



Small States and the 'Throughput' Legitimacy of International Organisations

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Abstract

The unequal participation of member states in IOs is said to undermine IOs’ legitimacy as global actors. Existing scholarship typically makes this assessment by reference to a combination of input – the interests IOs serve – and output – the decisions they take – factors. Not enough attention is paid to how IOs have responded to these concerns. We argue that IOs have used the participation of small states, a membership typically ignored by most studies, as an important means of generating what Vivian Schmidt calls ‘throughput’ legitimacy for their operations. We organize our analysis of ‘throughput’ legitimacy in IOs around four institutional mechanisms – 1. agenda setting; 2. leadership (s)election; 3. management and operation; and 4. service delivery – in which all states seek to exert an influence. What emerges is an account of IOs seeking to balance ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ by way of ‘throughputs’. We conclude by arguing for an expanded focus on the means by which IOs generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy in future research.

Keywords: international organizations, throughput legitimacy, new institutionalism, small states; small island developing states

1. Introduction

The great advantages of universal multilateralism are inclusiveness and legitimacy. Those advantages are costly in terms of process... So there is a balance to be achieved between process expense and efficiency, with inclusiveness, legitimacy and effectiveness, the consequences of choice. Democracy is not necessarily adopted for its efficiency. The risk of exclusion is related to the risk of unequal strength. Arguably the weakest are most protected in the multilateral world (Director General of WIPO, Francis Gurry 2013).

The legitimacy of international organisations (IOs) is said to be derived from a combination of inputs and outputs (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Tallberg and Zürn 2017). ‘Input’ legitimacy stems from the principle of sovereign equality: the idea that IOs are responsive to all members, regardless of size. ‘Output’ legitimacy is a product of what IOs do and how these actions benefit their members. The complicating factor is that while the nature of participation has changed, IOs still operate with yesterday’s formal structures and rules. This results in a cycle in which the problems of IOs are blamed on unequal participation (inputs). But more participation exacerbates ineffectiveness (outputs). Despite considerable changes to the IO system in recent decades, unequal participation sharpens questions about their legitimacy (e.g. Dahl 1999; Goodhart 2007; Goodhart and Taninchev, 2011; Kuyper 2014).

A key reason for this characterisation of IOs, we posit, is that too little attention is paid to how they seek to generate what Schmidt (2013) calls ‘throughput’ legitimacy

via their decision-making processes. We highlight how IOs have used the participation of small states, a membership typically ignored by most studies, as an important means of generating ‘throughput’ legitimacy for their operations. Our analysis revolves around four institutional mechanisms – 1. agenda setting; 2. leadership (s)election; 3. management and operation; and 4. service delivery. What emerges is an account of IOs seeking to balance ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ by way of ‘throughputs’.

To substantiate this argument we first delve into the literature on the legitimacy of IOs. We contrast the old power arguments with studies that show how IOs have changed in recent decades as a result of the active participation of more and more actors. Second, we discuss the contribution of Schmidt’s (2013) conceptualisation of ‘throughput’ legitimacy and the unique perspective it offers. Third, we outline the empirical material that we draw upon to substantiate this claim. Fourth, we illustrate how IOs have used the participation of small states to generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy for their operations. We conclude by returning to the theoretical implications of this approach for understanding the role of sovereign equality in IOs and argue for an expanded focus on the means by which IOs generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy .

2. Input and Output Legitimacy in IOs

The legitimacy of IOs has gained increased scholarly attention in recent years (Zaum 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Tallberg and Zürn 2017; Lenz and Viola 2017). Specifically, scholars have sought to identify the

mechanisms that legitimate or deligitimate IOs as supernational actors, and the means by which they can, as strategic players, generate legitimacy among different communities—e.g. member states, other IOs and INGOs and the public at large—while remaining bound to the centuries-old principle that sovereign states are the fundamental units of the international system. The importance of this research agenda is articulated by Buchanan and Keohane's (2006: 407) argument that: 'The perception of legitimacy matters because, in a democratic era, multilateral institutions will only thrive if they are viewed legitimate by democratic publics' (cf. Tallberg and Zürn 2017).

One method by which IOs have sought to generate greater 'input' legitimacy is by taking the principle of sovereign equality – one state, one vote – seriously. New states sought recognition from the recently created United Nations as a means of affirming their sovereign status (e.g. Vital 1967, 1971; Reid 1974). But the common consensus for much of the 20th Century was that a 'club model' of decision making prevailed nonetheless (Keohane and Nye 2001). In this view, IOs were created by the initiatives of a few large and rich states that negotiated the rules of the game (see classically Waltz 1979). The majority of members were either non- or passive participants (e.g. Drezner 2008). The image is best captured by the way scholars traditionally conceptualised the role of small states in IOs: they participated only when 'America's crusading spirit presented small allies with bargaining influence' (Keohane 1971:163) or when large states allowed them 'to act collectively to help shape developing international attitudes, dogmas, and codes of proper behaviour' (Keohane 1969:297).

This is no longer true (Chong and Maass 2010). A decade ago Keohane and Nye concluded that the old club model where a small number of rich countries controlled the agenda had been undercut by ‘greater participation’ of a diverse number of states and ‘their increased assertiveness’ (Keohane and Nye 2001:269, 271; see also Lyne et al 2009). This shift is said to have been caused by the proliferation of membership of IOs (Lake and O’Mahony 2004; Mansfield and Pebehouse 2006; VanGrasstek 2013; Tallberg et al 2013), the impact of emerging powers, demands for ‘democratic norms being applied to international institutions’ (Keohane and Nye 2001:281), the willingness of IOs to help their smaller members build their multilateral capacities (IMF 2013), increasing representation at IOs (e.g. more than doubled between 1995-2010 at the WTO, Laker 2014), and some small states’ determination to ‘to play an effective role’ in IOs (Cooper and Shaw 2013:11). Together these developments have changed the IOs’ world. This renewed emphasis on increasing the ‘input’ legitimacy of IOs via increased responsiveness has, in turn, seen the world’s smaller states, individually or collectively, assuming a more prominent role (Baldacchino 2009:29).

To be clear, we do not contend that all states, and especially the smallest and poorest, have the same influence or even the same interests in IOs. Nor do we overlook the fact that the participation of the small states is often influenced by powerful patrons (Veenendaal 2014) with whom they seek ‘shelter’ (Thorhallsson 2011; 2013; Panke 2017) and other functional benefits derived from conformity to institutionalised global norms (Sharman 2015). Rather, a combination of factors point to a change in their participation (Sharman 2017): 1) IOs themselves have encouraged and assisted participation of smaller and poorer members through training and technical assistance programs (World Bank 2000, IMF 2013); 2) large or/and rich states have consciously

assisted the smallest states in developing their capacity at IOs, via bilateral or multilateral initiatives, such as the Commonwealth offices in Geneva; 3) a growing number of states have made conscious decisions to be active in IOs, committing more resources (Cooper and Shaw 2010) while others participate through regional or other types of groupings, to aggregate their numbers and thus their influence; and 4) the expanded IO agenda, especially on various aspects of development, offer more opportunities for all states to participate (Bexell et al 2010; Kleine 2013).

This attempt to resolve the participation problem in IOs by increasing their legitimacy by way of ‘inputs’ has, however, generated considerable questions about ‘outputs’. One consequence of the increasing participation of more and more members is that IO operations have become more complicated (Porter et al 2001), bringing renewed focus on gridlocks (Goldin 2013:3) and the collapse of multilateral negotiations (Vlcek 2008; see also Clift 2014; Harbinson 2015). Concern that increased participation would complicate decision making is not new – for some the smallest members in particular have always been ‘irritants’ (Lewis 2013:vii) – but it has been heightened, in part because despite the rules and procedures enshrining equality, it is increasingly clear that not all states have the capacity to participate on all issues all of the time (Wallis 2010; Bishop 2012; Corbett and Connell 2015).

The upshot is that IOs appear to be trapped in a perpetual cycle in which they win themselves input legitimacy via the active participation of more states while perceptions of ineffectiveness and an inability to satisfy all members means they lose output legitimacy (Dellmuth and Tallberg. 2015). All IOs face this dilemma to varying degrees. As the above quote by WIPO Director General Francis Gurry

illustrates, IOs themselves are increasingly aware of the need to grapple with this dilemma. They cannot solve the problem by returning to the old ‘club model’. Reforming yesterday’s formal rules and institutions is too difficult given the interests involved. Instead, much innovation consists of attempting to change the informal practices and processes by which IOs make decisions. We contend that balancing ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’ by way of ‘throughputs’ has become the new pathology of IOs, which in turn has significant theoretical and empirical implications.

3. The Throughput Legitimacy of IOs

The term ‘throughput’ legitimacy is often associated with the work of Vivian Schmidt (2013) and has been especially prominent in analysis of the European Union (e.g. Boswell and Iusmen 2016). Schmidt (2013: 3) uses the term ‘throughput’ to describe decision-making conducted *with*, rather than *for* (output) and *by* (input), *citizens*. Likewise, Uhlin’s (2010) work on the democratic legitimacy of transnational actors distinguishes between *input* legitimacy, defined as the relationship between the actor and its constituencies, *throughput* legitimacy, defined as the procedures for decision-making, and *output* legitimacy, defined as the consequences of decisions. Obviously, small states, as members of IOs, are not directly equivalent to the citizens in Schmidt’s conceptualisation or Uhlin’s transnational actors. But long-standing assumptions about their structural disadvantages in the international system mean they face similar challenges of unequal knowledge, access, and influence. Indeed the common view is that despite their membership small states have no influence on IOs and in this sense their participation (or lack thereof) cannot be explained away by reference to inputs. We therefore adapt and extend the essence of Schmidt and

Uhlin's definitions to the study of member state participation in IOs. Where the latter in particular sees throughput legitimacy as characterised by transparency, accountability, participation and deliberation, we focus primarily on participation in institutional processes to empirically demonstrate the way IOs, as strategic actors (Gronau and Schmidtke 2016), seek to generate throughput legitimacy via the inclusion of small states. Our rationale is that all four characteristics may be important from the standpoint of some transnational actors, like NGOs, but they are not all relevant to member states, large or small.

What the term 'throughput' does is bring our attention to the processes by which decisions are made in institutional contexts. It draws on the idea of 'feedback' articulated in Easton's (1965) seminal systems theory and turns on a version of Beetham's (1991) dual meaning of legitimacy: it is something that actors *believe* in and *express*. It has normative aspirations – Schmidt (2013: 6) sees a need for administrative systems to shore up 'the quality of the governance processes as established by their efficacy, accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and openness to interest intermediation' – but, we argue, it also has important empirical purchase as it invites us to open up the 'black box' of daily interactions between players in IOs.

Paying greater attention to processes of decision-making and consultation in IOs is especially significant given how much IOs have changed in recent years. IOs may be seen as being 'captured by out-of-date mandates and governed by divided nations' (Goldin 2013:160), but they remain important forums where cross-border issues are discussed, global problems are managed and interests of states can be protected and promoted (Abbott and Snidal 1998). Further, great powers, despite their frustrations,

remain members and pay substantially to do so; they have not taken the ‘exit’ option. We argue that the ‘throughput’ legitimacy concept helps us uncover both the aims and consequences of these shifts.

A focus on ‘throughput’ legitimacy differs from much of the extant literature on IOs. The growing interest in the roles of IO secretariats as bureaucracies among constructivist scholars (eg Barnett and Finnemore 2004; RIO articles) questions whether the tendency of secretariats to pursue their own interests means that dysfunctional behaviour will thwart the best intentions of their member states. At the least this literature illustrates that IOs are made up of more than just competing member states, and great powers in particular; other actors, such as secretariats and NGOs, also shape outcomes. Studies, nonetheless do not focus on small states. We contend that their participation is also key to generating ‘throughput’ legitimacy for the mandate and practices of IOs.

We posit that a focus on ‘throughput’ requires a different set of perspectives than conventionally used by international relations scholars. We need to explore the dynamics of institutions (e.g. Wildavsky 1978; Kingdon 1984). In these studies, decisions spring from the interplay between the actors who, some temporarily, some for longer periods, have access to strategic levers of influence, whether formal authority, information, communal memory or expertise. Institutionalised processes create networks of ambitions, enmities and disappointments. At different times temporary coalitions seek to dictate what the IOs should. The point is that practitioners, whether member state representatives or secretariats, take small states seriously, even if most scholars do not.

That is not to say that our analysis of ‘throughput’ legitimacy neglects the role of member states – quite the opposite. It just does not exclusively focus on ‘great powers’. Some of this work is underway. But, outside the EU (e.g. Thorhallsson 2000; Panke 2010; 2012), the literature has barely kept up with these developments (Lyne et al 2009 and Bishop 2012 are exceptions). Indeed, as Bishop (2012) highlights, from 1980s to the 2000s small states virtually disappeared from the literature. The renewed focus has been generated in part by the actions of IOs, and the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat in particular, who have highlighted, *inter alia*, the unique challenges of Small Island Developing States. This attempt to generate interest in these countries is, we argue, an important illustration of ‘throughput’ legitimacy in action. If IOs are more than arenas, but are in fact institutions whose processes are shaped by a host of actors, including secretariats and NGOs (e.g. Finnemore 1996; Martin and Simmons 1998), then we would expect that even the world’s smallest states, individually or collectively, could have an influence. And, if their participation is the key to understanding how IOs have sought to manufacture legitimacy outside the usual ‘input-output’ logic presumed in past studies, then this influence matters.

4. Method, Data and Approach

Our investigation of how IOs have sought to use the participation of small states to generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy draws insights from the new institutionalism (Campbell 2004, Fioretos 2011, Lowndes and Roberts 2013). When compared with the paradigms employed by international relations scholars this approach might be considered ‘eclectic’ (Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Haynes and James 2014) as it is

based on the assumption that responses to ambiguity are determined via a dynamic and iterative relationship between actors and institutions rather than either fixed interests or norms. We expect that IOs work through a combination of formal and informal rules; the formal rules may be mission statements or terms of agreement determined long ago, still shaping responses but no longer reflecting current structures of influence. The informal rules will include the conventions, practices and operating procedures that allow the IOs to work from day to day (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Atari and Smith 2012). Those rules and conventions are consistently contested and mutate to take account of changing circumstances and beliefs. Second, IOs will have a past, a present and, usually, a future (Hecló 2008). Their continuing existence creates both expectations of what the institutions should do and the rules of appropriate behaviour for those who work within its bounds (Peters 2001; Mahoney and Thelan 2011). Third, decision-making within these institutions is essentially a political process, not necessarily a command-sensitive hierarchy. Fourth, the players' (be they representatives of member state or international civil servants (ICS)) understanding of their roles shapes their reactions (Rhodes 2011; see also Bell 2011; Schmidt 2011). Organizational traditions direct their perspectives.

Empirically, we draw on our own work on both IOs and small states – in total more than 300 interviews with representatives and senior ICS across six IOs (World Bank, IMF, WIPO, WTO, WHO and FAO) over 15 years, and domestic political actors in small states conducted over more than six years. Our choice of these IOs reflects the availability of our data. We are conscious that by not covering the United Nations we are omitting the global forum in which small states have historically had the greatest scope for influence. But, given our theoretical focus, we maintain that investigating

IOs where small state participation has been more limited is of greater intellectual value. Having said that, our insights remain relevant for the UN organisations too even if further empirical work is required to substantiate similarities and differences between IOs and across time. For now our aims are both more modest and fundamental: to draw attention to the way IOs generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy by working with their weakest members: small states.

Our account is ‘experience near’ (Jackson and Nexon 2013) and insider-orientated (Rhodes 2011). Based on the perspectives of the actors involved, we ask how they see their relationships within their organisations. We employ the data selectively to illustrate conceptual points because our account is based on deep, iterative immersion in the intricacies of the IO world over a long period of time. We preference our most recent interviews to illustrate the timeliness of this discussion. This matches our explorative aims for this piece; our analysis is designed to take the first step in describing and analysing what has changed about the ways IOs generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy, not to provide the last word. To that end, debates about *how* and *why* the membership of IOs has sought greater participation is beyond our scope.

When talking about member states definitions are important (for review see Crowards 2002; Maass 2009; Veenendaal and Corbett 2015). Since the 1950s an academic debate has emerged on the conceptualisation of state size. Size can be measured on the basis of population, territory, economic indicators, or military capabilities. The limited work on small states at IOs offers similar arrays of categories, but tends to focus on power-based arguments: lack of power (whether economic or human capital and population size (Krasner 1985, Kotschwar 1999, Tussie and Lenegyel 2002) is

said to make small states irrelevant, as they ‘exhibit a low level of participation in world affairs’ (Hey 2003:5). Lack of resources and capacities often cast small states as victims of IOs’ work (George and Sabelli 1994), or as ‘irritants’ (Lewis 2013:vii) as their narrow scope of issues can cause conflict among their large patrons (Vlcek 2008).

How IOs define small states is an important indicator of the significance attributed to them (Sutton 2011). So we do not settle on one definition. Instead, using the existing groupings as our guide, we probe how selected IOs define small states. The World Bank’s small states program covers 50 countries, drawn from the island nations of the Pacific, Caribbean and African regions, along with the smallest European, Middle Eastern and Asian states. The United Nations established its Small Islands Developing States Network, which includes 39 countries drawn from the Pacific, Caribbean, and Africa but not Europe or the Middle East. In all cases, definitions are porous; the UN’s group of 39 includes Papua New Guinea (PNG), which has a developing economy but a relatively large population (around 8 million). Singapore is a small island but can hardly be considered a developing economy.

We favour a pragmatic definition more suited to the study of IOs and the fact that the categorisation of states is an important means of generating ‘throughput’ legitimacy (Bevir and Kader 2008). Any analysis of the impact of small states must pay attention to how self-perceptions (Maass 2009) shape collective processes. Given the trend towards ever-smaller states (Lake and O’Mahony 2004), irrespective of any definition the number of small states has steadily grown in recent decades. The emphasis on self-perception recognises that actors in IOs think of each other in terms of size and

influence. Singapore is small and yet it has never been run over at the GATT/WTO in part because of its history of active participation. In contrast, despite a larger population, PNG has shown little interest in IOs. When discussing small states, three dimensions of ‘smallness’ – population, economic size and self-perception – are important in different arenas. However, identifying precise predictions for when and how these dimensions matter are beyond our scope. Therefore we largely draw on examples that fall well within the bounds of any definition – small states in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific – rather than those, like Singapore or Qatar, who might be considered on one or more dimensions as relatively large.

4. Small States and Throughput Legitimacy in IOs

To expand our discussion of the ways IOs and their members interact, and building on Schmidt’s (2013) insights, we identify four processes where IOs have sought to generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy via the inclusion of the smallest states: 1. agenda setting; 2. leadership (s)elections; 3. management and administration; and 4. service delivery. Our analysis rests on the assumption that IOs are representative, and so members shape each organisation. Our contention is that the need to demonstrate an inclusive and transparent decision-making process has meant that the involvement of small states has become part of their very essence: they would not be considered effective IOs without them. That is, small state influence cannot be explained away as a function of inputs – consensus is the *modus operandi* in IOs – nor output – while most small states are also important clients of IOs the language of participation seeks to enshrine their status as principals.

4(i) Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is a process where discussion on issues can be initiated and support mobilised by advocates in pursuit of a policy outcome. In IOs' first half-century there was a limited number of active states who would seek to set agenda.

GATT was dependent on the Quad (USA, EC, Japan, Canada) as a working core. That no longer applies in the WTO. There was a strong reaction to the pressure applied to close the Uruguay Round and members were determined that the new WTO would be 'member-driven' (Interview with WTO Ambassador, 2011). There are now 80 active members, with others on the periphery. Small states, working through the Development Committee and groups such as the Small and Vulnerable Economies, want to be heard when proposals for action are discussed. The groupings gave them capacity and numbers so that they would be taken seriously. The Green Room meetings convened by the Director-General now include not only the influential trading nations but also representatives of the key groupings. It may not be the whole membership; but there is greater *representative* involvement (Interview WTO Ambassador from small state 2011).

This focus on inclusion and transparency is encouraged by the members and by the secretariats who seek to facilitate greater participation by small member states. The WHO has a department dedicated to supporting small states. The Commonwealth Secretariat has opened a suite of offices in Geneva for rent to countries with very small budgets and delegations, and provided them with some technical and administrative support. The explicit recognition of regional or functional groups by IOs allows small states to participate more effectively, relying on others to keep them

informed and, if needs be, to negotiate on their behalf while they expend scarce resources in areas where their state interests are greatest. In WIPO regional groupings are recognised as key players in negotiations and the DG's chief of staff liaises with their selected representatives (Prasad 2015).

The increasing emphasis on inclusive participation is significant because, apart from elections of directors general, either by convention or design, IOs do not vote. When the IMF's Executive Board debates an issue, the Secretary to the Board will keep a running total of the support, based on the voting weights of the EDs. But that record is not pushed to a formal count. Everyone knows where they would stand before the proposal reaches the board (Interview IMF official 2011). Votes would not settle disagreements between members; IOs cannot force conclusions on members. So, issues are talked through in search of an acceptable consensus. Other IOs will return to items time and again until some agreement, perhaps on smaller but attainable issues, can be settled.

There are a number of occasions when the contribution of small states has been critical. The Maldives brought the significance of sea level rises to the attention of IOs (Lewis 2013). Four Western African countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali – were able to convince members of the WTO Singapore Ministerial meeting in 2005 to include cotton on the Doha round of trade negotiations (Anderson 2013). The Nauru Group of nine Pacific small states brought about the FAO Code of Conduct of Responsible Fisheries. Botswana, with the cooperation of Sweden, changed the funding rules at the WHO; and Antigua succeeded in challenging the US in a dispute settlement at the WTO. In each case small states' success is an important means of

demonstrating the openness of the system. Whether the US changed its policies in bananas is less important than the fact that minnows like Antigua could successfully have their case heard in the WTO forums. Malta, a member of the EC, can influence the EC position in areas where it has particular experience, such as refugees and people smuggling (Interview with Representative 2013). As emerging powers take their participation more seriously, space opens up for small states to manoeuvre (sometimes at the margins but not exclusively so) either by working within a bloc or by playing off large and emerging states. Indeed, contra conventional wisdom, this dynamic can be especially true in IOs that have consensus seeking decision-making processes. WIPO was initially seen as the preserve of developed economies as they generated most intellectual property. As the active membership expanded, two consequences emerged. First a new ‘development agenda’, included issues of direct interest to many small states, such as technical assistance for them to develop IP regimes. Second, there was a suspicion that developed countries wanted to use WIPO to harmonise the regimes of IP in a way that benefitted them; those concerns led to procedural difficulties.

One consequence of the increased emphasis on throughput legitimacy created on agenda setting is the potential for small state obstructionism. The emphasis on consensus means that small states have the potential to hold issues up. In global economic terms the impact of these groupings may still be minuscule. As an identifiable set of members they can argue that they should be taken seriously. For our argument, however, the important point is that IOs have raised concerns about the impact of representation and (non-) participation of small states on their legitimacy

and operation (World Bank 2000, IMF 2013). If the actors think they matter, then this will undoubtedly shape their actions.

The greater the participation, the greater the potential for contestation there may be. As more member states want to push their items, and as there is a desire and a need to listen, so the pressures on time and capacity grows, one example of the problems created by the need to balance efficiency and inclusiveness.

4(ii) Leadership (s)elections

Where leaders are elected, they will always be conscious of the interests of those who voted for them. Where a majority of member states are comparatively small, their demands will seldom be far from the minds of directors general. Their involvement and their demands to be heard will be reflected to a degree in the strategies leaders adopt.

The principle of sovereign equality should, in theory, disproportionately advantage citizens in small states (Corbett and Connell 2014), especially in IOs that have vote-based decision-making procedures that affords a small country like Tuvalu (population 11,000) the same formal powers as China (population 1.38 billion). Keohane once assumed real power trumps this institutional advantage (Keohane 1969); others have noted how capacity constraints perpetuate asymmetries (Broome 2011; Bishop 2012; Corbett and Connell 2015). Now Keohane's discussion of legitimacy outlines six criteria, one of which is 'inclusiveness' – 'the inequality of power among states means that in world politics inclusiveness does not imply equality

of voice. That would be unrealistic' (Keohane 2011:101). Legitimacy requires IOs processes to be open to those who are willing to participate.

The best example is leadership elections. While there is variation in the way leadership elections are conducted in IOs – in the World Bank and the IMF voting in the Executive Board may be merely symbolic, for example – in most cases the views of members matter: even in the Bank and the IMF, the Boards now want to meet candidates and some executive directors have indicated they will not always accept a passive role. Elsewhere, the opinions and votes of small states can be even more significant. Rather than elect a DG, the WTO General Council appoints a troika, headed by its chair, to run a selection process. They consult members in a gradual process of elimination. The WTO troika responsible for managing the choice of director general ensures that all member states participate in the selection by ringing the capital cities of those small members who could not maintain an office in Geneva (Interview WTO ambassador 2013). They then report on which candidates have the greatest support and which should be eliminated. The process continues until they determine which individual has the greatest level of support. That person is then 'elected' unanimously (Interviews, several WTO Ambassadors 2014; see also Kahler 2001).

There are several issues involved. If the previous incumbent had come from the developed world, was it then the turn for the developing bloc? The qualities of the candidates may be less important than their country or region of origin. In 2013, for instance, with eleven candidates initially, each member state was asked to nominate their preferred five. There was no discussion and only positive votes were permitted;

the troika did not want to entertain vetoes. Then with five candidates left, members were then asked their top two preferences. In deciding who had the greater support, the troika was not just concerned with numbers but also with a spread of support across regions and economies of different size. Then it came down to two candidates and a choice. The process was not entirely without problems but all countries had an opportunity to have a voice, not big countries alone. Indeed, the US supported the loser but was happy to live with the winner who was promoted primarily by developing countries and smaller members. Small states still see problems; one ambassador noted that the elimination of candidates in each round reflected the size of the country's GDP; wealth had an impact. Involvement could never be equal, but they still could express a voice.

In those IOs where there is a direct vote the impact of small states is more obvious. In the WIPO and WHO a smaller executive committee (34 members in WHO and 83 in WIPO) voted in a series of ballots. In the WHO the executive board interviewed a short list of three or four candidates and then voted in a series of ballots until it had a single choice whom it recommended to the World Health Assembly. In 2005 the committee was split 16-16 for a number of votes before one member changed sides. In 2007 there were four ballots before Margaret Chan was elected (Interview WHO official 2011). The World Health Assembly never rejected a proposed candidate. In 2017 the system changed and the WHA voted on three names proposed by the Executive Board, with each member state having a vote. The influence of small member states was thus enhanced. Recent ballots in both the WIPO and FAO ballots were seen as clashes between the developed and developing blocks, and economic power was not necessarily translated into voting power.

Numbers mattered too when directors general sought re-election. Incumbents have the advantage that they are in constant contact with their member states. One FAO officer wondered why his DG, on the way to a conference in New Zealand, detoured to a regional meeting of agriculture ministers in Niue (population 1400). Then he realised that there were sixteen votes sitting around the table. Programs within a DG's discretion can satisfy small states; their votes count the same (Interview FAO official 2011; for an earlier election, see Weitz 1997). Indeed the prevalence of support for incumbents explains why some director generals are re-elected unopposed so frequently; when they could develop support across the globe, they are difficult to beat.

Finally, small states take elections seriously, even if they are intensely aware of the asymmetries that work against them. An I-Kiribati minister reflects:

There is a feeling of being insignificant out there: small and insignificant and the big countries were not taking us seriously. But when it came to voting I felt we were significant, even if you are a small country... They are all lobbying for decisions and when you are in the WHO I feel myself somewhat important ... When it comes to the politics, getting their candidates into certain position, then our votes are important (Interview, 2013).

The leaders of IOs are aware of the need to include a wide number of member states in their activities, particularly in those institutions where they are elected directly by

members on the basis of one state, one vote. More importantly, the legitimacy of leaders, which is always contingent, depends on the levels of support they can continue to engender.

4(iii) Managing and Operating IOs

Many small states want to be heard. They may have a limited capacity to cover all the issues, but there are a number of strategies they can adopt to ensure that their views are represented when they think it essential. IOs in turn will often facilitate the process to ensure inclusiveness.

IOs as organisations of states rarely vote because states cannot be subjected to commitments that they did not accept. Individually small states when acting alone, just one among 160 or more members, may have limited influence. As members of a larger group it is a different issue. These groupings are an important means by which IOs enact 'throughput' legitimacy.

There have always been divisions between the rich and poor members not least on the 'proper' role and functions of IOs. In FAO, developed countries want the organisation to concentrate on standard setting; small and developing countries seek technical assistance (Interviews, 2011). In debates on the budgets there are divisions between the principal donors and recipients. As the core budget has shrunk, to under 28 % in the WHO, the capacity to deliver programs has declined, unless programs can attract funds through other channels that are tightly targeted. These funds may come from member states that want to see identifiable outcomes for their commitments, or from

private philanthropic donors such as the Gates Foundation's Global Fund. Members face a dilemma. They want funds but they also want to oversee their expenditure (Interview, WHO official, 2012; also Health Assembly debates January 2012).

In IOs, the management of these traditional battlelines has been altered with increasing participation of groupings. Some groupings are regional: the African Union, GRULAC (Latin America and the Caribbean). Others are functional: the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries), LDC (Least Developed Countries), Small and Vulnerable Economies, island communities etc (Harbinson 2015). In WIPO, for example, regional groupings have an elected regional representative to negotiate with officials (Prasad 2015). Groupings allow small states to overcome the problems of limited resources; states concentrate on those IOs where they have the greatest interests, other countries report on developments elsewhere.

Of course, small states face resource constraints. A delegation in Geneva may have only two or three people to cover everything from the WTO to the Human Rights Commission. For Pacific countries, just being there takes time and effort due to distance. Groupings provide a means of appreciating the issues across institutions. A Nauruan Minister reflected:

It's not easy, they are not going to pay much attention to what little Nauru has to say ... But it is of more relevance when you attach yourself to these groupings, like AOSIS [Alliance of Small Island States], SIDS [Small Island Developing States Network]. I think that is the way to go, particularly where

you share common interests on things like climate change. And you have to take the best use of your opportunities that come your way (Interview, 2013).

Leaders are progressively including the interests of small states in their agenda not only because of short-term personal interests (e.g. getting elected) but rather because it just makes political and managerial sense. As one DG explained:

I was telling these powerful lobby groups from rich countries ... there must be an agenda that appeals to everyone, not one side, but multilateral; otherwise important constituents will leave the organisation. Then the problem is small states have limited resources of covering all IOs; this makes them very vulnerable to NGOs pushing for their agenda. We have got to help them; so we organise seminars, send out information; it is tough on small states; but we have to help. (Interview 2011)

The emphasis on legitimacy and inclusiveness echoes our argument about the changing pathologies of IOs. Also relevant is the recognition that ineffective small states are actually a problem for IOs; they have to be persuaded. The advantage of the old club model was that it was comfortable, with settlements made among a small group of players. Small states with limited resources and fewer interests are unlikely to ever play the same role or have the same influences. But if numbers matter then they do need to be capable of contributing.

On procedural issues small states draw the attention to their unique situation. In 2004-05, the WHO board meeting discussed whether it should pursue an e-documents

policy. EU countries preferred to continue receiving paper documents. The minister of health from Tonga told the WHO staff and other board members, ‘I do not want to wait for 3 weeks to receive all documents to make a decision; if you put everything on line, I can access them right away’ (Interview 2011). This became the catalyst for the WHO’s use of e-documents. The issue, however trivial, was important for small states.

The rationale underpinning small states’ active role in IOs is little different from those of large ones. As one African ambassador in Geneva explained:

Historically, my country never really had a very strong desire to be an active player at IOs; we never really made a big effort. We decided to stand for the Human Rights Council and now chair it, knowing that would affect our work in other IOs. I have to spend all my time on the Human Rights Council and leave the rest of the organisations to my colleagues because Africa is not looking very good in terms of democracy and my country has had stable democracy and we need to promote good standards. If there is a place where we can do something, that is the place where we more than other African countries can have a voice and make a difference (Interview 2013).

WHO’s executive board always includes one member from the West Pacific. Ministers of health from Tonga and Marshall Islands have played an active role. Their much larger neighbour, PNG, does not. So, we are not arguing size is the key determining variable – interests and leadership matter too, especially for small states;

the important point is that in certain circumstances small states can be rewarded for being active IO members.

Finally, small states influence the way executive board members see their role and functions. An executive board member at the IMF, from a G-20 country, stated:

Yes, my country has the largest share of votes in this group. No, I am not the representative of my country. I am the member of the executive board. I am representing my groups. I need to ensure all our interests are aligned, including those of the smallest in the world. I also need to make sure that the staff are not too tough or too insensitive to these small and poor states ... At the board meeting, when there is tension or disagreement, we do not vote; we pay attention to what the US ED has to say; but we do not vote; we summarise the positions and the summary reflects the difference ... Even after the staff have done Article IV review, countries can decide whether they would like the reports to be made public. The poorest country in my group told me that it did not want the report to be made public. Then I would tell the board, no, this report will not be made public (Interview IMF Executive Director 2011).

Another ED said directly:

On many issues, my small states are not interested. I need to make sure they are informed and present our position in a balanced way. I am here not only for my country, but for my group, including those smallest and poorest ones (Interview, IMF Executive Director 2011).

The ability to give voice in the proceedings of IOs when issues of direct relevance to the member states are discussed, is a crucial component for ensuring throughput legitimacy, both in terms of the small state support for the IO and for the credibility of the process of policy development. In some cases it may be as important that the opinion is inserted into the processes of decision to ensure all needs are satisfied; ambassadors want the views of their government heard. Consequently, the opportunities, even if they vary from one IO to another, are being created for that voice to be included.

4(iv) Servicing member states

IOs need clients. Small states are often also poor. They want programs, but they want to decide what the projects will be. Over the last decades the expression ‘country-ownership’ has become more prevalent. Projects have to be developed with the local community. IOs should not presume (or at least pretend they do not presume) to know what is best.

However there are complications. As more countries graduate from IDA, to use the World Bank’s term, there is less demand for the projects or loans. So increasingly programs for countries in the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean constitute much of their activity. These programs are not the largest in terms of quantity; the World Bank still lends large tranches to China and India. It remains true that a substantial percentage of the world’s poor live in those countries, particularly India, but increasingly they do not want the assistance. Small states do.

As clients, small states represent hard work for IOs; the same effort may be required to develop a program but the levels of loan or technical assistance will be much smaller. The common assumption is that, due to their size, small states are bullied into accepting the assistance that IOs offer (e.g. Grynberg 2006; Wallis 2010; Connell 2013). In some cases this is true. But small countries, conscious of their (often recently obtained) sovereignty, can also be determined that they will not be pushed around. Timor Leste is one such example, always suspicious of the ties that may come with aid. Getting onside with governments, ensuring (not always successfully) that programs are delivered in these countries with limited infrastructure and human capacity, remains a challenge for IOs but puts the small, whether by population, economy or self-identification, at the centre of their mission (Interview Country Director, World Bank 2012).

In 2007 WIPO developed a Development Agenda and established a Committee on Development and Intellectual Property. Several projects have since been initiated under its auspices after Francis Gurry, who committed himself personally to the project, became director general in 2008 (de Beer and Bannerman 2010: 214). In the past the bulk of WIPO's existing intellectual property work relates directly to the 'old' powers. WIPO observers have interpreted the Agenda as a paradigm shift reflecting the increasing importance of developing countries, many of whom are small.

Sometimes large states take smaller ones seriously because of domestic demands. In 2011, Denmark joined forces with UNDP and AOSIS to create a program to help

small island states transform their energy sector from dependence on imported petroleum to more sustainable sources of energy, thus addressing adaptation to climate change. Denmark committed over DKK 38 million to the initiative. No doubt the Danish renewable energy sector stood to benefit from the scheme, but small states, who represent a fraction of the energy market, gained as well. The scheme was justified to a domestic audience on the grounds that it produced both developmental and climate change benefits.

Finally, we note that small states take themselves seriously in these settings; why else would they participate if they did not think they could make a difference? Indeed, given that they are both members and clients, they often have a significant stake in the outcomes, particularly in the Pacific and the Caribbean – where climate change poses a significant threat to their long-term viability. Indeed, representatives of small states see awareness of the impact that climate change on island nations as one of their key victories in the multilateral sphere:

So Maldives was the first country to talk about climate change at any multilateral forum. In 1987, we spoke ... on the issue of climate change ... it was called the “Death of a Nation” speech ... If you look at the UN system, if you look at the multilateral sphere, it's probably that one example that you find of one country and then a group of small countries being able to make a difference. In the UN system, you can make a difference, the only problem is it takes 20 years to make these kinds of normative shifts (Interview 2017).

In this view, small states are active and can be influential, even if often frustrated that capacity constraints limit their involvement and their ability to more effectively make their case heard. The challenge for small states is the need to develop the ability to interact with international civil servants and to have their preferences taken seriously. Some of them are developing that capacity; others are still limited but usually well aware of their problems.

5. Conclusion

We have noted the occasions when the initiative of small states ensured their interests were considered. Whatever happens to the Doha round, the ability of small states to put topics on the agenda was a significant step. Small states mattered in these cases. Their participation influenced *the way* that IOs worked. We are not the first to identify this fact (see Lyne et al 2009. For the EU see Thorhallsson 2000; Panke 2010) but what we add to the small existing literature is the claim that this type of participation is an important means by which IOs demonstrate what Schmidt calls ‘throughput’ legitimacy

The main advantage of a ‘throughput’ approach is that it allows us to grapple with how IOs manage their inbuilt dilemma – they must deal with today’s challenges while operating with formal rules and structures devised for a different world (VanGrasstek 2013). Rather than resolve it in favour of either ‘inputs’ or ‘outputs’ (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Tallberg and Zürn 2017), they hold these imperatives in tension. They still rely on a few large and rich states for resources. At the same time, for multilateral cooperation to function effectively, the IOs have to accommodate assertive emerging

powers and more active participation by a large number of small states, as either can from time to time to block initiatives or change the direction of debates (or agendas). In this environment both old and new powers seek to garner wide support for their plans. They have agenda, they forum shop and, like all states, at times they are able to achieve their goals. Rarely do the smallest members act alone, but that does not mean they do not act. On the contrary, it has become increasingly difficult for IOs to act without them; the need to generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy demands that they be taken seriously. The lesson is that IOs, as institutions in their own right, also want and need to win the support of a large number of their members (Gronau and Schmidtke 2016), many classified as small states, in order to be both inclusive – to retain legitimacy – and efficient – to remain relevant. Schmidt’s concept speaks directly to both the need and strategy IOs have adopted to do so. That is, small state influence cannot be explained away as a function of inputs – consensus is the *modus operandi* in IOs – nor outputs – while most small states are also important clients of IOs the language of participation seeks to enshrine their status as principals.

Let us reiterate that we do *not* contend that small states have the same influence or even the same interests in IOs as large members; asymmetries are well documented (Drezner 2008). We argue an exclusive focus on asymmetries understates the fact that IOs have sought to encourage greater participation in the processes of global governance. Ensuring that the world’s smallest states are able to be active is an important means by which they generate ‘throughput’ legitimacy. The result is that on some issues in some IOs, their participation shapes outputs. By illustrating the empirical and analytic purchase of Schmidt’s concept in IOs we pave the way for a more systematic study of how IOs are seeking to confront the inherent dilemma

enshrined in their mandates. There is considerable mileage to be gained from including all member states, including the smallest, in explanations of how IOs operate.

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