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SPECIAL DATA FEATURE

Identifying Formal Intergovernmental Organizations*

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Scholarship on intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) has mushroomed, especially studies involving quantitative analyses of state involvement in IGOs and the effects of IGOs on the behavior of state members. Yet, little of that literature enumerates IGOs using conceptually based definitions of what are formal intergovernmental organizations. Here, the authors develop a new database on IGOs, based on a definition focusing on three dimensions: formal organizations that demonstrate ongoing decision-making and oversight by states; evidence bureaucratic organization; and demonstrate organizational autonomy. The authors conceptualize these organizations as FIGOs. Using these dimensions, they identify the population of FIGOs at three points in time: 1975, 1989, and 2004. In addition, they generate data on state membership in FIGOs, offering not only a simple frequency of number of organizations in which a state participates, but also another measure of state involvement through the creation of a denominator of 'opportunity', allowing for an analysis of the number of organizations joined versus the number of organizations a state is capable of joining. Finally, the authors compare the results from their efforts with the IGO COW database and suggest some advantages to using their data for a number of theoretical questions.

Introduction

In this effort, we probe conceptual and empirical dimensions for identifying the existence of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) in international affairs and create a new database of IGOs. We do so because we are interested in two major research questions that we believe are not usefully addressed by existing data on IGOs. First, we wish to ascertain the extent to which a formal, institutional dimension of a 'new world order' is being created after the end of the Cold War. From a theoretical standpoint, we see the possibility of such new institutional creation partly as a function of the strength possessed by the lead global power in the international system (the USA) and partly as a function of the capacity of other powers and the extent of their dissatisfaction with the dominant state's leadership. We assume that creating IGOs with little bureaucratic organization and very limited autonomy is less useful in stabilizing a new world order than a network of organizations that are significantly organized and autonomous. Additionally, it may be far easier to construct organizations that have neither of these characteristics than ones that do. By including in our analysis IGOs that are easy to assemble but produce little autonomous capability or organization, we

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would distort responses to research queries regarding the importance of great-power strength in formal institutional construction.

Our second research concern is about patterns of joining and participation by states in these IGOs. We wish to uncover whether or not states participate in these organizations for reasons similar to, or different from, factors correlated with their participation during the Cold War. We assume that joining organizations that lack bureaucratic organization and offer little capacity to execute the collective will of members requires much less from states in terms of the costs of joining such organizations. Therefore, analyzing patterns of participation by states in such organizations may distort our understanding of the conditions under which states may invest resources in joining IGOs, including possibly confusing membership in minimalist organizations with the willingness of state policymakers to potentially surrender some of their sovereignty as a trade-off for their participation in more autonomous organizations.

We assume, too, that joining organizations is based both on opportunity and willingness. Measures of organizational participation based on simple counts of number of organizations joined fail to take into account the numbers of organizations a state is qualified to join. Since a simple count may distort the opportunities states have to join, we develop a denominator which allows us to factor in this dimension of participation.

Clearly, alternative definitions of IGOs have substantial impacts on their empirical enumeration. As Jacobson, Riesinger & Mathers note (1986: 144), different 'reasonable' definitions yield population estimates that vary by as much as 300%. Below, we discuss previous efforts to enumerate systematically the population of IGOs in international relations, identify our conceptually based definition of an IGO and compare it with previous efforts, provide a series of criteria with which to identify an IGO, illustrate some of the empirical results, and compare the database with the most recent systematic data on IGO population.

Previous Efforts

The literature in international relations offers three major efforts that provide overlapping empirical criteria and quantify systematically – and longitudinally – the number of IGOs in the international system. None of the three, however, focuses explicitly on the broader conceptual meaning of an IGO that is associated with our research concerns, and therefore these efforts create both coding rules and empirical enumerations that differ substantially from those we identify below.

The earliest effort is by Wallace & Singer (1970), who posited four empirical criteria for identifying the existence of an intergovernmental organization: a minimum membership of two states; regular plenary sessions; a permanent headquarters arrangement; and independence from other IGOs[1] (Wallace & Singer, 1970: 245–248). A second effort (Jacobson, Reisinger & Mathers, 1986; Shanks, Jacobson & Kaplan, 1996) provides a similar set of empirical criteria: intergovernmental organizations are 'associations established by governments or their representatives that are sufficiently institutionalized to require regular meetings, rules governing decision making, a permanent staff, and a headquarters' (Shanks, Jacobson & Kaplan, 1996: 593). Further, these authors define and identify separately emanations as 'second-order IGOs created through action of other IGOs' (Shanks, Jacobson & Kaplan, 1996: 594).

Finally, Pevehouse, Nordstrom & Warnke (2003, 2005) represent the most recent and most comprehensive effort to measure annually the number of IGOs in the international

[1] Wallace & Singer (1970: 246) do not require bureaucratic autonomy as long as staffing can perform ongoing tasks in ways that distinguish between an organization and an ad hoc conference.

system. They define an IGO as an organization with the following attributes: '(1) is a formal entity;[2] (2) has [three or more] [sovereign][3] states as members, and (3) possesses a permanent secretariat or other indication of institutionalization such as headquarters and/or permanent staff' (Pevehouse, Nordstrom & Warnke, 2005: 9–10).

Defining IGOs

Taken together, the empirical criteria noted above share critical characteristics related to the institutionalization of enduring multilateral relationships: routinized interactions by state members, explicit methods of decision-making within organizations, enduring bureaucratic structures, and evidence of organizational independence from other IGOs. These approaches seek to distinguish between IGOs and other types of cooperative arrangements, such as ad hoc agreements, ongoing but uninstitutionalized meetings between states, sub-units of other IGOs, or institutions controlled not by member states but by other entities (e.g. IGOs or NGOs).

While these authors provide essentially empirical measures, the indicators hint at a broader conceptual view of an IGO. That broader conceptual view is our starting point. We define intergovernmental organizations as *entities created with sufficient organizational structure and autonomy to provide formal, ongoing, multilateral processes of decisionmaking between states, along with the capacity to execute the collective will of their members (states).* This definition highlights both the process of interactions within IGOs and the possibility of collective outcomes from them, even though collective outcomes are contested among realist conceptions of international politics.[4]

Furthermore, formal, ongoing processes of interaction within an organization and collective action require ongoing administration and organization. We concur with Abbott & Snidal (1998: 5) that the two primary functions of formal organizations are a stable organizational structure and some amount of autonomy in a defined sphere. Stability of organizational structure (in terms of routine interactions by states along with an administrative apparatus to ensure both institutionalized interactions and stability of organization) and autonomy are also critical for institutional conceptions of power (Barnett & Duvall, 2005), for assessing both global governance and hegemony.

This conceptual approach suggests that IGOs evidence attributes that (1) institutionalize state decisionmaking and oversight in governance, (2) provide sufficient bureaucratic organization to assure some stability of management, and (3) demonstrate autonomy in organizational operation and in the execution of the collective will of the membership. All the operational definitions above seem to address some of the conditions under which these criteria can be observed. However, each of these criteria represents a continuum and suggests a *threshold*, below which institutionalization may not be in evidence, and for our theoretical concerns, an entity is not classified as an IGO. For instance, it is a rare IGO (perhaps not even the European Union) that exhibits fully autonomous characteristics in the execution of the collective will of the organization. Requiring absolute autonomy in a decentralized international system would, at that end of the continuum, leave virtually no empirical cases of formal organizations. At

[2] Pevehouse and colleagues exclude emanations – those not created by a treaty between states – unless the emanation gains independence from the parent organization.

[3] Pevehouse, Nordstrom & Warnke, 2003 (Codebook: 2).

[4] While the collective will part of an IGO is not its only value (a routinized forum where state leaders interact on a regular basis may yield unique benefits for cooperation, e.g. Bearce & Omori, 2005), it is an important one, allowing for outcomes that may not be achievable by members outside of the organization.

the same time, an IGO that relies completely on its members to carry out voluntarily the collective decisions made by the organization, without a secretariat that at least monitors and reports on the actions of its members, would represent the other end of the autonomy continuum, and it would be more realistic to view a structure of this type as a 'discussion forum' rather than a viable, formal IGO. Somewhere between these two extremes exists some threshold, above which an organization qualifies as an IGO.[5]

Where is that threshold? We turn now to the task of identifying thresholds below which an IGO loses one or more of its three qualifying characteristics.

Thresholds

Membership, Decisionmaking, and Oversight

First, we concur that the threshold for membership is one that consists of an IGO that contains three or more member states, consistent with the multilateral idea associated with IGOs. While it is plausible that an organization containing two members can be of theoretical interest, it falls within the area of bilateral relationships, and virtually all of the literature in the area focuses on multilateral dynamics effecting cooperation between states.

Second, we require that the membership be composed overwhelmingly of states and governed by them without a veto by non-state members.[6] We recognize that some forms of cooperative arrangements have integrated into their deliberations non-state actors, including other IGOs and NGOs, and we have conceptualized IGOs, first and foremost, as mechanisms of cooperation between states. We are reluctant to exclude institutions that may contain non-state actors, but we require that decisionmaking and oversight must reside overwhelmingly among states.

Third, we require that state membership entail representation by individuals or groups acting on behalf of the state, as individuals who are either directly part of the central governmental machinery of a state, or are temporarily (albeit primarily) acting in that capacity. If the individuals who represent their states are not expected to represent the preferences of their policymakers, then the state membership threshold is not reached. This would be the case if an organization's membership is designated for states, but each state appoints a citizen who is acting as an expert rather than in the role of government representative. We believe that this qualification is important: much of the research on the potential effects of IGOs on their members rests on the notion that state representatives have routinized opportunities to interact with each other in the formal setting of organizations, and such interactions may have important potential consequences for conflict reduction, through greater understanding of others' policy positions and better information regarding intentions of policymakers (e.g. Bearce & Omori, 2005; Abbott & Snidal, 1998). These effects are unlikely when countries designate individuals who are not linked to the state's foreign policy apparatus.

Fourth, we require that collective decisionmaking and oversight be routinized: there are clear procedures governing the timing of meetings and decisionmaking, and members meet routinely to make decisions and to exercise oversight over organizational operations.

[5] We are cognizant of the tension between networks of organizations, with their increasing interdependence, versus different degrees of organizational autonomy. See Jonsson (1986) regarding networks and interdependence; an example of research focusing on the issue of IGO independence is provided by Haftel & Thompson (2006). In the future, we will pursue the nature of networks of IGOs and develop more refined measures of variation in independence.

[6] We refer to one of two types of 'vetoes' over state decisions: the first, when decisions are subject to the approval of another organization, and the second, when non-state members are granted a veto in decisionmaking, or have voting privileges when decisional rules require unanimity.

Procedural requirements are typically set out in the charters/constitutions/treaties of organizations and are easy to uncover. There is, however, much variation in the frequency with which organizational plenums are held, and a threshold value establishing a minimum is somewhat arbitrary. Ideally, meetings would occur on an annual basis. Recent efforts seem to have relied on the UIA[7] definition of inactivity: the lack of reported meetings for four or more years.[8] We reluctantly accept the four-year threshold for regular meetings, although most viable organizations appear to hold annual meetings of their members.

Bureaucratic Organization and Autonomy

While conceptually distinct criteria, in practice, the empirical correlates of collective decisionmaking, bureaucratic organization, and autonomy within an IGO may be difficult to separate, especially with respect to the last two dimensions. Viable administration requires professional staffing on a permanent basis; we anticipate the same for the execution of collective decisions, even if such staffing is only for the coordination or reporting on efforts of member states. Furthermore, permanent professional staffing is not feasible without a permanent source of funding.

Autonomy requires that both staffing and funding be relatively immune from control by either a single member state or outside forces (e.g. another IGO). Staffing that is not controlled by members of the organization and may not report primarily to the organization (e.g. the Andean Parliament initially was staffed by Colombia's foreign ministry) does not meet the staffing autonomy threshold. Likewise, if the primary funding for administration is provided by another IGO or overwhelmingly by one state – as is the case with some organizations – then it fails to meet the autonomous resources threshold.

Thus, we require evidence of the following thresholds for an IGO to have sufficient bureaucratic organization and autonomy. First, an IGO must demonstrate the existence of a *permanent headquarters and non-symbolic, professional staffing, independent* of other IGOs and/or one single state. Typically, the issue of a permanent headquarters is relatively unambiguous. Such headquarters may move periodically but is usually required within the charter of an IGO and specified as its address. By non-symbolic staffing, we are referring to an actual group of people who administer the organization. There are a few organizations that indicate a staff of one or two, which we assume to be either symbolic of an administration, or of a minor, clerical function, and does not represent an administration needed for a complex organization. By professional staffing, we are referring to people who administer the organization as their livelihood and are paid to do so (some organizations report a staff of volunteers). By independence of staffing, we are referring to an administration that is paid by, reports only to, and holds as its permanent assignment, the IGO in question. We do not consider an organization to have independent staffing if it is administered by the staff of another organization, the administrative apparatus of one member state, or if the administration shifts annually from one state to another as the presidency of the organization shifts between states (a condition that violates both autonomy and permanence). We have found all these conditions with a number of IGOs.

Finally, we require that a majority of the funding for the ongoing operations of the

[7] The closest source for an official chronicle is the UIA Yearbook, which largely depends on organizations providing information.

[8] UIA classifies organizations as H or U if they are 'inactive', when it fails to detect activity for 'several' years or through 'repeated efforts to trace a body through other bodies in its field of activity' (UIA, 1998, Appendix 1: 1473). A perusal of H organizations indicates that when there has been no annual meeting for at least four years, the IGO earns an H classification.

IGO be *non-symbolic, systematically available, and independent* of any one state or another IGO. Extensive budgetary data are difficult to obtain for many IGOs, especially on an annual basis. Therefore,we settle for a relatively low set of thresholds. By non-symbolic, we require that the available funding is minimally sufficient to support staffing beyond one or two individuals. Funding that is systematically available requires provisions in the charter/constitution of the organization for a routine, recurring method of funding. Finally, independence of funding requires that a majority of the organization's budget is independent of any one member or other IGO(s).

Thus, we identify 11 threshold values as operational criteria for designating an entity as a formal intergovernmental organization (FIGO). The most consistent pattern of differences between our empirical criteria and those of other efforts relates to the nature of staffing and funding within FIGOs.[9] Table I summarizes some essential differences from other databases.

Constructing the Database

We create the FIGO database for three points in time: 1975, 1989, and 2004. These years are of interest to us for ascertaining changes to the web of organizations in the post-Cold War environment (2004), changes that require comparison with the two time periods that represent some mid-point during the Cold War (1975) and one that is directly at the end of the Cold War (1989). The three time points represent relatively equidistant intervals and the 1989–2004 period offers a 15-year time span in the development of post-Cold War institutional formation; 2004 is the most current point for reliable information on FIGOs.

Unlike the COW IGO data, our database is not based on annual observations, since our theoretical questions do not require them. Equally important, however, is our belief (based on a close inspection of the data available on IGOs and state membership) that annual counts of state membership in these organizations may be somewhat unreliable and may violate the notion of independence of observation. Except for very high profile organizations (such as the UN, NATO, the EU, etc.), joining an organization may not be a sufficiently salient event to capture attention, and there is no official chronicle that reliably records such events annually.[10] Thus, while we lose some information using a time frame longer than annual observations, we reduce significantly – although we do not eliminate completely – distortions in recording state membership in FIGOs.[11]

Our compilation of FIGOs, similar to other efforts, starts with the UIA *Yearbook of International Organizations*. We use the online version and supplement it with the hardbound yearbooks as needed. In addition, we check our compilation against both the Jacobson database, *International Governmental Organizations: Membership and Characteristics, 1981 and 1992* (ICPSR 6737), and the Pevehouse and Nordstrom update of the COW IGO database: *Correlates of War 2 International*

[9] Recently, a systematic effort has been made (Boehmer, Gartzke & Nordstrom, 2004; Gartzke et al., 2005; Ingram, Robinson & Busch, 2005) to differentiate COW IGOs, based on the level of institutionalization. However, two of the three categories ('minimalist' and 'structured') still appear to include organizations that fail to meet one or more of our threshold criteria for inclusion.

[10] UIA officials indicate a considerable lag between a state joining and the organization informing UIA.

[11] We recognize the trade-off between more reliability in observing state membership versus the problem of a limited number of observations over time. That the reliability problem exists seems clear, even when the annual observations of the COW IGO database are compared with other datasets focusing on variables that are unlikely to change quickly over time (Volgy et al., 2006). For scholars wishing to explore FIGOs using annual observations, we have recast COW IGO, dividing the population between FIGOs and NFIGOs. The database is available from the authors at volgy@email.arizona.edu.

Table I. Comparison of Threshold Requirements for FIGO Classification versus Other Collections Enumerating IGOs

Criterion	*FIGO Data*	*UIA Yearbook*	*Wallace & Singer*	*Jacobson*	*COW IGO data*
Membership:					
Number of states	Three or more	Three for A-D organizations	Two	Three generally[a]	Three
Mix	Predominantly by states; no veto on collective decision by non-state members	Unclear for A-D orgs.; no for others	Assumed	UIA criteria	Primarily states
Representation	Representing central government or its sub-units	No	No	UIA criteria	States or their appointments
Rules of governance	Specified in charter	Same	Same	Same	Same
Meetings	Routinized and meeting at regular intervals and at least every four years	Recently four years for H/U classification[b]	Every ten years	UIA criteria	Variable[c]
HQ/Secretariat:					
HQ/Secretariat	Permanent	Same	Same	Same	Same
Staffing presence	Non-symbolic (more than two); paid by IGO	No	No	No	No
Staffing independence	Independent of any IGO or any single state	No	Can be provided by another IGO but not be identical to that IGO's staffing	UIA criteria	No
Budget:					
Amount	Sufficient to cover mini-mal staffing and operation	No	No	No	No
Funding mechanism	Routinely identified; regularly available	No	No[d]	No	No
Source	Majority funding not controlled by another IGO or one state.	No	No	No	No
Sources of information	Varied, including UIA; COW/IGO; Shanks et al. database; direct contact with IGOs and their websites; news reports and original documents	Primarily self-reporting by organizations	UIA Yearbook; other sources[e]	UIA Yearbook	Primarily UIA Yearbook

[a] Shanks, Jacobson & Kaplan (1996: 597) include UIA type G organizations that have bilateral membership.
[b] UIA (2000: 1463–1464); Beckfield (2003: 405).
[c] Since 1965 it is checked annually, especially for organizations that are 'alive'. We assume that this process reflects the UIA effort which now scrutinizes frequently and uses a threshold around four years of inactivity (correspondence with UIA staff).
[d] Although regular funding may be used to assess the existence of staffing if information on staffing is not clear.
[e] Including 'UN sources; the many national listings; the scholarly compilations; and monographs; and the records of many of the organizations themselves' (Wallace & Singer, 1970: 249).

Governmental Organizations Data Set, Version 2.1. We supplement these sources with additional sources when information is insufficient: reading the websites of IGOs;[12] corresponding with the headquarters and/or executive committees of IGOs; reading the treaties and/or charters of the organizations; querying *Europa World Plus* online edition; and searching news sources and scholarly materials on regions[13] for additional information.

We include, in the database, organizations meeting all of our threshold criteria and code for a variety of organizational characteristics, including organizational birth year (and death), primary organizational mandate, the geopolitical scope of the organization (i.e. global, interregional, regional, or subregional), and state membership. Two sets of files are generated. One set contains information on FIGOs. The second set contains state membership data for each FIGO.

Data on state membership are aggregated so that they yield two types of measures for each state. One is a traditional frequency count (NUMBER), which can be further disaggregated into frequency of membership in global (GIGOs), interregional (IRGOs), regional (RGOs), and subregional organizations (SRGOs; for descriptive purposes we aggregate SRGOs and RGOs as regional organizations). In addition, we create an 'opportunity' code, which specifies whether or not a state is able to join an organization. For example, a Latin American state cannot join a variety of African FIGOs. If there are many more FIGOs in Africa than Latin America, a frequency count of FIGO membership does not provide a good comparison of the willingness by Latin American and African states to join the range of FIGOs they are eligible to join. Thus, we create a second measure for each state where the numerator is the number of organizations joined and the denominator is the number of FIGOs it is able to join (WILLING). Researchers may wish to use the frequency measure when analyzing the impact of membership on states; the WILLING measure may be more useful for assessing why states join FIGOs.

The FIGO database yields 265 IGOs[14] that are alive in 2004. Several patterns are worth noting regarding our concerns about new institutional world order construction, great-power contestation, and state membership. First, the dominant mode for FIGOs is a combination of regional[15] and subregional organizations (accounting for nearly half of all FIGOs), consistent with earlier findings (Shanks, Jacobson & Kaplan, 1996); global FIGOs constitute approximately 26% of the overall FIGO population. At the same time, there is considerable variation in the number of FIGOs within regions (Figure 1). Africa and Europe – the poorest and richest regions – contain the largest number of FIGOs. By contrast, Asia has very few regional organizations. This is a region where the USA has worked to substitute bilateral mechanisms of coordination and cooperation, in lieu of multilateral arrangements from which it may be excluded or which it may not be able to control (Rapkin, 2001; Goh, 2004), and where there has been a culture of informal arrangements between state and non-state actors (Katzenstein, 2005),

Second, a decade and a half after the end of the Cold War, nearly two-thirds of all FIGOs are institutions that were created during the 1945–89 period. The number of

[12] From this point forward, IGOs refer to the generic classification of intergovernmental organizations, while FIGOs refer to formal intergovernmental organizations.

[13] Including, for example, Buzan & Waever (2004); Grant & Soderbaum (2003); Katzenstein (2005); Pempel (2005); Solingen (1998, 2005).

[14] We continue to update and revise the data as new information becomes available. Consequently, the numbers we report here and below may change slightly.

[15] For definitions of regions, subregions, and interregions, see Volgy et al. (2006).

FIGOs created during the 1970s alone accounts for approximately one-quarter of all FIGOs still alive in 2004, a number larger than all the FIGOs created since the end of the Cold War.

Third, classifying FIGOs by their primary original mandate indicates that approximately two-thirds of the organizations alive in 2004 have an economic mandate as their primary mission. Considerable variation exists, however, depending on when the organizations were created: 72% created prior to 1990 and surviving through 2004 have an economic mandate, compared with less than 50% of those created after the Cold War. Whether or not this is due to the higher survivability rate of economic FIGOs, or due to other factors, is not readily observable from the data.

Fourth, factoring in 'opportunity' to join FIGOs should make a difference in assessing state membership. The average number of organizations joined by any one of the leading EU states (Germany, France, and the UK) is substantially higher than the membership rate of other major powers (Figure 2). This differential in membership is due, in part, to the opportunities for European states to join a large constellation of regional FIGOs; Japan and China are 'penalized' by the virtual absence of a major network of regional FIGOs in Asia. At the same time, the differential between Japan and China indicates additional forces at work, beyond simple opportunity to join available FIGOs.

An additional example may indicate further the differences between a simple count of memberships versus a measure based

Figure 1. FIGO Population, by Region, 2004

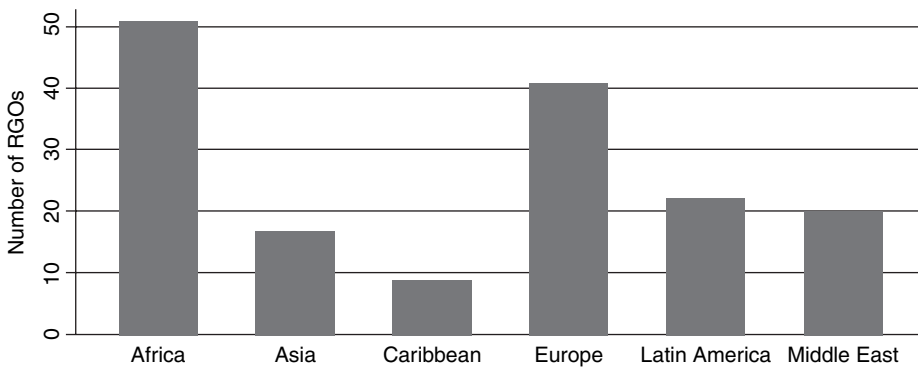
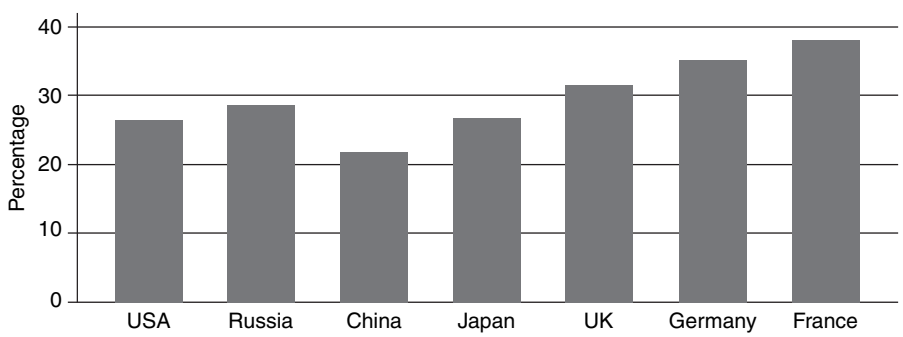


Figure 2. Major Powers FIGO Membership (as percent of all FIGOs), 2004



on 'opportunity' to join. Sudan (N = 64) actually has more memberships in FIGOs than does Australia (N = 63). However, once we factor in the opportunity to join certain organizations, it appears that Sudan's joining rate is actually 15% below that of Australia, due in part to the much larger constellation of regional FIGOs in Africa compared with Oceania. Unsurprisingly, but masked by a simple frequency count, Australia's membership rate in global organizations (78%) significantly surpasses Sudan's membership rate (54%).

Comparing FIGO with COW IGO

In order to gauge the effects of our threshold criteria on the population of IGOs, we compare the FIGO population with the COW IGO series. We do so for a number of reasons. Most important, the COW IGO effort is the current benchmark for IGOs, representing a careful process of data collection (meeting scientific standards for validity and reliability) and most current assessment (up through 2000) of the IGO population. A second reason is its wide utilization (see Volgy et al., 2006, for a sampling of literature) in quantitative analyses.

We compare the FIGO data with the COW IGO series in two ways: first, we update the number of COW IGOs formed between 2000 and 2004, in order to be able to make comparisons at the aggregate level between the two datasets for the years 1975, 1989, and 2004. Second, we compare state membership between the two datasets, using the existing COW IGO data and eliminating from FIGO the last four years uncovered in COW IGO.

Our coding rules create what amounts to a database that is *theoretically*[16] a subset of COW IGO. Therefore, we do not expect the two populations of IGOs to be identical, noting the warnings from Wallace & Singer (1970) and Jacobson, Reisinger & Mathers (1986) that populations will differ, depending on IGO definition. Nor do we imply any criticism of the COW IGO collection: the purpose of the comparison is to ascertain whether or not there are significant differences in IGO populations and state memberships when our thresholds are used to identify FIGOs. Without such differences, it would be a more cost-effective strategy to update COW IGO rather than construct another database.[17]

The COW IGO database contains 340 IGOs classified as 'live' for the year 2004. Of these, 105 organizations (30.9%) fail to meet one or more (Table II) of our criteria.[18] Clearly, the dominant reason for exclusion occurs as a result of issues related to autonomy and/or the bureaucratic organization capabilities of these IGOs, although 29 cases also violate some provisions related to collective decisionmaking and oversight by states.

Can we note significant differences as a result of these exclusions? Comparing the two sets of data yields substantial differences regarding both the population of IGOs and state membership in them. First, and at the macro level, the two populations are substantially different in size, in rates of growth over time, especially during the post-Cold War era. For example, the FIGO population in all time periods is substantially smaller (e.g. 28% smaller in 2004) than the COW IGO population. There are also significant differences between the two databases regarding rates of growth (Table III). While both populations show vigorous growth in the 1975–89 period,

[16] Albeit the FIGO database is not an empirical subset of COWIGO: having identified FIGOs using a broad variety and contemporary sources, we have added organizations that COW IGO does not contain.

[17] Klein, Goertz & Diehl (2006: 346) note that databases should be able to serve a variety of theoretical purposes, although it may be dangerous to use an existing database if it is unsuited for the theoretical questions being raised.

[18] See Volgy et al. (2006) for aggregate characteristics of COW IGO units that are excluded.

Table II. COW IGOs Not Meeting FIGO Threshold Requirements

Criteria	*Number of COW IGOs Not Meeting Criterion in 2004*
Three or more states and predominantly states as members	8
Member states meet on a regular basis and oversee operations of IGO, overall supervision is not by another IGO	21†
Staffing is permanent/non-symbolic/and independent of other IGOs or any single state	49
Funding is routinized/non-symbolic/and independent of any other IGO or any single state	42
Absolutely no evidence appears to be available to indicate staffing and/or funding; there is no web page or response from the organization	8

† Eight of these organizations have been declared dead or inactive by either UIA or by our criterion of inactivity/absence of meetings at least every four years.

Table III. Comparison of Changes in Numbers of FIGOs and COW IGOs, 1975–2004 (as percentage change)

Year	*FIGO*	*COW IGO*
1975–89	+26.4	+25.0
1989–2004	− 2.9	+ 6.1
1975–2004	+23.6	+32.5

the net growth rate for FIGOs in the post-Cold War era is negative (reversing a long-term trend toward increased organizational development).[19] The cumulative effect of these differences demonstrates a more modest net growth of FIGOs than COW IGO growth over a quarter of a century.

Second, the frequency of state memberships differs between the two databases: US membership in the FIGO web is roughly 20% smaller than in COW IGO; China's is approximately 18% smaller; for the three major states of the EU (combined) – the UK, Germany, and France – it is 13% smaller. As these differences suggest, the effects of differential IGO selection on membership frequency is not uniform across states, a point illustrated by considering that membership is nearly identical for Russia across the two sets of data and only minimally different for Japan. Apparently, a stricter definition of IGOs, requiring more states, may alter the enumeration of state membership in the web of intergovernmental organizations.

Do these differences matter? We believe they do, at both the macro and micro levels of analysis. With respect to the distinction between FIGOs, IGOs, and the Kantian peace, replicating Russett, Oneal & Davis (1998), we find that generic IGO membership underestimates the importance of membership

[19] Our findings parallel analyses on the creation of alliance treaties: although typically bilateral, the proportion of bilateral alliances since 1989, compared to multilateral ones, far exceeds the norm, indicating a diminution of formal multilateral agreements between states, along with a substantial decrease in alliance agreements requiring a permanent bureaucratic structure (Leeds & Anac, 2005).

effects on conflict, with FIGOs demonstrating a stronger effect. The IGO variable yields a positive and significant effect when both measures are included in the same model (Volgy et al., 2006). The reversal in directionality of the IGO variable may be indicative of the aggregation of two distinct populations of organizations, with FIGOs reducing the likelihood of interstate dispute, while non-FIGOs possibly increase it. Future research will investigate further the dynamics underlying these relationships (Volgy et al., 2008).

Likewise, we are finding that creating a simple count measure for a state's participation in IGOs, compared with our measure of WILLING, for predicting the propensity to join IGOs, distorts complex relationships underlying differences across states. A simple count of membership for Latin American and African states over time indicates a primary prediction based on minimum economic capabilities. Using WILLING (to control for opportunity to join) as the dependent variable reveals substantial interregional and polity-based differences, and differences between the dynamics driving membership in global versus regional organizations (Volgy et al., 2006).

At the macro level, we will demonstrate, in our forthcoming research, that a focus on IGOs substantially overestimates the ability of major powers to restructure the institutional dimension of the new world order (Volgy et al., 2008). Focusing on FIGOs and constellations of organizations created since 1989 indicates a substantial diminution in the capacity and/or willingness of global states to fashion new organizations to meet the challenges of the post-Cold War international system.

Conclusion

We conceptualized a FIGO as constituting three dimensions: (1) institutionalization of state decisionmaking and oversight in governance, (2) bureaucratic organization allowing for stability of management, and (3) evidence of autonomy in organization and in the execution of collective decisions. Based on these dimensions, we identified 11 threshold criteria with which to mark an organization as being a FIGO. Comparing the resulting database with the COW IGO database, we found, as expected, significant differences in the size of the IGO population, changes in the growth of IGOs over time, and differences in state membership in the constellation of IGOs in international affairs.

It is important to note that data on all IGOs are both more 'squishy' and 'dynamic' than they appear on the surface. By 'squishy', we mean that the disparate sources needed to trace their activities and membership make changes difficult to pinpoint. For example, while we are able to ascertain procedural requirements for organizational funding and can trace some amount of funding being spent, we are loath to estimate the exact size of FIGO budgets and the extent to which those budgets are resupplied annually. This is not a problem for many organizations, but it is probably so for a substantial number of them. A similar problem occurs with data on state membership, which is relatively accessible for organizations operating currently. But, when such membership changed over time, there are more formidable problems in pinpointing the exact year of the change.[20] This issue is especially problematic for research based on annual observations of state membership in IGOs.

There is also the issue of 'dynamism': organizations may acquire additional attributes (or lose some) over time, either lifting them across the minimum threshold to qualify as a FIGO, or drop them below the threshold. Detecting the precise time when such changes occur is difficult through self-reporting, especially in the case of lost

[20] This is especially for organizations that are no longer functioning.

attributes.[21] Just as important, institutional design characteristics may change over time,[22] and some of these structural changes may not be reported for several years. Again, research based on annual observations may be more susceptible to this problem.

Researchers working in this field may gain more valid observations through aggregating observations over periods larger than one year. This is the strategy we adopt by sampling three time frames – 15 years apart – with the hope that we are able to minimize errors we would likely generate utilizing annual observations.

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[21] The UIA indicates that organizations often 'overstate' their importance.

[22] Haftel & Thompson (2006) demonstrate a strong relationship between an RTA's longevity and certain institutional characteristics (related to its independence), suggesting that enduring institutions may change their design features over time.

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