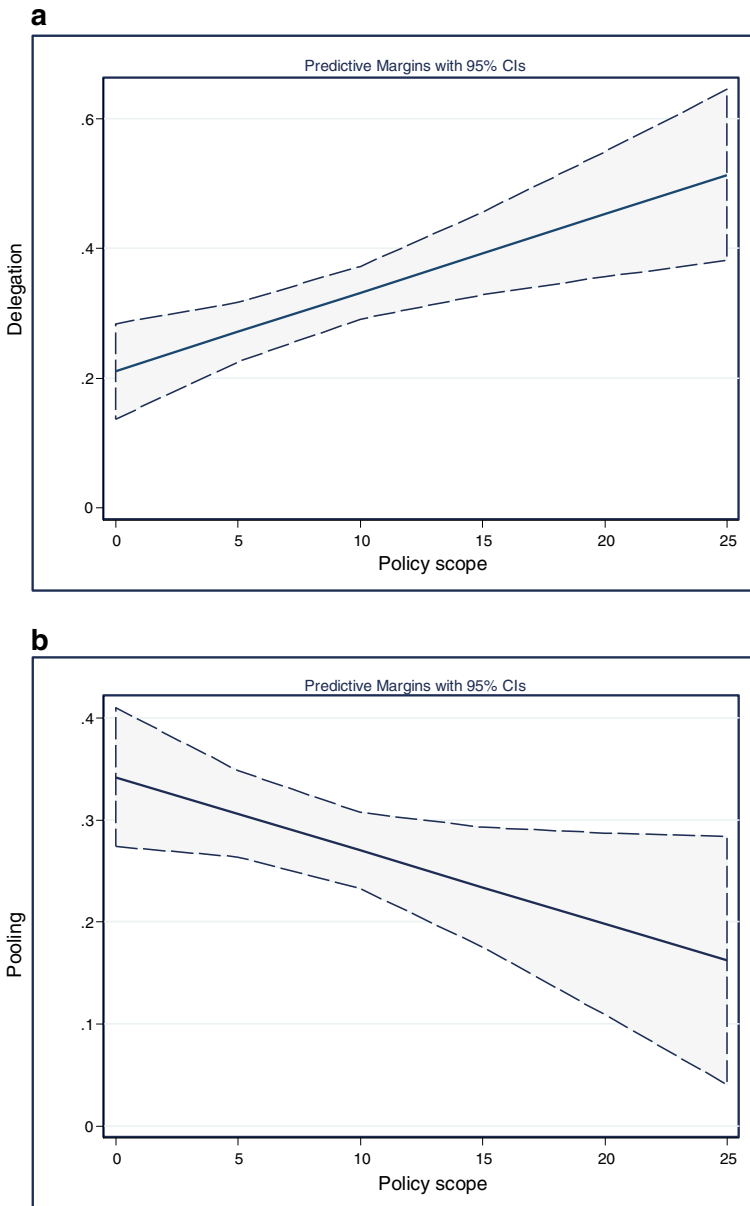
the second column, *Pooling*. The coefficients for *Policy scope* are highly significant in both models, but as we expect, the signs are different. The broader an IO's policy portfolio, the *greater* its expected level of delegation but the *less* its pooling. The coefficient for *Members* is positive and highly significant for both *Delegation* and *Pooling*. Hence, the more members an IO has, the greater on average its level of both delegation and pooling. These results are robust using sampling with replacement and when individual cases are excluded from the analysis ([online appendix](#)). We see no evidence that the average level of democracy of the members of an IO makes a difference in the authority invested in an IO, but we do find that *Power asymmetry* depresses delegation.<sup>14</sup>

Marginal effects can be an informative means for summarizing how change in one variable is related to change in a covariate. Figure 2a illustrates the marginal effect of *Policy scope* on *Delegation* (upper figure) by holding all other independent variables in the base model (Table 1) at their means. The substantive effect is considerable. Delegation in an IO such as the Universal Postal Union (UPU) which specializes in a single policy will typically be limited to a secretariat with agenda setting power over one or two domains. In the UPU, the authority of the secretariat is limited to drafting the budget. By contrast, the secretariat in an IO with a broad portfolio covering 20 policies, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), will typically have agenda setting powers in four or five domains. In addition to framing the budget, the Commission of ECOWAS is the sole agenda setter for policy initiatives and makes proposals regarding member state non-compliance and suspension—of which there have been four cases in the past 5 years.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Controlling for preference heterogeneity among member states has no effect. The only published data source covering the IOs discussed here is the Affinity Index which extracts similarity scores from voting in the United Nations. This is a topic on which valid hypothesis testing must await improved measurement (Voeten 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Niger and Guinea (2009), Ivory Coast (2012), Mali (2011).

Figure 2b uses the same method to illustrate the marginal effect of *Policy scope* on *Pooling*. The effect is considerable, but has the opposite sign. A task-specific IO typically departs from unanimity in three or four of six domains, whereas an IO with a broad portfolio covering 20 policies will typically have unanimity in all but one domain. In the UPU, decision making on constitutional amendments are made by a supermajority of two-thirds of the member states, while decisions on the budget and policies are by simple majority. In ECOWAS, by contrast, decisions are by consensus across the board.



**Fig. 2** a and b Marginal effects of policy scope

The scale of an IO's membership has a strong and positive effect on delegation and pooling. The indicator we use is logged, but nothing noteworthy changes if the absolute number of members is used instead. Figure 3 depicts the standardized marginal effects and 95 % confidence bands for the independent variables and controls. The scale of an

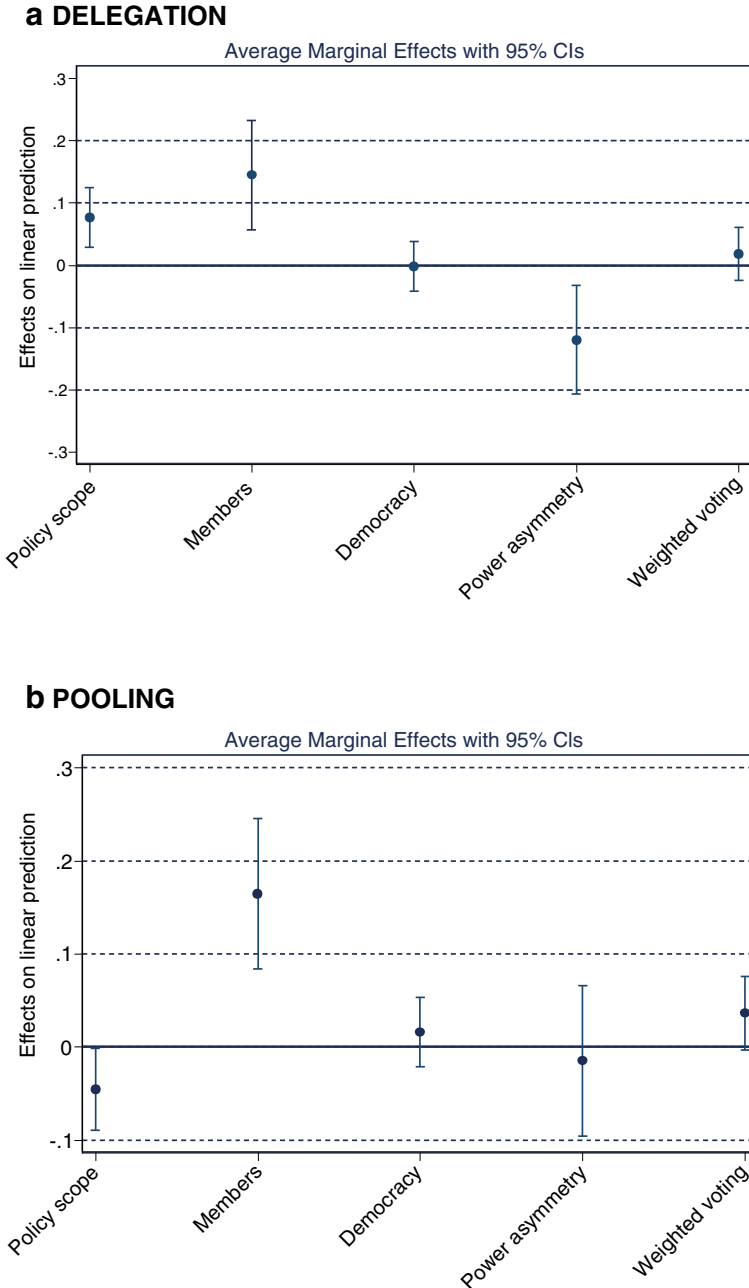


Fig. 3 Marginal effects for delegation and pooling

**Table 2** Delegation and pooling without weighted voting

	Delegation	Pooling	Pooling (recoded) <sup>a</sup>
Policy scope	0.082*** (0.024)	-0.039* (0.022)	-0.036* (0.020)
Members	0.148*** (0.044)	0.173*** (0.041)	0.169*** (0.038)
Democracy	-0.005 (0.020)	0.009 (0.019)	0.007 (0.017)
Power asymmetry	-0.115** (0.043)	-0.002 (0.040)	-0.009 (0.037)
Constant	0.311*** (0.020)	0.280*** (0.018)	0.271*** (0.017)
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	<b>0.236</b> <b>(0.190)</b>	<b>0.633</b> <b>(0.612)</b>	<b>0.643</b> <b>(0.622)</b>

*N*=72. OLS regression with two-tailed significance for estimates: \*\*\* sign <0.01 \*\* sign <0.05 \*sign <0.10. Standardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

<sup>a</sup> DV recoded to encompass weighted voting

IO's membership has by far the greatest marginal effect on pooling of authority and a sizeable effect on delegation. All else equal, an IO with three to six member states typically imposes the decision rule of unanimity across the board. By contrast, an IO with global membership breaks with this in at least two or three domains.<sup>16</sup>

## 7 Robustness of the model

### 7.1 Endogeneity

Our analysis may be marred by endogeneity, and in this section we discuss two possible sources. One concern stems from the weighted voting measure. *Weighted voting* is a predictor in our baseline model because we wish to examine whether *Membership scale* and *Policy scope* have institutional effects independent of the imposition of weighted voting by powerful member states. We find that this is indeed the case, but it is of course possible that states decide whether to weight votes at the same time as they decide whether to pool authority. We conduct two kinds of test to control for potential endogeneity.

The simplest test is to remove *Weighted voting* from the baseline model. The results, displayed in the first two columns of Table 2, are consistent with those reported in Table 1. *Policy scope*, *Members*, and *Power asymmetry* retain statistical significance for *Delegation* and *Democracy* remains insignificant. *Policy scope* and *Members* retain

<sup>16</sup> *Members* and *Policy scope* are quite strongly associated ( $r=-0.55$ ). In the online appendix we confirm the results of the OLS models presented here in sequential matching models (Ho et al. 2007; Holland 1986). Matching allows one to examine the effects of predictors that are highly correlated by weighting cases to achieve better balance between treated and control groups.



**Table 3** Delegation and pooling with covariates at the IO's founding

	Delegation	Pooling
Policy scope	0.017*** (0.049)	-0.018*** (0.005)
Members	0.169** (0.077)	0.177*** (0.062)
Democracy	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.004)
Power asymmetry	-0.007 (0.005)	-0.187 (0.128)
Weighted voting	0.015 (0.051)	0.179*** (0.052)
Constant	0.107 (0.096)	0.214 (0.129)
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	<b>0.210</b> <b>(0.148)</b>	<b>0.550</b> <b>(0.515)</b>

$N=72$ . OLS regression with two-tailed significance for estimates: \*\*\* sign  $<0.01$  \*\*sign  $<0.05$  \*sign  $<0.10$ . Standardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Estimates of the covariates take on values in 1950, or in the year of IO creation, whichever is later

statistical significance for *Pooling*, while *Power asymmetry* and *Democracy* are not significant.

A tougher test is to recode *Pooling* for IOs that use weighted voting. There are thirteen such IOs in our sample. In decision areas where the final decision is taken by a body with weighted voting (or reserved seats), we code weighted voting as equivalent to supermajority. Then we apply, as before, a discounting factor when decision making is partially binding or nonbinding or involves ratification. Again, the analysis with the *Recoded Pooling* variable produces results that are consistent with those in the baseline model (final column in Table 2).

We prefer the baseline models in Table 1 on the grounds that they are the most explicit, but the results are robust across alternative specifications. *Weighted voting* can be interpreted as endogenous to the decision to relinquish the national veto, and therefore its inclusion in the baseline model serves as a conservative control. That is to say, our theory survives the idea that pooling of authority is really just a response to the introduction of relative power (via weighted voting or reserved seats) through the backdoor.

A second potential source of endogeneity concerns the causal direction between scope and scale on the one hand and authority on the other. We hypothesize that the authority of an IO is affected by its scope and scale. However, we need to engage the possibility that scope and scale are endogenous to IO authority. Our theory is consistent with the idea that state preferences over delegation and pooling constrain the kinds of IOs that states are willing to establish. But there is also the possibility that the scope and scale of an IO could adjust over time to prior decisions that states make on delegation and pooling.

To test this possibility we introduce OLS models for delegation and pooling where all predictors are observed in 1950 or at the time of the IO's founding if later (Table 3).

**Table 4** Exploring the regional vs. global contrast

	Delegation		Pooling	
Policy scope	0.107*** (0.029)	0.063** (0.028)	-0.058** (0.027)	-0.047* (0.026)
Members	0.108** (0.050)	0.176*** (0.052)	0.186*** (0.046)	0.173*** (0.047)
Democracy	0.003 (0.020)	-0.008 (0.021)	0.012 (0.019)	0.014 (0.019)
Power asymmetry	-0.117** (0.044)	-0.135*** (0.046)	-0.018 (0.040)	-0.018 (0.042)
Weighted voting	0.014 (0.022)	0.018 (0.022)	0.038* (0.020)	0.037 (0.020)
Regional IO	-0.129 (0.079)		0.057 (0.072)	
Regional IO (Goertz-Powers)		0.081 (0.074)		0.010 (0.067)
Constant	0.370*** (0.041)	0.286*** (0.030)	0.254*** (0.038)	0.277*** (0.027)
R <sup>2</sup> (adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	<b>0.273</b> <b>(0.206)</b>	<b>0.256</b> <b>(0.188)</b>	<b>0.655</b> <b>(0.623)</b>	<b>0.652</b> <b>(0.620)</b>

$N=72$ . OLS regression with two-tailed significance for estimates: \*\*\* sign <0.01 \*\* sign <0.05 \* sign <0.10 Standardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

The pattern of significance for the key independent variables mirrors that of the base models in Table 1. In the model with *Delegation* as the dependent variable, the coefficients for *Policy scope* and *Members* are, as we expect, positive and statistically significant. *Members* is also positive in the model for *Pooling*, while *Policy scope* is negative and significant.

## 7.2 Regional international organizations

To what extent do our findings add to an understanding of IO design beyond the contrast between regional and global IOs? We introduce a dichotomous variable tapping regional organizations to test whether our results are driven by a distinctive category of IO—namely “multifunctional, multipurpose regional economic institutions” (Powers and Goertz 2011: 2388; de Lombaerde and Schulz 2009; Haftel 2012; Mattli 1999; Pevehouse 2005). Goertz and Powers (2012) categorize regional IOs as having non-overlapping memberships, multi-functional scope, and as composed primarily of contiguous states. There are 22 such IOs in our dataset. A less restrictive definition which allows overlapping membership extends the list to 33 IOs.

Table 4 introduces dichotomous terms for these definitions of *Regional IO* in models for *Delegation* and *Pooling*. The key estimates retain significance. *Policy scope* is positive and significant for *Delegation* and negative and significant for *Pooling*. *Members* is positive and significant in both models. Regional IOs tend to have considerably less scale, less diversity, and broader policy portfolios than global IOs, and while these are useful shorthand descriptions for different types of IO, we can show

that they do not exhaust the power of more nuanced variables in explaining levels of delegation and pooling.

### 7.3 Outliers

Cases that are mis-predicted can be more revealing than those which are accurately predicted. Two IOs stand out as being mispredicted by at least 2.5 standard deviations. Delegation is underpredicted in the Nordic Council (s.d.=-2.79). Pooling is overpredicted in OTIF (s.d.=2.73). Both cases reveal the limits of the model set out here and suggest possible lines for future inquiry.

The Nordic Council is an interesting and unusual example of dense international cooperation in the absence of a powerful permanent secretariat. It is the only IO in our dataset where an inter-parliamentary body, the Nordic Council Plenary Assembly, sets the agenda and does many of the things that are usually handled by a secretariat (Qvortrup and Hazell 1998). The Nordic Council is exceptional in other ways that help explain its institutional character and the limits of our analysis. It is composed of a small number of small democratic countries with extensive similarities, including deeply embedded norms of democratic participation. When IOs introduce parliamentary agenda setters this is usually at the expense of technocratic secretariats, a phenomenon well documented in the European Union (Rittberger 2005).

The Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail, known by its French acronym OTIF, takes decisions by simple majority or, in the case of constitutional amendments and member state suspension, by supermajority. Decisions are partially binding. OTIF is unusually majoritarian given its relatively small membership (47 in 2010). It is a technical organization where the typical problem is one of coordinating standards for passenger and freight carriage on international rail traffic. OTIF is the quintessential IO designed to solve a coordination problem where the cost of non-cooperation is high but the sovereignty risks of ceding control are minor. Here is an example, then, in which refined information about the problem structure of an IO appears to have considerable leverage in explaining its authority (Mitchell 2006).

## 8 Conclusion

The premise of this article is that states have more than one dimension of choice when it comes to the authority exercised by an international organization: they can set up independent bodies to reduce transaction costs and they can collectivize decision making in majoritarian voting. We describe the former as *delegation* and the latter as *pooling*.

Delegation concerns the authority exercised by the principal non-state body, the general secretariat. Every IO in our dataset has a secretariat with infrastructural functions such as running the IO's headquarters, organizing meetings, and maintaining records. However, the extent to which the secretariat carries out executive functions, monitors compliance, and facilitates member state bargaining varies considerably.

Pooling concerns how member states make decisions. Do they retain the national veto or do they aggregate their votes under majoritarian or super-majoritarian rules? Do decisions made by the IO have to be ratified by individual member states? To what extent are they binding?

We seek to show that these are conceptually different aspects of IO authority. We measure them independently, and we theorize that they respond to different problems.

Delegation to an independent body is a form of soft authority. It is a response to the transaction costs of decision making, which, we hypothesize, increase with the breadth of an organization's policy scope and the scale of its organization. No general secretariat in any of the 72 organizations we survey takes the final decision on policy, the budget, or appointments, let alone constitutional reform, suspension, or accession.

Pooling is subject to more severe pressures. Refusal to pool authority in majoritarian decision making may doom a large member organization to impotence. However, pooling authority involves a serious loss of control for individual member states which becomes more intolerable as international decisions affect domestic constituencies. The broader the interface of an IO with domestic politics, the greater the threat that pooling can damage a government's domestic standing.

This article makes the claim that delegation and pooling have distinct causes. We suspect they have different consequences both for what IOs do and how they perform. To what extent do delegation and pooling have an independent effect on the results of cooperation among states? Just as the institutional structure of the state has been linked to its economic performance, regime stability, quality of democracy, and social equality, so one might ask how the institutional structure of international organization influences the provision of transnational public goods, including peace, security, trade, sustainable development, and equity.

Finally, there is the issue of change in international organization. Do delegation and pooling have a dynamic effect on international organization? Are IOs with high delegation more adept at discovering cooperation in response to a changing environment? How do IOs with different mixes of delegation and pooling change over time (if at all), and why? These are topics that would surely benefit from comparative research extending the dataset we have assembled.

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