

International Organizations and their Offspring

Tana Johnson (2014)

Organizational Progeny: Why Governments are Losing Control over the Proliferating Structures of Global Governance, Cambridge University Press, Oxford, UK, 304 pages, \$39.99, ISBN: 978-0198717799.

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Are states losing control to IOs? A review of *Organizational Progeny*

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This is a sophisticated multi-method study that seeks to chart the influence of international bureaucrats. Johnson starts with the realization that most new international organizations are created as offspring of existing ones. Those organizations seek to shape the landscape of new creations to their advantage and insulate them from state influence in terms of voting, funding and oversight.

Johnson seeks to understand variation in insulation. She argues that inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) are more capable of shaping the creation of new IGOs under two conditions: (i) when they themselves are moderately insulated from state interference, and (ii) when they have access to allies in other IGOs, NGOs, states and other organizations. She qualifies her argument, suggesting that if the intended organization covers an issue of 'high salience' to states (namely security issues) then she would not expect the new organization to enjoy much insulation from state influence. In

addition, she suggests that when the new organization is being negotiated by a highly capable group of states, then they might not turn to existing IGOs whose expertise is normally needed in the creation of new organizations.

To assess her theory, Johnson first does a random draw of 180 organizations from a wider list of IGOs and assesses whether they were created by states alone or in concert with international bureaucrats. She finds that between 55 and 80 per cent of organizations created since the 1950s were created with the involvement of other IGOs. She then develops an econometric model to test her specific predictions, that IGOs created by other IGOs ought to show more insulation from state influence, as operationalized in the degree of financial domination by states, the frequency of oversight meetings, whether states possess veto power, and the extent to which states monopolize representation in the IGO.

Here, Johnson is exhaustive in her analysis including bivariate relationships, ordered probit models, negative binomial models, propensity score matching, as well as an exploration of potential alternative explanations, including whether the nature of the issue covered an area of high politics and if the issue was a technical one that demanded specific IGO expertise. While the book reports the statistical tests, Johnson presents the material with some simple tables that should be accessible to non-expert readers. She also painstakingly walks the reader through different pieces of her argument accompanied by diagrams to remind the reader where they are in the theoretical narrative. Finally, Johnson also makes good use of Clarify software to translate coefficients into substantive significance. For example, she finds that if international bureaucrats designed an IGO with limited to no input from states, then the likelihood states will carry out oversight meetings once or more per year declines by 46 percentage points.

Beyond the economic analysis, she does a deeper dive in detailed case studies of a number of organizations, namely the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) with slightly shorter treatments of the World Food Program, the United Nations Development Program (me), UNAIDS, the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Financial Action Task Force.

I found the argument on some level to be too narrow and too broad. In terms of narrow, I think one could find examples of security organizations where IGOs have had a hand in their creation. While the aggregate findings may be true, that IGOs are less likely to provide much of a role for international bureaucrats if they are related to international security, there may be organizations in the security space where existing IGOs played a role in issue creation and IGO formation. For example, it seems reasonable that some IGOs had a hand in recent IGOs and intergovernmental agreements such as the International Criminal Court and the Landmines Ban because NGOs are known to have had considerable influence over those processes as documented by scholars such as Richard Price, Ken Rutherford, Nicole Deitelhoff, Caroline Fehl, among others. Indeed, non-governmental organizations have been some of the important boosters of disarmament and arms control processes.

NGOs in their independence and freedom to pursue advocacy may have more scope than IGOs for influencing (or at least openly seeking to influence) security-oriented processes, but IGOs may have more quiet behind the scenes influence on some organization creation processes even in the security space. By ceding the realm of high politics to states, Johnson risks giving too much ground to other theoretical approaches. For example, the United Nations (UN) has a mixed record when it comes to peacekeeping and conflict resolution, often hamstrung both by its own caution and donor meddling and in-fighting. On some level, each UN peacekeeping mission can be thought of as

a new institutional creation, with opportunities for state intervention and UN and IGO influence over the mandate. Some of these missions are more salient than others to state intervention, and one probably observes more UN influence (and possibly success) in peacekeeping episodes where states let the UN do its job. While Johnson tests the limits of her argument in the security space by examining the role of IGO's in the creation of the IEA, she could push the point further with a more direct test of variation of IGO influence among security-oriented organizations.

That said, in other ways, the book's claims are also too broad. The book's subtitle implies that states are 'losing control' to international bureaucrat influence. I find this unpersuasive, perhaps a title the press advocated to make the book more appealing to a non-academic audience. While complexity and interdependence in the world may make some problems difficult to govern, states possess the capabilities and resources to override international bureaucrats if they feel so inclined by starving organizations of resources, by forum-shopping or by intervening to clean house at organizations through personnel and rules changes. In some areas that are putatively low politics, there are examples of state influence, suggesting that states periodically may find other issues to be of sufficient salience to warrant more oversight and interference.

For example, Chapter 5 focuses on the IPCC, a scientific organization mostly known for its periodic reports evaluating the science of climate change, with three working group covering the physical science, impacts and mitigation, respectively. Johnson writes that the IPCC proved to be no 'pushover' to the influence of powerful states such as the United States. The IPCC, she argues, was ultimately partially insulated from state interference because of influence bureaucrats from the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organization. For example, the synthesis for policymakers (that accompanies the overall report and each working group report) is evaluated line-by-line by state delegates. However, states do not have the same say over the longer reports prepared by scientists.

While all of this is true about the IPCC, the key decision-making body for action on climate change is the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The secretariat, located in Bonn, is responsible for organizing the annual conference of the parties (COPs) during which state delegations meet to decide what actions are necessary to deal with the problem. In their book on the comparative politics of international environmental bureaucracies, editors Frank Biermann and Bernd Siebenhüner find that the UNFCCC has the least agency of any of the nine bureaucracies they explore, what they call a 'straightjacket'. Climate change is sufficiently salient and politically contested that state interest in the issue and control over the agenda are high, limiting the scope for independent action by the

UNFCCC. Throughout much of the 2000s, powerful states like the United States and China remained opposed to international action on climate change. As a consequence, the meetings of the COPs took on a dull formalism, what Joanne Depledge called ‘ossification’. It was not until 2009 that the climate architecture would undergo a sea change at Copenhagen when states, led by US President Barack Obama, would negotiate a new bottom-up architecture of state commitments to action to replace the politically intractable targets and timetables treaty-based approach.

It could be that Johnson’s argument is limited to the early stages of IGO creation and agenda setting, but her claims about insulation and influence suggest a certain path-dependency of influence that endures beyond the formative years. I would have liked to see the climate discussion grapple explicitly with the difference between the IPCC, which as an advisory scientific body enjoys some if not complete insulation from state influence, and the UNFCCC, which as a convener of decision making, is severely circumscribed in its discretion and agency.

Similarly, in the health space, the book covers the important work of UNAIDS, a joint program of eleven United Nations agencies that emerged out of a previous office at the World Health Organization (WHO) that suffered from neglect by WHO leadership and ultimately was unable to coordinate the disparate AIDS-related enterprises of the UN. While states were active in the creation of UNAIDS (many IGOs did not like the idea of a joint program of coordination forced upon them), Johnson argues persuasively that IGO personnel (and WHO in particular) were able to actively shape the form that UNAIDS took, namely by incorporating AIDS activists as participants (if not full voting members) in the board structure that would help insulate decisions from being imposed by states on UNAIDS.

I am persuaded by this story of UNAIDS but the AIDS discussion on some level ends too soon for me. UNAIDS was created in 1996 as the main advocacy organization for

coordinated UN messaging on AIDS, creating momentum by states and in the international arena broadly to do more about AIDS. However, the main financing organization, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, was not created until 2002. The Global Fund has channeled billions of dollars of finance to combat the AIDS crisis.

As UNAIDS’ Peter Piot argued in his memoir, international bureaucrats, namely himself and the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, were active in the creation of the Global Fund. The Global Fund has an even more robust board structure for civil society, private sector and developing country participation. However, states are the leading donors to that body, and they periodically have exercised leverage and oversight over the organization. When self-audits yielded reports of modest diversion of funds by recipients in 2011, the Global Fund went through a crisis, with the Board, led by pressure from the United States, foisting on the Executive Director Michel Kazatchine the creation of a new position of general manager in 2012 to oversee the administration of the fund. Kazatchine resigned in response, paving the way for Marc Dybul, former administrator of the US bilateral AIDS program PEPFAR, to become the Executive Director in 2013 and rescue the Global Fund’s confidence among major donors.

While the UNFCCC and Global Fund are but two examples, they both represent ostensibly ‘low politics’ issues that temporally became salient enough for states to intervene. They also represent venues with far more at stake in terms of decision making or resources than the examples in Johnson’s book, suggesting finer distinctions may be necessary than the salience of security as ‘high politics’ and other ‘low politics’ issues.

These quibbles aside, I found the meticulous research in Johnson’s book to be a model of multi-method, ambitious research, and I know her book will offer students of international organizations much insight for years to come.

Organizational Progeny: Whence and Whither?

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International relations has traditionally been conceived of as the study of how states conduct their affairs with each other. Tana Johnson’s important new book, *Organizational Progeny*, shows that this traditional view, and even the title of ‘international’ relations, is somewhat of a misnomer. Not only are many important transnational and international interactions conducted by non-

governmental organizations, but the states that make up intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have much less control over the day-to-day workings of these organizations than the conventional view of IGOs would suggest. Indeed, as Johnson’s original data shows, the great majority of new IGOs are created by other IGOs. Yet, as the very name ‘inter-governmental’ suggests, the