Legitimacy Politics

Once staunch advocates of international cooperation, political elites are increasingly divided over the merits of global governance. Populist leaders attack international organizations for undermining national democracy, while mainstream politicians defend their importance for solving transboundary problems. Bridging international relations, comparative politics, and cognitive psychology, Lisa Dellmuth and Jonas Tallberg explore whether, when, and why elite communication shapes the popular legitimacy of international organizations. Based on novel theory, experimental methods, and comparative evidence, they show that elites are influential in shaping how citizens perceive global governance and explain why some elites and messages are more effective than others. The book offers fresh insights into major issues of our day, such as the rise of populism, the power of communication, the backlash against global governance, and the relationship between citizens and elites. It will be of interest to scholars and students of international relations, political science, and experimental and survey research methods.

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Legitimacy Politics

Elite Communication and Public Opinion in Global Governance

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The inspiration for this book comes from a paradox: While international organizations are increasingly contested among political elites, who challenge and defend these institutions in the public debate, we know little about how such elite communication affects the way ordinary citizens view global governance. Are antiglobalist populists successful in influencing public perceptions of international organizations? To what extent can advocates of global governance push back and secure public support? And what are the logics and circumstances that shape whether citizens are receptive to such messages from political elites?

This book offers our answers to these questions, with a particular focus on how elites influence the popular legitimacy of international organizations. Legitimacy among citizens is a key resource for any political institution, contributing to effectiveness and democracy. Yet earlier research has overlooked how elites shape popular legitimacy perceptions. In this book, we contribute the first comprehensive analysis on this subject. For this purpose, we develop a novel theory of elite communication in global governance and explore empirically how elite messages affect citizen legitimacy beliefs toward international organizations in a broad comparative context.

Looking back to when we started this book project, its subject has only become more topical with time. We began our work on this book before Boris Johnson convinced the British public of the benefits of leaving the European Union, before Donald Trump rolled out an antiglobalist agenda as a United States president, and before liberal leaders rallied behind the World Health Organization in the fight against COVID-19. As we conclude our work, we resist the temptation to call ourselves prescient but admit that slowness in execution sometimes has its advantages. Looking forward, we see no reason why contestation around global governance would not remain a key feature of contemporary politics.
This book extends research that we have previously published in other outlets. Chapter 4 draws in part on an article in the *British Journal of Political Science*. Chapter 6 builds in part on an article in the *Review of International Studies*, coauthored with Jan Aart Scholte. We are grateful to Jan for allowing us to use part of our joint work for this chapter. For readers who would like to consult additional analyses we have conducted for the book, a supplementary online appendix, replication data sets, and associated code are available at [https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/legitimacypolitics](https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/legitimacypolitics) and on author homepages.

We have been fortunate to benefit from the intellectual generosity of a large number of people in our work on this book. To begin with, we are particularly thankful to our colleagues in the Legitimacy in Global Governance (LegGov) research program for stimulating discussions and constructive feedback throughout the writing of this book: Hans Agné, Bart Bes, Magdalena Bexell, Karin Bäckstrand, Farsan Ghassim, Catia Gregoratti, Kristina Jönsson, Jan Aart Scholte, Thomas Sommerer, Nora Stappert, Fredrik Söderbaum, Anders Uhlin, Soetkin Verhaegen, and Fariborz Zelli. This book complements other research by ourselves and our colleagues on sources, processes, and consequences of legitimacy in global governance.

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Finally, we wish to thank our families for putting up with us as we have worked hard on this book. While we have done our best to keep work and family time separate, we have not always succeeded. Your love and understanding means everything – we dedicate this book to you.
### Abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AfD</td>
<td>Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMCE</td>
<td>average marginal component effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (Christian Democratic Union)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>civil society organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Party)</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>EVS</td>
<td>European Values Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAL</td>
<td>green, alternative, and liberal</td>
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<td>G8</td>
<td>Group of Eight</td>
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<td>G20</td>
<td>Group of Twenty</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>IO</td>
<td>international organization</td>
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<td>IPCC</td>
<td>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer</td>
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<td>NAFTA</td>
<td>North American Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>nongovernmental organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPD</td>
<td>Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)</td>
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<td>TAN</td>
<td>traditional, authoritarian, and nationalist</td>
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<td>UK</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNFCCC</td>
<td>United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USMCA</td>
<td>United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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<td>WVS</td>
<td>World Values Survey</td>
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Introduction

Elite communication about the strengths and weaknesses of international organizations (IOs) is an increasingly common feature of global politics. As IOs have gained far-reaching political authority, in the expectation that they can help solve transboundary problems, they have also become more contested. While elites historically have been some of the staunchest supporters of international cooperation, they are now divided over the merits of IOs. Member governments criticize IOs for unpopular policies but also endorse them to protect multilateral arenas. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) challenge IOs for insufficient ambitions but also praise their efforts to consult with stakeholders. IOs themselves regularly trumpet their achievements in their public relations but also occasionally admit to their shortcomings. Recently, elite communication about IOs has gained additional topicality through the challenges from populist politicians on the right and the left, criticizing IOs for being undemocratic, politically biased, and detrimental to national sovereignty.

Consider the example of how elites around the world quarreled in public over the World Health Organization (WHO) following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. It all started with former United States (US) President Donald Trump sharply criticizing the WHO’s response to the pandemic, which then escalated into a threat of withdrawing US funding, and eventually culminated in Trump declaring a termination of the US relationship with the WHO, since the organization had “failed to make the requested and greatly needed reforms” (CNN, May 29, 2020). Brazil’s prime minister, Jair Bolsonaro, joined in the critique, calling the WHO a “partisan political organization” that had not acted responsibly and therefore lost credibility (Reuters, June 9, 2020). These criticisms and actions did not go unchallenged. Then German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed her “full support for the WHO” (Deutsche Welle, April 16, 2020), Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declared that “multilateral
institutions like the WHO are extremely important, particularly at a time of a global health crisis” (CTV News, May 19, 2020), and Chinese President Xi Jinping underlined the decisive role of the WHO, which had made “a major contribution in leading and advancing the global response to COVID-19” (China Daily, May 18, 2020). NGOs and IOs too rushed to the defense of the WHO. For instance, the director of the Global Health Council stated that “WHO plays a central role in the global response to COVID-19, from country guidance to vaccine trials,” while the spokesperson for the United Nations (UN) asserted that “WHO is showing the strength of the international health system” (Reuters, April 7, 2020).

Yet, despite the prominence of such elite communication in global politics, we know little about its effects on the popular legitimacy of IOs. While a growing scholarly literature explores the contestation around IOs, the consequences for legitimacy remain poorly understood. That citizens consider IOs to be legitimate is important from a democratic perspective, as IOs wield extensive power in world politics, often supplanting national decision-making. In addition, IOs, like all organizations, are more likely to govern effectively when they enjoy legitimacy. Popular legitimacy affects whether IOs remain relevant as political arenas, makes it easier for IOs to gain political support for ambitious new policies, and influences IOs’ ability to secure compliance with international norms and rules.

The ambition of this book is to offer the first systematic assessment of the effects of elite communication on the popular legitimacy of IOs. Guided by the question of whether, when, and why elite communication shapes citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, it provides an in-depth analysis of how different elites affect public opinion on global governance. It addresses this question in ways that bridge scholarship in cognitive psychology, comparative politics, and international relations, and advances an expanding agenda of research on legitimacy in global governance.

We conceptualize elites as people who hold leading positions in political and societal organizations, citizens as the general public in a country, communication as discursive messages conveying information about a particular topic, and legitimacy as the belief that an institution exercises authority appropriately. Substantively, we explore the scope for party politicians, government bureaucrats, civil society representatives, and international officials to shape
popular legitimacy beliefs toward IOs through publicly communicated messages.

The book makes three distinct contributions to existing knowledge. First, we develop a novel theory of the effects of elite communication in global governance. While existing explanations attribute legitimacy beliefs to individual, institutional, and societal factors, our theory privileges the process of elite communication. Inspired by research on heuristic opinion formation, it assumes that citizens usually lack sufficient information to form independent opinions about IOs. Citizens therefore turn to communication by elites as an efficient shortcut to opinions. But reliance on elites for information comes with consequences. Our theory explains why communication empowers elites to shape the opinions of citizens and when those effects are particularly strong. It theorizes conditions for influence associated with each core component of the communicative situation – the elite, the message, and the citizen.

Second, we offer the most comprehensive empirical examination to date of the effects of elite communication in global governance. While research in American and comparative politics is rich in analyses of elite influence, this literature remains exclusively focused on the domestic setting. Only a handful of studies have examined the effects of elite communication in the international setting, mainly with a focus on the European Union (EU). In contrast, this book explores the effects of elite communication on popular legitimacy beliefs in a broad global governance context, drawing on comparative evidence from IOs in multiple issue areas and from countries in different world regions. This design allows us to identify general patterns and scope conditions in the influence of elites over citizens’ legitimacy beliefs.

Third, we push the methodological frontier in research on the legitimacy of global governance. While the existing literature primarily relies on data from public opinion polls, this book makes use of experimental methods for causal inference, which are particularly well suited for establishing effects of elite communication. Experiments allow us to bypass the classic problem of establishing whether elites influence citizens or the other way around, and to identify the effects of elite communication under different conditions, while controlling for any other potential explanations of legitimacy beliefs. The book presents the results of five survey experiments conducted among
nationally representative samples of citizens, comprising both vignette and conjoint designs. Our approach makes legitimacy beliefs ever more tractable as a topic of social scientific research.

Our core findings are twofold. First, the way in which elites communicate about IOs matters extensively for citizens’ evaluations of the legitimacy of these organizations. When elites criticize or endorse IOs in the public debate, citizens pay attention and adjust their opinions. This capacity to shape popular legitimacy beliefs extends across domestic and global elites, including political parties, member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves. Moreover, elites can exercise influence by targeting a variety of IO qualities, from the degree of authority they exercise and the social purpose they pursue to the procedures they use and the performance they achieve.

Second, elites are more likely to shape citizen legitimacy perceptions under some conditions rather than others. These conditions are associated with each of the three components of the communicative situation: the elite, the message, and the citizen. Elites are more influential in shaping people’s legitimacy perceptions when perceived as credible. In addition, elites are more influential when highly polarized, since polarization makes messages clearer and more distinct. Messages are more effective in shaping legitimacy beliefs when conveying negative rather than positive information about IOs. Moreover, messages targeting IOs that have been subject to less contestation in the past are more likely to influence people’s opinions. Finally, citizens are more responsive to elite communication when they are ideologically closer to the elites issuing the messages.

Our results carry several broader implications for the understanding of politics. First, they speak to scholarship on the drivers of legitimacy in global governance, demonstrating that elite communication constitutes an independent source of such beliefs and that citizens care about the institutional qualities of IOs. Second, they engage with the rapidly growing literature on legitimation and delegitimation in global governance, showing that elites’ communicative practices are not inconsequential positioning but have distinct implications for how citizens perceive IOs. Third, they contribute to research on elite influence in politics, identifying the ways in which communication effects in the global realm are similar to, or distinct from, corresponding dynamics in the domestic setting. Finally, our findings shed light on the recent backlash against IOs in world politics, explaining why elites of discontent
can shape and exploit public grievances for political gain and suggesting how supporters of international cooperation may fight back.

Research Problem

Elite contestation over the merits and demerits of IOs has become increasingly prominent over recent decades, fueled by growing divisions among elites over international cooperation and the advent of new channels of communication. On the one hand, IOs are frequently criticized by NGO representatives, leaders of rising powers, and populist politicians. On the other hand, many political and societal elites still defend IOs as necessary vehicles for collaboration on cross-border problems.

NGOs frequently level criticism against IOs (O’Brien et al. 2000; Scholte and Schnabel 2003; Beyeler and Kriesi 2005; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Pallas 2013; Kalm and Uhlin 2015; Sommerer 2016; Rauh and Zürn 2020). Protests organized by NGOs have attracted particular attention, possibly because of the political drama involved. Classic examples are the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Prague in 2000, the Group of Eight (G8) in Genoa in 2001, and the EU in Gothenburg in 2001. More recent examples include the protests against the EU and the IMF in Greece in 2015, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US in 2015–2016, and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU in 2017. As illustrated by these examples, NGO protests were particularly intense in the early 2000s and have primarily been directed at global economic governance (Sommerer 2016; Sommerer et al. 2022; Uhlin and Gregoratti 2022).

NGOs tend to target either the decision-making procedures of IOs, which are blamed for being undemocratic and inefficient, or the policy performances of IOs, which are attacked as ineffective and unfair in their consequences. Concerns with fairness and democracy are particularly prominent when NGO leaders have taken to the media (Rauh and Zürn 2020). Fairness concerns often relate to poverty alleviation, debt relief, social equality, environmental protection, and human rights, while democratic concerns often pertain to transparency, social accountability, civil society participation, and inequalities.
in representation between the Global North and the Global South. In most cases, NGOs do not reject international cooperation per se; rather, they are dissatisfied with the way global governance is executed and, in some cases, actually want more rather than less of it (Zürn et al. 2019).

Another group of critics are the leaders of rising powers in world politics (Stephen and Zürn 2019; Kruck and Zangl 2020). Recent decades have witnessed a shift in the global distribution of power from established powers in Europe and North America to rising powers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Layne 2012; Brooks and Wohlworth 2015/2016). With the rise of new regional and global powers, the distribution of influence within this institutional order has been called into question. What may have appeared as a reasonable arrangement in times of Western dominance is increasingly seen as unjust and unreflective of economic and political realities. The distribution of structural capabilities has shifted decisively in favor of the rising powers, while the US and its allies are in relative decline – economically, demographically, and militarily.

This shift in geopolitical weight has gone hand in hand with demands for greater representation and influence in global governance. At the forefront of these demands are the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – but also other powers call for greater influence (Kruck and Zangl 2020). For instance, regional powers without permanent seats have called for institutional reforms that would make the UN Security Council (UNSC) more inclusive and egalitarian. China has demanded a recalibration of the system of voting weights in the IMF and the World Bank. Brazil and India have requested to become part of the core negotiating group of the WTO, previously restricted to the US, the EU, Japan, and Canada. These demands are intimately related to the legitimacy of the liberal international order (Stephen and Zürn 2019; Tallberg and Verhaegen 2020; Kentikelenis and Voeten 2021). “[T]he crisis of the liberal order is a crisis of legitimacy,” as Ikenberry (2018, 19) puts it.

However, the most vociferous critics of IOs at the current point in time are likely the antiglobalist populists on the left and the right (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Hooghe et al. 2019; Adler and Driesschova 2021; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; De Vries et al. 2021; Söderbaum et al. 2021). Encouraged by electoral gains in recent years, populist politicians have made fierce criticism of IOs part and parcel
of their political message. Radical-left populists tend not to reject international cooperation per se as much as they question its distributive profile, arguing that IOs impose reforms that hurt countries and groups already worse off. Examples include the political parties Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, both of which rose to prominence in the wake of the Eurozone economic crisis. For instance, when serving as Greece’s minister of finance, Syriza’s Yanis Varoufakis famously accused the EU and the IMF of terrorism because of the conditions they imposed on the country (*The Guardian*, July 7, 2015).

More principled rejection of international cooperation comes from the far right. Right-wing populists tend to accuse IOs of undermining national sovereignty and contributing to sociocultural change by spurring economic, political, and cultural globalization. In their analysis, international cooperation is an elite project, distant from the true wishes of the people. In this vein, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the French far-right party National Rally, declared globalization her enemy number one in the presidential election of 2017 (Politico, February 5, 2017), while Michael Gove, a leading advocate for Brexit, criticized the EU for being “distant, unaccountable, and elitist,” before famously adding that “this country has had enough of experts from organizations with acronyms” (Sky News, June 3, 2016). Other examples include Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil dismissing the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Viktor Orbán of Hungary and Jaroslaw Kaczyński of Poland challenging the EU, Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines attacking the UN, and, of course, Donald Trump of the US criticizing multilateral cooperation in a range of IOs, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), UNFCCC, WHO, and WTO.

Still, many – perhaps most – political and societal leaders around the world remain committed to international cooperation. In some cases, they have even stepped up the defense of multilateralism in response to the intensifying challenges from critical NGOs, rising powers, and antiglobalist populists. Politicians in the liberal mainstream speak up in favor of IOs, typically emphasizing their necessity for solving cross-border problems (De Vries et al. 2021). NGOs favorably disposed toward IOs highlight their role in fighting human rights violations, combating climate change, and preventing health pandemics (Stephen and Zürn 2019). Leaders in Western powers with a stake in the liberal international order defend current arrangements
Introduction

as well functioning (Kruck and Zangl 2020). IOs themselves increasingly invest in public communication, justifying their operations and policies to a variety of stakeholders, from governments to citizens (Zaum 2013; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Bexell et al. 2022). Recent years have even seen the emergence of new advocates for global governance, such as global coalitions of city leaders and businesses working with the UNFCCC to address climate change.

This contestation over global governance presents us with a range of questions about the consequences of elite communication. Are the opponents of multilateralism getting through to citizens? Are the defenders of global governance able to counteract these attacks? If elites indeed are shaping how citizens think about international cooperation, then why are people susceptible to such communication? Is it because citizens mindlessly follow any elite who tries to lead them, or because they seek information and know just too well whom to trust, or because of some other reason? Moreover, are citizens particularly responsive to elite communication under some circumstances rather than others? For instance, does it depend on the elite engaging in communication, the nature of the message, and the characteristics of the citizen?

Getting traction on these questions is essential. Popular legitimacy is central to IOs’ capacity to govern and achieve change in world politics. By uncovering the effects of elite communication on popular legitimacy beliefs, we can help to identify the factors that facilitate or impede effective global governance. As Buchanan and Keohane (2006, 407) put it: “The perception of legitimacy matters, because, in a democratic era, multilateral institutions will only thrive if they are viewed as legitimate by democratic publics.”

First, legitimacy influences whether IOs remain relevant as arenas for states’ efforts to coordinate policies and solve problems. In a world of forum shopping and organizational turf battles, legitimacy is a crucial resource for IOs wishing to fend off multilateral competitors and unilateral action (Morse and Keohane 2014; Zelli 2018). For instance, the dwindling legitimacy of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in many African countries is widely seen as a challenge for the court’s relevance, leading to demands for the establishment of an African court (Clarke et al. 2016; Helfer and Showalter 2017). Conversely, states actively seek the endorsement of the UNSC because this lends international legitimacy to their actions, thereby further reaffirming the stature of this body (Hurd 2007; Binder and Heupel 2015).
Second, legitimacy affects the capacity of IOs to develop new rules and norms. When IOs suffer from poor legitimacy among citizens, this makes it more difficult to gain governments’ support for ambitious policy goals and to secure ratification of new agreements (Putnam 1988; Martin 2000). For instance, successive rejections of new EU treaties by citizens in several countries have put plans for further large-scale reforms on the back burner. Most dramatically, British citizens in 2016 voted to leave the EU altogether, not only illustrating the importance of popular legitimacy for a state’s active engagement in international cooperation but also the paralyzing effects of a legitimacy crisis on IO policy-making, as the EU was forced to focus its political energy on negotiating Brexit.

Third, legitimacy shapes IOs’ ability to secure compliance with international rules and norms. Not only is legitimacy a much cheaper means to obtain compliance than coercion; in addition, few IOs command the coercive power to compel state and nonstate actors to comply, making legitimacy particularly important in global governance (Franck 1990; Hurd 1999). Evidence from a broad range of regulatory domains and levels suggests that legitimacy contributes to compliance, even when adjustment costs are high (Chayes and Chayes 1998; Zürn and Joerges 2005). Conversely, low legitimacy can hurt the respect for international rules. For instance, the weak legitimacy of the IMF has often hampered the implementation of its macroeconomic prescriptions in countries.

Finally, the popular legitimacy of IOs speaks to fundamental normative concerns about global governance. If IOs lack legitimacy in society, this contributes to a democratic deficit in global governance (Dahl 1999; Zürn 2000; Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005). As political authority increasingly shifts to the global level (Hooghe et al. 2017; Zürn 2018), democracy’s preservation requires that IOs are both structured in accordance with democratic principles and perceived by citizens as legitimate systems of governance. While the EU, for instance, may conform well to many democratic standards, and even features a directly elected parliament, it would be normatively problematic if European citizens did not have faith in its legitimacy. In this vein, the low turnout in European Parliament elections is often times cited as an indication of the EU’s faltering democratic legitimacy (Hix 2008; Schmidt 2012).

These benefits of legitimacy are not unique to IOs but mirror advantages for organizations, in general, emphasized by social theorists in a...
variety of disciplines. Sociologists varyingly identify legitimacy as a crucial resource (Parsons 1960; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) or constitutive feature (Meyer and Scott 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1991) of well-functioning organizations (Suchman 1995). Lawyers and psychologists stress how legitimacy creates a sense of obligation to defer to the decisions of an authority (Milgram 1974; Franck 1990; Tyler 1990). Political scientists highlight the role of popular legitimacy in a well-functioning democracy (Habermas 1976; Beetham 1991; Dahl and Lindblom 1992) and assess the consequences of political systems possessing larger or smaller amounts of it (Hetherington 2005; Booth and Seligson 2009; Norris 2011).

Argument

This book advances a novel theory about the effects of elite communication on citizen legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We conceive of elites as people who hold leading positions in key organizations in society that strive to be politically influential (Mosca 1939; Khan 2012; Verhaegen et al. 2021). This understanding includes both political and societal elites, and both global and domestic elites. We conceptualize citizens as the general public in a country. Citizens are political subjects with rights and responsibilities as members of the public (Dewey 1927), whose collective opinions may be studied through nationally representative polls. We understand communication as discursive or verbal messages that convey information about a particular topic. Communication is a process of transmission and interpretation that involves a source, a message, and a receiver (Fiske 2011). Finally, as explained at greater length in Chapter 3, we conceive of legitimacy in sociological or empirical terms as the belief or perception that an institution exercises authority appropriately (Weber 1922/1978; Tallberg and Zürn 2019).

Our theory explains why citizens are susceptible to elite communication and when those effects are particularly strong. It starts from the assumption that elites deliberately seek to influence how citizens perceive IOs and that citizens are receptive to such communication because of information deficits. It then theorizes the conditions under which citizens are more or less likely to be influenced by elites, focusing on the core components of the communicative situation – the elite, the message, and the citizen. Our theory suggests that citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs are profoundly shaped by how elites speak about IOs but also that such effects vary in predictable ways.
Our account is inspired by theories of heuristics in cognitive psychology, as well as theories of cueing and framing in American and comparative politics. Cognitive psychology offers powerful insights about the limitations that individuals confront in processing information, the heuristic strategies they use to deal with this condition, and the implications of relying on such cognitive shortcuts (e.g., Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Kahneman et al. 1982; Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011; Fiske and Taylor 2017). Theories of cueing and framing in turn build on these insights to better understand when, how, and why citizen opinions are influenced by political information (e.g., Sniderman et al. 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2013). We draw on these two strands of theory to develop our argument for why citizens are receptive to elite communication about IOs and when elites are likely to be particularly influential. Similar to earlier accounts, we highlight how information deficits lead citizens to form opinions based on cognitive shortcuts. Different from earlier accounts, we identify and theorize the particular conditions in global governance that shape the effects of elite communication.

Our theory positions elite communication a global political context, distinct from the domestic political context conventionally analyzed in studies of elite communication. Global politics is generally characterized by a greater variety of political actors, more complex patterns of political authority, and weaker links between citizens and political institutions. These features of global politics shape the conditions for communication in terms of elites, objects, and citizens. In this setting, typical messengers comprise both globally active elites, such as member governments, non-state actors, and IOs themselves, and domestically oriented elites, such as political parties. In present-day politics, IOs are not the exclusive concern of actors on the international stage, nor are political parties exclusively communicating about domestic political issues. Moreover, in this setting, messages about IOs typically invoke the institutional qualities of these organizations: their social purpose, the authority they have been granted, the procedures they use to make decisions, and their performance in solving societal problems. Elites focus their communication on these qualities because they are central to IOs as governance systems and because elites expect them to matter for people’s attitudes toward IOs. Finally, in this setting, citizens hold patterns of knowledge and beliefs that matter for elite communication. The public’s opinions of international issues are typically less informed, less politically salient, and more ambivalent.
Our theory offers answers to two crucial questions. First, why would elite communication be influential in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs? We argue that this expectation is logically grounded in three assumptions: (1) citizens’ political awareness tends to be low, (2) citizens therefore rely on heuristics to form political opinions, and (3) reliance on heuristics makes citizens susceptible to elite influence. The general point is that citizens behave no differently when forming opinions about IOs than what they do when making up their minds about domestic politics or other issues in life – they depend on heuristics. In fact, people may even be particularly prone to rely on cognitive shortcuts in the context of global governance, which they tend to know relatively less well.

Second, when should elite communication be particularly influential in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs? We argue that elite influence is likely to vary with conditions associated with the communicative setting: the elite, the message, and the citizen. Specifically, we identify six moderating factors: elite credibility, elite polarization, tone of the message, object of the message, citizens’ political awareness, and citizens’ political beliefs. The central point is that citizens are varyingly susceptible to elite influence depending on a set of identifiable conditions in the communicative situation. These conditions shape the extent to which elite information about the institutional qualities of IOs influence citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward these organizations.

The core findings of the book are consistent with our expectations. First, the way in which elites communicate about IOs has clear effects on the extent to which citizens perceive IOs to be legitimate. When elites invoke qualities of IOs to endorse or criticize these organizations in public, citizens listen and take notice. This potential to shape public opinion is not reserved for specific elites, such as national governments, but extends across a variety of global and domestic elites, including NGOs, IOs, and political parties. Similarly, communication is influential irrespective of which specific institutional quality that elites target in their messages – the authority, purpose, procedure, or performance of IOs. Second, elites are more able to shape citizen opinion toward IOs under some conditions rather than others. The context of the communicative situation thus matters for the degree of elite influence. As theorized, these moderating factors pertain to elites, messages, and citizens.

As the sources of information about IOs, elites themselves matter for the effectiveness of the communication. Elites that are perceived as more
credible are more influential in shaping people’s legitimacy perceptions. Domestically, people listen particularly to political parties with which they sympathize. Globally, people are more attuned to messages from member governments and NGOs than from IOs, which likely are seen as biased when communicating about themselves. In addition, the degree of polarization among elites conditions effects of communication on citizen’s perceptions of IOs. Notably, political parties are considerably more influential in a highly polarized setting in which parties are far apart, such as the US, compared to a lowly polarized setting in which the main parties are relatively close, such as Germany.

Other moderating factors are associated with the message as such. The tone of a message matters for the likelihood that it catches people’s attention and influences their opinions of IOs. Negative messages are more effective than positive. When elites criticize IOs by invoking democratic deficits or poor performances, they therefore get through more easily to citizens than when they endorse the same organizations. Furthermore, the object of a message matters. When messages target IOs that already have been subject to extensive societal contestation, the likelihood of further communication effects is significantly reduced. Citizens have then developed stronger priors about the IO in question, reducing the probability that additional information will shift their opinions.

Finally, the effectiveness of elite communication depends on characteristics of citizens as recipients of information about IOs. Citizens’ political beliefs matter in multiple ways for the impact of elite communication. Citizens are most receptive to elite communication when they are ideologically proximate to the elites issuing these messages. Moreover, citizens interpret the same information about IOs in different ways, and with different consequences for legitimacy beliefs, depending on their preexisting political beliefs. While, for instance, information that an IO is engaged in combating climate change boosts the legitimacy perceptions of people on the left, it decreases the legitimacy perceptions of people on the right.

**Research Design**

Studying empirically how elites shape the popular legitimacy of IOs is a challenging task. Legitimacy beliefs are commonly seen as a complex and elusive phenomenon that is difficult to capture empirically.
Identifying whether elites influence publics or whether publics rather influence elites is a notorious problem. And systematically examining how effects of elite communication vary across contexts puts great demands on research design. Our strategy for dealing with these challenges consists of three components: a survey approach, an experimental approach, and a comparative approach.

To start with, we opt for surveys as our approach for capturing legitimacy beliefs empirically. Surveys allow us to tap into the beliefs or perceptions of individuals vis-à-vis IOs. While there are several ways of operationalizing legitimacy beliefs in survey research, as we discuss in Chapter 3, all are based on the idea that such beliefs are subjective perceptions that individuals can be made to reveal through survey interviews. By aggregating individual survey responses, it is subsequently possible to map and compare legitimacy beliefs across countries, institutions, societal groups, and time, as well as to assess potential explanations of variation in legitimacy beliefs. Since the 1990s, extensive research in comparative politics and international relations has relied on the survey approach to legitimacy (e.g., Caldeira and Gibson 1995; Gilley 2006; Booth and Seligson 2009; Levi et al. 2009; Johnson 2011; Voeten 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Anderson et al. 2019; Dellmuth et al. 2022b).

To be sure, surveys also have certain limitations. For example, we cannot know exactly how respondents interpret closed questions, nor what experiences they draw upon when selecting their answers. Other research has therefore explored alternative ways of capturing legitimacy beliefs. Some have turned to political communication, such as statements in news media and social media (e.g., Binder and Heupel 2015; Rauh and Zürn 2020). Others have focused on political behavior, such as patterns of participation and protest (e.g., Velasco-Guachalla et al. 2021; Sommerer et al. 2022). However, both communication and behavior involve actions that are more likely to have strategic intent and are therefore less likely to capture sincere legitimacy beliefs. In addition, neither alternative is well suited to map legitimacy beliefs in a representative sample of a population, since these approaches focus specifically on those individuals who actively seek to make their voices heard. We therefore regard surveys as superior in identifying, aggregating, comparing, and explaining legitimacy beliefs.

The second key component of our research design is an experimental approach. Compared to regular observational surveys, surveys
with embedded experiments have particular advantages in identifying causal effects of elite communication. Any effort to establish whether elite communication affects public opinion by looking for relationships between elite statements and citizen views in polls confronts two well-known problems: complex causality and omitted variables (Gabel and Scheve 2007; Mutz 2011). For instance, correlations between elite communication and mass opinion may not only arise from elite effects on public attitudes but also result from public opinion influencing the positions of elites. In addition, correlations between elite communication and public opinion could result from a third unobserved cause, such as developments in the political environment that affect both elite and public opinion simultaneously. These problems are common concerns in previous research that investigates whether elite communication affects attitudes toward IOs based on efforts to link elite and public opinion data (e.g., Steenbergen and Jones 2002; Gabel and Scheve 2007; Chalmers and Dellmuth 2015).

Survey experiments offer a way out of these problems (Gaines et al. 2007; Sniderman 2011). They allow us to establish causal effects of elite communication by comparing citizens treated with specific messages from specific elites to citizens in a control group that are not treated with any message. In addition, the randomization of individuals built into any experimental design makes it possible to control for other potential explanations of citizen legitimacy beliefs, which may be unrelated to elite communication.

Specifically, we rely on population-based survey experiments. The advantage of this type of survey experiment is that theories can be tested on samples that are representative of a certain population, usually the citizens in a certain country (Mutz 2011). To implement our population-based survey experiments, we relied on online panels from YouGov, a well-reputed global survey company (Berinsky et al. 2012). YouGov uses targeted quota sampling with the aim to achieve representative samples at the end of the fieldwork. The samples for our survey experiments were matched to the full populations of the selected countries using age, education, gender, and party identification, and generally produce accurate population estimates (Ansolabehere and Rivers 2013; Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2014) (Online Appendix A).

We use two types of survey experiments in the book. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, we rely on vignette experiments. Vignette experiments are particularly useful when seeking to establish the separate causal
effects of multiple factors in complex theories (Mutz 2011, Ch. 4). Vignettes are short statements of one or a few sentences that contain the treatment and precede the question of interest. The purpose of vignette treatments is to assess what difference it makes when the factors embedded in the vignette are systematically varied. This method is common in research about how party cues affect public opinion (e.g., Druckman et al. 2013; Maier et al. 2012) and has become increasingly frequent in the study of global governance as well (e.g., Anderson et al. 2019; Isani and Schlipphak 2020; Spilker et al. 2020). In our experiments, the vignette treatments systematically vary the elites and the messages involved in communication and precede a question used to measure legitimacy beliefs toward an IO. By comparing average legitimacy beliefs in different treatment groups to those in a control group and to each other, we can establish if elite communication shapes citizen legitimacy beliefs and whether some elites or messages are more effective than others.

In Chapter 7, we instead rely on a conjoint experiment. Conjoint experiments involve having respondents rank or rate two or more hypothetical choices that have multiple attributes. The objective is to ascertain the influence of each attribute on respondents’ choices. Conjoint experiments thereby allow researchers to establish the causal effects of many treatment components simultaneously. In recent years, conjoint experiments have become increasingly common in political science (Hainmueller et al. 2014), including the study of global governance (Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Bernauer et al. 2020). In our experiment, we assess the influence of information about different institutional qualities of IOs on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. The conjoint design thus allows us to compare whether elite information about some institutional qualities is more effective than information about other qualities, when citizens simultaneously consider information about all qualities.

A question that frequently arises in relation to survey experimental research is whether its findings actually capture effects and patterns in the real world. After all, experiments such as ours expose respondents to stimuli in an artificial survey setting meant to represent actual communication by elites in public discourse. Like other survey experimental researchers, we recognize the limitations of our approach in this respect. However, there are reasons to remain optimistic about the usefulness of survey experiments in capturing real effects of elite
communication. Previous research suggests that the choices individuals make in vignette and conjoint experiments closely match the choices they make in real-world situations (Hainmueller et al. 2015).

In addition, we use a three-pronged strategy to strengthen confidence in our findings reflecting real-world outcomes. First, we strive to design experiments in ways that mimick conditions in the real world, for instance, using elite messages drawn from actual public discourse. Second, we rely on population-based samples of respondents rather than convenience samples to ensure that our findings are representative. Third, we discuss whether findings established in our experiments resonate with results from observational studies.

The third major component of our research design is its comparative scope. As noted, existing research on public opinion toward IOs is heavily focused on individual organizations, mainly the EU and to some extent the UN. Comparative analyses of legitimacy beliefs across several IOs are still in short supply. Similarly, most research on elite influence evaluates communication effects in single countries, usually the US. Comparative analyses of elite communication in multiple countries are notable for their absence. Our design breaks with this orientation of earlier scholarship by examining effects of elite communication across multiple countries and IOs. This allows us to establish the general importance of elite influence, while simultaneously exploring its conditionality across diverse contexts.

All five survey experiments were conducted in multiple countries. The included countries are Germany, the Philippines, South Africa, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US. This general selection of countries ensures diversity in contextual conditions, as it covers countries with different regional belongings, economic circumstances, political systems, and experiences of the IOs in question. At the same time, all are democratic countries, which avoids the issue that legitimacy for political institutions may mean different things to citizens of democratic and autocratic regimes (Jamal and Nooruddin 2010), and all have moderate to high levels of Internet penetration, thereby increasing the representativeness of the samples to the whole populations of those countries. Moreover, several of these countries are particularly politically important in the examined IOs, making our findings substantively important for the prospects of global governance. The specific combination of countries that we include varies slightly across the experiments, depending on the analytical purpose of the study.
For instance, in Chapter 5, we focus specifically on Germany and the US, since we want to explore how contextual variation in political polarization conditions the impact of party cueing on IO legitimacy beliefs. In contrast, Chapter 6 pools data from four diverse countries to reduce the risk of biases from contextual country factors.

Similarly, all five experiments are comparative across IOs. The included IOs are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), African Union (AU), EU, IMF, NAFTA, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), UN, UNFCCC, UNSC, and WTO. In one experiment, we instead compare across hypothetical IOs. This general selection allows us to assess whether the occurrence and strength of elite communication effects vary across IOs in different policy fields. All selected IOs are central in their respective policy domains, known to citizens at a basic level, and regularly subject to positive and negative communication by elites. This ensures that treatments expressing elite messages about these IOs are understandable and reasonable to respondents. At the same time, the specific combination of IOs varies across the experiments depending on the analytical purpose. In Chapter 4, for instance, we seek to evaluate whether elite communication effects are conditioned by the level of prior contestation of an IO and therefore select IOs with variation in this respect. Likewise, in Chapter 7, we opt for a comparison between hypothetical IOs, since the conjoint analysis requires a level of precision in the experimental conditions that real-world IOs cannot offer.

State of the Art

This book relates to three important bodies of research. Neither has offered a systematic and comparative account of the effects of elite communication on IO legitimacy perceptions, as we do. Yet all have provided important inspiration for this project and all have something to learn from our findings.

To begin with, recent years have witnessed an upsurge of interest in the legitimation and delegitimation of IOs by political and societal elites. Legitimation and delegitimation are processes of justification and contestation, whereby supporters and opponents of IOs seek to influence audience perceptions of the legitimacy of these organizations (Tallberg et al. 2018; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bexell et al. 2022). Theoretically, this literature is inspired by Weber’s (1922/1978, 213)
notion that every system of authority “attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy,” which directs our attention to the ways in which IOs are legitimized and delegitimized (see also Barker 2001). Empirically, it is spurred by recent developments in world politics that we have described in previous pages – the growing contestation and politicization of IOs around the world.

Simplifying slightly, this literature focuses on three categories of actors. First, growing out of social movement research, a range of contributions have explored opposition by NGOs against IOs (O’Brien et al. 2000; Kalm and Uhlin 2015; Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018; Stephen and Zürn 2019). Second, a number of studies have foregrounded states’ attempts at legitimizing and delegitimizing IOs as a means to further their objectives in world politics (Hurd 2007; Morse and Keohane 2014; Binder and Heupel 2015; Stephen and Zürn 2019). Third, scholars have started to thoroughly scrutinize IOs’ strategies of self-legitimation (Steffek 2003; Zaum 2013; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018; Zürn 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Rocabert et al. 2019; von Billerbeck 2020).

Distinguishing between behavioral, discursive, and institutional legitimation and delegitimation (Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018), this literature maps the types of strategies actors use (e.g., Gronau and Schmidtke 2016), the kinds of narratives they advance (e.g., Dingwerth et al. 2019), and the sorts of audiences at which they direct these efforts (e.g., Bexell and Jönsson 2018). Lately, this research has also turned to explanations of variation in legitimation and delegitimation, examining factors such as the authority and purpose of IOs, as well as the level of democracy in their membership (e.g., Rocabert et al. 2019; Schmidtke 2019). Yet, so far, this literature has not explored whether and when legitimation and delegitimation are successful in shaping popular perceptions of IOs. While documenting and explaining an increasingly prominent phenomenon in global governance, existing work has thus shied away from perhaps the most important question of all: so what?

Another important body of research is the growing literature on public opinion toward IOs. When this literature focuses specifically on legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, it tends to break down into individual, institutional, and societal explanations (Tallberg et al. 2018: Chs. 3–5). Research that takes the individual as the starting point attributes legitimacy beliefs to characteristics and circumstances of the person...
holding them, such as interest calculations, political values, social identification, and institutional trust (e.g., Dellmuth et al. 2022a, 2022b). Scholarship that adopts the organization as the starting point assumes that legitimacy beliefs arise from the features of IOs, such as their purposes, procedures, and performances (e.g., Hurd 2007; Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Anderson et al. 2019; Scholte and Tallberg 2018; Dellmuth et al. 2019; Bernauer et al. 2020; Verhaegen et al. 2021). Finally, research that embraces society as the starting point locates the sources of legitimacy beliefs in characteristics of the wider social structure, such as cultural norms, economic systems, and political regimes (e.g., Bernstein 2011; Gill and Cutler 2014; Scholte 2018).

In the broader literature on public opinion toward IOs, the debate has been dominated by competing perspectives on which individual-level logics that best explain variation in citizen attitudes. It features four main positions (Dellmuth et al. 2022b). The first emphasizes economic utility and expects people to form opinions based on cost-benefit assessments (e.g., Anderson and Reichert 1995; Dellmuth and Chalmers 2018; Gabel 1998; Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Lake 2009; Curtis et al. 2014; Rodrik 2018; Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019; Brutger and Clark 2022). The second position highlights social identity and predicts that people with more cosmopolitan orientations are more favorably disposed toward IOs (Carey 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2005; McLaren 2006; Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Norris 2009). The third position stresses political values and suggests that political orientation shapes people’s attitudes toward IOs (e.g., Norris 2000; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Hooghe et al. 2019). Finally, the fourth position emphasizes domestic experiences and attitudes, expecting either positive or negative relationships with opinions toward IOs (Sánchez-Cuenca 2000; Muñoz 2011; Hartevedt et al. 2013; Voeten 2013; Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Chaudoin 2014; Schlipphak 2015; de Vries 2018; Chapman and Chaudoin 2020; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020).

However, progress in research on public opinion toward IOs has been hampered by poor availability of systematic and comparable data (Dellmuth 2018). Data are either fragmented across disparate regional samples (e.g., Eurobarometer, Afrobarometer) or insufficiently systematic in their coverage of countries and IOs (e.g., World Values Survey [WVS]). As a consequence, most studies focus on individual IOs,
while comparisons across organizations are rare (but see Edwards 2009; Voeten 2013; Schlipphak 2015; Dellmuth et al. 2022a, 2022b). To date, the most impressive body of scholarship pertains to public opinion toward the EU, which has become an area of research in and of itself in European studies (for overviews, see Hooghe and Marks 2005; Hobolt and de Vries 2016). The UN is another organization covered by several studies (Torgler 2008; Norris 2009; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015).

Moreover, the role of elites in shaping public opinion toward IOs has received limited attention in this literature. The exception is a number of studies on the effects of party cueing and elite polarization in the context of the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Gabel and Scheve 2007; de Vries and Edwards 2009; Maier et al. 2012; Torcal et al. 2018). However, this literature confronts a number of restrictions. Methodologically, it has proven difficult to establish the causal effects of elite communication on public opinion, given problems of complex causality and omitted variables, leading to calls for experimental designs. Empirically, its scope is limited to the EU, and the broader applicability of its findings has not been assessed. Theoretically, it focuses exclusively on how domestic parties influence public opinion, whereas elite communication in global governance is a broader phenomenon, involving legitimation and delegitimation by multiple types of elites.

Finally, we draw inspiration from the large body of scholarship on elite communication in American and comparative politics. This literature focuses on the influence of partisan elites on public opinion. Building on pioneering contributions by Downs (1957), Converse (1964), and Zaller (1992), it assumes that citizens turn to party elites for information that can help to simplify their political choices. Informed by this insight, scholars have examined the communicative processes by which elites influence public opinion, distinguishing between cueing and framing. While cueing effects arise whenever opinions are influenced by pieces of information that help people to make inferences without more detailed knowledge, framing effects refer more narrowly to changes in opinions that result from the way in which issues are presented (Druckman et al. 2010).

Both cueing and framing effects have attracted significant attention in the literature on elite communication and public opinion. Studies of cueing effects explore how simple information about the position
of a political party shapes people’s opinions toward an issue (e.g., Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Hobolt 2007; Levendusky 2010; Bullock 2011; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Torcal et al. 2018). Related, studies of framing effects explore how the ways in which politicians present issues affect people’s attitudes toward those issues (e.g., Iyengar 1991; Nelson et al. 1999; Druckman 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007a; Busby et al. 2018; Zvobgo 2019). Having demonstrated that cueing and framing effects are ubiquitous in politics, this literature is nowadays primarily concerned with the conditions under which such effects are more or less likely. Among the moderating factors that studies examine are elite polarization (Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013), elite credibility (Druckman 2001), partisan identification (Leeper and Slothuus 2014), political awareness (Sniderman et al. 1991; Bullock 2011), competing messages (Chong and Druckman 2007b), and time (Chong and Druckman 2010). Studies of cueing and framing effects rely almost exclusively on experiments, because of their advantages in identifying and comparing causal effects across alternative conditions.

Yet, so far, this literature has hardly ventured beyond the setting of domestic politics; in fact, it remains overwhelmingly focused on party elites and public opinion in the US. When studies have considered world politics, it has been for the purpose of establishing whether party cueing may affect people’s attitudes on international matters as well (Hiscox 2006; Berinsky 2009; Hicks et al. 2014; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Dür and Schlipphak 2021). Yet we know of no studies in this tradition that examine elite communication about IOs, apart from the few studies on the EU, and of no studies that consider cueing and framing by other types of elites than political parties. Yet world politics is rife with elite contestation over IOs and offers a specific set of conditions that may shape the extent to which elites influence citizen attitudes.

This book advances on research in all three areas. First, we develop a novel theory of elite communication in global governance, explaining why elites influence people’s legitimacy beliefs toward IOs and when those effects are particularly strong. Second, we adopt an experimental design that allows us to identify causal effects of elite communication with some certainty and to control for alternative explanations of legitimacy beliefs. Third, we study elite communication comparatively across a variety of IOs and countries, which permits us to establish the
Plan of the Book

This introduction is followed by seven chapters. Chapter 2 sets the stage for the book by providing an empirical overview of citizen legitimacy beliefs, elite legitimacy beliefs, and elite communication in global governance. It shows that citizen legitimacy beliefs vary across countries, IOs, and over time, but that there is no secular decline in IO legitimacy in the eyes of citizens; that elites are divided in their legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, but that they on average moderately support IOs; and that elite communication about IOs mainly is negative in tone, but also involves a broadening of narratives about IOs and a pattern of fluctuations over time.

Chapter 3 presents our theory of elite communication in global governance. It begins by introducing our conceptualization of legitimacy beliefs and our favored empirical measure of such beliefs. It then contextualizes our theory through a discussion of elites and messages in the global setting, before laying out the logic of the theory in two consecutive steps. The first step explains why we should expect elite communication to shape citizens’ legitimacy beliefs, anchoring this expectation in assumptions about heuristic opinion formation. The second step specifies when we should expect elite communication to be particularly influential, identifying conditions associated with all three components of the communicative setting – elites, messages, and citizens.

Chapters 4 to 7 make up the empirical section of the book. These chapters are grouped in two parts. Chapters 4 and 5 focus specifically on the elites engaging in communication. Chapters 6 and 7, in turn, focus particularly on the content of communicated messages. This division of labor allows us to explore in greater depth the specific conditions for effective communication associated with elites and messages, respectively. Conditions associated with citizens are examined throughout all chapters.

More specifically, Chapter 4 explores the conditions under which globally active elites are influential in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. It distinguishes between member governments, NGOs, and IOs as three sets of global elites, evaluates whether these
elites impact legitimacy beliefs through their communication, and identifies the conditions under which such communication is more or less successful. It examines the expectations of our theory comparatively across five prominent global or regional IOs (EU, IMF, NAFTA, UN, and WTO) based on nationally representative samples of respondents in three countries (Germany, the UK, and the US). A key finding of the chapter is that communication by more credible elites (member governments and NGOs) tends to have stronger effects on citizens’ legitimacy perceptions than communication by less credible elites (IOs themselves).

Chapter 5 turns to domestically active elites and examines the conditions under which political parties are influential in shaping public perceptions of IO legitimacy. While we know from previous research that political parties are powerful communicators about domestic political matters, we know less about the effects of party cues on global political issues. The chapter explores this topic based on party communication regarding two IOs (NATO and UN) in two countries (Germany and the US), which vary in the degree of political polarization. It finds that party cues almost exclusively shape legitimacy beliefs toward NATO and the UN in the highly polarized US setting, while few effects are detected in the less polarized German context.

Chapter 6 then shifts the principal focus from elites to the contents of messages, examining whether and to what extent information about the procedures and performances of IOs affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. It examines this issue comparatively across seven IOs in different issue areas (AU, EU, IMF, NAFTA, UNSC, and UNFCCC) based on nationally representative samples from four countries in diverse world regions (Germany, the Philippines, South Africa, and the US). It finds that information about both procedures and performances impacts legitimacy beliefs. Moreover, within procedure and performance, communicated qualities of democracy, effectiveness, and fairness all matter for citizens’ legitimacy perceptions.

Chapter 7 extends the analysis to also consider, for the first time, the impact of information on the authority and purpose of IOs. In addition, it shifts to an experimental design that allows for an assessment of how these institutional qualities matter when simultaneously communicated to citizens. It examines this issue across hypothetical IOs and based on nationally representative samples in two countries (Germany and the US), which vary in ways that may shape citizens’
receptivity to communication about the authority and purpose of IOs specifically. The chapter establishes that citizens are sensitive to information about an IO’s authority and purpose when forming legitimacy beliefs. However, such effects are conditioned by people’s political priors. In the US, we find evidence that information about an IO’s authority has a weaker negative effect on citizens with internationalist attitudes, while citizens with different partisan identification value the varying social purposes of an IO differently. In Germany, we do not find such conditioning effects.

Chapter 8 summarizes the empirical findings of the previous chapters and outlines the implications of the book’s results for our understanding of politics in four areas: legitimacy and legitimation, elite communication and public opinion, elite influence and democratic politics, and the contemporary backlash against IOs.
One of the key insights of scholarship on global governance over the past decade is that IOs have become increasingly salient and debated among citizens and elites. In this chapter, we set the stage for the main analysis in this book by presenting the broader context in which we study elite communication effects on citizen legitimacy beliefs. The chapter provides an overview of patterns of citizen opinion, elite opinion, and elite communications about IOs. These patterns are not only substantively interesting in themselves but also useful for contextualizing the experimental results in the remainder of the book.

We begin this chapter by asking to what extent citizens perceive IOs to be legitimate, that is, whether they perceive an IO’s exercise of authority to be appropriate. To address this question, we engage in an analysis of citizen attitudes toward IOs over time and across IOs. The longitudinal analysis consists of a mapping of patterns of legitimacy beliefs among citizens, drawing on data from the European Values Study (EVS) and WVS for the period 1994–2020 as well as regional surveys. The assessment of popular legitimacy beliefs toward IOs has been hampered until recently by an absence of comparable data at a global scale. Data on legitimacy beliefs were long available primarily for the EU and UN. Thus, for the cross-IO analysis, we draw on recent data on several IOs in the seventh wave of WVS (WVS7), to which we contributed a module on global governance to increase the coverage of IOs.

Second, we ask about the extent to which elites perceive IOs to be legitimate. To this end, we map elite opinion across countries, IOs, and elite types. We refer to elites as people in leading positions in their respective field, distinguishing between elites in six distinct political and societal sectors. We draw on original data from the LegGov Elite Survey, conducted among 860 leaders in six countries, as well as a group of global elites, between 2017 and 2020 (Verhaegen et al.)
These data allow us to show patterns of elite opinion toward a variety of IOs in a diverse set of countries.

In the third section, we ask how elites communicate about IOs. To address this question, we focus on practices of discursive legitimation and delegitimation. Legitimation and delegitimation are attempts to boost or undermine legitimacy perceptions in a given audience, in our case citizens (Tallberg and Zürn 2019; see also Gronau and Schmidtke 2016, 540; Dingwerth et al. 2019, 36–39; Bexell et al. 2022). We focus specifically on the intensity, narratives, and tone of legitimation and delegitimation, summarizing evidence from recent empirical research, and illustrating patterns using original newspaper and social media data.

We arrive at three main conclusions. First, we find little support for the widespread belief that the backlash against international cooperation is rooted in the mass public (e.g., Hobolt 2016; Foster and Frieden 2017; Zürn 2018; Colantone and Stanig 2019; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Rather, we see country-specific fluctuations in the short- and medium-term, but no consistent pattern of long-term decline (Kriesi 2013; Tallberg 2021; Walter 2021). Second, our elite survey data show that elites on average display moderate support for IOs. However, these averages hide a division among elites, where slightly more than half are rather positive and slightly less than half are rather negative toward IOs. Our results also reveal interesting variation in elite opinion across countries and elite types. Third, elite communication about IOs has fluctuated in intensity in recent decades but also seen a broadening of the type of narratives that are used when criticizing or defending IOs. Moreover, elite communication about IOs has been primarily negative in tone. There is evidence that purpose- and performance-related narratives are more frequent than procedure-related narratives in IO’s own communication, even if the latter are becoming increasingly important. Our news and social media evidence suggests that elite communication typically takes place in the context of negatively connotated narratives, especially in news media, whose very raison d’être is to identify problems.

Legitimacy Beliefs among Citizens

We explore to what extent citizens perceive IOs as legitimate and how those patterns have developed over time. We examine these issues with a particular focus on the UN and a select set of regional organizations.
Before we turn to our mapping of legitimacy beliefs among citizens, we briefly explain our data.

Data

Our interest here is to illustrate citizen attitudes toward IOs across countries and over time. However, comparative data on public opinion vis-à-vis IOs are in short supply. The only cross-national dataset on citizen opinion toward IOs with global reach is the WVS. The WVS has in recent waves included a growing number of organizations in a question about confidence in IOs, but there are important limitations. With the exception of the UN, the included IOs are almost exclusively regional organizations. Moreover, the countries covered tend to vary from one survey wave to another, making systematic tracking of legitimacy beliefs over time difficult (Dellmuth 2018). Next to the WVS, public opinion toward IOs is covered in a number of regional barometers, but then with an exclusive focus on specific regional organizations. In our mapping of citizen legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, we therefore use a combination of data from the WVS and regional barometers.

First, we use data on the UN from the EVS and WVS in order to map attitudes toward this organization in specific countries over the time period 1994–2020. The UN is the global IO for which we have the most encompassing public opinion data (Online Appendix B).

Second, we complement the analysis of the UN with an inquiry into regional organizations in three geographical contexts with adequate data availability: Africa, Europe, and Latin America. For Africa, we use data from the Afrobarometer on citizen support for the AU over the time period 2002–2015. For Europe, we use data on trust in the EU from the Eurobarometer over the period 2003–2017. In Latin America, we use data from the Latinobarometer on support for Mercosur over the time period 2001–2015.

Third, we examine cross-IO variation in citizens’ legitimacy beliefs based on new data from the WVS7. Thanks to a question battery we contributed to this wave, we have access to comparable data on citizens’ confidence in a broader range of global IOs for the period 2017–2020 (for in-depth analyses using these data, see Dellmuth et al. 2022a, 2022b). These IOs enjoy substantial authority in their respective issue areas, are reasonably known to citizens, and allow us to assess whether patterns of legitimacy beliefs vary among IOs active
in economic governance (IMF, World Bank, WTO) compared to IOs involved in human security governance (ICC, NATO, UN, WHO).

When mapping public opinion toward IOs in this section, we are pragmatic as to the measures used in different surveys. While Chapter 3 explains why we prefer citizens’ confidence in an IO as the measure of legitimacy beliefs, we accept greater diversity in measures in this section, for purposes of being able to identify some patterns based on the scattered data that exist.

**Patterns in Legitimacy Beliefs**

The UN is a hub and major incubator of ideas in global governance. The organization was established in the tradition of the League of Nations after World War II and has undergone numerous reforms, which have broadened its mandate and rendered its landscape of agencies, bodies, funds, and programs more complex and interconnected. The UN deals with a wide variety of issue areas and is one of the most accessible IOs for nonstate actors (Tallberg et al. 2013). In recent years, the organization has experienced criticism for its inability to act in various conflicts, as well as protests in association with its climate change summits (Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018). The IO’s most powerful body, the UNSC, has relatively low legitimacy among the broader membership (Binder and Heupel 2015). Reform aimed at improving effectiveness and legitimacy is a consistent theme in the UN (Weiss 2012).

To examine popular legitimacy beliefs in the UN, we focus on confidence in the organization among citizens in all countries covered by the EVS and WVS 1994–2020, as well as the specific trajectories for a select number of countries: Germany, Japan, Poland, Russia, Turkey, and the US.¹ These countries represent a mix between established powers with privileged positions on the UNSC (Russia and the US), regional powers without the same institutional privileges (Germany and Japan), and countries that have often been at the receiving end of global governance (Poland and Turkey).

The key finding in Figure 2.1 is that the perceived legitimacy of the UN among citizens declined between 1994 and 2014 in the observed

¹ Data come from the joint EVS-WVS trend file (EVS 2021; Haerpfer et al. 2021), released in May 2020.
Figure 2.1 Citizen confidence in the UN and domestic government

Source: EVS and WVS trend file, 3rd–7th wave, 1994–2020 (EVS 2021; Haerpfer et al. 2021). Question wording: I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it “a great deal of confidence” (4), “quite a lot of confidence” (3), “not very much confidence” (2), or “none at all” (1). Number of respondents is ca. 1,000–2,000 per country. Poststratification weights were used. UN average calculated for all countries available. See www.worldvaluessurvey.org.
countries, but has increased since. We see a decline of about 10 percentage points in the share of citizens having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the UN over the first two decades, from about 58 percent in 1994 to about 46 percent in 2014. Since 2015, this share has increased slightly to about 48 percent. However, we see great variation across countries.

In Germany, slightly less than every other citizen has a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the UN, which is slightly below the global average. Germany has seen much fluctuation in UN confidence since the early 1990s, in line with broader assessments that we are not seeing a continuous erosion of legitimacy, but rather short- or medium-term fluctuations (Kriesi 2013; Walter 2021). Between 1999 and 2004, UN confidence in Germany was at an all-time high during the observed period, perhaps influenced by the events around “9/11” and the ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, which were heavily politicized in Germany and broadly seen as underlining the need for multilateralism rather than unilateralism.

Turning to the patterns in other countries, Poland and the US stand out. In both countries, a growing share of citizens have confidence in the UN since 2010, despite both countries’ governments repeatedly expressing critique against the liberal world order. In Poland, UN confidence has risen from almost 50 to about 60 percent over this time period. In the US, it has risen from about 35–45 percent during the same time period. By contrast, in Russia and Turkey, UN confidence has fallen and is relatively weak. In Japan, UN confidence has remained largely stable at around 60 percent since the early 1990s.

One way of putting these patterns of IO confidence in a broader context is to compare with corresponding levels of citizen confidence in the respective domestic governments. Governments have on average not experienced the same decline as the UN over time in the observed countries, but start from lower levels of legitimacy in the eyes of citizens to begin with. The average level of confidence in governments is only marginally lower at the end of the observation period (41 percent) compared to the beginning (43 percent). Average confidence in the national government in the surveyed countries is consistently lower than the average confidence in the UN in the same countries. Today, every other citizen has confidence in the UN, while only 41 percent have confidence in their country’s government.
There are country-specific trends when comparing government and IO confidence. For example, in Japan, the gap between government and UN confidence was largest between 1994 and 2009 (almost 40 percent). Since then, confidence in the government has increased, shrinking the gap to about 10 percent today. In Russia, confidence in the government increased strongly from 30 to 50 percent over the past thirty years, while confidence in the UN fell slightly from 50 to about 45 percent over this period. Likewise, Poland has seen a surge of confidence in the government from about 50 to 70 percent during this period, while UN confidence fell from about 50 to slightly under 40 percent. In Germany, the trajectories for government and UN confidence are relatively similar. Finally, in the US, confidence in government has remained relatively stable at slightly under 40 percent since 1999, while confidence in the UN fell sharply between 1999 and 2009 from about 55 percent to about 35 percent.

Next, we turn to the regional organizations. We begin with the AU. This organization is a multi-issue organization active in a large number of policy areas. Central issue areas are development, economic integration, and security. The transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the AU in 2001 brought about a new institutional structure, as well as deep policy reforms. More emphasis was placed on economic integration, environmental cooperation, and infrastructure development within the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). In addition, the AU’s pillar for peacekeeping was strengthened, by moving beyond the traditional principle of nonintervention to a pledge to human security, solidarity, and a responsibility to protect, captured in the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). As a main venue for African diplomacy and regional politics, the AU has assumed ever greater authority since the beginning of the 1990s (Hooghe et al. 2017) and has thus been increasingly judged against standards of democratic and effective decision-making (Nujoma 2002; Witt 2019). We examine perceptions of the AU in the context of six member countries with varying size, colonial past, and experiences with IOs: Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Average perceptions of how well the AU does its job are remarkably stable (Figure 2.2). The average level oscillates between 50 and 60 percent over the period from 2002 to 2015. Among the specific countries examined, AU perceptions fluctuate especially in Nigeria and
Legitimacy Beliefs among Citizens

Tanzania, where confidence dropped from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013, but then saw a recovery between 2012/2013 and 2014/2015. AU perceptions fluctuate in Mali and Mozambique as well, starting out with relatively high shares of people thinking the AU is helpful, but then experiencing a decline from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013, followed by a rise again in 2014/2015. By contrast, perceptions of the AU are relatively stable in Kenya and South Africa, where about every other citizen thinks that the AU is helpful.

The EU is arguably the most powerful of all regional organizations. It enjoys more authority than other regional IOs because of decision-making competence in a larger number of issue areas, far-reaching delegation to supranational institutions, and extensive pooling of authority in collective decision-making (Hooghe et al. 2017; Zürn 2018). European integration is also deeper because of the monetary

Figure 2.2 Citizen support for the AU

Source: Afrobarometer, 2002–2015. Question wording: In your opinion, how much does the African Union do to help this country, or haven’t you heard enough to say? 0 = Do nothing, no help, 1 = Help a little bit, 2 = Help somewhat, 3 = Help a lot. Poststratification (“within-country”) weights were used. AU average calculated using data for all countries available, that is, eight countries before 2008, and about eighteen countries in Africa after 2008.
union between nineteen of the twenty-seven member states, and due to the primacy and direct applicability of EU law. Because of its far-reaching authority, the EU has become increasingly politicized in its member states (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Zürn et al. 2012; De Vries 2018; Schmidt 2019). In January 2020, the UK left the EU following a national referendum on membership in 2016.

We analyze trust in the EU from 2003 to 2017. Average trust stood at about 45 percent in 2017, which is lower than the 60 percent recorded in 2007, but higher than the all-time low in 2013 at around 38 percent. We also show specific trends for Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and the UK (Figure 2.3). These countries have varying experiences with the EU, in terms of when they joined the organization, the formal power they enjoy within institutions, and their contributions to the EU’s budget, which is an important dividing line in EU politics (Hooghe and Marks 2005).
In most of these countries, EU trust declined following the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007/2008, leading to historically low trust levels in 2013. However, EU trust has since recovered in most of the examined countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and the UK), the exception being Poland. EU trust is highest in Poland (and Denmark) among the countries studied, but has steadily declined from almost 80 percent in 2007 (following the country’s accession to the EU and its improving economic situation) to about 50 percent since 2013. Unsurprisingly, the lowest levels of trust throughout the time period are found in the UK, where trust fluctuates between 20 and 40 percent.

We now turn to Mercosur, a regional trade arrangement between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The organization is a customs union with free trade among its member states and common external tariffs. In addition, it coordinates common standards for goods, agriculture, health, infrastructure, and food. With its main focus on economic integration, Mercosur is more limited in terms of authority and issue scope than the AU and the EU. Moreover, its three main decision-making bodies – the Common Market Council, Common Market Group, and the Trade Commission – use unanimous decision-making. Mercosur has enacted a series of reforms to spur integration over the past two decades, including the deepening of judicial integration through the creation of the Permanent Review Court (Arnold and Rittberger 2013). However, Mercosur’s authority remains relatively restricted, both in terms of delegation and pooling (Hooghe and Marks 2015; Meissner 2017). We focus on average perceptions of Mercosur in all member states, as well as the specific trajectories for three member countries: Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela.

On average, in 2014–2015, almost 70 percent of all citizens in Mercosur evaluate the organization as 6 or higher on a 10-point scale ranging from very bad to very good. This is the highest level of average public trust among the IOs examined in this chapter. From 2000 to 2015, average positive evaluations of Mercosur rose from slightly less than 50 percent to about 67 percent. The rise was especially steep between 2009 and 2015, when average support increased more than

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2 Venezuela has been a member since 2003 but has been suspended in all the rights and obligations since 2016.
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10 percentage points. The trajectories among the three member countries specifically examined are remarkably close to the average, in particular since 2003 (Figure 2.4).

As a last step, we broaden the selection of IOs and use data from the most recent wave of the WVS (Figure 2.5). On the whole, citizens have a medium level of confidence in IOs. The share of citizens having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in an IO is highest for the WHO (about 60 percent) and the UN (about 50 percent), followed by the WTO, the World Bank, and the ICC (40–45 percent). The corresponding figure for the IMF and NATO is about or slightly less than 40 percent. Overall, these figures suggest that IOs engaged in human security governance (ICC, NATO, UN, and WHO) enjoy greater confidence on average than IOs active in economic governance (IMF, World Bank, and WTO). Interestingly, confidence in domestic government is at slightly over 40 percent, putting national governments in the middle of the ranking.

Figure 2.4 Citizen support for the Mercosur
Source: Latinobarometer, 2001–2015. Question wording: From the list of institutions which are on this card, please put the institution on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being very bad and 10 very good. Percentage of those scoring 6 or higher on this scale. Poststratification weights were used. Mercosur average calculated using data for all five member states. Data available for 2001, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2013, and 2015.
Legitimacy Beliefs among Elites

Taken together, there is no consistent pattern indicating a crisis of legitimacy for IOs, even if there is a downward trend for the UN and the EU in a long-term perspective. However, both the UN and the EU have seen increasing legitimacy since about 2013–2014. In addition, confidence in the AU has been relatively stable over the past twenty years, while Mercosur has seen a significant rise in popular legitimacy. When comparing confidence across IOs, the WHO, and the UN enjoy most confidence.

Legitimacy Beliefs among Elites

Next, we turn to legitimacy beliefs toward IOs among elites. As a subset of the general public, elites are distinct in ways that may shape their perceptions of IOs. Elites tend to have the greatest access and input to IOs, and indeed conduct the actual global governing. They
are decision-makers in IOs (Cox and Jacobson 1973), implement IO policies (Hawkins et al. 2006), lead business and civil society advocacy vis-à-vis IOs (Dür et al. 2019; Scholte 2011), contribute knowledge to IOs through research (Haas 1992), and shape perceptions of IOs via the media (Schmidtke 2019).

Data

Few surveys have sought to capture elite opinion toward IOs, and existing datasets cannot be used for cross-national and cross-organizational comparisons of attitudes toward IOs among political and societal elites. Existing studies have drawn on data on elite opinion toward the EU (Hooghe 2002; Best et al. 2012; Persson et al. 2019), and legitimacy beliefs among elites in government (Binder and Heupel 2015) as well as civil society (Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018). The Chicago Council on Global Affairs regularly maps the opinions of both the general public and opinion leaders on matters of foreign policy, but its coverage is restricted to the US and it does not specifically focus on attitudes toward IOs (Kafura 2019).

In the absence of systematic data on elite opinion toward IOs, our team in the LegGov research program engaged in a large-scale collection of original data on elite legitimacy beliefs. The methodology is described in detail in Verhaegen et al. (2019) (for in-depth analyses based on these data, see Tallberg and Verhaegen 2020; Scholte et al. 2021; Verhaegen et al. 2021; Dellmuth et al. 2022a, 2022b). Our survey was fielded in 2017–2019 in six diverse countries around the world – Brazil, Germany, the Philippines, Russia, South Africa, and the US. We also included a sample of global elites, working for transnational organizations, such as staff of IOs, multinational corporations, global news media, and international NGOs. More specifically, we interviewed 860 elite individuals: 124 in Brazil, 123 in Germany, 122 in the Philippines, 108 in Russia, 123 in South Africa, 122 in the US, and 138 at the global level.

We define elites as persons who hold leading positions in key organizations in society that strive to be politically influential. While most studies of elite opinion focus exclusively on political elites, the LegGov survey also encompasses wider societal elites. Specifically, we distinguished between six elite types, of which two types were political – party and bureaucratic elites – and four types were societal – business,
civil society, media, and academic elites. In the global sample, we distinguish between member state representatives and IO officials in the category of international bureaucrats. For the selection of elite interviewees, the survey used quota sampling as the preferred procedure.

Among many issues, the survey inquired about elite individuals’ confidence in ten IOs. These IOs differ with respect to authority, membership, and issue area. They include IOs in economic and human security governance, similarly to the WVS data above; in addition, the elite data allow for distinguishing between global organizations with universal membership – the ICC, IMF, UN, UNFCCC, WHO, World Bank, and WTO – and restricted membership – the Group of Twenty (G20), NATO, and UNSC.

The elites who participated in the survey have higher formal education than the wider public. In addition, they likely have greater experience of interaction with IOs, as a result of working in positions and sectors that bring them into closer contact with political institutions. As can be expected, a comparative analysis of elite and citizen knowledge in the five countries shows that elites tend to know more about global governance than citizens. We find that about 62 percent of the elite respondents in Brazil, Germany, the Philippines, Russia, and the US correctly answered three knowledge questions about the UNSC, the IMF, and Amnesty International, compared to about 13 percent of the citizens in these countries in the WVS7 (Dellmuth et al. 2022b).³

In the following, we present patterns in elite legitimacy beliefs across IOs, countries, and elite types.

**Patterns in Elite Legitimacy Beliefs**

On average, elites are moderately supportive of IOs. In contrast to the citizen data in Figure 2.5, a slight *majority* of elites have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in these IOs (Figure 2.6). The percentage of elites having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence is highest in the WHO (more than 80 percent) and lowest in the G20 (about 50 percent).

³ “Don’t know” and incorrect responses were coded as incorrect (0), and correct answers as 1 (cf. Jessee 2017). Probability weights were applied to calculate percentages to approximate a representative sample in the included countries. Hong Kong and Taiwan were included as strata for which representative samples are drawn in the WVS7.
This result for the WHO is interesting given the growing contestation of the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Like in the citizen data, the IO enjoying the second-highest level of support is the UN, with about 70 percent of elites having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the organization, followed by the ICC and the UNFCCC with slightly more than 60 percent. The World Bank, WTO, IMF, UNSC, and NATO all attract a great deal or quite a lot of confidence among slightly more than 50 percent of the elites studied. However, these averages hide important divisions among elites in terms of their levels of confidence in IOs. If 60 percent of elites have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in IOs, 40 percent of elites do not. These contrasting perspectives on the legitimacy of IOs can help us to understand why elites compete in shaping citizen opinion toward IOs using positive and negative communication. The divisions among elites are particularly pronounced with regard to the IMF, NATO, and UNFCCC, for which a larger share of respondents use the two extreme options – a great deal of confidence or no confidence at all. The divisions are less severe in the case of the UN, WTO, and World Bank, for which a larger share of elite respondents use the two middle options – little or quite a lot of confidence in the IO.
Legitimacy Beliefs among Elites

Again, we use confidence in the domestic government as a point for comparison. Most IOs examined enjoy more elite confidence on average than the domestic governments, except for the IMF, UNSC, NATO, and G20. This might be because these IOs are especially contested in some of the examined countries, which is what we can observe in the next graph.

Figure 2.7 shows how confidence in the same ten IOs (pooled) varies across countries. Interestingly, elites on average have most confidence in IOs in Brazil, the global sample, the US, and Germany, and least in the Philippines, Russia, and South Africa. Only in South Africa is the support for IOs among elites clearly lower than in the other countries; in South Africa, only slightly more than 40 percent have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in IOs, whereas the corresponding figures for the other samples are between about 55 and 70 percent.

At the same time, elites in some of these countries have been at the forefront of attacking international cooperation. For example, in the US, former President Donald Trump concretized his “America first” strategy by withdrawing the country from several international agreements and organizations; in the Philippines, President Duterte is a
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vocal antagonist of international cooperation and has threatened to leave the UN; in Germany, the populist right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland is critical of EU cooperation and has expressed support for Brexit; and in Brazil, President Bolsonaro regularly offers scathing critique of the UNFCCC and the WHO. Examining the variation in confidence in all IOs in these countries, we see that elites are especially divided over international cooperation in Brazil, the Philippines, and the global sample, and least divided in Germany, Russia, and the US. While this may seem counterintuitive given partisan political polarization in the US, it is worth reiterating that the partisan-political category only is one of six different elite types in our sample.

We now turn to the question of how confidence in IOs varies by elite type. Figure 2.8 shows that there is fairly extensive variation across the six types of elites, amounting to almost 30 percentage points between the lowest and the highest confidence levels. In particular, bureaucrats in various categories (national bureaucrats, IO officials, and member

Figure 2.8 Elite confidence in IOs, by elite type

Source: LegGov Elite Survey (Verhaegen et al. 2019), 2017–2019. Question wording as in the WVS7, with four answer categories (see Figure 2.1). Member state representatives in IOs (“MS rep’s”) as well as permanent officials in IOs (“IO officials”) are categories which belong to the global sample depicted in Figure 2.6, while the other categories consist of data pooled from the six countries examined. This figure is based on the average percentage of people having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the ten IOs shown in Figure 2.6.
state representatives in IOs) and business leaders stand out as having high and very similar levels of confidence toward IOs. Around 70 percent of elites in these sectors have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in IOs. In the categories of party and research elites, around 60 percent have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in IOs. The lowest shares of elite individuals having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in IOs can be found among media and civil society elites (around 50 percent).

In terms of how divided elites are, we see a larger share of respondents indicating a great deal of confidence or no confidence at all among bureaucrats, member state representatives in IOs, and media. The divisions are less severe among research elites, business elites, and IO officials.

In sum, elites show moderate support for IOs on average, even if there is some variation across IOs, countries, and elite types. Elites have most confidence in the WHO and the UN, and least confidence in NATO and the G20. The highest confidence in IOs is found in Brazil and the global sample, and the lowest in South Africa and Russia. Bureaucratic elites and business elites display the highest confidence in IOs, while confidence is lowest among civil society and media elites.

However, these averages also mask divisions among elites within the same country and sector. If we consider the variety of responses given by elites, it becomes clear that they are split in their attitudes toward IOs. Those divisions are particularly strong with regard to the IMF, NATO, and the UNFCCC; in Brazil, the Philippines, and the global sample; and among bureaucrats, media elites, and member state representatives in IOs. In the next section, we examine how elites with varying attitudes toward international cooperation make use of positive and negative messages in an effort to influence the public.

Elite Communication

Having established patterns in citizen and elite attitudes toward IOs, we now examine ways in which elites communicate to citizens about IOs. For these purposes, we turn to research and data on legitimation and delegitimation in global governance. Much elite communication is conducted in an attempt to discursively confer legitimacy on IOs (legitimation) or withdraw legitimacy from IOs (delegitimation) by affecting citizen opinion. Legitimation is a relational concept, and IOs can be both
the subject and object of the communication (Biegón and Gronau 2012, 179). As subjects, IOs engage in self-legitimation, aiming at maximizing their own legitimacy (Zaum 2013; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018). As objects, IOs are often the targets of communication by national governments, NGOs, and political parties (Stephen and Zürn 2019; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2021). We draw on empirical findings in this research to describe the nature of elite communication across three dimensions: intensity, narratives, and tone. In addition, we illustrate how elite communication is manifested along these three dimensions in a given year based on an original dataset comprising news media and social media data.

Data

Legitimation and delegitimation of IOs may be of three principal kinds: discursive, institutional, and behavioral (Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Given our focus on elite communication, we are exclusively interested in discursive legitimation, as expressed in public statements and official texts by elite supporters and opponents of IOs (Steffek 2003; Gronau 2015). Discursive legitimation and delegitimation takes place in a variety of ways, among them, official IO communication, parliamentary debates, press conferences, party programs, news media, and social media. Different forms of content analysis are the favored method for capturing discursive legitimation and delegitimation.

The existing literature on discursive legitimation and delegitimation is sizeable and until recently mainly case-study based. Many studies focus on the EU (for overviews, see Hurrelmann 2007; Rittberger and Schroeder 2016), but a growing number of contributions study other IOs, often comparatively. For instance, Dingwerth et al. (2019) use IO annual reports from the period 1970–2010 to examine the increasing emphasis on democratic procedures in IOs’ public communication, focusing on the AU, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Union for Conservation of Nature, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and WTO. Gronau (2015) studies the self-legitimation efforts of the G8 and the G20 over almost 40 years based on ample textual and visual material. Nuñez-Mietz (2018) evaluates the case of NATO’s intervention in Kosovo in 1999, identifying seven types of strategic self-legitimation moves. Gregoratti and Uhlin (2018) study protests by civil society activists targeting global governance institutions, using illustrations from the ASEAN, Asian
Development Bank, and G8. Bexell et al. (2022) offers paired comparisons of the legitimation and delegitimation of global governance institutions in a variety of issue areas.

The most recent years have seen a number of comparative large-scale data collection efforts on legitimation and delegitimation. These initiatives have typically relied on content analysis of either IO annual reports (e.g., Dingwerth et al. 2019; Gregoratti and Stappert 2019; Bexell et al. 2021, 2022; Lenz et al. 2020) or news media (e.g., Bes et al. 2019; Schmidtke 2019; Rauh and Zürn 2020; Sommerer et al. 2022). The aim of these studies is to provide general knowledge about legitimation and delegitimation by comparing such practices across organizations and over time. Social media appear to offer a source of data on discursive legitimation of IOs that so far has remained largely untapped.

**Patterns in Legitimation and Delegitimation**

We discuss legitimation and delegitimation in terms of three dimensions: intensity, narratives, and tone (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Intensity refers to the number of legitimation or delegitimation events (e.g., statements) within a given time frame, sometimes referred to as the level of “ politicization” (e.g., De Wilde and Zürn 2012; Rauh and Zürn 2020). Narratives are patterns in the standards invoked to justify or challenge IOs. Tone captures whether discursive practices frame the IO in positive terms (legitimation) or negative terms (delegitimation). In the following, we use these three dimensions to summarize what existing empirical literature can tell us about discursive legitimation and delegitimation of IOs.

**Intensity.** Overall, existing research provides a relatively unanimous picture of the intensity of legitimation and delegitimation over time. IOs have seen an overall increase in the intensity of legitimation and delegitimation since the 1980s until today. However, this development has not been uniform over time or across IOs. IOs saw more intense legitimation and delegitimation struggles from the early 1980s until the mid-2000s, after which intensity has declined and the trend mainly involves minor fluctuations. Since the mid-2000s, patterns in intensity appear to be more IO-specific, with some IOs experiencing overall increases in the intensity of legitimation and delegitimation, while other IOs experience peaks around specific events, such as the global financial crisis 2007–2008.
To discuss the evidence in more detail, Schmidtke (2019), for instance, comparatively examines intensity in legitimation and delegitimation discourse about the EU, G8, and UN in the quality press of four countries – Germany, Switzerland, the UK, and the US – over the time period 1998–2013. The findings reveal that there is no clear trend of growing contestation over time. Rather, we see rising public discourse about all three institutions from the late 1990s until the mid-2000s, followed by a marked decline in intensity. While all three IOs largely follow the same pattern, the legitimacy discourse around the EU is almost always more intense than the discourse about the G8 and UN. Schmidtke attributes this pattern to variation in the authority of the three organizations.

Lenz et al. (2020) embark on a comparative inquiry into legitimation discourse across a large number of regional organizations over time. Drawing on the annual reports of twenty-seven organizations between 1980 and 2019, they arrive at several key findings. Legitimation intensity in the context of the IOs in their sample has risen over the observation period, reaching a plateau around 2005, after which average legitimation intensity has remained relatively stable or even declined slightly. However, when they group IOs by world regions, they find that developments in legitimation intensity vary considerably. While IOs in Africa and the Americas follow the general pattern, IOs in Europe see a slight continuous increase over time, and IOs in the Asia-Pacific see a U-shaped pattern with declining legitimation intensity until around 2000 followed by an increase ever since.

Rauh and Zürn (2020) study legitimation and delegitimation in the context of the IMF, NAFTA, World Bank, and WTO based on a semiautomated analysis of statements in more than 120,000 articles in international newspapers during the period 1992–2012. They confirm that the surge in IO authority over the past thirty years has paralleled a trend toward more intense (and differentiated) legitimation and delegitimation discourse. They show that the share of legitimation and delegitimation statements about the IMF and the World Bank in their newspaper corpus increased from 1992 to 2005, after which it declined slightly and then has fluctuated. The patterns for NAFTA and the WTO are more fluctuating overall.

Dingwerth et al. (2020) also observe an increase in legitimation intensity, measured as the share of identity- and purpose-related statements in the annual reports of twenty cross-regional IOs. This increase
in the use of legitimation statements by IOs roughly follows a linear trend over the decades in their observation period, from 1980 to 2011. Over time, the share of legitimation statements increased more than twofold, from 12 percent in 1980 to as much as 28 percent in 2017.

Finally, Sommerer et al. (2022) map the intensity of delegitimation for thirty-two IOs over the time period 1985–2020, based on media coverage of public criticism against IOs, in a larger effort to identify legitimacy crises. They find that contestation of IOs increased from the 1980s onwards to reach a peak around the turn of the millennium. Some IOs subsequently experienced rising intensity in delegitimation in association with the global financial crisis, while other IOs saw such increases in the most recent years. Overall, however, IOs tend to follow unique patterns of contestation, rather than conform to a uniform picture of growing delegitimation, indicative of a legitimacy crisis in their analysis.

**Narratives.** Generally, existing research indicates that the type of narratives used to legitimize and delegitimize IOs have broadened over time. There appears to be a relation between increased authority of IOs and greater variety in the narratives used to justify this authority. Purpose- and performance-related narratives are typically invoked more often than procedure-related narratives in IOs’ own communication, but the latter type is on the rise. In particular, IOs increasingly legitimize themselves by referring to democratic values. Moreover, the types of narratives used to criticize and defend IOs vary to some extent: While actors that aim to delegitimize IOs typically invoke fairness and democracy, actors that seek to legitimize IOs invoke a broader range of standards pertaining to procedure, performance, and purpose.

To review the evidence in greater detail, Zürn (2018, 70–77), for instance, distinguishes between seven different legitimation narratives: participatory, legal, fairness, technocratic, traditional, relative gains, and manipulative narratives. One central conclusion of his work is that most IOs rely on technocratic narratives to justify their exercise of authority (see also Uhlin 2019). However, the level of authority that is exercised by many IOs makes it necessary to complement justifications on technocratic grounds with other types of narratives, especially in times of politicization. Examples are fairness- and participation-related narratives, which are found to expand in times of more intense public debate and protest. Thus, as IOs gain increasing authority, we observe a broadening of the narratives used to justify this authority.
Lenz et al. (2020) distinguish between procedure-, performance-, and purpose-related narratives about IOs, which they then characterize in terms of liberalism, communitarianism, and functionalism, yielding nine legitimation narratives. They arrive at several important findings based on their analysis of communication from twenty-seven IOs over the time period 1980–2019. All nine types of narratives are present in IO legitimation communication. This suggests that IOs make use of a broad range of standards when justifying their authority. However, functional narratives are vastly more common than liberal or communitarian narratives. Likewise, purpose-based narratives are more common than performance-based narratives and especially procedure-based narratives. These patterns are largely robust across IOs in different world regions. However, if we consider patterns over time in the development of these narratives, the evidence yields a more varied picture, highlighting alternative temporal paths.

Rauh and Zürn (2020) pit technocratic, fairness-based, and participatory narratives against each other. They demonstrate increasing shares of civil society organizations (CSOs) in legitimation narratives until 2006, and declining rates since, which indicates that CSO presence in legitimation narratives might be related to legitimation intensity more broadly. In addition, they show that civil society actors, when making statements about IOs in news media, invoke fairness-based demands that stretch beyond the technocratic legitimation narrative that conventionally characterizes global economic governance.

Dingwerth et al. (2019) focus specifically on democracy-related narratives about IOs. Their case studies convey two important findings. First, “the people” is becoming a central reference point in the legitimation of the five IOs they study. IOs are increasingly asked to demonstrate not only what they can do for their member states but also for the citizens in these states. Second, procedural legitimacy standards are gaining ground, as IOs are increasingly evaluated on the basis of how they make decisions and not only what they accomplish. Dingwerth et al. (2019) point to growing politicization and a rise in nonstate actors making demands on IOs as explanations for these trends. In a related study, Dingwerth et al. (2020) analyze data on the democratic legitimation of twenty regional organizations in annual reports from 1980 to 2011. They demonstrate a far-reaching rise of democratic legitimation in global governance and find that politicization emerges as the main driving force behind a “democratic turn” in IO legitimation.
Bexell et al. (2022) examine the narratives that are present in the legitimation and delegitimation of sixteen global governance institutions in a variety of issue areas. While a central conclusion is that narratives tend to be quite context dependent, they also identify a number of larger patterns. Notably, actors engaging in legitimation of IOs tend to invoke technocratic norms of expertise and effectiveness, democratic norms of transparency and participation, and norms linked to the specific purpose of the organization. When actors instead seek to delegitimize IOs, they are more likely to invoke norms related to fairness, but also democratic standards.

Other types of narratives relate to more specific empirical story lines. For instance, narratives can invoke mandates, as in the case of the Arab League’s backing and the AU’s condemnation of the Libya intervention in 2011 (Drieskens and Reykers 2017). Other criticism that IOs have had to fend off in the past revolve around their memberships, institutional structures, and unique political challenges (Zaum 2013). For instance, US politicians have questioned the legitimacy of NATO’s unanimity rule that legally accords the US a voice in alliance decision-making equal to Lithuania’s (Michel 2014). Finally, elite communication sometimes pertains to the norms and rules that an IO stands for. For example, the EU’s high standards for minority rights face strong criticism because several member states themselves do not meet these standards (Gawrich 2006).

Tone. Previous research seeking to unravel patterns of legitimation and delegitimation shows that elites most often communicate about IOs in negative terms, except in the context of self-legitimation. However, we need more comparative evidence to be able to make conclusive statements about the tone of communication in global governance. Based on available evidence, it appears that the UN is more often subject to positive communication than the EU and economic organizations such as the IMF, but that specific organizations within the UN system, such as the UNSC, are predominantly delegitimized rather than legitimized.

Taking a closer look at the evidence, Schmidtke (2019) sheds light on the tone of the legitimacy discourse around the EU, G8, and UN, mapping the share of positive evaluative statements about the three IOs. His analysis suggests that the tone in news media in Germany, Switzerland, the UK, and the US is predominantly negative. The UN is usually greeted with the highest share of positive statements, while the tone is slightly more negative toward the EU and most negative toward the G8. Overall, the analysis suggests that positive and
negative evaluations do not follow a uniform trend over time but are characterized by country-specific patterns. There is no clear trend that negative communication has consistently become more prevalent over time based on the evidence presented by Schmidtke (2019).

Focusing on the IMF, Tokhi (2019) reveals that this organization is mainly talked about negatively in elite communication. Using data on all the statements made by member state representatives during the meetings of the International Monetary and Financial Committee in 2010 and 2014, Tokhi (2019) shows that more than 60 percent of all statements contested the status quo. By contrast, positive evaluations make up about one-third of all statements. However, the intensity with which some member states challenged or embraced the status quo varied considerably across constituencies. There is striking country-specific variation, where the industrialized democracies display larger proportions of positive statements and the rising powers, especially the BRICS, primarily make contesting statements.

Binder and Heupel (2015) assess legitimation and delegitimation of the UNSC in the UN General Assembly and find that the UNSC suffers from a “legitimacy deficit.” Negative statements about the UNSC, especially its procedures, outweigh positive evaluations. The evidence comes from a sample of seven debates in the General Assembly over the time period 1991–2009. Binder and Heupel (2015) emphasize that, despite substantial delegitimation efforts by states demanding reforms, there is also evidence that states acknowledge when the UNSC seeks to legitimize itself by improving decision-making procedures or performing well.

Taken together, the reviewed patterns in legitimation discourse suggest that: (a) IOs saw more intense legitimation and delegitimation struggles from the early 1980s until the mid-2000s, after which intensity has declined and mainly involves minor fluctuations; (b) purpose- and performance-related narratives are generally invoked more often than procedure-related narratives in IOs’ own communication, but the latter type appears to be on the rise; and (c) IOs are mostly communicated about in negative messages, except in the context of self-legitimation.

Illustrations

These patterns beg important questions about how elites talk about IOs in public spaces. To shed light on this, we illustrate intensity, tone, and narratives in elite communication as present in varying media
outlets. When communicating about IOs, elites are nowadays navigating a more complex media landscape, where traditional news media exist alongside novel social media as two main pathways for conveying messages about IOs.

For these purposes, we draw on news media (both print and online) and social media (Twitter) data collected within the LegGov research program for an analysis of legitimation around sixteen IOs. These data enable us to identify predominant narratives about specific IOs during a given time period, as well as the tone of these narratives (positive or negative). The time period chosen in our case is January to August 2020, which was the most recent time period available at the time of research. This period of six months provides us with sufficient material to illustrate how actors engage in legitimation and delegitimation using news media and social media. We identify narratives by using a method that captures frequent “associations” between words (i.e., words that co-occur most frequently with a selected word) and tone by conducting a sentiment analysis. While this method allows us to capture prominent narratives in news media and social media, it also reflects the broader context in which IOs are discussed at a certain point in time, which does not correspond to legitimation or delegitimation, strictly speaking.

The strategy to examine both news media and social media is novel for research about elite communication and legitimation (Hall et al. 2021) and offers an opportunity to capture and compare how people talk about IOs in traditional and novel media outlets (Anstead and O’Loughlin, 2015). While these outlets are not reserved for political and societal elites exclusively, such elites likely dominate both news and social media communication about IOs. In the quality press journalists tend to grant preferential access to information and statements from high-ranking governmental actors and large businesses (Danielian and Page 1994; Tresch 2009). On Twitter, governments, parties, NGOs, and IOs themselves are regular communicators about global governance; in addition, individual Twitter communicators are more likely to belong to elite groups, since they on average have higher levels of education and income than the general public (Pew Research Center 2019).

News media and Twitter data were collected with the assistance of Weblyzard Technology – an Austrian semantic technology company with a strong record of applied research in collaboration with universities and organizations such as UN Environment and BMW Group. Weblyzard’s
software was used to systematically collect all references to our privileged IOs in online and print news articles as well as tweets during this six-month period (see Scharl et al. 2013, 2016, 2017). The data collection resulted in (a) tens of thousands of news media articles from 315 English-speaking online and print news sources, such as The Guardian, Canberra Times, Financial Times, Associated Press, and (b) 622,866 tweets.

For the analysis, we select four central IOs with extensive authority in their respective issue area – the EU, IMF, UNFCCC, and UNSC – and which occur in several of our experimental studies. We do separate analyses for these IOs and present patterns for each organization individually. We use this method to capture intensity by identifying the most frequent associations between the search term (the IO) and its strongest word associations (which we broadly interpret as narratives) at a specific point in time. The keyword graphs display a “semantic network,” which captures what negative and positive associations (tone) are present in communication about an IO.

For this purpose, we use a sentiment analysis, which classifies a news media article or a tweet into the categories negative or positive. The color of the data points captures the sentiment of a particularly prominent word association (or narrative). The analysis is performed by using dictionaries of about 12,000 a priori established English-language terms tapping either negative or positive emotions. Thus, our data are illustrative of topics that were intensively discussed during the period studied, and the extent to which these discussions were negative or positive in tone (see Weichselbraun et al. 2017 for a detailed discussion of the methodology). With regard to tone, it is worth reiterating that the sentiment analysis captures the tone of the contexts in which IOs are debated and not necessarily the intention of elites to legitimize or delegitimize IOs.

We proceed by discussing the results for each of the four selected IOs. We present the analysis in pairs (Figures 2.9–2.12), comparing narratives around the IO in news media (top panel) and social media (bottom panel). Lighter colors indicate more positive sentiment, whereas darker colors indicate more negative sentiment.

We start by discussing the EU (Figure 2.9). The news media data reveal that the EU during this period was mostly discussed in negative contexts, such as the presidential elections in Belarus in August 2020,

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4 The network graphs show topics discussed in relation to each other, quantified in a specific measure of reach (= 0.4 on a 0 to 1 continuous scale).
the refugee camps in Greece and Turkey, and the development of the economy within the Eurozone. One salient narrative involved mostly positive associations, namely reporting on the EU’s Coronavirus
recovery fund. In the same narrative, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte was primarily discussed in negative terms as a proponent for countries resisting an expansive financial recovery package. In comparison, the Twitter discussion about the EU during this period mainly features positive narratives. The Coronavirus recovery fund did not play a similarly large role on Twitter. Rather, positive narratives focused on an agreement with the UK over Brexit and the future of trade relations between Britain and the EU after Brexit, both processes in which the EU plays a pivotal role as a negotiator. On the negative side, Twitter communicators discussed the risk of a trade war with China, which would negatively affect EU trade.

Next, we examine communication around the IMF (Figure 2.10). In news media, the IMF, just like the EU, is mostly debated in contexts that have negative associations. One example is the development of the Argentinian economy, which the IMF sought to support with a nearly $57 billion line of credit agreed with Argentina in the Stand-By-Agreement from 2018, but which failed to prevent a drastic depreciation of the Argentinian Peso since July 2019. On Twitter, the dominant narratives involving the IMF were mainly negative in tone and pertained to comparisons between the Coronavirus recession and the Great Depression, as well as Coronavirus-related lockdowns in Africa possibly calling for financial support by the IMF and the World Bank. Yet the IMF approval of an 18-month $5 Billion financial plan for Ukraine was mostly debated in positive terms.

In the case of the UNFCCC (Figure 2.11), the dominant news media narratives during this period revolved around Greta Thunberg, the Paris Agreement, António Guterres, and the climate negotiation summit. The context in which Greta Thunberg is discussed is mostly negative, because news media report on her criticism of the performances of countries in the UNFCCC. On Twitter, the discussion around the UNFCCC is considerably more positive, even when focusing on similar topics, including Greta Thunberg, because Twitter communicators tend to praise these efforts. One of few negative narratives revolves around the delay of the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference, postponed due to the Corona pandemic.

In the context of the UNSC (Figure 2.12), the narratives in news media were again more critical in tone than on Twitter. In the news, salient narratives focused on topics such as the nuclear deal with Iran,
Figure 2.10 Legitimacy narratives in relation to the IMF in news and social media

Notes: LegGov Newspaper and Twitter Dataset, January–August 2020. Lighter colors indicate more positive sentiment, whereas darker colors indicate more negative sentiment.
Figure 2.11 Legitimacy narratives in relation to the UNFCCC in news and social media

Notes: LegGov Newspaper and Twitter Dataset, January–August 2020. Lighter colors indicate more positive sentiment, whereas darker colors indicate more negative sentiment.
Figure 2.12 Legitimacy narratives in relation to the UNSC in news and social media

Notes: LegGov Newspaper and Twitter Dataset, January–August 2020. Lighter colors indicate more positive sentiment, whereas darker colors indicate more negative sentiment.
the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, Kenya being elected to the UNSC in competition with Djibouti, and Canada’s failed bid for a seat on the UNSC. Twitter discussions about the UNSC dealt with similar topics, but also the territorial dispute over the Kashmir region and the humanitarian crisis in Syria, in which the UNSC is involved by safeguarding aid delivery.

In sum, these illustrations exemplify how elite communication in media conveys both positively and negative framed narratives about IOs even if the latter tend to dominate, especially in traditional news media.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have provided a contextual background for our experimental analyses of elite communication effects on citizen legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. For this purpose, we have examined patterns in citizen legitimacy beliefs, elite legitimacy beliefs, and elite communication, drawing on cross-national public opinion polls, the LegGov Elite Survey, and news media and Twitter data, as well as earlier empirical research on legitimation and delegitimation. Among the many observations, we wish to highlight three in conclusion.

First, there is no evidence of a uniform secular decline in citizen legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Rather, citizen opinion fluctuates over time and is mildly declining only in the context of the UN and the EU in a long-term perspective, but not in a short-term perspective or if we consider other IOs, such as the AU and Mercosur. These patterns challenge a widespread narrative that there is a long-term decline in the legitimacy of IOs.

Second, while elites are moderately supportive of IOs on average, they are also divided. Whereas slightly more than half of the studied elites are positive toward IOs, slightly less than half are negatively predisposed, suggesting why we observe both positive and negative elite communication about IOs. In addition, there is variation in elite legitimacy beliefs toward IOs across elites, countries, and organizations.

Third, elite communication about IOs has increased in intensity over time, but following a peak in the mid-2000s, the dominant pattern has been one of short-term fluctuation. Elite communication invokes a variety of narratives. In IOs’ own communication,
Conclusion

Purpose- and performance-related narratives are more frequent than procedure-related narratives, but the latter are becoming increasingly important. When elite media discuss IOs, it is predominantly in terms of negative narratives, even if social media communication is relatively more positive than news media reporting.

These observations describe the context in which elites communicate about IOs. The remainder of the book delves into a systematic inquiry into how such communication affects citizen legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We begin by outlining our theory of elite influence and popular legitimacy.
What determines the legitimacy beliefs of citizens toward IOs? In this chapter, we present our theory of elite communication as a source of popular legitimacy in global governance. While other accounts emphasize individual characteristics, institutional qualities, and societal structures as sources of legitimacy (Tallberg et al. 2018), we argue that citizens’ legitimacy beliefs are profoundly shaped by the ways in which elites speak about IOs. Since citizens have limited independent information about global governance, they rely on elite communication as a shortcut to opinions, which in turn opens up space for elites to influence how citizens perceive the legitimacy of IOs. We outline this argument in four steps.

First, we specify our conceptualization of citizen legitimacy beliefs – our dependent variable. We explain that our conceptualization rests on a sociological approach, which conceives of an organization’s legitimacy as derived from the beliefs and perceptions of a given audience. We then discuss four possible ways to operationalize legitimacy beliefs for empirical research and explain why we settle on the measure of confidence, which privileges individuals’ deep-seated approval of an organization.

Second, we introduce the key components of elite communication in the context of global governance – the messengers and the message. We suggest that the relevant messengers comprise both globally active elites, such as member governments, nonstate actors, and IOs themselves, and domestically oriented elites, such as political parties. In contemporary politics, IOs are not the exclusive concern of globally oriented actors, as sometimes assumed in international relations, nor are political parties exclusively communicating about domestic political issues, as sometimes assumed in comparative politics. We also suggest that messages about IOs typically invoke the institutional qualities of these organizations: an IO’s social purpose, the authority it has been granted, the procedures it uses to make decisions, and
the performance it achieves in terms of outcomes. Elites communicate about these qualities because they are central to IOs as political systems and because they expect them to matter for people’s attitudes.

Third, we explain *why* we expect elite communication to shape citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We derive this general expectation from three core assumptions, which are anchored in theories of heuristic opinion formation and empirically applicable to opinion formation in the context of global governance: (1) citizens’ political awareness tends to be low, (2) citizens rely on heuristics to form political opinions, and (3) reliance on heuristics makes citizens susceptible to elite influence. The general takeaway is that citizens rely on elite communication as a heuristic when forming opinions toward IOs, just as they rely on heuristics when developing attitudes toward domestic political issues or making other decisions in their daily lives. If anything, elite influence should be even more pronounced in the context of global governance, which citizens tend to know relatively less well.

Finally, we explain *when* we expect elite communication to be particularly powerful in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. Consistent with our overall approach, we theorize conditions associated with the three core features of the communicative situation: the elite, the message, and the citizen. Specifically, we identify six moderating factors: elite credibility, elite polarization, tone of the message, object of the message, citizens’ political awareness, and citizens’ political beliefs. The central point is that citizens are varyingly susceptible to elite influence depending on a set of identifiable conditions in the communicative situation. These conditions shape the extent to which elite information about the institutional qualities of IOs influences citizens’ legitimacy beliefs.

Our theory is inspired by, and contributes to, three larger movements in political science research. The first is the turn toward an empirical study of legitimacy based on a sociological understanding of this concept (Caldeira and Gibson 1995; Gilley 2006; Esaiasson et al. 2012; Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Tallberg et al. 2018; Dellmuth and Schlipphak 2020; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bexell et al. 2022; Dellmuth et al. 2022b; Sommerer et al. 2022). This move involves conceptualizing legitimacy in empirically tractable ways and developing theories of the determinants, processes, and consequences of legitimacy. The second is the ambition to learn from cognitive psychology when developing theories of political opinion formation. This motivation underpins...
the rich literature on cueing, framing, and heuristics in American and comparative politics (Sniderman et al. 1991; Mondak 1993; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Chong and Druckman 2007a; Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2013; Carmines and d’Amico 2015), as well as the recent boom in international relations research on individual attitudes and beliefs (e.g., Hainmueller and Hiscox 2007; Tomz 2007; Rathbun 2012; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Hafner-Burton et al. 2017; Lenz and Viola 2017). The third is the effort to theorize political processes that are generic in nature and defy conventional distinctions between domestic and international politics. We count legitimacy beliefs, elite influence, and heuristic opinion formation to such topics which benefit from a closer marriage between comparative politics and international relations (Milner 1998).

Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Legitimacy Beliefs

Our analytical focus are citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. In this section, we specify this dependent variable in two steps. To begin with, we describe the sociological approach to legitimacy and explain how this understanding allows us to study legitimacy empirically, as a property of IOs derived from the beliefs of citizens. We then discuss alternative ways of operationalizing legitimacy beliefs and explain why we have chosen to rely on people’s confidence in an organization.

A Sociological Approach to Legitimacy

Legitimacy has two main alternative conceptual meanings: normative and sociological. Normative legitimacy refers to a governor’s right to rule based on its conformity to certain philosophically formulated values and principles, such as democracy, justice, and fairness. This is the notion of legitimacy that is studied in normative political theory (e.g., Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Christiano 2010). In contrast, sociological legitimacy refers to the beliefs or perceptions within a given audience that a governor’s exercise of authority is appropriate (e.g., Weber 1922/1978; Zürn 2018). Normative and sociological inquiries of legitimacy are thus guided by different questions. Normative studies typically ask: “By what ethical standards should we evaluate a governor’s right to rule, and how do particular governance arrangements
measure up against these standards?” Meanwhile sociological inquiries ask: “To what extent, on what grounds, through what processes, and with what consequences is a governor perceived to be legitimate by a given audience?”

Considerable research on legitimacy in global governance has been normative. One strand of scholars has explored normative values associated with the input side of global governance, such as participation, transparency, and accountability (e.g., Held 1995; Dahl 1999; Christiano 2010; Scholte 2011; Archibugi et al. 2012). Another strand of scholars has emphasized values associated with the output side of global governance, assessing the extent to which IOs produce outcomes that contribute to welfare, justice, and fairness (e.g., Pogge 2002; Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Westergren 2016).

We join others in adopting a sociological understanding of the legitimacy of IOs (e.g., Hurd 2007; Reus-Smit 2007; Tallberg et al. 2018; Zürn 2018; Bexell et al. 2022; Dellmuth et al. 2022b; Sommerer et al. 2022). Central to this approach is a focus on legitimacy as an attribute of an IO, based on audience beliefs, and (de)legitimation as a process of justification and critique of an IO’s exercise of authority, with the aim of affecting audiences’ legitimacy beliefs (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). An audience comprises the group of actors whose beliefs are considered when evaluating the legitimacy of an organization (Bexell and Jönsson 2018). Audiences of IOs may include both state and societal actors, ranging from government elites to NGOs, business actors, and ordinary citizens. In this book, we focus exclusively on citizens as the relevant audience when examining the effects of elite communication on popular legitimacy perceptions.

Grounding the legitimacy of an IO in the beliefs of citizens has several implications. It means that the legitimacy of an IO ultimately is a subjective matter rooted in individual perceptions (Easton 1975; Tyler 2006). It also means that the legitimacy of a political institution is an aggregate construct, which may vary across various subsets of an audience, such as citizens in different countries or societal groups. Finally, it enables us to study drivers of legitimacy at the individual level, by examining what factors contribute to such beliefs among citizens.

When citizens develop legitimacy beliefs, they do so in a context of social norms about the appropriate exercise of authority. The social embeddedness of legitimacy beliefs suggests that sociological and normative conceptions of legitimacy may be empirically related while
still analytically distinct (Beetham 1991; Keohane 2006; Bernstein 2011). The normative may shape the sociological inasmuch as audiences are influenced by philosophical standards of appropriateness when assessing an institution’s legitimacy. Conversely, the sociological may shape the normative inasmuch as standards developed in political theory reflect the time and place of their formulation. Showing such an interplay, both normative and sociological theories tend to emphasize an institution’s conformance to standards of democracy, effectiveness, and justice as a source of legitimacy (Scholte and Tallberg 2018).

The social embeddedness of legitimacy opens up possibilities for actors to affect popular legitimacy beliefs by invoking norms and values broadly associated with appropriate governance. In line with a growing literature, we refer to such justification and criticism aimed at affecting legitimacy beliefs as legitimation and delegitimation (Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bexell et al. 2022). Thus, supporters of IOs may engage in legitimation practices that seek to cultivate beliefs in the legitimacy of these organizations (Symons 2011; Zaum 2013; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Dingwerth et al. 2019). Conversely, opponents of IOs may engage in delegitimation practices that aim to undermine beliefs in the legitimacy of these organizations (O’Brien et al. 2000; Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018; Zürn 2018). Elite communication, as theorized later in this chapter, represents a form of discursive legitimation and delegitimation of IOs.

**Operationalizing Legitimacy Beliefs**

Legitimacy beliefs may be operationalized in multiple ways for empirical research. All alternatives have their strengths and weaknesses, and all involve an element of simplification, as we move from theoretical conceptualization to empirical measurement. “However defined, ‘legitimacy’ belongs to the family of abstract concepts that are hard to measure directly” (Esaiasson et al. 2012, 790). Yet, as Gilley puts it: “[T]he complexity of a concept is neither a valid objection nor an insuperable obstacle to its measurement” (2006, 500). In the following, we distinguish between four alternative ways of operationalizing legitimacy beliefs, building on existing work in comparative politics and international relations. While all four approaches take individuals and their attitudes as the starting point, they are tied to different
conceptualizations of legitimacy and lead to different suggestions for measures to use in empirical research. We conclude by explaining why we have chosen to opt for an individual’s confidence in an institution as our preferred measurement of legitimacy beliefs.

The justification approach measures legitimacy beliefs as individuals’ perceptions that an institution conforms to normative criteria motivating its right to rule. This approach is tied to a conceptualization of legitimacy that combines normative and sociological elements, by restricting legitimacy to support for an institution that arises from certain morally appropriate justifications of its authority (Beetham 1991; Agné 2018). What justifications count as appropriate is established externally by researchers, drawing on normative political theory. In empirical research, this approach is expressed through attitudinal measures that seek to capture individual beliefs in an institution’s conformance to these justifications, such as whether an institution makes decisions democratically or produces fair outcomes. In this vein, Esaiasson et al. (2012) measure legitimacy beliefs as perceptions that an institution’s procedures are fair, while Bernauer and Gampfer (2013) rely on assessments of transparency, representation, skill, and expertise in an institution, and Agné et al. (2015) on perceptions of an institution’s conformance to standards of representation, deliberation, and accountability.

The approval approach measures legitimacy beliefs as individuals’ deep-seated approval of an institution. This approach reflects Easton’s (1965, 1975) conceptualization of legitimacy beliefs in terms of diffuse support, as distinguished from specific support. Diffuse support refers to “a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed” (Easton 1965, 273). Such foundational approval is distinct from specific support for an institution that rests exclusively on particular policies or actions. From an approval perspective, legitimacy beliefs involve more durable and fundamental backing of an institution. The grounds for this approval lie with individuals’ subjective attitudes, and

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1 A fifth approach conceives of legitimacy in terms of institutional loyalty. This perspective stresses that opposition to fundamental structural and functional changes to an institution captures the deep-seated institutional commitment inherent in the concept of legitimacy (Caldeira and Gibson 1992, 1995; Gibson et al. 1998, 2003). We omit further discussion of this approach since, thus far, it has only been used in relation to national high courts.
it is not for researchers to specify what counts as the “right” reasons for approval, as in the justification approach. Empirical research following the approval approach has usually operationalized legitimacy in terms of confidence or trust. While asking individuals about their support for an institution presents an additional alternative, it is usually discarded in research on legitimacy, as support can involve short-term specific support rather than deeper attachment (Dellmuth and Schlipphak 2020; Tallberg and Zürn 2019).

The acceptance approach measures legitimacy beliefs as individuals’ willingness to defer to an institution. This approach is linked to a conceptualization of legitimacy that emphasizes consent, acceptance, deference, obedience, and compliance (e.g., Bodansky 1999; Tyler 2006). In this vein, Levi et al. conceive of legitimacy as “a sense of obligation or willingness to obey authorities (value-based legitimacy) that then translates into actual compliance with governmental regulations and laws (behavioral legitimacy)” (2009, 354). Building on this conceptualization, they then measure legitimacy beliefs as the extent to which people are willing to defer to government authorities. In a similar way, Anderson et al. (2005) examine the legitimacy of political systems based on the degree to which losers in elections accept outcomes and extend their support to the new regime.

Finally, the multidimensional approach measures legitimacy beliefs by way of a combination of the other three approaches. This approach builds on the idea that legitimacy as a concept incorporates multiple dimensions, including justifications, approval, and acceptance, and therefore is too rich to capture through measures focused on a single dimension. This approach was particularly influential in comparative politics in the 1990s and 2000s, when several scholars sought to explain a decline in the legitimacy of political systems around the world (Weatherford 1992; Norris 1999; Gilley 2006; Booth and Seligson 2009). For instance, Norris (1999) marshalled indicators of five components of political legitimacy: attitudes toward political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions, and political actors. In the study of global governance, Anderson et al. (2019) follow this approach when measuring legitimacy using five items that capture substantive support, principled approval, and deference in the area of climate change.

In this book, we have chosen to rely on the approval approach in general and the confidence measure in particular. We use individuals’
Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Legitimacy Beliefs

confidence in IOs as our preferred measurement of legitimacy beliefs in all empirical analyses in Chapters 4–7, recognizing that confidence and trust are substitutable measures of approval. Our choice of measure does not reflect a principled rejection of alternative strategies, as much as a recognition of the comparative advantages of this operationalization for our purposes. More specifically, this choice is based on three considerations: conceptual fit, research purpose, and scientific cumulativity.

First, the confidence measure aligns well with our conceptualization of legitimacy as the belief that an institution exercises its authority appropriately. By capturing individuals’ general faith in an institution, it taps into that reservoir of long-term support that is indicative of legitimacy. Confidence picks up on a sense of institutional attachment and on a willingness to put one’s judgement in the hands of that institution. This link is borne out empirically in Gibson et al. (2003, 361), which shows how confidence in an institution reflects a combination of diffuse support measures and is not driven by specific support for certain policies.

Second, the confidence measure has advantages when studying sources or effects of legitimacy. Different from the other three approaches, the approval approach does not integrate into the privileged measure either potential sources of legitimacy (such as fairness or effectiveness) or potential consequences of legitimacy (such as acceptance or compliance). Relying on confidence thereby avoids a confutation between the operationalization of legitimacy and potential sources or effects of legitimacy (Mishler and Rose 2001, 40–41; Booth and Seligson 2009, 12). This is a central concern for us, since we are interested in establishing the sources of legitimacy beliefs, including the role of elite communication about institutional features of IOs, such as democracy, effectiveness, and fairness.

Third, the confidence measure facilitates scientific progress by allowing us to relate the findings of this book to the large literature in comparative politics and international relations that already employs this indicator of legitimacy (e.g., Caldeira 1986; Newton and Norris 2000; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2009; Bühlmann and Kunz 2011; Voeten 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015, 2020; Dellmuth et al. 2022b). Next to scattered observational data, the absence of consistent measures for legitimacy is a prominent reason why scientific cumulativity has been slow in this field (Dellmuth 2018).
Having conceptualized and operationalized legitimacy beliefs, we now turn to our theory of why and when elites shape such beliefs through their communication. We outline this argument in three steps. First, we identify the key players and narratives in elite communication about global governance. We suggest that the central communicators include both globally and domestically oriented elites and that the key focus of communication are the institutional qualities of IOs. In a second step, we explain why elite communication should matter for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs, grounding the argument in theories of heuristic opinion formation and contextual conditions in global governance. Finally, we theorize the conditions under which elite communication should be more or less important in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs in the global realm. Consistent with our overall theory, we identify conditions associated with the elite, the message, and the citizen.

Elites and Messages in Global Governance

Who are the elites engaged in communication in global governance and what do they communicate about? While research on elite communication in the domestic setting conventionally focuses on political parties communicating about issues and candidates, global governance presents a different context. In the following, we describe what we consider to be the main messengers and messages in elite communication about IOs, thus identifying the central contextual components and boundaries of our topic.

The first important component is the messenger – the elite conveying information about an IO through a communicative act. One of the hallmarks of global governance is the multitude of elite actors and organizations that aspire to influence its outcomes. We regard both global and domestic elites as relevant communicators with a potential to shape how citizens think about the legitimacy of IOs. While this distinction between global and domestic elites is a simplification, since most elites these days are transnational, it is helpful for organizing our analyzes.

At the global level, elites that frequently communicate about IOs include states, nonstate actors, and IOs themselves. Member governments often criticize IOs in order to force policy change, deflect blame or mobilize domestic supporters, but may also endorse them to rally support for ambitious goals, lock in policy preferences and protect multilateral arenas (Morse and Keohane 2014; Zürn 2018; Tallberg
Elites and Messages in Global Governance

Nonstate actors, such as NGOs, business associations, and philanthropic foundations, frequently challenge IOs for insufficiently ambitious policies and undemocratic decision-making procedures, but may also praise them for their policy achievements and efforts to consult with stakeholders (O’Brien et al. 2000; Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018). Finally, IOs themselves not only increasingly engage in self-legitimation, trumpeting their democratic credentials, expertise-based policies and critical achievements, but also occasionally admit to mistakes when seeking to minimize political damage or generate support for reorientation (Zaum 2013; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Von Billerbeck 2020).

At the domestic level, political parties and candidates frequently communicate about IOs when debating political issues on which these organizations have prominent roles, such as climate change, pandemics, and international trade. While research in international relations, with some notable exceptions (e.g., Gabel and Scheve 2007; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Dür and Schlipphak 2021), has been slow to acknowledge the role of political parties as communicators, we consider partisan politics an important arena of contestation over IOs. Political parties not only communicate about domestic concerns but also often take positions on international issues involving IOs as well. Parties in the political mainstream tend to be relatively supportive of international cooperation aimed at solving cross-border problems. In contrast, parties on the far right tend to contest IOs because of their constraints on national sovereignty, while parties on the far left tend to challenge IOs because of insufficient representation and redistribution (de Vries and Edwards 2009; Hooghe et al. 2019). Given the central role that parties occupy in structuring the choices that citizens confront (Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper and Slothuus 2014), we expect their influence over citizens to extend to international issues as well.

The elites that engage in communication about IOs are the focus of two empirical chapters in the book. In Chapter 4, we examine the effects of communication by globally active elites, in the shape of member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves. In Chapter 5, we turn to communication by domestically oriented elites, in the shape of political parties, examining their influence on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs vis-à-vis IOs. These two chapters are complementary, by exploring communication by elites that primarily are active at two
different levels of governance and usually the topic of separate literatures in international relations and comparative politics.

The other important contextual component is the message – the information about an IO that is conveyed to citizens. By definition, all communication about IOs refers to the organization in some capacity. We assume that elite communication typically attempts to affect individual attitudes by invoking the institutional qualities of IOs. We conceive of an IO’s institutional qualities in broad terms, distinguishing between four main features: the organization’s purpose, the authority it has been granted, the procedures it uses to make decisions, and the performance it achieves in terms of outcomes. Elites communicate about the institutional qualities of IOs because they expect these features to matter for people’s attitudes toward these organizations.

The identification of procedure and performance as two discrete institutional qualities draws on Scharpf’s (1999) influential distinction between the processes by which an IO makes decisions (“input”) and the consequences of this decision-making (“output”). The dichotomy of procedure versus performances structures most research on how institutional qualities of IOs may matter for people’s legitimacy beliefs toward these organizations (e.g., Hurd 2007; Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Scholte and Tallberg 2018; Strebel et al. 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bernauer et al. 2020). Procedure encompasses qualities such as participation, accountability, deliberation, transparency, efficiency, legality, impartiality, proportionality, and expertise. Performance includes qualities such as problem-solving, collective gains, rights protection, and distributive justice.

Authority and purpose have so far received less attention in empirical studies of IO legitimacy. Authority refers to an IO’s formal right to make decisions in a particular area. More specifically, the authority of an IO reflects the degree to which member states have conferred policymaking competences, delegated independent authority to supranational bodies, and pooled authority in collective decision-making (Zürn et al. 2012; Hooghe et al. 2017; Zürn 2018). Purpose refers to the organizational goals of IOs – their stated normative objective (Dowling and Pfeffer 1975; Scott 1991; Lenz and Viola 2017). For instance, the purpose of an IO may be to protect human rights, fight pandemics, reduce poverty, promote free trade, ensure peace and security, or combat climate change. Some IOs, such as the UN and the EU, combine multiple goals in general-purpose designs, while other
IOs, such as the WHO and the WTO, focus on particular purposes in task-specific designs (Lenz et al. 2015). Purpose is distinct from performance: While purpose indicates the normative goal of the IO, performance refers to its success in achieving this goal.

Communication about the institutional qualities of IOs is at the center of two empirical chapters in the book. In Chapter 6, we examine how information about procedure- and performance-related qualities of IOs affects people’s legitimacy beliefs. In Chapter 7, we extend the analysis to also consider the impact of information on the authority and purpose of IOs. Our argument gives us not reason to expect *a priori* that information about one particular type of institutional quality would be more influential than information about some other institutional quality. We therefore focus on developing the logic for why information about each quality should matter for legitimacy beliefs and on assessing the conditions under which such communication effects are stronger or weaker.

**Why Elite Communication Matters**

Why would elite communication about the institutional qualities of IOs affect the way citizens think about the legitimacy of these organizations? Our core argument is that citizens care about the qualities of IOs but lack sufficient information to form independent opinions, leading them to rely on communication by elites as a cognitive shortcut. While elite communication thus offers an efficient solution to an information deficit experienced by citizens, it simultaneously opens up possibilities for elites to shape the opinions of citizens.

This logic rests on three key assumptions about heuristic opinion formation. These assumptions are anchored in cognitive psychology, inform research on domestic opinion formation, and apply to contextual conditions present in global governance. Together, these assumptions suggest why citizens make use of heuristics when forming political opinions, why elite communication presents a form of heuristic, and why such communication affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs.

*Citizens’ Political Awareness Tends to Be Low*

The starting assumption for understanding heuristic opinion formation pertains to individuals’ political awareness. According to a long line
of studies, awareness tends to be quite low (e.g., Converse 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lupia 2016). While there is variation across individuals, people on average have a relatively weak grasp of politics. As Zaller (1992, 18) puts it: “The two main points about political awareness [...] are (1) that people vary greatly in their general attentiveness to politics, regardless of particular issues; and (2) that average overall levels of information are quite low. More succinctly, there is high variance in political awareness around a generally low mean.”

This finding has been attributed to a number of conditions. Classic theories in cognitive psychology and behavioral economics focus on individuals’ cognitive limitations in information processing. Simon (1957, 1982) famously argued that people are boundedly rational agents who experience limits in thinking capacity, information, and time, making them satisfice rather than optimize their choices when making decisions. Building on Simon’s insights, Tversky and Kahneman (1974) took individuals’ cognitive limitations and bounded rationality as the starting point for an influential research program on how people make decisions under uncertainty. From this perspective, citizens’ low awareness about politics is nothing particular for this domain, but the expression of a general limitation in humans’ ability to process information and a “rational” adaptation to this condition. The complexity of the social world in combination with limitations in time and cognition means that citizens are selective in their learning.

In political science, one strand of research links citizens’ limited political awareness to inconsistency in individual belief systems. According to Converse’s (1964) seminal contribution, citizens’ belief systems suffer from weaknesses in three connections: horizontally, between opinions on different issues; vertically, between abstract concepts and positions on specific issues; and temporally, between positions on issues taken at different times. Research after Converse concludes that citizens’ opinions tend to be minimally consistent, minimally stable, and rest on minimal levels of comprehension of political abstractions (Sniderman et al. 1991, 2). While this picture has not stood unchallenged given the crude measures and pessimistic assumptions it is based on (cf. Sniderman et al. 1991; Dolan 2011; Cohen and Luttig 2020), it has proven highly influential in the field (Chong and Druckman 2007a, 103; Levendusky 2010, 112).

Other research in political science attributes citizens’ low awareness about politics to structural conditions, such as economic inequalities
and flailing educational systems. In this vein, Solt (2008, 48) argues that economic inequalities in a society put a damper on all but the most affluent citizens’ incentives to develop political knowledge and become politically engaged, concluding that “higher levels of income inequality powerfully depress political interest, the frequency of political discussion, and participation in elections.” Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 188), for their part, highlight limitations in education as the foremost source of low political awareness, establishing that education is “the strongest single predictor of political knowledge.”

The take-home message of these accounts is the same: People tend to possess limited information about politics. Documenting these limitations has been a favorite pastime among public opinion researchers, usually with reference to the US context. Yet people in comparable countries appear to be only slightly better informed than Americans (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 89–91). Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 101–102) offer the most comprehensive overview and find the overall picture disturbing from a democratic perspective:

Many of the facts known by relatively small percentages of the public seem critical to understanding – let alone effectively acting in – the political world: fundamental rules of the game; classic civil liberties; key concepts of political economy; the names of key political representatives; many important policy positions of presidential candidates or the political parties; basic social indicators and significant public policies.

We have good reasons to believe that this pattern extends to people’s awareness of global governance. In fact, citizens are probably even less informed about international cooperation than about domestic politics. Global governance is more remote and complex than national politics, IOs are less frequently covered in national media than domestic institutions, and the transnational public sphere is less developed than its domestic counterparts. Citizens therefore rarely have access to rich and varied information about IOs. Even if citizens have usually heard of the most prominent IOs (Gallup International Association 2005, 2011), they likely have limited knowledge about their political mandates, decision-making procedures, and policy impacts (Dellmuth 2016). This assumption is substantiated by recent data on people’s awareness of global governance based on three knowledge items included in the WVS7, fielded during the time period 2017–2020 (see Chapter 2).
This picture of citizens’ awareness of global governance is consistent with findings on people’s knowledge regarding foreign affairs more broadly. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 82–86) find that only 14 percent of more than 500 questions regarding world politics were answered correctly by at least three quarters of US survey respondents. Figures such as these have contributed to a predominant view among students of foreign policy and public opinion that citizens tend to possess relatively little information about foreign affairs, except when such issues become highly politically salient or touch directly on people’s everyday lives (e.g., Aldrich et al. 1989; Berinsky 2009; for a discussion, see Kertzer and Zeitoff 2017, 544–545).

Citizens Rely on Heuristics to Form Political Opinions

Our second core assumption is about the role of heuristics in helping citizens to form political opinions. When individuals confront limitations in processing relevant information, they rely on cognitive shortcuts – heuristics – to make decisions. This fundamental insight in cognitive psychology has been highly influential in the study of public opinion, where it offers the favored answer to the puzzle of how citizens make up their minds on political issues under conditions of uncertainty. It suggests that individuals are “cognitive misers” (Fiske and Taylor 2017), who have become quite skilled at applying various forms of heuristics to compensate for their own limitations. Part of why it has been so influential is because it portrays political opinion formation as an extension of generic cognitive processes. If people use cognitive shortcuts to make up their minds about all kinds of things, why not politics as well?

Heuristics are problem-solving strategies, employed automatically or unconsciously, that serve to keep information-processing demands within bounds (Lau and Redlawsk 2001, 952; see also Sniderman et al. 1991, Ch. 2; Shah and Oppenheimer 2008; Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011). Simon’s (1957) strategy of satisficing is an early example of a heuristic used to deal with the impossible information demands involved in optimizing choices. Kahneman and Tversky deepened and broadened the study of heuristics (Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Kahneman et al. 1982). On the one hand, they identified several prominent heuristics that people use when making judgments under conditions of uncertainty. On the other hand, they linked people’s
use of heuristics to systematic biases in judgment. While presenting an efficient strategy for dealing with cognitive limitations, heuristics simultaneously cause systematic errors in judgment, according to this argument. Cognitive psychology suggests that all humans rely on cognitive shortcuts. While not everyone relies on the same heuristics to the same extent, all people simplify choices in life by way of cognitive short cuts. Heuristics are associated with System I of the human intellect, which is fast, automatic, and instinctive, and thus different from System II, which is slower, more deliberative, and involves more effort (Stanovich and West 2000; Kahneman 2011).

For political scientists, heuristics offer a compelling answer to the question of how people make political choices in the face of limited information. If individuals generally use heuristics to deal with uncertainty in their everyday lives, would they not use similar strategies when making political choices? The consensus position is affirmative and can be summarized in two points (Lau and Redlawsk 2001, 952; see also, e.g., Hamill et al. 1985; Sniderman et al. 1991; Lupia 1994; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Carmines and d’Amico 2015). First, everyone uses cognitive shortcuts in thinking about politics. It is not limited to a particular group, such as more uninformed citizens or political experts. Second, the use of heuristics partially compensates for limited political awareness, so that individuals who are less informed nonetheless can make reasonably accurate political judgments.

Research in comparative politics highlights how political parties, political ideology, and political endorsements present people with useful heuristics (e.g., Lodge and Hamill 1986; Sniderman et al. 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Bullock 2011; Torcal et al. 2018). According to this literature, citizens typically look to political parties for cues. As long as citizens know what parties they like or dislike, they can use basic information about a party’s position to figure out their own opinion. Political ideology works in a similar way: provided that citizens identify more or less with specific ideologies, information on whether an argument or a candidate is advanced by the left or the right offers a shortcut to opinions. Finally, political endorsements can help citizens to arrive at opinions on complex matters. Rather than gathering information and carefully thinking through the options, people choose to listen to political elites they trust. These political heuristics are not always neatly distinguishable in practice. Yet their impact is the same: “Citizens can overcome informational shortfalls about policies, not
because they (mysteriously) can simplify public choices effectively, but because their choices are systematically simplified for them” (Sniderman 2000, 81).

There is much to suggest that citizens rely on heuristics also when forming opinions toward global governance (for a theoretical argument, see Lenz and Viola 2017). To begin with, research in the European context shows that political parties and political ideology serve the same function in structuring attitudes toward the EU as they do in shaping domestic public opinion (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Hobolt 2007; Hellström 2008; Torcal et al. 2018). These studies extend the logic of partisan politics at the domestic level to governance at the regional level. The central argument is that “European integration is too complex and remote from the daily lives of most citizens for them to have sufficient interest, awareness, or emotional attachment to base their attitudes on an evaluation of the implications of the integration process. Instead, citizens rely on proxies or cues to overcome their information shortfalls” (Hobolt and de Vries 2016, 421–422).

In addition, a number of studies suggest that citizens use their attitudes toward domestic political institutions they know better as a heuristic when forming attitudes toward IOs they know less well (Harteveld et al. 2013; Voeten 2013; Armingeon and Ceka 2014; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Schlipphak 2015). The evidence for this heuristic is a stable and strong correlation between people’s attitudes toward domestic political institutions and IOs, consistent across institutions, time, measures, and surveys (for a discussion, see Dellmuth and Tallberg 2021). In this vein, Armingeon and Ceka (2014, 82) conclude that “support for the EU is derived from evaluations of national politics and policy, which Europeans know far better than the remote political system of the EU.” Similarly, Schlipphak (2015, 367) suggests that this link in attitudes reflects “general satisfaction with or broad trust in domestic political actors that is extrapolated to a more diffuse trust of political actors operating at other levels beyond the national level.”

Finally, some accounts suggest that citizens are rationally ignorant about world politics, as these issues are far removed from their daily lives and therefore rely on a variety of heuristics to form opinions on these matters. Berinsky (2009) argues that citizens consider the positions of party elites when making up their minds about foreign policy issues. Kertzer and Zeitoff (2017) submit that citizens rely on
informational cues from peers in society, next to information from political elites, when developing opinions about foreign policy. Nielson et al. (2019) show that NGO representatives tend to use heuristic shortcuts when taking a stand on the legitimacy of election observer organizations. Guisinger and Saunders (2017, 425) summarize: “Foreign affairs are distant from most voters’ everyday concerns and thus are especially ripe for cue-giving by elite actors.”

**Heuristics Make Citizens Susceptible to Elite Influence**

The third core assumption focuses on the implications of people relying on heuristics. It suggests that the use of cognitive shortcuts comes with a consequence, namely, that people develop opinions and make choices influenced by these heuristics. In cognitive psychology, this possibility has spurred a debate on whether heuristics lead to biased or accurate judgments. In political science, it has invited analyses of how elites may influence public opinion through cueing and framing.

The implications of people relying on heuristics are front and center in cognitive psychology. Two alternative accounts dominate the debate. The standard assumption has been that heuristics, while helping people to make choices, simultaneously produce systematic errors in judgment. Indeed, Kahneman and Tversky’s original research program is generally known as “heuristics and biases,” and an important part of their classic 1974 contribution was to link the use of specific heuristics to concrete biases in judgment. This insight has informed dual-processing accounts in which biases typically are associated with the fast, automatic, and instinctive System I, rather than the slow, deliberative, and thoughtful System II (Evans 2008; Kahneman 2011).

This perspective is challenged by Gigerenzer and colleagues, who suggest that heuristics in fact may produce more accurate judgments than more complicated cognitive strategies (Gigerenzer and Brighton 2009; Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011; Gigerenzer 2015). Using simple decision rules that ignore part of the information can yield greater predictive accuracy. Heuristics appear to involve less-is-more effects, stemming from “an inverse-U-shaped relation between the level of accuracy and the amount of information, computation, or time” (Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011, 453).
This debate has carried over to political science. Mirroring the discussion in cognitive psychology, political scientists have debated the effects of heuristics on decision efficacy, citizen competence, and democracy at large. On the one hand, party cues, ideological prompts, and elite endorsements may lead citizens to disregard other information, shy away from independent assessments, and arrive at positions that do not fully reflect their preferences (Kuklinski and Quirk 2000). In a larger perspective, substituting one’s own judgment with a mechanical adoption of partisan positions may even hurt democracy itself (Achen and Bartels 2016). On the other hand, political heuristics may make citizens more efficacious by guiding them to the “correct” political choices in view of their preferences (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Partisan cues thus lead to higher – not lower – quality decisions. In the larger perspective, it is the influence of parties, ideologies, and elites on citizens that should be credited for the consistency in public opinion that is so essential to democracy (Sniderman and Bullock 2004; Leeper and Slothuus 2014).

Yet, most important for our purposes, the use of heuristics in politics has spawned a rich research agenda on elite influence. The starting point is the argument that citizens turn to elites for information that can simplify their political choices.\(^2\) Downs (1957, 233) offers an early (and somewhat antiquated) statement of this idea: “[A citizen] cannot be expert in all fields of policy that are relevant to his decision. Therefore he will seek assistance from men who are experts in those fields, have the same political goals he does, and have good judgment.” Zaller (1992, 6), in another classic contribution, explains how ordinary citizens, by necessity, rely on elites to make sense of the political world: “To an extent that few like but none can avoid, citizens in large societies are dependent on […] others for most of their information about the larger world in which they live. […] The ‘others’ on whom we depend, directly or indirectly, for information about the world are […] political elites.”

Building on this insight, later work focuses on the communicative processes through which elites influence public opinion, distinguishing

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\(^2\) A related literature examines the reverse relationship, that is, how citizen preferences shape elite positions (e.g., Schneider 2019). Other contributions explore the reciprocal relationship between elites and publics (e.g., Steenbergen et al. 2007, Hellström 2008).
Why Elite Communication Matters

between cueing and framing. A cue refers broadly to “a piece of information that allows individuals to make inferences without drawing on more detailed knowledge” (Druckman et al. 2010, 137; see also Bullock 2011, 497). Cueing effects, then, arise whenever people’s opinions or choices are influenced by this limited piece of information. Such effects are at the core of the rich literature on party cues, which examines how simple information about partisanship shapes people’s opinions on issues and candidates (e.g., Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Hobolt 2007; Levendusky 2010; Bullock 2011; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Torcal et al. 2018).

A frame, on the other hand, refers to a particular definition or interpretation of a political issue (Chong and Druckman 2007a). Framing effects arise whenever individuals reorient their thinking about an issue because of how it is presented. A classic example is that of attitudes toward a hate group rally, which become more positive when this rally is discussed in terms of free speech than when it is discussed in terms of public safety (Druckman et al. 2010). Framing effects are ubiquitous in politics and have given rise to an impressive literature on the conditions under which such influence is likely (e.g., Iyengar 1991; Druckman 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007a; Busby et al. 2018).

There are indications that cueing and framing by elites may influence the opinions of citizens on international issues as well. First, studies of public opinion in Europe show that citizens’ reliance on party cues affects their support for the EU. For instance, Gabel and Scheve (2007) find that more negative elite messages about European integration result in decreased public support for the EU. Maier et al. (2012) establish that party cues about economics and identities shape citizen support for the EU, especially among people who identify with the respective parties. Hobolt (2007) and Torcal et al. (2018) examine how party cues help to increase voter competence by giving citizens the information they require to make choices in line with their political preferences.

depending on the baseline distribution of mass opinion on these issues. Kerzer and Zeitzoff (2017) confirm that cues from party elites shape American’s opinions on foreign policy, while also demonstrating that cues from social peers matter. Zvobgo (2019) examines how competing frames about human rights and national interests affect US public opinion on the issue of whether or not to join the ICC. Taken together, these studies from the European and US contexts suggest that citizens’ reliance on heuristics make them susceptible to elite influence on international issues as well.

When Elite Communication Matters

Our general expectation is that elite communication about IOs affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward these organizations. Yet elites are unlikely to be equally influential under all circumstances. While some conditions favor greater effects of elite communication on people’s legitimacy beliefs, other conditions restrict the scope for elites to shape citizens’ attitudes toward IOs. In this section, we therefore consider the conditionality of elite communication. Under what circumstances should we expect elite communication to be more or less influential in relation to citizen legitimacy beliefs?

We theorize conditional effects arising from all three constitutive components of the process of elite communication: the elite, the message, and the citizen. The moderating factors we consider are all consistent with the underlying logic of heuristic opinion formation, as developed in cognitive psychology and applied in comparative politics. First, the ability of elites to shape popular legitimacy beliefs is likely conditioned by credibility of these elites in the eyes of citizens, as well as the extent to which elites are polarized over IOs. Second, elite influence likely varies with tone of the messages, as well as the extent to which messages target IOs that have been subject to more or less prior contestation. Third, elite

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3 We refrain from theorizing factors that are not broadly consistent with the logic of heuristic opinion formation, but which potentially could affect the strength of communication effects. Instead, we consider such factors by testing these propositions in different country and issue-area contexts and by controlling for individual-level confounders through random allocation of respondents in the experimental design.
communication likely affects individuals differently, depending on their degree of political awareness and their political beliefs. In the following, we outline the general logic of each expectation. In the empirical chapters that follow, we formulate specific hypotheses to test these propositions.

**Elite Credibility**

Elite credibility refers to the belief that a speaker has relevant knowledge and can be trusted to reveal that information accurately (Lupia 2000). The basic expectation is that elites who are perceived as more credible are more likely to sway the opinions of citizens. According to this view, citizens are not mindless followers of elites who might want to manipulate them, but instead listen specifically to the elites they perceive to be credible on a particular issue. There are reasons to expect that elites exhibit varying degrees of credibility when communicating about IOs, which would have implications for the effects of this communication on citizens’ legitimacy perceptions. Based on this general expectation, we theorize the drivers of elite credibility in the domestic and international contexts, respectively.

In the domestic context, we expect partisanship to be the central source of credibility for elites communicating about IOs. The general idea is that people will follow cues from parties they trust, while neglecting cues from parties they distrust, especially in polarized political environments. This association between credibility and partisanship is rooted in an understanding of domestic politics as structured in partisan terms (Sniderman 2000; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). On the one hand, parties order the political choices that citizens confront. On the other hand, citizens display partisan identification, understood as deep and emotional attachments to political parties. When citizens identify with or lean toward a specific political party, they therefore tend to interpret information from that party as more credible than alternative information from opposing parties. This process involves an element of motivated reasoning, that is, a tendency to seek out information that confirms prior beliefs (Druckman et al. 2013, 59).

We build on this general logic in Chapter 5 when we assess the conditions under which domestic party elites shape citizens’ perceptions of IO legitimacy.
In the global context, where elites are less strongly linked to specific partisan positions, and the issues often are less polarizing, we expect credibility instead to be tied to perceptions of impartiality. This expectation of a link between credibility and impartiality is inspired by research on the impact of expert endorsements, which shows that experts can affect public opinion by virtue of their perceived unbiased knowledge (Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Maliniak et al. 2021), as well as research on media priming, which shows that news sources perceived as authoritative are more likely to produce framing effects (Miller and Krosnick 2000; Druckman 2001). Analogously, we expect that citizens consider whether elites in global governance can be expected to hold and reveal accurate information about IOs. Elites who have greater incentives to convey biased information about IOs are less likely to be seen as credible sources. Conversely, elites who stand to gain less from how IOs are perceived can be expected to communicate more honestly about these organizations.

We examine this expectation in Chapter 4, when we explore the conditions under which member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves affect citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs.

**Elite Polarization**

Elite polarization refers to the extent to which elites are divided on the issues they communicate about. The expectation that elite polarization matters has been developed in the context of party cueing in domestic politics, where polarization is conceptualized as having two components: the ideological distance between parties on a particular issue and the ideological homogeneity within each party on this issue (Levendusky 2010, 118). The expectation is that greater polarization leads to stronger cueing effects among people sympathizing with the communicating party, since polarization leads to clearer signals.

On this view, polarization works by strengthening or weakening the impact of people’s partisan identification on their political attitudes or voting behavior (Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013). Provided that people have partisan leanings and are prone to take cues from their favored party, polarization helps to facilitate this process. “When elites are polarized, they send voters clearer signals about where they stand on the issues of the day: the parties’ positions are distinct from
one another, and each party is more internally ideologically homogeneous. In this environment, it is easier for an ordinary voter to follow his party’s cue” (Levendusky 2010, 114–115).

This expectation is consistent with Zaller’s (1992) seminal model, which suggests that consensus among political parties increases public support for government policy, while dissensus leads citizens to follow those elites who share their political beliefs. Berinsky (2009) and Gabel and Scheve (2007) have subsequently found support for this basic claim in studies of US attitudes toward war and public opinion toward the EU.

We test this expectation in Chapter 5, when we assess if communication by political parties about IOs affects citizens differently depending on the degree of elite polarization.

**Tone of Message**

Elite communication in global governance comprises both positive messages that endorse, praise, and defend IOs, and negative messages that challenge, criticize, and dismiss IOs. A growing literature refers to such positive and negative communication as legitimation and delegitimation of IOs (Zaum 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Tallberg et al. 2018; Zürn 2018). While legitimation aims to boost legitimacy beliefs through positive communication about IOs, delegitimation aims to undermine legitimacy beliefs through negative messages about the same organizations. Tone is in many ways at the core of communication as a practice in global governance. It is through the inclusion of an evaluative tone that elite messages are charged and become potentially influential communicative practices.

We expect that negative elite messages will have stronger effects on legitimacy perceptions than positive messages. We base this expectation on theories in comparative politics, economics, and psychology. While identifying slightly different mechanisms, all ground their expectations in general sociopsychological dynamics, and all suggest that negative messages should have a larger impact than positive.

First, research on voting behavior shows that people respond asymmetrically to positive and negative information about the economy (Bloom and Price 1975; Soroka 2006). Since people tend to be slightly optimistic in their basic predisposition, negative information usually diverges more from people’s reference points than positive information.
and therefore has a greater impact on attitudes and behavior. This dynamic has been identified in communication about political candidates and institutions as well (e.g., Lau 1985).

Second, prospect theory suggests a similar story of asymmetry, highlighting a complementary mechanism. It submits that individuals tend to be risk averse, weighing potential losses more heavily than potential gains (Kahnemann and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Such loss aversion leads people to react more strongly to negative information than to positive, for instance, by cutting back consumption more sharply in response to bad news than they expand consumption in response to good news.

Third, psychological research on impression formation establishes that bad emotions weigh more heavily than good emotions (Baumeister et al. 2001). Negative information tends to be processed more thoroughly, be stickier, and have greater impact than positive information.

We test this expectation in Chapter 4, when comparing the effects on legitimacy beliefs of positive and negative messages communicated by member governments, NGOs, and IOs.

Object of Message

IOs are subject to public debate to varying extents. While some IOs fly beneath the radar of public contestation, others are continuously discussed in society. When messages target IOs that already have been subject to extensive societal contestation, the likelihood of communication effects is significantly reduced. Citizens have then developed stronger priors about the IO in question, reducing the probability that additional information will shift their opinions. This is a different way of saying that prior elite communication has consequences for the effectiveness of future elite communication. As Levendusky (2010, 120) notes: “For more crystallized issues, the impact of elites has already been absorbed into citizens’ attitudes.”

Research in political psychology suggests that the strength of people’s priors has a negative conditioning effect on the influence of communicative processes, such as cueing, framing, persuasion, and priming (Chong and Druckman 2007a, 111–112). When people hold strong prior beliefs on a topic, this opinion is unlikely to change in view of new information and likely to continue dictating actions and
thoughts. In contrast, when people hold weak prior beliefs on a topic, affecting this opinion is considerably easier, even if the new opinion is unlikely to stick unless it is simultaneously strengthened.

The process by which priors are strengthened is motivated political reasoning (Taber and Lodge 2006). Motivated reasoning occurs when individuals seek out information consistent with their prior opinions, while rejecting information inconsistent with those prior opinions (Kunda 1990). When people already have strong priors, they rely more extensively on motivated political reasoning. As Druckman and Leeper (2012, 877) explain: “Those with stronger attitudes are substantially more likely to engage in motivated reasoning not only because their attitudes reflect cumulative exposure over time to information, but also because they increasingly resist new information that might change those attitudes.”

Building on this logic, we expect the level of prior contestation of the IO targeted in a message to condition the effectiveness of elite communication. When people have stronger priors about an IO, they will be less susceptible to new information about this organization (see also Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Spilker et al. 2020). Their attitudes toward this IO will already be hardened from earlier discussion, and they will be reluctant to change their opinions in response to communication from elites. However, if citizens have less developed attitudes toward an IO, they will be more open to new information about this organization and therefore more easily affected by elite cues and frames.

In Chapters 4 and 6, we draw on this logic to interpret evidence that citizens respond less strongly to elite cues about IOs that have been subject to more intense public debate.

**Political Awareness**

Political awareness refers to the extent to which people have a developed understanding of politics, as a result of formal education, media consumption, own experiences, conversations with friends, and other way of acquiring information about politics. Political awareness has been described as “a relatively long-term and stable characteristics of individuals pertaining to the degree to which citizens pay attention to, understand, and know about the political world” (Claassen and Highton 2009, 539). Related concepts, often used as synonyms, are political sophistication (Sniderman et al. 1991), cognitive engagement (Zaller
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1992), and political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). In the context of global governance, politically more aware citizens have the training and resources to comprehend complex processes in world politics, consume news reporting on global events, and may even have international experiences themselves, making them more likely to know of IOs and their basic functioning (Dellmuth 2016).

We expect political awareness to have a positive conditioning effect on the influence of elite communication: The more politically aware citizens are, the more responsive they will be to elite cues about IOs. This may seem like a puzzling expectation, since a lack of information, after all, is the reason why individuals make use of heuristics in the first place. Yet integrating new information about IOs or other phenomena requires a level of political sophistication that allows the individual to sort and systematize this information. Ironically, then, those who are most well versed in politics may be those most easily affected by elites’ communication about politics, while those who need to build a better knowledge base about politics may be those most likely to resist new information.

Sniderman et al. (1991, 20) refer to this expectation as the “sophistication interaction hypothesis” – while all people are expected to take advantage of heuristics in politics, the politically more sophisticated are more likely to be guided by elite endorsements when forming opinions. Zaller (1992, 42), similarly, expects a positive conditioning effect of political awareness, stating that “the greater a person’s level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend – in a word, to receive – political messages concerning the issue.” Druckman and Nelson (2003, 732) advance the same argument with regard to framing effects, submitting that “elite frames will exhibit a greater impact on more knowledgeable individuals,” since those individuals are more able to connect the considerations put forward in a frame with their overall opinions.

Building on this general expectation, we anticipate that political awareness can help to account for individual-level variation in the effectiveness of elite communication about IOs. We distinguish between people’s general political awareness and their political awareness regarding global governance, expecting both to affect elite communication in the same way. When people are more politically aware, they will be more receptive to elite messages about the institutional qualities of IOs. Conversely, when they are less politically aware, they
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will have a harder time making sense of novel information about the workings and consequences of IOs.

We examine this expectation in all empirical chapters.

Political Beliefs

Political beliefs refer to individual opinions about a situation or object, which typically form clusters with related beliefs that together constitute more enduring attitudes (Rokeach 1968). Political beliefs tend to be influenced by political ideologies (such as liberalism or socialism), be reflected in relatively stable political attitudes (such as placement on the left or the right), and give rise to varying degrees of party identification (such as attachment to the Democratic or Republican Party). But political beliefs may also pertain to opinions on specific political topics, such as animal welfare, LGBTQ rights, immigration, and climate change. People’s prior beliefs about politics is perhaps the most well-established moderator of communication effects in earlier research (Chong and Druckman 2007a; Leeper and Slothuus 2014).

Political beliefs are commonly ordered according to specific conflict dimensions. The classic left–right dimension sorts political beliefs in terms of whether people support a more egalitarian distribution of income and more government intervention in the economy or consider inequality a natural social outcome and support more laissez-faire economic principles (Downs 1957; Bobbio 1996). This dimension effectively captures people’s opinions on matters of domestic politics (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; Mair 2007) and, some argue, international politics (Hooghe et al. 2002; Nôel and Thérien 2008). Over time, the left–right dimension has been supplemented by another axis, often referred to as GAL–TAN, since it distinguishes between green, alternative, and liberal values, on the one hand, and traditional, authoritarian, and nationalist values, on the other hand (Hooghe et al. 2002; Kriesi et al. 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2018). This dimension captures attitudes on social and cultural issues that fit poorly on the left–right dimension, but have risen in prominence in recent years, such as immigration, gender equality, gay rights, ecology, national sovereignty, and international cooperation.

We expect people’s political beliefs to matter in two ways. First, they likely affect the extent to which people are receptive to messages from certain political elites. Specifically, people are more likely to
listen to politically likeminded elites. The extensive literature on party
cueing shows that such messages are most effective with citizens who
have developed a deep and emotional attachment to a party – partisan
identification (e.g., Sniderman 2000; Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper
and Slothuus 2014). When they hold such partisan loyalties, “citizens
can take advantage of parties’ endorsements of policies and candidates
to form preferences without having to pay attention to substantive
content” (Leeper and Slothuus 2014, 135).

We test this expectation in Chapters 4, 5, and 7. In Chapter 4, we
assess if people are more likely to follow government cues if they iden-
tify with a party in office. In Chapter 5, we examine if citizens’ politi-
cal ideology and partisan identification affect the influence of party
cues on legitimacy beliefs. Likewise, in Chapter 7, we explore if citi-
zens’ partisan identification shapes how they respond to information
about the social purposes of IOs.

In addition, people’s political beliefs likely affect their receptiveness
to elite communication with certain ideological content. The informa-
tion that elites convey about IOs is rarely apolitical and frequently
touches an ideological nerve in citizens. For instance, whether IOs
possess more or less authority likely activates citizens’ political beliefs
along the GAL–TAN dimension. Similarly, whether IOs pursue some
social purposes rather than others likely triggers citizens’ political
beliefs along the left–right dimension. All else equal, the information
contained in a message may therefore be received differently depend-
ing on a citizen’s preexisting political beliefs.

We evaluate this expectation in Chapter 7, when we explore whether
citizens’ political beliefs and internationalist attitudes, respectively,
moderate the impact of information about the authority and purpose
of IOs. In addition, we draw on this logic in Chapter 5, when inter-
preting evidence that communication effects vary with internationalist
attitudes.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework of the book in
four steps. First, we conceptualized legitimacy in sociological terms
and explained how this approach directs our attention to the beliefs
of citizens. Second, we introduced the two principal components of
elite communication as this process unfolds in global governance: the
Conclusion

elites at global and domestic levels, and the messages about institutional qualities of IOs. Third, we laid out the central assumptions of our theory, building on heuristic opinion formation, and explained why those translate into a general expectation of elite communication affecting IO legitimacy beliefs. And fourth, we identified conditions at the level of elites, messages, and citizens that likely shape the strength of such communication effects.

In the following four chapters, we proceed to test our general expectation that elite communication matters for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, as well as our specific expectations about heterogeneous effects across elites, messages, and citizens. Our analyses are structured in two parts. We begin by focusing specifically on elites, while concentrating less on the information they convey, in order to examine the effects of global and domestic elites on citizen legitimacy beliefs (Chapters 4 and 5). We then reverse the design, focusing on the information conveyed about IOs, while bracketing the elites themselves (Chapters 6 and 7).
Communication by global elites about the strengths and weaknesses of IOs is a common feature of global politics. Member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves regularly criticize and endorse the operations and efforts of international organizations. As the US announced its withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council in June 2019, then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo proclaimed: “The Human Rights Council has become an exercise in shameless hypocrisy, with many of the world’s worst human-rights abuses going ignored and some of the world’s most serious offenders sitting on the council itself” (NPR 2019). As the WHO was challenged by former US President Donald Trump in April 2020, Bill Gates of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation tweeted: “Halting funding for the World Health Organization during a world health crisis is as dangerous as it sounds. Their work is slowing the spread of COVID-19 and if that work is stopped no other organization can replace them. The world needs @WHO now more than ever” (Gates 2020). And as the IMF faced criticism from a variety of sources in 2019, then IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde shot back: “I like to say that the IMF brings a wallet, a brain and a heart” (Lagarde 2019).

Yet, despite the prominence of communication by global elites, we know little about its effects on the popular legitimacy of IOs. A growing body of research explores legitimation and delegitimation by such elites (Zaum 2013; Morse and Keohane 2014; Binder and Heuipel 2015; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Zürn 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Schmidtke 2019; Stephen and Zürn 2019; von Billerbeck 2020; Bexell et al. 2022). However, this literature exclusively maps and explains patterns in the contestation around IOs, without assessing its consequences. Part of the reason is the methodological challenge of isolating the effects of elite communication.

1 This chapter draws from and extends previous work published in Dellmuth and Tallberg (2021).
In this chapter, we comparatively study how communication by global elites affects the popular legitimacy of IOs. We use the term “global elites” pragmatically to refer to elite actors who seek to influence politics beyond the nation-state, at global and regional levels. Building on our theory, we develop hypotheses about three conditions that should matter for the effects of global elite communication: the communicating elites (member governments, NGOs or IOs themselves), the IO features invoked in communication (procedures or performances), and the tone of messages (positive or negative).

We test our hypotheses through a population-based survey experiment. In other words, we embed an experiment designed to isolate causal effects of elite communication on citizen legitimacy beliefs toward IOs in a survey. As the survey is sent to nationally representative samples of citizens, we can generalize the experimental findings to the populations of the countries studied. We conducted the experiment in a survey with almost 10,000 respondents representing the populations of three countries: Germany, the UK, and the US. Using “vignettes,” that is, story lines in which we present specific framings of IOs to respondents, we vary the three factors we are interested in: the elite, the IO feature, and the tone. This approach enables us to examine causal effects on legitimacy perceptions comparatively across five prominent regional or global IOs: the EU, IMF, NAFTA, UN, and WTO. Our analysis goes beyond hypothesis testing, as we also explore the contingency of treatment effects among specific citizen subgroups, as well as IO and country contexts.

Our findings underline that communication by global elites matters for legitimacy perceptions. There are five key results. First, we find that communication by member governments and NGOs has stronger effects on legitimacy perceptions than communication by IOs themselves. This suggests that IOs’ increasingly prominent practice of self-legitimation confronts credibility constraints that reduce its effectiveness. Second, the evidence shows that elite communication affects legitimacy perceptions irrespective of whether it invokes IOs’ procedures or performances. While scholars for long have debated the relative importance of procedure and performance for legitimacy, citizens appear equally sensitive to both. Third, we find that negative messages about IOs have stronger effects on legitimacy perceptions than positive messages. This suggests that the opponents of global governance face an easier task than its defenders in shaping public perceptions.
Fourth, comparing across IOs indicates that elite communication is more often effective in relation to the IMF, UN, and WTO, than the EU and NAFTA. This finding highlights the benefits of a comparative perspective, since a focus on single IOs may lead to an under- or over-estimation of the general capacity of global elites to shape perceptions of IO legitimacy. Fifth, comparing results across countries shows that communication by these global elites is more effective in Germany and the UK than in the US. It may be that US citizens are relatively more susceptible to communication by domestic elites, as we discuss in Chapter 5.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. It begins by outlining our theoretical expectations about how communication by global elites is expected to shape legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. It then elaborates on the survey experimental design and presents the empirical analysis. We end the chapter by summarizing its main conclusions.

Hypotheses

We build on our theory (Chapter 3) to develop expectations about the conditions shaping the extent to which communication by global elites affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We assume that communication by trusted elites may offer citizens cognitive shortcuts to opinions about IOs and that citizens may be responsive to such information because it allows them to form opinions about IOs in efficient ways. Our expectations recognize that contextual circumstances of elite communication vary across scales of government. While research on elite communication in comparative politics has focused on political candidates and parties, global governance involves a different set of state and nonstate elites, raising novel questions about the effects of communication under alternative conditions. Specifically, we theorize that the strength of communication effects will depend on the type of global elite engaging in communication about IOs, the institutional features of IOs invoked in the communication, and the tone of the communication.

With regard to the *elites* engaging in communication, one of the hallmarks of global governance is the multitude of actors that aspire to influence its outcomes. We focus on three types of global elites who are common communicators about IOs: member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves (see Chapters 2 and 3). There are reasons to expect
that these elites are perceived as varyingly credible when communicating about IOs, with implications for the effects on citizens’ legitimacy perceptions. Building on research on expert endorsements and media priming, we expect credibility to be tied to perceptions of impartiality (Miller and Krosnick 2000; Druckman 2001; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Maliniak et al. 2019). Specifically, we expect that citizens consider whether elites in global governance can be expected to hold and reveal accurate information about IOs. Elites that have larger incentives to convey biased information about IOs are less likely to be seen as credible sources. Conversely, elites that stand less to gain from how IOs are perceived can be expected to communicate more honestly about these organizations.

Based on these considerations, we expect NGOs to hold the highest credibility in the eyes of citizens. NGOs are constitutively independent from IOs and therefore more likely to be regarded as autonomous voices (cf. Gourevitch et al. 2012). Many NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch and Transparency International, have made it their organizational purpose to offer independent assessments of norm conformance and goal achievement among IOs and their member states (Kelley and Simmons 2015). Member governments are the principals of IOs (Hawkins et al. 2006). They have played a part in creating IOs, serve on their governing bodies, and carry the main responsibility for implementing their policies. As a result, governments often have particular views on how cooperation should develop, as in conflicts over burden-sharing in the EU, voting weight in the IMF, and dispute settlement in the WTO. Because of these stakes, member governments are likely perceived as less credible communicators than NGOs. IOs, finally, have the most far-reaching vested interests in debates about themselves. The bureaucracies of IOs are committed to advancing the goals of these organizations, but depend on the support of their political environment to achieve them (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). We therefore expect IOs to be the least credible source of information about themselves.

We find support for this gradation of credibility in data on popular confidence in different elites in a global sample of countries. Data from the WVS6 in the years shortly before our survey was fielded (2010–2014) can shed further light on this issue. Using data from fifty-two countries around the world, we assess differences in average citizen confidence in NGOs (proxied by the available indicators “environmental organizations” and “women’s organizations”), governments,
and the UN. Using paired $t$-tests, we find that environmental and women’s NGOs are perceived as more credible than both governments and IOs, and that governments are perceived as more credible than the UN (see Online Appendix D).\footnote{Note that a replication of this analysis using data from the most recent 7th wave of the WVS (2017–2019) yields similar results, except that governments do not enjoy more confidence than the UN anymore (diff = $-0.136$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 96,728$) in 65 countries, counting Hong Kong and Taiwan as strata for which random samples in the WVS are drawn.} This leads to a first hypothesis:

$H1$: The more credible elites are perceived to be by citizens, the stronger their impact on citizens’ perceptions of IO legitimacy.

Next, we turn to the institutional features of IOs invoked in communication by global elites. We assume that global elites typically attempt to affect individual attitudes by invoking two alternative grounds for endorsement or criticism: the procedures and performances of IOs. An extensive literature shows that favorable attitudes toward a political institution may be shaped by the procedures and performances of that institution – both in the context of domestic politics (Newton and Norris 2000; Esaiasson et al. 2012, 2019) and global governance (Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Bernauer et al. 2020). As a consequence, elites interested in shaping the attitudes of citizens toward IOs frequently refer to these features. Procedural standards invoked in elite communication often relate to democratic aspects of IO policy-making, such as inclusiveness and accountability, but can also pertain to expertise and efficiency (Binder and Heupel 2015). Performance standards include aspects of goal achievement, such as problem-solving effectiveness and collective welfare gains, but can also relate to the fairness of outcomes (Zürn 2018).

Whether citizens’ legitimacy perceptions are most sensitive to the procedures or performances of IOs is a topic of debate. Procedural accounts submit that process criteria are most important for people’s perceptions of legitimacy. Even when institutions generate outcomes to their disadvantage, actors accept their exercise of authority because of how they were set up and operate (Hurd 2007, 71). Procedural accounts have an antecedent in Weber’s (1922/1978) notion of rational-legal legitimacy, emphasizing properly administered rules by properly appointed authorities. In contemporary scholarship, the idea
that legitimacy results from features of the decision-making process is prominent in theories of procedural fairness (Tyler 1990) and democratic legitimacy (Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005).

Performance accounts instead claim that legitimacy perceptions are determined by institutions’ contributions to collective welfare and distributional outcomes. Substantive outcomes are considered more powerful in shaping the perceptions of institutions than the process by which those outcomes were produced (Hurd 2007, 67). This idea features prominently in the study of domestic institutions: “Government institutions that perform well are likely to elicit the confidence of citizens; those that perform badly or ineffectively generate feelings of distrust and low confidence” (Newton and Norris 2000, 61). In the global setting, it is a common claim that IOs historically have earned their legitimacy through the benefits they have produced for states and societies (Buchanan and Keohane 2006).

Our theory gives us no reason to expect that elite communication would be varyingingly effective depending on the features of IOs that are invoked. If it is correct that citizens care both about the procedures and performances of IOs when forming legitimacy perceptions (Anderson et al. 2019; Dellmuth et al. 2019; Bernauer et al. 2020), then elite communication that invokes these features should be effective in both cases. This leads us to expect:

H2: Elite communication affects citizens’ perceptions of IO legitimacy irrespective of whether it refers to the procedures or performances of IOs.

Finally, we consider how the tone of elite communication may influence the strength of cueing effects. As previously described, elite communication spans the full evaluative spectrum, from endorsing, praising, and defending IOs to challenging, criticizing, and dismissing the same organizations. These positive and negative discursive strategies are performed by all types of elites and frequently referred to as legitimation and delegitimation of IOs (Zaum 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Tallberg et al. 2018; Zürn 2018). Empirical examples include former US President Donald Trump calling NAFTA the worst trade deal the US ever signed (New York Times, March 30, 2017), then Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis accusing the EU for terrorism during the country’s economic crisis (BBC, July 4, 2015), UN Secretary General António Guterres praising the organization’s peacekeepers for making the world safer (UN 2019), and European Commission President Ursula
von der Leyen portraying the EU as a global leader on competitiveness and the green economy (Strasbourg, September 15, 2021).

The study and practice of legitimation and delegitimation assume the evaluative component of communication to matter. It is by praising or criticizing IOs that elite messages become potentially powerful in shaping citizen attitudes. If elite messages had been neutral, few would have expected them to be influential. This expectation is borne out in studies showing that positive and negative party cues shape public support for the EU (Maier et al. 2012) and on international issues generally (Guisinger and Saunders 2017). However, it is an unexplored question whether legitimation or delegitimation is systematically more or less effective in shaping citizen attitudes toward IOs.

As theorized in Chapter 3, we expect that negative elite messages will have stronger effects on legitimacy perceptions than positive messages. We base this expectation on research in comparative politics, economics, and psychology. While identifying slightly different mechanisms, all traditions ground their expectations in general sociopsychological dynamics, and all suggest that negative messages should have a larger impact than positive. Research on voting behavior shows that people respond asymmetrically to positive and negative information about the economy (Bloom and Price 1975; Soroka 2006). Prospect theory submits that individuals tend to be risk averse, leading people to react more strongly to negative information than to positive (Kahnemann and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahnemann 1981). Psychological research on impression formation establishes that bad emotions weigh more heavily than good emotions, such that negative information is processed more thoroughly, is stickier, and has greater impact (Baumeister et al. 2001). We expect these general sociopsychological dynamics to be at play also when people respond to communication about IOs. They suggest a third hypothesis:

\[ H_3 \]: Negative messages have a stronger impact than positive messages on citizens’ perceptions of IO legitimacy.

**Research Design**

To examine our hypotheses, we conducted a population-based survey experiment in three countries. While we could have assessed the hypotheses based on a citizen sample from a single country, we wanted to reduce the risk of biases from contextual country factors.
By examining communication effects on legitimacy beliefs across different countries, we strengthen our ability to generalize the findings.

Survey Design

The survey experiment was conducted among nationally representative samples in Germany, the UK, and the US. We selected these countries as they are: (a) politically central in the examined IOs, making our findings substantively important for the prospects of global governance; (b) democratic countries, which avoids the issue that legitimacy for political institutions may mean different things to citizens of democratic and autocratic regimes (Jamal and Nooruddin 2010); and (c) countries with very high levels of Internet penetration (over 80 percent), increasing our confidence in the external validity of the data.

To implement the questionnaire, we relied on online panels from YouGov (see Online Appendix A). A total of 3,270 interviews were conducted in the UK, 3,268 in Germany, and 3,135 in the US during January 2015. Next to the experiment, the survey questionnaire (Online Appendix C1) included several attitudinal and demographic questions, which we use to describe the country-specific samples (Online Appendix C2), and for a series of randomization checks, also known as “balance tests” (see below).

Experimental Design

The experiment was embedded in a survey questionnaire. In the experimental part, respondents were randomly assigned to groups that received different experimental treatments, and a control group that did not receive any treatment. Following the experimental part, all respondents were immediately asked how much confidence they have in an IO. As discussed in Chapter 3, we operationalize legitimacy perceptions using the measure of confidence in IOs: “How much confidence do you personally have in the [IO] on a scale from 0 (no confidence) to 10 (complete confidence)?” In the experiment, the control group only received the question about confidence in a particular IO. The treatment groups (Table 4.1) received a vignette containing the treatment and then the confidence question. Respondents were never allocated to the same treatment group twice. Respondents who were placed in the control group remained in this group throughout the four rounds.
Table 4.1 Vignettes in the global elites experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Tone</th>
<th>IO feature</th>
<th>Elite</th>
<th>Wording of vignette</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 1</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>As you may know, most civil society organizations praise the (IO) for being highly democratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>As you may know, most civil society organizations criticize the (IO) for being highly undemocratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 3</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>As you may know, most civil society organizations praise the (IO) for doing a very good job in trying to solve the problems it faces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>IOs</td>
<td>As you may know, most civil society organizations criticize the (IO) for doing a very poor job in trying to solve the problems it faces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 5</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>As you may know, the (IO) prides itself for being highly democratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>IOs</td>
<td>As you may know, the (IO) admits to being highly undemocratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 7</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>IOs</td>
<td>As you may know, the (IO) prides itself for doing a very good job in trying to solve the problems it faces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>As you may know, the (IO) admits to doing a very bad job when trying to solve the problems it faces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 9</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>As you may know, the (COUNTRY) government praises the (IO) for being highly democratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>As you may know, the (COUNTRY) government criticizes the (IO) for being highly undemocratic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 11</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>As you may know, the (COUNTRY) government praises the (IO) for doing a very good job in trying to solve the problems it faces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment 12</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>As you may know, the (COUNTRY) government criticizes the (IO) for doing a very poor job in trying to solve the problems it faces.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We used vignettes to present the treatments. A vignette approach is well suited for complex factorial experiments, as different aspects of the presented storyline about IOs can be systematically altered in a vignette (Mutz 2011, 54). Here, we manipulated three features of the communicative situation: the elite making the statement (H1), the features of the IO (H2), and the tone of the message (H3). The vignettes were formulated in a way that allowed us to vary the three factors with precision but also express the subject matter in concrete terms so that it would be understandable to respondents (Gibson 2008). Moreover, we sought to formulate vignettes that would work equally well for all IOs and that were short and straightforward, since longer and more complex vignettes make it more difficult to determine what individuals respond to (Mutz 2011, 64–65).³

The treatments combined into a 3 by 2 by 2 factorial design, with twelve conditions in total (Table 4.1). We allocated the same number of individuals to each combination of factors, and the number of respondents giving a substantive answer was eventually relatively even across groups (see Online Appendix C2).

To examine H1, we varied the elite making the statement in the vignette: NGOs, member governments, or IOs themselves. While NGOs is our analytical actor category, we use the term CSOs in the vignettes in order for respondents to more easily understand the nature of these actors. To assess H2, we formulated vignettes about the procedures and performances of IOs, where procedural vignettes invoked the democratic character of IOs and performance vignettes the problem-solving effectiveness of IOs. To evaluate H3, we designed the vignettes so that they included positive or negative statements about IOs.

Experimental Rounds

Moving beyond the strict hypothesis test, we also explored the extent to which communication effects vary across different IOs. We therefore conducted the survey experiment in several rounds, with each round performing the same experiment on a different IO. We selected five IOs that are central in their respective policy domains and prominent

³ For ethical reasons, the vignettes were preceded by an instruction to the respondent clarifying their status as statements rather than facts (Online Appendix C1).
Communication by Global Elites

in public debate: three at the global level (IMF, UN, and WTO) and two at the regional level (EU and NAFTA). While some IOs fly beneath the radar of public awareness, we selected IOs that both are known to citizens at a basic level and regularly subject to positive and negative communication by elites.

Examining available surveys, we observe that, in 2011, 95 percent of the residents in the two EU member states had heard of the EU, and 95 percent of the residents in the three states had heard of the UN, while 85 percent of the residents in the three countries had heard of the WTO (Gallup International Association 2011). Knowledge of the IMF was only asked about in 2005, when about 70 percent of the residents in the three countries had heard of this organization (Gallup International Association 2005). NAFTA was not included in any of these surveys. More recent data from the WVS7 (2017–2020) provide a harder test of knowledge regarding global governance. The data suggest that a majority of citizens has reasonable knowledge about the UN, since about 42 percent of citizens in fifty-one countries could identify the five permanent members of the UNSC correctly (N = 73,294). About 30 percent of citizens in the same countries could identify the location of the IMF headquarters (N = 73,444).

Using relatively well-known IOs in the experiment ensures that treatments expressing elite messages about these IOs are understandable and reasonable to respondents. At the same time, the levels of citizen familiarity and public debate differ across these IOs, suggesting potential explanations of variation in treatment effects, further explored in the comparative analysis. All respondents were asked about all IOs of which their country is a member state. That is, the question about confidence in NAFTA was only asked in the US, and the question about confidence in the EU, only in the UK and Germany. The order of the experimental rounds for all respondents was: UN, EU/NAFTA, IMF, and WTO. We examine potential biases resulting from this design choice in the robustness check section below.

4 “Don’t know” and incorrect responses were coded as incorrect (0), and correct answers as 1 (cf. Jessee 2017). Probability weights were applied to calculate percentages to approximate a representative sample in the included countries. Hong Kong and Taiwan were included as strata for which representative samples are drawn in the WVS7.
Results

We discuss the results for each hypothesis in turn and then disaggregate the analysis by IO and country. Here and in the ensuing experimental chapters, we follow a standard convention in statistical practice to interpret as statistically significant only treatment effects that have a 95 percent chance of being found in the full population ($p < 0.05$). We calculate treatment effects using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with confidence as dependent variable. OLS regression analyses with one predictor are equivalent to $t$-tests, with the advantage that the clustered and weighted nature of the data can be taken into account. All models are estimated using robust standard errors clustered at the level of individuals.

Communicating Elites

The first hypothesis predicts that elite type matters for the effectiveness of elite communication and yields two observable implications. First, the differences in mean confidence between the treatment groups for the different elite types and the control group should be statistically significant. Second, the differences in mean confidence between the treatment groups for the different elites should be statistically significant. In line with our theory, we expect NGOs to be most effective, national governments less effective, and IOs themselves least effective in communication about IOs. To explore these observable implications, we pooled the data across the four experimental rounds so that the observations on confidence in the different IOs are clustered at the level of individuals. We then collapsed the treatment groups on procedure and performance, enabling us to contrast the effects of negative communication by NGOs, IOs, and governments as well as positive communication by the same elites. To this end, we created several dummy variables indicating if respondents were exposed to a specific vignette.

5 Collapsing the treatment groups receiving negative and positive communication is not possible. Because of different mean values for confidence in these two groups, aggregate measures in absolute numbers or standardized $z$-scores cannot be calculated.
Figure 4.1 shows the results. This figure and all ensuing figures reporting treatment effects show the effects with their 95 percent confidence intervals. These intervals indicate a 95 percent certainty that the true treatment effect lies within their range. If the confidence intervals include zero, the treatment effect is not statistically significant. Figure 4.1 demonstrates that the effects on confidence in IOs depend on the type of elite, largely corroborating H1. In line with the first observable implication, the first six treatment effects indicate that communication by all three elite types affects citizens’ confidence in IOs. These effects are potentially substantively important when considering that they result from a one-off exposure to treatment. For example, the first treatment effect (0.356) indicates that citizens who have received positively framed messages from NGOs on average have 0.356 more confidence in IOs on an 11-point scale, compared to those who did not receive such messages. However, the third treatment effect is not statistically significant, suggesting that IOs cannot successfully legitimate themselves in the eyes of citizens through appeals to their procedures or performances.
Results

Most importantly, the second observable implication receives support as well, albeit not in all parts. The last six treatment effects in Figure 4.1 indicate that there are some differences in the strength of communication effects between the three types of elites. The results suggest that NGOs manage to sway confidence in IOs more than IOs themselves, irrespective of whether they seek to legitimize or delegitimize IOs. Similarly, governments appear to shape legitimacy perceptions more than IOs when seeking to enhance confidence in IOs, but not when attempting to weaken it. However, the evidence also suggests that NGOs are not more effective than governments in shaping citizens’ confidence in IOs, contrary to our expectation.

These results suggest that the credibility of elites matters for their capacity to sway public perceptions of IOs. IOs appear unable to increase their own legitimacy by presenting themselves in a positive fashion. They are likely perceived as partial, and therefore noncredible, as a source of positive information about their own merits. The finding in other research that IO endorsements can affect public opinion about a state’s foreign policy is not at odds with this result, as IOs in those cases communicate about other actors (Chapman 2009). While IOs increasingly engage in various forms of self-legitimation, our findings question the effectiveness of that strategy. Instead, they suggest that IOs have to rely on positive communication by NGOs and national governments to increase their legitimacy. The finding that these two latter types of elites are equally effective communicators may be due to citizens not perceiving governments as partial principals of IOs, but as credible voices about the merits of these organizations.

IO Features

The second hypothesis predicts that elite communication is equally effective when invoking the procedures and performances of IOs as grounds for endorsement or criticism. H2 has three observable implications. First, the differences in mean confidence between the procedure group and the control group, as well as between the performance group and the control group, should be statistically significant. Second, the differences in mean confidence in these group comparisons should be similar in size. Third, there should not be a statistically significant difference in mean confidence between the procedure group
and the performance group. To test this, we collapsed the treatment
groups for the different elites and created a series of dummy variables
indicating if respondents received positive or negative procedural or
performance treatments.

In line with the first observable implication, the differences in
means between the four treatment groups and the control group,
respectively, are statistically significant (Figure 4.2). This indicates
that positive and negative messages about both the procedures and
performances of IOs are effective in swaying citizen confidence. Con-
sistent with the second observable implication, the differences in
mean confidence in these group comparisons are also very similar in
size, suggesting that procedure and performance have equally strong
effects. This finding is ultimately confirmed by the last two treatment
effects in Figure 4.2, which show statistically insignificant results for
the difference-in-means test between procedural and performance
treatments, in keeping with the third observable implication. This is
corroborated by a $t$-test statistic for independent samples ($t = 0.002$
in comparing positive procedural and performance treatments.
and $t = 0.013$ when comparing negative procedural and performance treatments).

These results suggest that citizens care equally about IOs’ procedures and performances when developing legitimacy perceptions (see also Anderson et al. 2019; Dellmuth et al. 2019). Theoretical accounts that privilege one or the other appear misguided. Contrary to claims that democratic procedure has become the foremost source of legitimacy (Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005), citizens may value IO performance just as much. Conversely, it would appear imprudent to conclude from findings in recent scholarship that citizens mainly care about IOs’ capacity to deliver, in line with findings from previous observational studies (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015), irrespective of the procedures by which policies are developed. From the perspective of communicating elites, there may be a wide menu of messages for effective legitimation or delegitimation of IOs.

**Tone**

The third hypothesis predicts that the tone of messages matters for the effectiveness of elite communication. H3 has two observable implications. First, the differences in means between the group receiving negative treatments and the control group, as well as between the group receiving positive treatments and the control group, should be statistically significant. Second, the difference in means between the negative and the positive treatment groups should be statistically significant, and negative messages should have stronger effects than positive.

Figure 4.3 shows that the results are in line with both observable implications. Both positive and negative treatments affect legitimacy perceptions. By implication, the difference in means of −0.517 on the 0–10 confidence scale between negative and positive treatment groups is also statistically significant. Furthermore, negative communication (−0.277) has stronger effects than positive (0.240). The statistically significant difference between negative and positive treatments is corroborated by a $t$-test statistic for independent samples ($t = 5.113$, see footnote 5).

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6 This statistic calculates if differences between the coefficients shown in the first two columns are significantly different from each other: $t = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{SE_{b_1}^2 + SE_{b_2}^2}}$, where $b_1$ is the first coefficient and $b_2$ is the second coefficient, with their respective standard errors.
Figures 4.1 and 4.2 further show that this pattern largely holds even when we disaggregate by the elites making the statements and by IO features. Figure 4.2 shows the effects of negative messages to be larger than the effects of positive messages, regardless of whether elites refer to procedure or performance. The findings in Figure 4.1 show a more varied pattern. In line with the expectation, they indicate that elite communication by IOs is more effective when negatively expressed. This finding ties in with research showing that communication has stronger effects when it is more costly for the communicating party and therefore more credible (Baum and Groeling 2009). However, for NGOs and governments, the effects are larger when the communication is positively expressed. If we disaggregate by IOs, as we do below, we find that the statistically significant difference in effects between positive and negative messages holds for all five IOs (Figures 4.5–4.7).

Overall, these results suggest that delegitimation of IOs by their opponents is more successful than legitimation by IOs themselves and their supporters. In line with earlier sociopsychological findings, people appear to be more sensitive to negative information than to positive.
Our findings suggest a problematic relationship in the public contestation over IOs. While public criticism against IOs often is intended to push these organizations toward improvements, rather than undermine them (Uhlin and Gregoratti 2022), such advocacy efforts could have costly negative externalities in terms of reduced public confidence.

**Interaction Analysis**

As a next step, we go beyond strict hypothesis testing and investigate the extent to which treatment effects could depend on partisanship and awareness, as theorized in Chapter 3. We could expect that a government’s cues work best among citizens identifying with the party in office. In addition, we test if political awareness has a conditioning effect on all treatments, based on the expectation that politically more aware individuals are more likely to comprehend and integrate new information into their opinion formation.

To test the first expectation, we interact the treatment dummy on positive and negative government communication, respectively, with a dummy variable capturing whether a respondent identifies with a party in government (= 1) or not. We find that the effect of the negative government treatment is moderated by partisan identification (Figure 4.4). The effect of the negative government treatment is only statistically significant among those identifying with a party in government.

To test the second expectation, we examine if treatment effects might be conditional on political awareness. We test these issues by interacting the treatment dummies with two awareness indicators, political knowledge and education (Online Appendices I2–I7). Both political knowledge and education are deemed good measures of political awareness (Zaller 1992; Gabel and Scheve 2007). The results suggest that more knowledgeable citizens did not respond differently than less knowledgeable citizens when confronted with our vignettes.

**Disaggregating Treatment Effects across IOs**

To shed light on how context matters, we undertake an additional analysis of the extent to which communication effects vary across IOs. This analysis allows us to assess if cueing effects occur less often in the context of some IOs compared to others. We are particularly interested in whether the patterns conform to our theoretical expectation,
developed in Chapter 3, that prior contestation of an IO conditions the effectiveness of elite communication. When people have developed stronger priors about an IO because it has been intensely debated in the past, they should be less susceptible to new information about this organization. Conversely, if citizens have less developed attitudes toward an IO because it has been less debated in the past, they should be more easily affected by elite communication.

Based on this consideration, we expect elite communication to be more effective in relation to the IMF, WTO, and UN than the EU and NAFTA. The EU has been highly contested in the member states of this IO since the early 1990s, when the conferral of greater political authority to the EU set off a process of growing politicization, manifested in popular rejections of new EU treaties, a rise in EU skeptic parties, and Britain’s vote to leave the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Hobolt 2016; Schmidt 2019). We therefore find it likely that European respondents, and especially our UK respondents, have developed more hardened attitudes toward the EU than toward the three global

![Figure 4.4](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009222020.004) Published online by Cambridge University Press
IOs. Similarly, NAFTA has been subject to quite some political contestation in its member countries in recent years, especially the US (Hurrelmann and Schneider 2015). The IO has been accused of benefiting some member states more than others, of favoring business interests at the expense of environmental and social standards, and of contributing to exploitation of workers (Bow 2015). We therefore find it likely that our US respondents have adopted more developed attitudes toward NAFTA than toward the three global IOs.

For this analysis, we reexamine the differences-in-means between the treatment groups and the control group presented in Figures 4.1–4.3, but now at the level of individual IOs (Figures 4.5–4.7). The analysis shows that the occurrence of treatment effects varies across IOs broadly consistent with the expectation that prior contestation matters. We exclusively report variation in the occurrence of effects, since differences in the strength of effects across IOs are not statistically significant, as indicated by the overlapping confidence intervals.

Figure 4.5 Effects of communication, by elites and IOs

Notes: Average treatment effects with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Sample size is about 3,000 for the global organizations, about 2,000 for the EU and about 800 for NAFTA. See Online Appendix C4 for detailed results.

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We begin by assessing the occurrence of treatment effects by IO for different elite types (Figure 4.5). Positive communication by NGOs is effective in relation to the UN, IMF, and WTO, while negative communication only is effective in relation to the UN and NAFTA. Positive communication by IOs never appears to work, mirroring the general ineffectiveness of IO self-legitimation, while negative communication works in all cases but NAFTA. Positive communication by governments about the UN and WTO seems to influence legitimacy perceptions, while negative communication works in the case of the WTO and EU. In sum, communication by global elites tends to lead to treatment effects in relation to the UN, WTO, and IMF, while we see fewer significant effects for the EU and NAFTA.

Figure 4.6 reveals a similar pattern across IOs when comparing communication about IOs’ procedures and performances. We observe statistically significant effects for all or most treatments relating to the UN, WTO, and IMF. Conversely, only one treatment pertaining to the
Results

EU yields a statistically significant effect and no treatment at all in the case of NAFTA. We observe the same pattern with regard to valence. As Figure 4.7 shows, positive communication works in the UN, IMF, and WTO, but not in the EU and NAFTA, while negative communication appears to work in the context of all IOs except NAFTA.

Taken together, these results indicate that elite communication is more often effective in the context of some IOs than in others. The pattern is largely consistent with the baseline expectation that prior contestation of an IOs matters for the effectiveness of elite communication: Cueing more often produces significant effects in the context of the IMF, UN, and WTO, and more seldom in the context of the EU and NAFTA.

Disaggregating Treatment Effects across Countries

Next, we disaggregate the analysis at the level of the individual countries (Figures 4.8–4.10). This allows us to examine if cueing

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**Figure 4.7** Effects of communication, by tone and IOs

*Notes:* Average treatment effects with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Sample size is about 3,000 for the global organizations, about 2,000 for the EU and about 800 for NAFTA. See Online Appendix C4 for detailed results.
effects occur more often in the context of some countries than others. There is considerable variation in the experience and salience of IOs across countries, and this may shape the effects of elite communication.

In Germany, communication by all three elite types and regarding both procedure and performance shape citizen confidence toward IOs. However, only negative treatments are statistically significant. This pattern is consistent with the general expectation that negative communication is more effective than positive.

In the UK, similarly, communication by all three elite types and regarding both institutional features is effective. Different from in Germany, both positive and negative treatments are statistically significant, with one exception: negative communication by NGOs. This exception is not driven by dynamics surrounding a particular IO, such as the EU, but applies to all four IOs (Table C.5.8). It suggests that British citizens do not find NGO criticism of IOs credible, possibly because it is common and less surprising.
Results

In the US, there are fewer significant treatment effects. Only positive communication by NGOs and negative communication by IOs appear effective. This pattern indicates that the elites we study in this chapter – NGOs, the national government, and IOs themselves – are less effective communicators in the US compared to other countries. Part of the reason may be that US citizens instead listen to domestic party elites as they make up their minds about IOs, as indicated by previous research on internationalist attitudes in the US (Guisinger and Saunders 2017) and as we also show in Chapter 5.

Validity and Robustness Checks

We perform several robustness checks. First, we replicate all analyses by including country dummies to check whether the aggregate results hold when controlling for potentially unobserved country-specific variables, given the country-specific results shown in this chapter. This change in model specification does not alter the

Figure 4.9 Effects of communication, by IO features and countries
Notes: Average treatment effects with their respective confidence intervals. Weighted data. See Online Appendix C5 for detailed results.
Second, we conducted two sets of balance tests. In the first set, we examined whether eight different individual characteristics measured in the survey, including education and age, are evenly distributed across the conditions we aggregated for the analysis. The results increase our confidence in the randomization of the subjects among treatment groups, as we only discover imbalances in six of the ninety-six tests. The second set of balance tests uses the twelve treatment conditions in Table 1 and shows evidence of only four imbalances for ninety-six tests (Online Appendices F1–F2).

Third, we examine whether there are potentially undesired spillover effects because the order of the four experimental rounds was not randomized. For this purpose, we have conducted balance tests for each round separately to assess if the fixed order of the rounds could have given rise to biases resulting from dropouts (Online Appendix E).

Figure 4.10 Effects of communication, by tone and countries
Notes: Average treatment effects with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. See Online Appendix C5 for detailed results.
Appendices F3–F10). We found no pattern indicating a potential systematic bias, as approximately the same very low number of balance tests comes out statistically significant in each round. Still, we examine potential biases further, as the absence of randomization of experimental rounds may give rise to varying distributions of respondents across samples. Indeed, the number of respondents giving substantive answers drops when comparing rounds 1 and 4 (Online Appendix C2). We test whether the experimental effects vary across the four rounds by plotting the predicted marginal effects of the different treatments for different rounds (Online Appendix G). The slopes of the dummy variables for the specific treatments are largely parallel across the four experimental rounds, indicating an absence of systematic differences.

Fourth, we replicated all analyses in order to check whether item nonresponse may have affected the results. If the use of the “don’t know” option reflects lower political knowledge about IOs (cf. Jessee 2017), these values would not be missing at random (cf. Rubin 1976) and average treatment effects may be biased. We therefore examined the causal process behind missingness and found that item nonresponse is unlikely to have affected our results (see Online Appendix H). While the effects of sociodemographic factors become smaller when comparing rounds 1 and 4, possibly as a result of samples having become more homogenous due to increasing item nonresponse, we also find instances of effect sizes becoming larger when comparing across other rounds (e.g., education across rounds 3 and 4, and age and gender across rounds 1 and 2).

Fifth and finally, we examine whether the results for governments as communicating elites are conditional on whether people trust their own government. We find that, while the effect of the positive government treatment is unconditional on government trust, the effect of the negative government treatment is moderated by confidence in national government. More specifically, the negative effect of the negative government treatment becomes stronger the higher the respondent’s trust in government (Online Appendix I8). These findings are in line with previous research suggesting that people distrusting their own government are unlikely to follow government cues (Aaroe 2012).

Taken together, the evidence from the validity and robustness checks strengthens our confidence in the experimental findings.
Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated the conditions under which communication by global elites affects the popular legitimacy of IOs. In brief, our results indicate that: (a) more credible elites – NGOs and member governments – tend to affect legitimacy perceptions more than less credible elites – IOs themselves, (b) legitimacy perceptions are equally affected by messages about the procedures and performances of IOs, and (c) negative communication has stronger effects on legitimacy perceptions than positive communication. Moreover, a comparative analysis suggests that communication effects are more often effective in the context of the UN, IMF, and WTO, than in the EU or NAFTA, which we attribute to variation in the prior contestation of IOs. We also establish that communication by these global elites more often is effective in Germany and the UK than in the US, which may be reflective of US citizens being relatively more attentive to domestic elites (see Chapter 5).

Our findings suggest three broader implications. First, they speak to the growing literature on legitimation and delegitimation in global governance (Zaum 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018; Zürn 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Bexell et al. 2022) by demonstrating how such communicative practices impact legitimacy beliefs. While previous research has shown how member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves make use of legitimation and delegitimation, we identify the consequences of this communication for the popular legitimacy of IOs.

Second, our results suggest that elite communication works slightly differently under the specific circumstances of global governance. The global setting involves another set of elites than those which dominate the study of political communication in the domestic context. Importantly, we found elite credibility based on impartiality, rather than partisanship, to matter in the global setting, different from conventional expectations (Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2013). With the growing internationalization of politics, it becomes increasingly important for public opinion research to explore how political communication and attitude formation work differently or similarly in the global realm.

Third, our findings suggest why the elites of discontent may have the upper hand in the global contestation over the legitimacy of IOs. While IOs invest considerably in public communication (Ecker-Ehrhardt...
2018), citizens do not appear to be convinced by IOs’ attempts to talk up their legitimacy. IOs’ best chance of strengthening their standing with citizens may therefore reside in mobilizing supporters among civil society and national political elites who can speak on their behalf. But such efforts run up against the challenge that positive communication appears less effective than negative in shaping citizen attitudes. Elites who criticize global governance get through to citizens more easily than those who speak to its virtues. These results may help to explain instances of popular backlash against IOs in recent years, as well as difficulties encountered by advocates of global governance.
What is the role of domestic political elites in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs? Some of the most prominent communicators about the merits and demerits of IOs have been domestic politicians. Consider well-known critics of IOs such as Rodrigo Duterte of the Partido Demokratiko Pilipino in the Philippines, Marine Le Pen of the National Rally in France, and Donald Trump of the Republicans in the US, or famous defenders of IOs such as Angela Merkel of the Christian Democratic Party in Germany, Carl Bildt of the Moderate Party in Sweden, and Fernando Cardoso of the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (SPD). IOs are not only contested among elites at the international level but also in domestic party debates on issues such as climate change, debt reduction, and free trade.

Yet, to date, domestic elites have received scant attention in existing research on the determinants of IO legitimacy. In the field of political communication, a rich body of literature has examined how party cues affect public opinion on domestic political issues, especially in the US (e.g., Levendusky 2010; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Broockman and Butler 2017; Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018). Beyond the domestic setting, existing research is limited to a number of studies on how party cues shape public support for the EU specifically (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2005; Maier et al. 2012; Torcal et al. 2018) and on the effects of party cues on US public opinion regarding foreign policy (e.g., Berinsky 2009; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Cavarini and Feedman 2019).

In international relations, recent years have seen an upsurge of interest in the legitimation and delegitimation of IOs by various actors (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). However, this literature has tended to overlook domestic political parties, focusing instead, as Chapter 4, on global elites, notably, nonstate actors (O’Brien et al. 2000; Kalm and Uhlin 2015; Maliniak et al. 2021), member states (Hurd 2007; Binder and
This chapter is an effort to bridge this gap by examining the effects of communication by domestic elites on IO legitimacy beliefs. We use the term “domestic elites” pragmatically to refer to elite actors who primarily aim to influence politics at the national level, and we concentrate on the role of political parties. The chapter aims to bring partisan politics into the debate over IO legitimacy and to shed new light on the importance of party cues for attitudes toward international cooperation. It complements the previous chapter on global elites by considering an alternative set of elites known to be influential in communication on domestic political matters. Identifying whether and when communication by political parties affects citizens’ perceptions of IO legitimacy is essential. With the rise of antiglobalist populist parties in many countries around the world, IOs have become politically contested in domestic politics like never before (De Vries et al. 2021). Getting a better grasp of how political parties shape legitimacy beliefs toward IOs can tell us something about the potential effects of this contestation for international cooperation, traditionally seen as dependent on domestic public support (Putnam 1988).

There are reasons to think that effects of party cues in the global setting are both stronger and weaker than effects of party cues in the domestic setting. On the one hand, citizens tend to be less familiar with global issues than domestic issues, and people can therefore be expected to rely on party cues as a heuristic to an even greater extent when forming opinions about global issues. On the other hand, foreign policy issues tend to be less politicized along party lines than domestic issues, suggesting that party cues may be less influential in shaping public opinion on global concerns.

Theoretically, we develop hypotheses about the effects of party cues on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs and about the conditions under which those effects should be particularly strong. We derive three specific hypotheses, focused on general effects of party cues on IO legitimacy beliefs and conditioning effects arising from partisan identification and political polarization.

Empirically, we test these hypotheses through two survey experiments conducted in the US and Germany, which offer variation in the degree of political polarization. As in Chapter 4, we use vignettes to present the treatments to respondents. The vignettes consisted of
descriptions of party positions in the US Congress and the German Bundestag. Two similarly designed experiments appeared in the same survey. One experiment focuses on party cues regarding military spending on NATO, and the other experiment on party cues regarding refugees accepted under the UN Refugee Convention.

We find that citizens draw on party cues when developing legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, but that these effects are conditioned by the political context and individual characteristics. Party cues matter almost exclusively in the US and hardly at all in Germany. This result suggests that party cues sway legitimacy beliefs more strongly in more polarized political environments.

In addition, citizens identifying with a specific political party who already have more positive opinions of the two IOs and the issues at hand are more easily influenced by “their” party’s cues. This result is found for all partisans studied. This indicates that Republican Party cues, for instance, are particularly influential among more positively predisposed Republicans, but do not get through to Republicans who care little for international cooperation. This chapter proceeds in five parts. It begins by developing hypotheses about how party cues are expected to shape legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. It then elaborates on the survey experimental design and presents the empirical analysis. We then turn to a discussion of the findings, offering interpretations of variation in effects. We end the chapter with a brief conclusion.

**Hypotheses**

We build on our theory (Chapter 3) to develop hypotheses about effects of party cues on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. Our expectations rest on the assumption that citizens rarely have stable, consistent, and informed political attitudes and therefore may be susceptible to elite communication. Elite cues shape people’s opinions on an issue by simplifying choices for them, thus allowing them to overcome informational shortfalls.

An extensive literature in American and comparative politics shows that cues from political parties are particularly influential in shaping public opinion (Levendusky 2010; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Druckman et al. 2013; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Broockman and Butler 2017). The general idea is that people tend to follow cues from parties they sympathize with, while neglecting cues from parties they
Hypotheses

This expectation is rooted in the dual recognition that citizens demand cognitive shortcuts to form political opinions and that parties fulfil central roles in structuring the choices that exist in domestic politics (Sniderman 2000; Leeper and Slothuus 2014).

The theory focuses specifically on so called “partisans,” that is, those citizens who identify with or lean toward a specific political party (Druckman et al. 2013, 61). Goren et al. (2009, 806) well summarize the general logic of partisan influence on public opinion:

When someone hears a recognizable partisan source advocating some position, her partisan leanings are activated, which in turn lead her to evaluate the message through a partisan lens. If the cue giver and recipient share a party label, the latter will trust the former and accept the message without reflecting much on message content. But if the cue giver and recipient lie across the partisan divide, the recipient will mistrust the source and reject the message, again without much reflection.

We expect that party cues not only shape opinion formation in domestic politics but also international politics, as citizens form opinions of IOs. Citizens listen specifically to those elites they trust when they develop opinions about political issues. While citizens may listen to member governments, NGOs, and IOs on issues of global governance, as we explored in Chapter 5, we consider it likely that political parties, too, shape citizens’ opinions.

Political parties not only communicate about domestic concerns but also often take positions on international issues involving IOs as well. Consider, for instance, the communication by Donald Trump on NATO funding, Angela Merkel on EU economic governance, or Jair Bolsonaro on the constraints of the UNFCCC. Given the central role that parties occupy in structuring the choices that citizens confront, we expect their influence to extend to international issues as well. Evidence from the one IO where such dynamics have been systematically studied – the EU – suggests that this expectation is reasonable (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Maier et al. 2012; Torcal et al. 2018).

We develop three hypotheses about the effects of party cues on legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. The first hypothesis expresses the general expectation that party cues affect legitimacy beliefs toward IOs when citizens identify with that political party. Research on party cues in the domestic context suggests two complementary ways in which this happens (Leeper and Slothuus 2014). One perspective conceives of
party cues as informational shortcuts that provide simple information which can guide citizens to form preferences (Carmines and Kuklinski 1990; Sniderman et al. 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Levendusky 2010). Citizens specifically follow the cues of those parties they tend to sympathize with, since the positions of those parties likely approximate the opinions citizens would have developed had they invested time and effort to form an opinion on their own. The other perspective suggest that party cues are influential because they activate citizens’ long-standing party loyalties and lead them to engage in motivated reasoning (Campbell et al. 1960; Taber and Lodge 2006; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Lavine et al. 2012; Druckman et al. 2013). When citizens identify with a party, they are emotionally attached to it and will interpret new information in ways that confirm this affective relationship. The psychological process through which this occurs is motivated reasoning – the tendency to seek out information that confirms prior beliefs, to view evidence consistent with prior opinions as stronger, and to spend more time arguing against evidence inconsistent with prior opinions (Druckman et al. 2013, 59). While emphasizing different mechanisms, both approaches lead to the expectation that party cues will be effective in shaping the opinions of partisans.

H1: When citizens receive a message sponsored by a party they identify with and a conflicting message sponsored by another party, their legitimacy beliefs will be more likely to move in the direction of the message conveyed by the party they identify with than in the direction of the other party’s message.

Yet party cues may be varyingly effective under different conditions. This leads us to formulate two additional hypotheses (cf. Druckman et al. 2013). To begin with, we expect the strength of the party cue effect to depend on the degree to which citizens lean toward a particular party, that is, the level of partisan identification. When citizens identify more with a party, cues are more likely to present efficient informational shortcuts and to activate partisan loyalties, making citizens more likely to follow cues from this party. Conversely, when citizens identify less with a party, cues offer less certain informational guides for citizens and mobilize loyalties less, making citizens less likely to follow cues from this party.

H2: The effect of party cues predicted in H1 will be stronger among citizens with a stronger partisan identity than among citizens with a weaker partisan identity.
In addition, we expect the strength of the party cue effect to depend on the level of party polarization on the particular issue (Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013). In this context, party polarization is seen as having two components: the ideological distance between the parties on the specific issue and the ideological homogeneity within each party on this issue (Levendusky 2010, 118). Greater polarization entails that parties send clearer signals to citizens on where they stand. Thus, when issues are more polarized (i.e., parties are further apart and more ideologically homogenous), citizens are more likely to follow cues from party elites whose partisan orientation they share than when issues are less polarized (i.e., parties are positioned closer to each other and less ideologically homogenous). A number of studies in American politics find support for this expectation (Levendusky 2010; Nicholson 2012; Druckman et al. 2013).

\[ H_3: \] The effect of party cues (H1) will be stronger when party polarization on an issue is high (parties are further apart and more ideologically homogenous) than when party polarization on an issue is low (parties are positioned closer to each other and less ideologically homogenous).

**Research Design**

We test these hypotheses through two survey experiments designed to assess whether and when party cues shape legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Below we present the design choices in detail.

**Survey Design**

Both experiments appeared in the same survey, conducted online among nationally representative samples of German and US respondents (N ≈ 2,000 per country), and implemented by YouGov during May 2019 (see Online Appendix A).\(^1\) While many experiments of party cue effects in the domestic context focus on a single country, usually the US, we opted for two countries, as we wanted to assess our hypotheses in political systems with varying levels of party system polarization (Dalton 2008) and mass opinion polarization (Lupu

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\(^1\) The experiment is preregistered with EGAP (No. 20190507AB). See: [http://egap.org/registration/5712](http://egap.org/registration/5712). A power analysis was conducted to ensure that our survey experiments are properly powered.
Communication by Domestic Elites

2015). It can be expected that party cues have stronger effects in countries with a higher level of party system and mass opinion polarization (such as the US) compared to countries with a lower level of party system and mass polarization (such as Germany) (Torcal et al. 2018, 505). While we recognize that these two countries also differ in other respects than polarization, the US and Germany are similar across several important contextual conditions. Both countries are advanced democracies, have federal political systems, are highly developed economically, are politically central member states in NATO and the UN, and have very high levels of Internet penetration.

In terms of political parties, we selected the historically two major parties in the federal parliament in both countries: the Democrats and the Republicans in the US and the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the SPD in Germany. In the US, the Democrats and the Republicans make up the country’s two-party system, while, in Germany, the CDU/CSU and SPD are the largest catch-all parties (Volksparteien) in a multi-party system, even if they have lost in dominance over time.

**Issue Selection and Frames**

Our ultimate interest is the effect of party cues on people’s legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. For these purposes, vignette experiments are uniquely suitable, as treatments about different partisan framings of IOs and other political issues can be systematically varied in vignettes (e.g., Druckman et al. 2013). While one option would have been to formulate vignettes that focus directly and exclusively on IOs, we chose a different strategy. Usually, IOs are invoked in domestic political debates in relation to specific political issues, rather than as objects in themselves. For instance, the IMF is discussed in the context of financial stability, crises measures, and macroeconomic adjustment. Likewise, the UNFCCC is debated in association with climate change, emissions reductions, and adaptation measures. In addition, political parties seldom communicate political positions on the legitimacy of IOs per se, beyond supporting or contesting a state’s membership in an IO. We therefore chose to formulate vignettes that invoke IOs in the context of specific political issues, expecting the party cues expressed through these vignettes to sway people’s legitimacy beliefs toward the respective IOs.
One experiment focused on party cues regarding military spending on NATO, and the other experiment on party cues regarding reductions in the number of refugees accepted under the UN’s Refugee Convention. These two issues share several features that make them well suited to test our hypotheses (Druckman et al. 2013). First, both issues received attention in public debates in Germany and the US prior to our study, as we discuss below. Second, both issues involved multiple considerations, such that parties and citizens could adopt different positions and opinions. Third, both issues were such that the main parties in the US and Germany tended to hold different positions, while the precise extent of those differences was not given, which allowed our treatments to vary the level of party polarization on the specific issues.

To substantiate vignette formulation, we conducted systematic content analyses using two large newspapers: The New York Times in the US and Die Zeit in Germany. The aim was to distil the main arguments that we could assign to the political parties in the vignettes about the respective IOs and to get information about the political polarization of the issue during the two years preceding data collection (2017 and 2018) (cf. Druckman et al. 2013). For this purpose, we searched the online databases of both newspapers through the Lexis-Nexis platform and downloaded all articles that contained one or several key words. In the case of NATO’s funding system and increased financial contributions to NATO by European countries, we focused on NATO, funding, financing of NATO, European countries’ financial contributions, and the political parties in question. In the case of the UNHCR/UN’s Refugee Convention and the discussion about capping the number of refugees to be accepted under the convention, we searched for UNHCR, UN Refugee Convention, cap, number of refugees, limit number of refugees, and the political parties in question. The search thus yielded articles that dealt with the issues in relation to IOs, or only with the issues, which offered an insight into the general debate about these issues independent of the IOs.

2 The corresponding key words in German were: NATO, Finanzierung, Zahlungen an NATO, finanzielle Beiträge Europäischer Staaten, Vereinte Nationen (UNO), Genfer Flüchtlingskonvention, Flüchtlingsobergrenze, Anzahl der Flüchtlinge, Begrenzung von Flüchtlingen, Hoher Flüchtlingskommissar der Vereinten Nationen.
This content analysis allowed us to identify the main arguments that the parties were using in relation to these specific issues. We also coded how close the parties were in their opinions on both issues. We observed differences in rhetoric between the parties on the two issues, but still relatively close positions, especially in Germany. This is an advantage in terms of research design, as it allows us to present different arguments for each pair of parties on the same issue, while at the same time credibly varying the extent of party polarization on the specific issue.

Table 5.1 *Issue frames about NATO military spending*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive (pro)</th>
<th>Opposed (con)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany Importance of NATO for peace</td>
<td>Trade-off between defense and welfare state expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Importance of NATO for peace</td>
<td>Lack of fairness in funding NATO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2 *Issue frames about the UN Refugee Convention*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supportive (pro)</th>
<th>Opposed (con)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany Need to honor Germany’s commitment to protect refugees under UN Refugee Convention</td>
<td>Costs of migration for Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Need to honor US commitment to protect refugees under UN Refugee Convention</td>
<td>Costs of migration for the US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This content analysis allowed us to identify the main arguments that the parties were using in relation to these specific issues. We also coded how close the parties were in their opinions on both issues. We observed differences in rhetoric between the parties on the two issues, but still relatively close positions, especially in Germany. This is an advantage in terms of research design, as it allows us to present different arguments for each pair of parties on the same issue, while at the same time credibly varying the extent of party polarization on the specific issue.

Table 5.1 illustrates the issue frames in the NATO experiment in Germany and the US (see Online Appendix J1 for the full questionnaire and the wording of all vignettes). For the NATO experiment, our pro frame in Germany and the US emphasized the importance of NATO for maintaining peace, which would be undermined if restricting member state funding. On the con side, our frame in Germany concerned the trade-off between defense and welfare state expenses – both budgetary categories at the top of the German political agenda during 2017 and 2018 – while our frame in the US concerned lack of fairness in NATO funding, as the US shoulders the greater burden.

Table 5.2 summarizes the key content of the issue frames for the UN experiment. The pro frame stressed the need to honor Germany’s or the
US’ commitment to protect refugees under UN Refugee Convention. The con frame emphasized the general costs of migration for the country.

While the content analysis was helpful in identifying applicable issue frames on the part of the parties, it also revealed contextual circumstances that should be noted. First, there was some variation in party polarization on these topics over time. For instance, the question of introducing a cap for refugees under the UN convention was a controversial issue in the German debate in the spring of 2018, but the debate then moved on to more general issues of restricting or increasing the inflow of refugees. Second, there was some amount of within-party debate. At times, and especially during the summer of 2018, media reported more about a conflict within the CDU/CSU than about a conflict between CDU/CSU and SPD. Third, while military expenditure and NATO were clearly linked to each other in public debates, migration was sometimes less distinctly tied to the UN specifically. The reason might be that the core mission of UN is not only to protect refugees, compared to NATO’s clear mandate to preserve peace.

Experimental Design

To isolate the causal effects of party cues, we randomly assigned individuals to groups that received different experimental treatments, in the form of vignettes, and a control group that did not receive any treatment. We context-adjusted vignettes according to issue and country, as described above. In addition, to make the experiment fit the German context, where the CDU/CSU are part of the same parliamentary group, but are two separate political parties, the vignettes refer to the parliamentary groups (“Bundestagsfraktionen”) of the CDU/CSU and the SPD, and not to the parties. In the US, the vignettes refer to Republicans and Democrats “in Congress.” The vignettes presented to the three treatment groups contained systematically varied information about the main arguments regarding the political issue, party endorsements, and party polarization on the issue (see Tables 5.3 and 5.4).

After each vignette, we asked a question measuring the outcome of interest: legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We capture legitimacy beliefs using the measure of confidence in IOs introduced in Chapter 3. Both respondents in the control group and in the treatment groups received the question “How much confidence do you have in [IO] on a scale from 0 (no confidence) to 10 (complete confidence)?”
Table 5.3  *Experimental conditions, NATO experiment in the US*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Vignettes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control group (N = 411):</td>
<td>There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment group 1 (N = 410):</td>
<td>There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP. The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is that NATO is too important for peace to be weakened by financial disputes between the US and European states. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is the lack of fairness in financial contributions to NATO by the US compared to European states. Republicans in Congress tend to oppose continuing current funding arrangements in NATO, while Democrats tend to favor continuing current funding arrangements in NATO.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP.

The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is that NATO is too important for peace to be weakened by financial disputes between the US and European states. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is the lack of fairness in financial contributions to NATO by the US compared to European states.

Republicans in Congress tend to oppose continuing current funding arrangements in NATO, while Democrats tend to favor continuing current funding arrangements in NATO.

However, the partisan divide is not stark, as the parties are not far apart. Also, while Republicans tend to be opposed to a continuation and Democrats in favor, members of each party can be found on both sides of the issue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Vignettes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control group ( (N = 404) ):</td>
<td>There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• only factual information on the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment group 1 ( (N = 398) ):</td>
<td>There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• factual information on the issue</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• balanced frames about the main arguments on each side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• party endorsements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is the importance of NATO for peace. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is that the money would be better spent on social expenses such as education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment group 2 ( (N = 401) ):</td>
<td>There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• factual information on the issue</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• balanced frames about the main arguments on each side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is the importance of NATO for peace. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is that the money would be better spent on social expenses such as education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag tends to favor increasing German public defense spending and thus also increased financial contributions to NATO, while the SPD parliamentary group tends to oppose increasing German public defense spending at the expense of increasing social spending.

However, the partisan divide is not stark, as the parties are not far apart. While the CDU/CSU parliamentary group tends to be in favor of an increase in financial contributions to NATO whereas the SPD parliamentary group is opposed, members of each party can be found on both sides of the issue.

There have been a lot of recent discussions about member states’ financial contributions to NATO as a military alliance. Member states contribute to NATO through their national spending on defense. In 2017, the US spent 3.6 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, while a major European state like Germany spent 1.2 percent of its GDP.

The main argument of those in favor of continuing current funding arrangements is the importance of NATO for peace. The main argument of those opposed to continuing current funding arrangements is that the money would be better spent on social expenses such as education.

Moreover, the partisan divide is stark, as the parties are far apart. Not only does the CDU/CSU parliamentary group tend to be in favor of an increase in financial contributions to NATO whereas the SPD parliamentary group tends to be opposed, but most members of each party are on the same side as the rest of their party.

Notes: Translated into English from the original German version of the experimental conditions. See Online Appendix J2.2 for the German version.
Tables 5.3 and 5.4 offer an example of the specific wording of the experimental conditions, using the NATO experiment as an illustration. The table also shows how we have sought to balance the number of respondents in each experimental group. Respondents were assigned the same condition in both experiments, since we were concerned that the degree of party polarization could otherwise be confusing and since this design makes it easier to assess any potential spillover effects (Transue et al. 2009; Druckman et al. 2013). The order of the experiments was block randomized for each respondent to reduce the likelihood of spillover effects from one experiment to another.

The testing of all hypotheses relies on those respondents indicating some level of identification with a particular party (i.e., partisans), in line with our theoretical expectations (see also Druckman et al. 2013). H1 is tested by estimating if the difference in mean confidence between treatment group 1 and the control group is significantly different from zero. H2 is tested by checking whether the treatment effects for respondents in treatment group 1 depend on the strength of partisan identification. Specifically, we test H2 through effects on confidence of interaction terms between a treatment dummy for belonging to treatment group 1 (=1) and our variable measuring partisan identify strength. H3 is tested by assessing whether the treatment in treatment group 2 (low polarization) gives a weaker effect on confidence than the treatment in treatment group 3 (high polarization).

The two experiments were preceded by a measurement of the respondent’s pretreatment opinions regarding NATO and the UN. In both cases, the respondent was asked to rate the extent to which they believe the IO works effectively and democratically. In addition, each experiment is followed by manipulation checks (see Online Appendix J1). Respondents in treatment group 1 were asked to identify the main argument of the two parties on the issue in question. In addition, respondents in treatment groups 2 and 3 were asked to identify the degree of party polarization on the issue in question.

Finally, the survey included questions intended to measure a respondent’s cognitive mobilization, social trust, knowledge about global governance, confidence in domestic government, left–right ideology, and political party identification. In addition, YouGov provided demographic and political data on the respondents as background information, which we use for the purpose of balance tests: gender, age, and educational attainment.
Results

In order to understand the political opinion context in which these experiments were carried out, we begin by presenting descriptive data from the survey on respondents’ partisanship and pretreatment opinions toward the two IOs. We then turn to the results from the two experiments.

Partisanship

Figure 5.1 shows the percentage of partisans in Germany and the US. In the US, about 82 percent are partisans who identify with either the Democratic or the Republican Party, while, in Germany, about 77 percent identify with a political party. However, only about 32 percent identify with one of the two main parties in Germany – the CDU/CSU and the SPD. Overall, then, a considerably larger share of the population identifies with one of the two main political parties in the US compared to Germany.

Figure 5.1 Percentage of partisans in Germany and the US

Notes: Weighted percentages. Independents are those answering “don’t know” to the question of partisan identification.
Figure 5.2 Partisan strength in Germany and the US

Notes: Weighted percentages. This figure includes only those who indicated a partisan identification (Figure 5.1). “Don’t know” answers coded as missing.

Figure 5.2 shows the strength of partisan identities among those who indicate that they lean toward a particular party. In the US, about 73 percent of the partisans feel very or quite close to their political party, while, in Germany, about 69 percent feel very or quite close to their political party. Thus, the distribution of partisan identity strength is quite similar in the two countries. When we further disaggregate the distribution of partisan strength in the different parties, the distribution is very similar for different parties in both countries (see Online Appendix K).

The partisanship captured by these data should be understood in the context of the domestic political situation in these countries when the survey was conducted (May 2019). In the US, both the party system and public opinion have become more polarized in recent years. Polarization between the Democrats and the Republicans has been fueled by redistricting, shifts in public opinion, and the relative success of more extreme position-taking. As a result, the Democratic and Republican parties are increasingly far apart and more homogenous than in the past. Polarization also applies to public opinion. Over recent decades, US citizens appear to have become more firmly situated at either end
of the left–right distribution, moving away from the middle ground (Abromowitz 2010; Pew Research Center 2014). In sum, increasingly polarized parties appear to function as sorting devices for an increasingly divided public.

In Germany, the CDU/CSU and the SPD have ruled together in a grand coalition since 2013, leading to a reduction in the level of polarization and open conflict between the two parties. Perceptions of a decrease in political polarization and a general shift to the left on the left–right spectrum may in turn have contributed to the rise of the populist far-right party AfD during the same period. The party first gained seats in the Bundestag in 2017, in the wake of the European migration crisis of 2015, and soon held seats in all sixteen regional parliaments (Landtage). The rise of the AfD reflects a general ideological movement in German politics toward the right, mainly at the expense of the SPD, which has lost voters to parties both on the right and the left. As our own data on partisan identification illustrate, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, once described as Volksparteien, no longer attract the large groups of partisans they once did (Figure 5.1).

Pretreatment Opinions

We also measured respondents’ pretreatment opinions toward the IOs and issues invoked in the experiments. There are striking differences among different partisan groups in the US (Figure 5.3). Democrats on average view NATO as more effective and democratic than Republicans (diff = 1.785 on a 11-point scale, N = 1,463, p < 0.000) and independents (diff = 2.047, N = 1,011, p < 0.000). Likewise, Democrats view the UN as more effective and democratic than Republicans (diff = 2.831, N = 1,554, p < 0.000) and independents (diff = 1.983, N = 1,078, p < 0.000). Opinion appears especially polarized when it comes to the question of accepting refugees as a moral obligation of the US, which an overwhelming majority of Democrats tends to strongly agree with, and an overwhelming majority of Republicans tends to strongly disagree with (diff = 3.589, N = 1,622, p < 0.000). Similarly, a majority of Democrats tends to strongly disagree with the statement that defense spending should be prioritized to ensure the national security of the US, while a majority of Republicans tends to strongly agree with this statement (diff = -4.872, N = 1,647,
Differences between Democratic partisans’ opinions and independents’ opinions are slightly smaller than differences between Democrats and Republicans, but still substantial (diff = 2.924, N = 1,174, p < 0.000 for “accepting refugees” and diff = −1.358, N = 1,138, p < 0.000 for “defense spending”).

In Germany, opinion is less polarized across these four items than in the US (Figure 5.4). Figures for both NATO and UN support are comparable between CDU/CSU and SPD partisans. While CDU/CSU and SPD partisans do not differ on whether the UN works democratically and effectively (N = 593, p < 0.760), CDU/CSU partisans on average believe more in NATO than SPD partisans (diff = 0.345, N = 582, p < 0.039). Interestingly, SPD partisans support the UN (diff = 0.588, N = 1,361, p < 0.000) and NATO (diff = 0.620, N = 1,342, p < 0.000) more than those who identify with other political parties. In addition, SPD partisans support the UN (diff = 0.836, N = 523,


\textit{Results}

Table 5.4 shows that SPD partisans (\textit{mean} = 5.11, \textit{SD} = 2.07) and NATO (\textit{mean} = 5.11, \textit{SD} = 2.07) more than the independents. This suggests that SPD and CDU/CSU partisans are less polarized when compared to each other than when compared to citizens with other or no partisan identification.

The issue of accepting refugees as a moral obligation of Germany is slightly more contentious among Christian and Social Democrats: SPD partisans on average agree slightly more with this statement than CDU/CSU partisans (\textit{diff} = 0.830, \textit{N} = 623, \textit{p} < 0.000), people with another partisan identification (\textit{diff} = 1.182, \textit{N} = 1,442, \textit{p} < 0.000), and independents (\textit{diff} = 2.136, \textit{N} = 628, \textit{p} < 0.000). Conversely, prioritizing defense spending to ensure the national security of Germany is a statement that SPD partisans tend to disagree with, while CDU/CSU partisans (\textit{diff} = -1.173, \textit{N} = 609, \textit{p} < 0.000) and people with another partisan identification tend to agree with it (\textit{diff} = 0.459, \textit{N} = 1,404, \textit{p} < 0.021). The difference in SPD partisan’s opinion on this issue compared to independents is not statistically significant (\textit{N} = 584, \textit{p} < 0.129). Taken together, the differences in opinion between citizens with different partisan identifications in Germany are much smaller than in the US.
Again, it is important to understand these figures in context. In recent years, both security and migration have been relatively politicized topics in the US and Germany, as revealed by our media content analysis. In terms of policies toward the two IOs, the governments of the two countries pursued quite different approaches at the time when our survey was conducted. The US saw a period of increasing disengagement from multilateral institutions under the Trump administration (Republican), while Germany under the leadership of Angela Merkel (CDU) continued to support the institutions of the liberal international order.

**Experimental Results**

Having presented the political opinion context in which the experiments were conducted, we now move to a presentation of the results. We discuss the results for each hypothesis in turn for each country separately and then report a series of robustness checks. We estimate treatment effects by analyzing the difference in means between the control group and the treatment groups, respectively, using OLS regression of confidence on a treatment dummy (1 = treated) based on weighted data. We also compare across treatment conditions when necessary to assess specific hypotheses. As our results on both IOs are very similar, we present them in tandem. We begin by reporting the results for the US and then move on to the results for Germany.

H1 predicts that party cues will affect legitimacy beliefs toward IOs when citizens identify with the political party issuing the message. For this purpose, we separated Democrat and Republican respondents in the US to detect the different effects of party endorsements hypothesized for each set of partisans. We find mixed evidence for H1. Figure 5.5 shows that party cues work well among Democrats in the context of both IOs. For these respondents, the treatment effects are positive and statistically significant across the board, irrespective of the information provided about the level of polarization. Among Democrats, the endorsement of NATO as a preserver of peace that needs continued funding (treatment 1) increases confidence in the IO by about 0.9 on the 11-point confidence scale, and the endorsement of the UN as a protector of refugees (treatment 1) increases confidence in this IO by about 0.5. In contrast, for the Republicans, we only find a negative and statistically significant treatment effect in the context of
H2 anticipated that the effects of party cues predicted in H1 would be stronger among those citizens with a stronger partisan identity. We again find mixed evidence for this hypothesis. Table 5.5 shows the results for the Democrats, while we refrain from showing the results for the Republicans, which do not offer support for this expectation in the context of any of the two IOs (results are available in Online Appendix L). The evidence from the Democrats corroborates H2 in the context of NATO, where larger treatment effects are consistently found among Democrats with a stronger partisan identity. Irrespective of the information provided about the level of polarization on the issue (treatments 1–3), respondents with a stronger identification with the Democratic Party appear more greatly affected by the party endorsement of NATO, indicated by the statistically significant and

Figure 5.5 Effects of communication among partisans in the US

Notes: Average treatment effects with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Treatment group 1 received issue frame and party endorsement; group 2 received issue frame and party endorsement in a low polarization environment; and group 3 received issue frame and party endorsement in a high polarization environment.
Table 5.5  Effects of party cues among Democrats in the US, by partisanship strength and IO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NATO</th>
<th>UN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Party cues, low pol. (2)</td>
<td>Party cues, high pol. (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated × Not at all close</td>
<td>2.020 (1.814)</td>
<td>1.131 (1.277)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Treated × Not close</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.267* (1.127)</td>
<td>2.823* (1.131)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated × Quite close</td>
<td>3.679*** (1.100)</td>
<td>3.309** (1.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated × Very close</td>
<td>3.879*** (1.118)</td>
<td>2.314 (1.165)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.563** (1.079)</td>
<td>4.217** (1.585)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. $R^2$</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, using an OLS regression analysis on confidence in NATO and confidence in the UN as dependent variables, respectively. Weighted data. Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. 
increasingly large coefficients. By contrast, we do not find evidence of such a conditional effect of partisan identity strength on confidence in the context of the UN.

H3 anticipated that the effects of party cues predicted in H1 would be stronger when issues are presented as more politically polarized among the two parties. Two types of evidence would be consistent with this expectation. First, if there is a significant effect of party cues in the case of high polarization of an issue (treatment group 3) but not in the case of low polarization of an issue (treatment group 2). Second, if there are significant effects of party cues under the condition of both high and low polarization and there is a significant difference in the size of the effect between treatment groups 2 and 3. The preferred test statistic for this second test is a $t$-test of statistical significance of the difference between the coefficient of the treatment effect in group 2 and the coefficient of the treatment effect in group 3:

$$t = \frac{b_1 - b_2}{\sqrt{SE_{b_1}^2 + SE_{b_2}^2}},$$

where $b_1$ is the first coefficient and $b_2$ is the second coefficient, with their respective standard errors.3

These tests yield mixed evidence for H2. First, among Republicans, there is a statistically significant effect in treatment group 3, but not in treatment group 2, in the context of NATO, consistent with the expectation. When Republican partisans receive the message that Republicans in Congress oppose current funding arrangements in NATO, and that this issue is highly polarized, this information reduces their confidence in NATO by about 0.6 on the 11-point confidence scale. Second, among Democrats, both treatment groups 2 and 3 show significant effects in the context of both IOs. However, a $t$-test indicates that the difference in treatment effects between the two groups is not statistically significant ($p < 0.235$ for NATO; $p < 0.391$ for the UN).

We now turn to the results for Germany (Figure 5.6). We find some evidence for H1, expecting party cues to affect the legitimacy beliefs

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3 As we expect effects to be positive for Democrats and negative for Republicans, we report one-tailed $t$-tests. However, we obtain similar results using two-tailed tests.
of partisans. Among CDU/CSU partisans, we observe one positive and statistically significant treatment effect in the case of NATO, in line with H1. When CDU/CSU partisans are conveyed the message that the CDU/CSU parliamentary group advocates an increase in the financial contribution to NATO, because of the organization’s importance for peace, this affects their confidence in NATO positively when the issue is highly polarized. However, we also observe similar positive treatment effects among CDU/CSU partisans in the case of the UN, despite the expectation of negative effects from a treatment indicating the CDU/CSU parliamentary group to advocate a reduction in the need of refugees under the UN convention due to costs. We do not find any significant treatment effects for SPD partisans.

There is no support for H2 in the German context. Party cues do not have a greater effect on respondents with a stronger partisan
Results

identification, regardless of whether we focus on CDU/CSU or SPD partisans, and regardless of whether we explore this expectation in the context of NATO or the UN (detailed results are in Online Appendix L).

Finally, we find mixed evidence in favor of H3, about a conditioning effect of issue polarization, when considering the two types of evidence indicated above (Figure 5.6). First, among CDU/CSU partisans, the endorsement of NATO as a preserver of peace, combined with high issue polarization (treatment group 3), increases confidence in NATO by about 0.8 on the 11-point confidence scale, while there is no effect in the context of low polarization (treatment 2), consistent with H2. The treatment effects are nonsignificant among SPD partisans. Second, among CDU/CSU partisans, both treatment groups 2 and 3 show significant effects in the context of the UN. However, a t-test (Equation 1) indicates that the difference in treatment effects between the two groups is not statistically significant ($p < 0.378$).

As a complement to the hypothesis tests, we also explored whether the treatment effects were statistically significant among independents. We did not find any statistically significant treatment effects in either country. In addition, we examined whether treatment effects are dependent on respondents’ level of political awareness, using the two indicators of education and knowledge regarding global governance. The results indicate that treatment effects are stronger among more politically aware Democrats, while no such contingent effect was found for Republicans. In Germany, results are not found to depend on any of the political awareness indicators (see Online Appendices L4–L7).

Taken together, we find strong support for H1 on general party cue effects among Democrats in the US, some support among Republicans in the US and CDU/CSU partisans in Germany, and no support among SPD partisans in Germany. H2 on a conditional effect of partisan identification receives support among Democrats in the US in the context of NATO, but not in the context of the UN, and not for other partisans in the two countries. H3 on a conditional effect of issue polarization receives support among Republicans and CDU/CSU partisans in the context of NATO, but not among Democrats and SPD partisans in relation to any of the two IOs.

4 Results are available from the authors upon request.
Validity and Robustness Checks

To test the validity of the data, we performed balance tests. Specifically, we examined whether eight different individual characteristics measured in the survey, including age, gender, education, and social trust, are evenly distributed across the conditions we aggregated for the analysis. The results increase our confidence in the randomization of the subjects among treatment groups. We only discover imbalances in one of the forty-eight tests (see Online Appendix M1).

In addition, we conducted a range of robustness checks, which corroborate the main results. First, we included a series of manipulation checks to ensure that respondents had properly registered the information on party endorsements and level of polarization. Respondents in treatment group 1 were asked to identify the main argument of the two parties on the issue in question. In addition, respondents in treatment groups 2 and 3 were asked to identify the degree of party polarization on the issue in question. In the US, where the political climate is more polarized and people thus may be more alert to information about party positions, the manipulation checks worked better. In the context of NATO, on average almost 79 percent of respondents correctly recalled the pro and con positions of the Republicans and 82 percent the positions of the Democrats. In the context of the UN, on average almost 83 percent of respondents correctly recalled the pro and con positions of the Republicans and 82 percent the positions of the Democrats. We also asked respondents if they recalled the level of polarization between the two political parties on the issues of migration and security. About 75 percent of the respondents correctly recalled high polarization, while only about 38 percent correctly recalled low polarization in the context of NATO. About 85 percent of the respondents correctly recalled high polarization, while only about 30 percent correctly recalled low polarization in the context of the UN. Moreover, the results from $t$-tests of the polarization comprehension checks confirmed for both experiments that both of our polarization conditions prompted significantly higher perceptions of polarization ($N = 820$, $p < 0.000$ for both experiments).

In Germany, manipulation checks yielded somewhat weaker results. In the context of NATO, on average 70 percent of respondents correctly recalled the pro and con positions of the CDU/CSU and 75 percent the positions of the SPD. In the context of the UN, however, much fewer respondents correctly recalled party endorsements, which
may have to do with the less clear partisan divide between the CDU/CSU and the SDP on this issue in public debate. About 25 percent correctly recalled the CDU/CSU position, while about 30 percent correctly recalled the SDP position. When we further asked respondents across conditions about the extent to which they thought the parties were polarized, recall accuracy in the context of NATO was 58 percent for the weakly polarized condition and 66 percent for the highly polarized condition. In the context of the UN, 58 percent correctly recalled low polarization and 68 percent high polarization. The results from t-tests of the polarization comprehension checks for both experiments confirmed that our high polarization prompts led to significantly higher perceptions of polarization ($N = 804$, $p < 0.001$ for both experiments).

Given these results from the manipulation checks, it is warranted to test for the robustness of the results by reanalyzing the results from Figures 5.5 (US) and 5.6 (Germany) only using the answers of those who passed at least one of two manipulation tests about the partisan endorsements per experiment. The results are robust throughout with one exception: In Germany, the NATO cue in a highly polarized context (treatment group 3) does not affect the confidence of CDU/CSU partisans in NATO (Online Appendices M2–M3).

Second, we explored the results in more depth by checking whether treatment effects differ among those who have more negative or positive pretreatment opinions of democracy and effectiveness in the two IOs. It might be that those with negative opinions are firmer in their stances and less easily influenced by elite communication. To test this, we examine whether our experimental results differ across pretreatment beliefs on our two IOs for partisan groups separately. For example, we investigate whether Republican Party cues are particularly influential among more positively predisposed Republicans, but do not get through to Republicans who care little for international cooperation. Indeed, all treatment effects are larger in size among those with more positive opinions of the two IOs compared to those with more negative opinions. This result holds in both countries. Thus, respondents who already have a positive impression of IOs react more strongly to party cues about IOs (see Online Appendices M1–M2).

Third, we checked whether treatment effect size differs depending on pretreatment attitudes toward defense spending and refugees. In the US, treatment effects on UN confidence are larger in size among those who think that accepting refugees is a moral obligation of the
US. In the context of NATO, treatment effect size is not different among people with varying positions on whether defense spending should be prioritized. In Germany, effects depend on pretreatment attitudes across the board. Treatment effects on confidence in NATO are consistently stronger among those who agree defense spending should be prioritized, and treatment effects on confidence in the UN are consistently stronger among those who agree accepting refugees is a moral obligation of Germany (see Online Appendices M3–M4). In sum, citizens who already care more deeply about the two issues, also tend to be more receptive to party cues on these matters.

Finally, we checked whether treatment effect size depends on confidence in government. We find that treatment effects are stronger among those respondents who have relatively more confidence in government in both countries (see Online Appendices M5–M6).

Discussion

Taken together, the results from two experiments conducted in Germany and the US suggest that party cues may work as heuristics for forming legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, but that the effects are heterogeneous. In other words, party cues work better under some conditions than others. In the following, we discuss how we may understand this variation in our findings.

First, why do party cues appear to have stronger effects on people’s legitimacy beliefs in the US compared to Germany? We attribute this variation in effects across the two countries in part to variation in the degree of political polarization across the two countries, both in terms of party system polarization and mass polarization. The US two-party system is considerably more polarized than the German multiparty system, in the sense that parties are ideologically more differentiated in the US than in Germany (Hetherington 2001; Dalton 2008). In the more polarized system, the positions of the parties are more distinguishable from one another, and thus clearer and less ambiguous as cues for their partisans (Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013).

In addition, this cross-country pattern may have been reinforced by less statistical power in the case of Germany, as there are fewer CDU/CSU and SPD partisans in Germany than there are Democratic and Republican partisans in the US (Figure S.1).
While the American and German respondents in our experiments received equally distinguishable cues, the greater polarization between the two US parties likely made the differences between these two sets of party cues more credible in the US than in Germany, as indicated by the stronger recollection of party endorsements among US respondents (see robustness checks).

In addition, public opinion in the US is more ideologically polarized than in Germany (Lupu 2015). When the public is more clearly divided in ideological terms, citizens are also more likely to listen to their favored political party when it conveys messages that conflict with those of parties on the other side of the spectrum (Guisinger and Saunders 2017). General differences in mass polarization between the two countries apply to the partisans in our experiment as well, which are positioned closer to the extremes on the left–right continuum, and identify more strongly with their party (Figure 5.2), in the US than in Germany. This polarization extends to respondents’ pretreatment opinions of the two IOs as well. While pretreatment beliefs about whether the UN works democratically and effectively did not differ among CDU/CSU and SPD partisans in Germany, they clearly do in the US among Democrats and Republicans. And while pretreatment beliefs about how well NATO works differed among CDU/CSU and SPD partisans in Germany, they do so to a much larger extent in the US among Democrats and Republicans.

Second, how come party cues worked better in shaping the opinions of partisans identifying with some political parties than others? In the US, the results show a significant difference between Democrats and Republicans in terms of cueing effects on legitimacy beliefs (see also Brutger and Clark 2022), while in Germany, such effects are more common for CDU/CSU partisans compared to SPD partisans, although sometimes in the opposite direction than expected. In the US case, one reason might be found in the pretreatment opinions toward IOs. As revealed by the robustness tests, party cues had considerably stronger effects on citizens who already had a positive opinion of these two IOs, and those citizens were on average much more common among Democratic partisans. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the only example of a party cue effect among Republicans is found in the context of NATO, which Republicans tend to view more favorably. These results tie in with findings in recent research that people’s prior opinions on international issues affects their responsiveness to elite cues (Spilker et al. 2020).
In the German case, the differences in pretreatment opinions between CDU/CSU and SPD partisans are nonexistent regarding the UN and small regarding NATO, and thus offer little help in accounting for the greater sensitivity of CDU/CSU partisans to party cues. The puzzling finding that CDU/CSU partisans move in the opposite direction from the party cue on the UN migration regime may be explained by the relatively high support among these partisans for the UN as an organization and for the notion that Germany has a moral obligation to accept refugees (see Figure 5.4), which may have trumped the economic concerns emphasized in the party cue. Such effects are not uncommon and usually interpreted as issue substance outweighing party cues (Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2013).

Third, what may account for party cues being more effective in relation to some issues than others? In both countries, party cues about military spending in the context of NATO had stronger effects than party cues about migration in the context of the UN. However, this pattern may very well be due to different reasons in the two countries. In the US, Democratic and Republican partisans are already positioned exceptionally far from each other in terms of pretreatment opinions toward the UN and the obligation to accept refugees (Figure 5.3). The already extreme positions of partisans on this issue mean that the room for further shifts in opinion toward the end of the spectrum is limited. It may also be that these extreme positions of partisans are anchored, making further movements less likely and far-reaching (Tversky and Kahneman 1974). In Germany, conversely, the media content analysis and the manipulation check suggest that the ineffectiveness of the UN cues may be due to the limited differences between the two main parties on this issue in the public debate, making the treatments less credible and the party cues more difficult for respondents to recall.

Fourth, the findings reported in the robustness tests suggest that some citizens are more responsive to party cues than others, irrespective of country, partisan identity, and issue focus. In both countries, the effects of party cues are reinforced among people with more confidence in the national government. Conversely, people who have lost faith in the government appear to simply dismiss cues from parties. This finding highlights the causal importance of confidence in national government for legitimacy belief formation, in line with a growing public opinion literature on attitudes toward the EU (e.g., Harteveld et al. 2013; Chalmers and Dellmuth 2015; Schlipphak 2015; Dellmuth...
et al. 2022a). Another pattern in both countries is the greater receptivity to party cues among people with more positive opinions toward IOs to start with. Related, party cues were more effective in both countries among people with more positive opinions of the two issues invoked in the context of international cooperation (accepting refugees, spending on security). This suggests that people who think of IOs as relevant governing institutions, and who care about the issues at stake, also are willing and able to integrate new information about these organizations and issues from parties they sympathize with. Finally, in the US, political knowledge about global governance amplifies the effects of party cues in the expected direction among Democratic but not Republican partisans. This result is consistent with research indicating that politically aware individuals are more likely to understand and integrate new information into their opinions (Druckman and Nelson 2003). Taken together, these findings suggest that party cues are of varying importance for citizens’ formation of legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Among citizens who trust political institutions, have positive expectations on IOs, care more about the issues of cooperation, and have more knowledge of global governance, party cues are effective in shaping opinions. Conversely, when citizens have lost faith in political institutions, think little of IOs, care little about the issues of cooperation, and have less knowledge of global governance, party cues matter little for their opinion formation toward IOs.

Conclusion

Taken together, this chapter suggests that citizens draw on party cues when developing legitimacy beliefs toward IOs and that those effects are stronger in countries which are more polarized politically. The two experiments focused on party positions in the US Congress and the German Bundestag found that cues mattered almost exclusively in the US context, and then mainly among Democrats, while Republicans appeared less easily swayed. The experiments also offered mixed support for the expectations that party cue effects depend on the strength of citizens’ partisan identification and the polarization of the issue between and within political parties. However, examining pretreatment opinions, the robustness checks contributed important insights, partly correcting the more negative findings in the main analysis. Specifically, it appears that party cues have effects on citizens in both countries,
sympathizing with both parties, when these citizens already have more positive opinions of NATO and the UN, more positive views of the issues at hand, and more confidence in their domestic government.

These findings suggest three broader observations. First, they show that domestic political elites play an important, albeit varying, role in citizens’ development of legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. While Chapter 4 established that communication by global elites, in the shape of member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves, affect the perceived legitimacy of IOs, this chapter shows that party elites may have a similar impact. As political parties engage in growing contestation over IOs, challenging and defending their authority (De Vries et al. 2021), citizens will take notice, especially when they care about international cooperation. Partisan politics is not divorced from the legitimacy of IOs, but a force shaping its future development.

Second, the findings indicate that party cue effects in general may be weaker on global issues compared to domestic issues. While it would have been reasonable to expect that citizens would rely more on party cues on global issues they know less well, the mixed picture in our findings suggests the opposite, possibly because global issues often are less politicized than domestic issues. The stronger effects of party cues established in the context of US politics (e.g., Levendusky 2010; Druckman et al. 2013) and European politics (e.g., Maier et al. 2012; Torcal et al. 2018) may thus be due to greater politicization and polarization of these issues among parties and the mass public compared to the legitimacy of IOs.

Third, our findings highlight the importance of extending experiments on elite cueing beyond single-country settings, particularly the US. Most experiments on the effects of elite cueing on public opinion toward international issues and institutions focus exclusively on the US (e.g., Hiscox 2006; Berinsky 2009; Guisinger and Saunders 2017). The same goes for the large literature on party cueing in the context of American politics (e.g., Levendusky 2010; Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2013; Broockman and Butler 2017). This chapter points to the perils of this strategy, as the US is a very particular case, due to the high level of polarization in the party system and the mass public. We can only expect findings from the US setting to travel to those rare contexts which share these features; in other contexts, the effects of party cueing may very well be weaker.
Communication about Procedure and Performance

When global and domestic elites communicate about IOs in an effort to shape people’s opinions, they typically invoke features of these organizations in support of their arguments. The most commonly invoked features are likely the procedures and performances of IOs. Do IOs take decisions through procedures that ensure adequate participation, transparency, efficiency, expertise, legality, and impartiality? Do the decisions of IOs impact outcomes through performances that solve societal problems, improve collective welfare, and distribute gains and losses fairly? Consider former Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre’s fierce criticism of the G20, targeting its procedural shortcomings: “[T]he G-20 is a grouping without international legitimacy. [...] The G-20 is a self-appointed group. Its composition is determined by the major countries and powers. It may be more representative than the G-7 or the G-8, in which only the richest countries are represented, but it is still arbitrary” (Spiegel International 2010). Conversely, consider the attack on the UN by President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, invoking the organization’s poor performance: “The UN has no purpose at all, actually, for mankind. [...] As far as I’m concerned, with all its inutility, it has not prevented any war, it has not prevented any massacre” (ABS-CBN News 2018).

In this chapter, we shift the principal focus from elites to messages, examining whether and to what extent information about the procedures and performances of IOs affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. While elites make use of both types of arguments, it is an open question whether messages targeting IOs’ procedures or performances are the most effective in swaying citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. The past two decades have seen the emergence of a growing literature on which IO

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1 This chapter is based on joint theory development and empirical data collection with Jan Aart Scholte, part of which resulted in a collaborative publication (Dellmuth et al. 2019).
features matter most to people (e.g., Scharpf 1999; Hurd 2007; Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Scholte and Tallberg 2018; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bernauer et al. 2020). For advocates of IO procedure, legitimacy beliefs are driven by the way the organization functions, irrespective of the effects of its policies. For advocates of IO performance, legitimacy beliefs are shaped by the consequences of the organization, irrespective of how the IO formulated the relevant policy. Recent research offers numerous examples of both types of accounts, as well as emergent efforts to assess the relative importance of procedure and performance.

Although this literature provides valuable insights, it confronts three important limitations. First, the evidence on the causal significance of information regarding procedure and performance qualities for legitimacy beliefs vis-à-vis IOs is inconclusive. Reliance in earlier work on textual analysis or cross-sectional public opinion surveys has not allowed for isolating the causal effects of these two institutional dimensions. Second, the focus on procedure versus performance masks the deeper question of what, more specifically, in these features of IO policy-making generates legitimacy beliefs. Each of the two categories hosts a range of particular qualities that may be important for legitimacy perceptions. Yet existing research has not systematically assessed this issue. Third, comparative analyses of institutional sources of legitimacy across IOs are in short supply. Most existing contributions focus on a single organization (e.g., Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015). Whether and how communication about institutional features varies in importance across IOs and issue areas remains an open question.

Pushing back these limitations, this chapter assesses the causal effect on popular legitimacy beliefs of communication regarding a broad range of procedure- and performance-related institutional qualities across IOs in multiple fields and in different countries. Theoretically, we disaggregate the institutional sources of IO legitimacy, on the intuition that the categories procedure and performance are by themselves too crude to identify the specific institutional features that citizens care about. Instead, we develop a more fine-grained typology of institutional qualities, distinguishing between democratic, technocratic, and fair qualities of procedure and performance. While this new sixfold classification may not be exhaustive, it provides the most encompassing, precise, and systematic typology to date.
Hypotheses

Empirically, we evaluate the effects of communicated institutional qualities on legitimacy beliefs through a population-based survey experiment, conducted in four countries with regard to IOs in four issue areas. The three issue areas are security governance (UNSC), climate governance (UNFCCC), economic governance (IMF), and regional governance (ASEAN, AU, EU, and NAFTA). To increase the generalizability of the findings, the survey experiment aggregates data from four countries in diverse world regions: Germany, the Philippines, South Africa, and the US. In the case of the regional organizations, we only examine communication effects for countries which are member states of these organizations.

The survey experiment yields three central findings. First, information regarding both procedure and performance matters for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs vis-à-vis IOs. Efforts to privilege the one over the other would therefore seem misguided. Second, within procedure and performance, all three tested qualities (democratic, technocratic, and fair) affect popular perceptions of legitimacy. The importance of both procedure and performance therefore holds across multiple qualities of these dimensions. Third, the extent to which communicated institutional qualities matter for IO legitimacy depends on the issue area at hand. A broader scope of institutional qualities appears to be important for legitimacy beliefs in the Philippines and the US compared to the other countries, toward global IOs compared to regional IOs, and, in the context of global IOs, toward the IMF compared to the UNFCCC and the UNSC.

This chapter proceeds in four parts. It begins by outlining our theoretical expectations about how communicated institutional qualities shape citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. It then proceeds to outline the survey experimental design. The third section presents the empirical findings from the analysis. We end the chapter by summarizing its main conclusions.

Hypotheses

The expectation that communicated institutional qualities matter for people’s legitimacy beliefs toward IOs is rooted in both theory and practice. In terms of theory, a long tradition of Weberian sociology has demonstrated that the characteristics of a governing organization shape the legitimacy beliefs of its subjects. However, existing knowledge about the effects of institutional qualities on popular legitimacy
beliefs toward IOs confronts large gaps. In terms of practice, ample observed behavior around IOs has suggested that institutional features shape audience responses to global governance. For instance, dissatisfaction with institutional qualities of IOs has been a prominent part of mobilization against global economic organizations (O’Brien et al. 2000; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Rauh and Zürn 2020). All of this suggests that communicated institutional qualities of IOs can play a key role in respect of legitimacy.

Procedure versus Performance

Recent years have witnessed growing efforts to identify institutional qualities of IOs with implications for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward these organizations. The starting point for most of this literature has been the distinction between input- and output-based legitimacy, introduced by Scharpf (1970, 1999). This dichotomy originally served to identify two alternative normative grounds for justifying the authority of the EU. In Scharpf’s view, the EU could earn its normative legitimacy either from democratic participation by the people or from problem-solving outcomes for the people. This distinction fed into a broader debate about the normative credentials of European and global governance (e.g., Zürn 2000; Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005; Archibugi et al. 2012). Scharpf’s dichotomy was also picked up by researchers interested in establishing institutional sources of sociological legitimacy for IOs. Over the past decade, a growing literature has distinguished between procedure (input) and performance (output) as two generic institutional sources of legitimacy for regional and global IOs (Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Tallberg and Zürn 2019).

The premise of procedural accounts is that process criteria are important for perceptions of IO legitimacy. On this argument, actors support an institution’s exercise of authority because of how it is set up and operates. Procedural accounts have an early antecedent in Weber’s (1922/1978) notion of legal-rational sources of legitimacy. On these lines, governance is regarded as appropriate because properly appointed authorities follow properly formulated decision-taking processes. So, for example, audiences might accord legitimacy to the UNFCCC because its policy-making is perceived to involve a broad range of stakeholders. Alternatively, actors might deny legitimacy to the IMF because its decision-making process
is seen to give some states disproportionate weight. For procedural accounts, the legitimacy of an IO derives from the way that the institution functions, irrespective of the consequences of its policies.

Recent research offers several examples of procedural accounts. For instance, Bernauer and Gampfer (2013) focus on whether procedures that allow for greater civil society involvement also translate into greater legitimacy for global environmental governance. They find this to be the case: Citizens tend to favor civil society engagement, and therefore, procedures that provide for such participation are rewarded with higher legitimacy. Similarly, Johnson (2011) studies how procedures giving certain states particular advantages (e.g., through vetoes) influence the legitimacy of IOs. She finds that IOs which grant major states such as the US and Russia a special say in decision-making suffer in terms of perceived legitimacy.

In contrast, other accounts emphasize performance as an institutional source of IO legitimacy. On these lines, legitimacy beliefs derive from audience evaluations of a governing institution’s outcomes. With a focus on performance, IOs might gain or lose legitimacy depending on whether audiences see them as enhancing or undermining desired conditions in society. For example, the WHO might gain legitimacy if actors perceive that it effectively prevents epidemics. Meanwhile, the World Bank might lose legitimacy if subjects believe that this institution fails to reduce poverty. For performance approaches, the legitimacy of an IO derives from its impacts, irrespective of how the institution formulated and executed the relevant policy.

Existing research provides many examples of this type of argument. Multiple studies of public opinion toward the EU highlight the importance of policy-making outcomes for people’s legitimacy beliefs. These investigations show that citizens evaluate the EU’s legitimacy in relation to costs and benefits, both for their personal well-being and for their country (Gable 1998; Hooghe and Marks 2005; Rohrschneider and Loveless 2010). Edwards (2009) advances a similar argument to explain public opinion toward the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. He finds that people’s legitimacy beliefs toward these IOs are primarily driven by the perceived implications of these organizations for their country’s economy.

While this existing work has expanded our understanding of how institutional features of IOs may affect people’s legitimacy perceptions, it suffers from two key limitations. First, efforts to compare the causal significance of communication about procedures and performances

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for popular legitimacy beliefs are missing. Especially in global governance, where citizens tend not to have direct experiences with IOs, elite communication is central as a mediating factor between institutional qualities and legitimacy beliefs. However, the few contributions testing factors drawn from both categories rely on observational methods such as textual analysis and public opinion surveys that do not allow for inferences about communication (e.g., Edwards 2009; Binder and Heupel 2015; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Schlipphak 2015).

Second, existing research has not systematically unpacked procedure and performance to consider the more specific qualities of processes and outcomes that may generate beliefs in the legitimacy of an IO. Procedure and performance are broad and encompassing categories which, while conceptually useful, evade the deeper question: What is it more particularly about an institution’s conduct and results that generates perceptions of legitimacy? Each category encompasses a diversity of more specific qualities that may be important for legitimacy assessments. In terms of procedure, is it civil society involvement, decision-making rules, legality, efficiency, or other features that elicit legitimacy beliefs toward IOs? In terms of performance, is it problem-solving capacity, distributional consequences, implications for democratic governance, or other outcomes that generate perceptions of IO legitimacy?

As a result of these limitations, important questions remain unanswered. Is communication about some institutional qualities more significant than communication about others in shaping citizens’ legitimacy beliefs regarding IOs? Do effects of communication about specific institutional features vary across countries, IOs, and issue areas?

This chapter moves beyond these limitations. The remainder of this section develops a conceptualization that unpacks procedure and performance to identify specific qualities of each that often feature in elite communication about IOs. Subsequent sections then describe the design and results of a survey experiment that evaluates the causal effects of specific communicated institutional qualities on popular legitimacy beliefs across IOs in three policy fields.

**Unpacking Institutional Qualities**

Building on the distinction between procedure and performance, this section develops a richer and more systematic typology of institutional qualities to which citizens may be receptive. As the preceding
discussion indicates, there is more to the sources of IO legitimacy than procedure and performance per se. To get at the institutional sources for legitimacy beliefs we must also examine the specific qualities of procedure and performance.

Starting from Scharpf’s (1999) work, previous research has tended to equate procedure with qualities of democracy and performance with qualities of effectiveness. However, this conflation excludes the possibility that democracy and effectiveness could each be features of both procedure and performance (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). For example, democratic governance could be an outcome in cases where an IO’s activities (such as election monitoring) generate more transparency and participation in politics. Likewise, effectiveness could be a quality of policy processes if a given institutional procedure (such as use of expert committees) allows an IO to produce more and faster decisions. In addition, it is plausible, for reasons elaborated below, that other qualities of procedure and performance besides democracy and effectiveness, such as fairness, could shape legitimacy perceptions.

Based on these considerations, we introduce a new typology of institutional sources of legitimacy by means of a 2×3 matrix (Table 6.1). In this schema, the two rows make the distinction between procedure and performance that has evolved out of earlier research. Hence, the matrix distinguishes between sources of legitimacy that pertain to the processes and to the consequences of IO policy-making. Meanwhile, the columns in the matrix highlight a threefold distinction between democratic, technocratic, and fair as three generic qualities that may apply to both the procedures and the performances of IOs.

This new typology uses the category of democratic procedure and performance to cover perceptions that affected publics have due voice in and control over governance arrangements. The category of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Democratic</th>
<th>Technocratic</th>
<th>Fair</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Impartiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>Proportionality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Democracy promotion in wider society</td>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>Human dignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collective gains</td>
<td>Distributive justice</td>
</tr>
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</table>
technocratic procedure and performance is taken to encompass perceptions that a governing authority is effective in the light of best available knowledge and policy instruments. The term “technocratic” is not invoked here with any pejorative connotations and rather seeks to convey a sense of expertise-based problem-solving (Fischer 1989). Finally, the category of fair procedure and performance captures perceptions that process and outcome are just, equitable and impartial vis-à-vis implicated actors. Fairness is a feature of both procedure and performance that has obtained limited independent attention in previous research and is distinctive from both democratic and technocratic qualities (for an exception, see Hurd 2007).

The 2×3 schema yields six types of institutional features that may generate perceptions of legitimacy for IOs when communicated by elites. The expectation that people care about these qualities is anchored in social-psychological research. The right to voice opinions, a key political norm held by individuals in democratic societies (Held 1995), has been shown to drive perceptions of legitimacy toward domestic political institutions (De Cremer and Tyler 2007). Similarly, outcome favorability is well known to influence how people evaluate policy decisions and institutions (Skitka 2002; Doherty and Wolak 2012; Esaiasson et al. 2019). Finally, extensive research has demonstrated that fairness is a fundamental concern in politics and matters to people’s perceptions of legitimate institutions (Tyler 1990; Tyler et al. 1997).

The following paragraphs specify and exemplify the six institutional qualities in the context of IOs. First, the category democratic procedure covers frameworks and practices that bring affected people into IO policy-making processes. In this category, one prominent institutional quality is participation: namely, where implicated actors have due involvement in the formulation, implementation, and review of IO decisions (Steffek et al. 2007; Macdonald 2008). Another significant feature of democratic procedure is transparency: namely, where affected publics can access full information about an IO’s activities and policies, making it easier to hold the organization accountable (Scholte 2011; Tallberg 2016). Several studies argue that democratic procedure has become the foremost source of legitimacy in global governance (e.g., Held 1995; Bernstein 2011). More specifically, some research finds that civil society involvement strengthens popular legitimacy in global environmental governance (Bernauer and Gampfer
Hypotheses

Other work identifies dissatisfaction with allegedly nondemocratic decision-making as a crucial motivation for public contestation of IOs (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Norris 2011).

The category democratic performance captures the consequences of policy-making for people’s power in national and international governance. Important in this respect are IO activities that safeguard or improve domestic democracy, for instance, by demanding accountability of national governments or by protecting civil rights (Pevehouse 2005; Keohane et al. 2009). The expectation that democratic performance matters for IO legitimacy is frequently expressed in the negative: namely, that people withhold support from IOs because of their negative implications for domestic democracy (Hooghe et al. 2019). Such thinking also figures prominently in populist discourse that argues for a repatriation of powers from IOs to democratic domestic governance (Inglehart and Norris 2017).

The category technocratic procedure encompasses practices that bring efficiency and expertise to policy-making processes. Efficiency can lie in the number and speed of an IO’s decisions (Hardt 2014; Tallberg et al. 2016), while expertise can involve basing IO decisions on the best available knowledge and skills (Majone 1998; Bernstein 2005). Along these lines, Chan et al. (2016) argue that the legitimacy of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) rests primarily on the scientific expertise that this body brings to global environmental governance. Conversely, slow decision-making, mismanagement of funds, and organizational dysfunction are frequently invoked when explaining legitimacy difficulties for organizations such as the UN and the EU (Reus-Smit 2007).

The category technocratic performance refers to effectiveness in achieving policy ends. Qualities under this heading include problem-solving (i.e., successfully addressing a policy challenge) and collective gains (i.e., achieving benefits for society) (Keohane 1984; Scharpf 1999). It is commonly claimed that IOs earn their popular legitimacy through the collective advantages they produce for states and societies. In this vein, Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) introduced the term “permissive consensus” to describe a situation where populations enjoy the fruits of international cooperation and support its broad goals, while taking little concrete interest in IO policy-making processes. Likewise, functionalist accounts assume that states and their domestic constituencies support IOs because of the collective benefits.
they generate (Keohane 1984). In line with these expectations, some recent empirical research concludes that citizen perceptions of successful IO problem-solving constitute a strong base for legitimacy beliefs (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Ecker-Ehrhardt 2016).

The category fair procedure refers to policy-making practices that give equitable treatment to all concerned. This quality is exhibited in impartiality (i.e., decision-taking processes are followed consistently and without discrimination) and proportionality (i.e., members contribute to IO resourcing in accordance with their relative means). For some types of IOs, such as international courts, fair procedure may be the chief institutional source of legitimacy. For instance, low legitimacy for the ICC among many African governments arises from their perception that the ICC imposes double standards between African and other leaders (Helfer and Schowalter 2017).

The category fair performance involves consequences of policy-making in terms of equitable outcomes. This quality can be judged in relation to IO practices that advance human dignity (i.e., norms of basic cultural, economic, and political livelihood) and distributive justice (i.e., equitable sharing of benefits and burdens) (Tyler 1990). For example, global justice protests have often targeted international economic institutions for allegedly producing unacceptable inequalities in society (O’Brien et al. 2000; Scholte et al. 2016). Conversely, IOs with poverty alleviation profiles – such as multilateral development banks and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – often legitimize themselves in terms of promoting fairness for underprivileged people. The expectation is that citizens are more likely to accord legitimacy to IOs that are perceived to reduce injustice within and between countries.

In sum, the typology developed above disaggregates the conventional distinction between procedure and performance to bring out six more specific institutional sources of IO legitimacy. Each of the six qualities gives rise to a hypothesis about effects on legitimacy beliefs when this quality of an IO is communicated to citizens (see Table 6.2). Together, these distinctions permit a more fine-grained assessment of how communicated institutional features shape citizen perceptions of legitimacy in global governance. Social psychology, earlier political research, and anecdotal examples suggest that each of these institutional features may matter for legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. However, it is an empirical question for systematic investigation to establish in what ways and to what extent this is actually the case.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Wording of vignette</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication about the democratic quality of an IO’s procedures affects</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>As you may have heard, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) holds its meetings about financial crises in public.</td>
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<td>its perceived legitimacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication about the democratic quality of an IO’s performance affects</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>As you may have heard, International Monetary Fund (IMF) actions on financial crises strengthen democracy in affected countries.</td>
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<td>its perceived legitimacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication about the technocratic quality of an IO’s procedures affects</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Technocratic</td>
<td>As you may have heard, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) responds on time to financial crises.</td>
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<td>its perceived legitimacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication about the technocratic quality of an IO’s performance affects</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Technocratic</td>
<td>As you may have heard, International Monetary Fund (IMF) actions on financial crises are effective.</td>
</tr>
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<td>its perceived legitimacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication about the fairness quality of an IO’s procedures affects</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>As you may have heard, all countries have an equal say in International Monetary Fund (IMF) decisions on financial crises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its perceived legitimacy.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication about the fairness quality of an IO’s performance affects</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>As you may have heard, International Monetary Fund (IMF) actions on financial crises benefit everyone equally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>its perceived legitimacy.</td>
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Notes: Wording of vignettes for the IMF. The wordings change depending on the IO, as they are active in different issue areas. For exact wordings in the second and third round, see Online Appendix N. After receiving the treatment, people were asked how much confidence they have on IOs: “How much confidence do you personally have in the UN?” Answer categories range from 0 (no confidence at all) to 10 (complete confidence); “don’t know.” The control group receives the question about confidence without a vignette.
Research Design

We assess the institutional grounds for legitimacy beliefs toward IOs through a population-based survey experiment. The purpose of this survey experiment is to establish the effects of communicated institutional qualities on citizen beliefs about IO legitimacy. While such effects could have been assessed with a population sample from a single country, estimating average effects of institutional qualities on legitimacy beliefs in several countries reduces the risk of biases from contextual country factors.

Survey Design

The survey experiment was conducted in Germany, the Philippines, South Africa, and the US. These countries were selected based on two criteria. First, they lie on different continents, thereby reducing the risk of regional biases and covering countries with different experiences of the IOs covered. Second, the four selected countries all have relatively high levels of Internet penetration (almost 90 percent in Germany and the US, over 50 percent in South Africa, and more than 40 percent in the Philippines), thereby increasing the representativeness of the sample to the whole populations of those countries.

The questionnaire was implemented by YouGov from September to November 2016 (see Online Appendix A). A total of 1,586 interviews were conducted in Germany, 1,358 in the Philippines, 1,384 in South Africa, and 1,393 in the US. After respondents accessed the online survey, they filled in a questionnaire in English (except in Germany, where it was translated into German). The survey took about 5 minutes to complete. It started with several “warm-up” questions, then moved to the survey experiment, and ended with several additional questions (see Online Appendix N for the questionnaire). The warm-up and supplementary questions were included to enable balance tests and robustness checks (see below). Questions were sequenced in ways to avoid priming the respondents inappropriately.

Experimental Design

The experimental part of the questionnaire aimed to isolate the causal effects on legitimacy beliefs of communication regarding the
six institutional qualities discussed above. To this end, individuals were randomly assigned to groups that received different experimental treatments, as well as to a control group that did not receive any treatment (Mutz 2011, 9). The randomized design consisted of two factors that varied across the respondents of the survey: (a) dimension of policy-making (procedure or performance) and (b) institutional quality (democratic, technocratic, or fair). The resulting 2×3 factorial design yielded six conditions in total. Each combination of factors was presented to a similar number of individuals (around 820).

Table 6.2 summarizes the hypotheses-related treatments tested in the experiment. Taken together, these treatments allowed us not only to identify and compare the respective causal impacts of procedure and performance on legitimacy beliefs but also to disaggregate these dimensions to evaluate the importance of democratic, technocratic, and fair qualities of procedure and performance.

The experimental treatments were operationalized in vignettes. It was vital that respondents should react to the precise prompt in the respective vignettes. We therefore kept vignette formulations as short and straightforward as possible, and similar in strength, since longer and more complex vignettes lead to a greater risk of ineffectual treatments (Mutz 2011, 64–65). The vignettes involved hypothetical rather than actual scenarios. Although using real-world information can increase the credibility of vignettes, using hypothetical vignettes makes it easier to ensure that treatments are of similar strength.

The vignettes exposed respondents to a description of an IO (see Table 6.2). For instance, respondents were presented with the information that “the United Nations (UN) holds its meetings about military conflicts in public,” “United Nations (UN) actions on climate change strengthen democracy in affected countries,” “the International Monetary Fund (IMF) responds on time to financial crises,” or “European Union (EU) actions on regional cooperation benefit everyone equally” (Online Appendix N). The use of framed descriptions as vignettes builds on the assumption in our theory (Chapter 3) that citizens on average are not very well informed about political matters and therefore use communicated information to update their opinions on issues. Survey data suggest that this assumption is reasonable in the present case: Citizens are typically aware of the existence of the IOs used in the experiment, but lack a detailed understanding of their decision-making procedures and policy performances (Gallup...
2005; Dellmuth 2016). When respondents are presented with framed descriptions of IOs, the expectation is therefore that they integrate the new information into their opinions. If this new information relates to features of IOs that respondents care about, it should also influence their perceptions of the organization’s legitimacy.

In the treatment groups, people received first a vignette and then a question about their “confidence” in IOs. In contrast, the control group received only the question of how much confidence the respondent has in an IO, without the preceding vignette. Confidence – our preferred measure of legitimacy, as set forth in Chapter 3 – was measured on a scale from no confidence at all (0) to complete confidence (10). Most respondents answered on this scale, although a small minority (close to 10 percent) selected a “don’t know” option.

The experiment used a randomized factorial design that systematically varied vignettes on combinations of the first factor (procedure or performance) and the second factor (democratic, technocratic, or fair). This made it possible to establish the distinct causal effects on IO legitimacy of information regarding each of the six institutional qualities. Each vignette was formulated to operationalize one central institutional quality in each of the six categories summarized in Table 6.1: transparent decision-making (democratic procedure), effects on domestic democracy (democratic performance), efficient decision-making (technocratic procedure), effective problem-solving (technocratic performance), equal say in decision-making (fair procedure), and equal distribution of benefits (fair performance). The effects of information regarding these six institutional qualities were evaluated by comparing mean confidence in the treatment groups with mean confidence in the control group. Since people are psychologically more responsive to negative information than to positive prompts (Kahnemann and Tversky 1979; Baumeister et al. 2001; see also Chapter 4), vignettes were constructed using a positive formulation in order to enable a hard theory test. Positive treatments also speak to IOs’ efforts to appear more democratic, effective, and fair in their procedures and performances.

In sum, we establish whether communication about an institutional quality matters for respondents’ legitimacy beliefs toward an IO by first exposing them to a treatment containing information on this particular quality, then asking them about their confidence in the IO, and finally comparing the average level of confidence among the respondents who receive this particular treatment with that of respondents who receive no treatment (the control group). A statistically significant difference in
the average level of confidence between the two groups allows us to con-
clude that the institutional quality, which is manipulated in the particu-
lar treatment, likely contributes to respondents’ confidence in the IO.

The experiment was conducted in four rounds designed to capture in-
stitutional sources of legitimacy for seven IOs: three global organi-
zations (IMF, UNFCCC, and UNSC) and four regional organizations
(ASEAN, AU, EU, and NAFTA). This design permits the experiment
not only to test expectations about the general effects of these six insti-
tutional qualities but also to show the occurrence of such effects across
countries and IOs. The first round presented vignettes related to the
UN’s actions on military conflict, speaking to the UNSC, the primary
IO in the area of security. The second round presented vignettes about
the UN’s actions on climate change, speaking to the UNFCCC, the
central IO on this issue. The third round addressed a prominent eco-
nomic IO, the IMF. The fourth round focused on one regional organi-
zation relevant for each of the four included countries (ASEAN in the
Philippines, AU in South Africa, EU in Germany, and NAFTA in the
US). Respondents were never exposed to the same treatment more than
once. Respondents who were placed in the control group remained
there throughout the three rounds. The order of the experimental
rounds was randomized in order to avoid potential priming effects.

Results

The results of the experiment are now presented in two steps. The first
examines whether and to what extent communication regarding pro-
cedure- and performance-related institutional qualities affect respon-
dents’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. The second considers whether
and to what extent these effects vary across IOs in climate, economic,
security, and regional governance. As discussed above, we will present
the results in a series of tables that compare the average level of confi-
dence among respondents receiving a particular treatment to those not
receiving any treatment at all (the control group).

Similar to Chapter 4, data have been pooled across the four experi-
mental rounds to estimate treatment effects, so that the observa-
tions are clustered in individuals. Treatment effects are calculated by
using OLS regression analysis using weighted data and robust stan-
dard errors clustered at the level of individuals, where confidence is
regressed on a treatment dummy (1 = treated, 0 = not treated).
The key finding is that communication about all six procedure- and performance-related institutional qualities affected respondents’ legitimacy beliefs. Figure 6.1 sets out differences in average levels of confidence between the control group and the respondents receiving treatments. All of the treatments generated statistically significant effects on respondents’ confidence in IOs, be they about democratic, technocratic, or fair qualities of procedure and performance.

The size of the treatment effects varies from 0.241 to 0.419 on an 11-point scale of confidence. These effects are substantively important. For example, an effect size of 0.419 for “democratic performance” is similar in size to the average difference in confidence between the UNFCCC and the IMF in the control group (Figure 6.2). In addition, the experimental setting likely underestimates the corresponding real-world impact. After all, the experimental effects result from a one-shot treatment, rather than from continuous exposure to a particular institutional quality, as would be the case in actual situations (Gaines and Kuklinski 2011). Moreover, it
should be recalled that positive treatments usually generate smaller effects than negative treatments, since people are psychologically less responsive to positive information than to negative prompts.

We also assess if cues about procedure and performance are more effective among the politically more aware, given that they are more likely to use new information efficiently when updating their opinions, as theorized in Chapter 3. We therefore test if the treatment effects depicted in Figure 6.1 are conditional on our two awareness indicators: education and discussion of politics with friends. The results suggest that more politically aware citizens did not respond differently than less aware citizens when confronted with the treatments (Online Appendices O2–O3).

Taken together, these results demonstrate that both procedure and performance can affect people’s confidence in IOs, and this conclusion holds across democratic, technocratic, and fair qualities of procedure and performance. Hence, claims that legitimacy rests with either procedure or performance, or with either democratic, technocratic, or fair features of IO policy-making, would appear to be misguided.

The finding that democratic, technocratic, and fair qualities all matter speaks to earlier research in interesting ways. First, this result supports previous research which holds that democratic concerns are central to people’s evaluations of IOs (Held 1995; Zürn 2000; Bernstein 2011). Second, this finding shows that the importance of
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fairness for legitimacy beliefs applies to international as well, ant not only domestic political institutions (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler 1990; Gibson et al. 2005; Esaiasson et al. 2019). Third, this outcome cautions against the proposition that people are nowadays less concerned with technocratic aspects of IOs (Scharpf 1999; Hooghe and Marks 2009), instead pointing to the sustained importance of efficiency and effectiveness considerations for legitimacy perceptions.

Disaggregating Treatment Effects across IOs

Next, we examine whether the effects of communication regarding procedure- and performance-related institutional qualities vary across IOs, considering the results from each experimental round separately. Figure 6.3 shows the results for the global organizations, while Figure 6.4 depicts the results for the regional organizations.

**Figure 6.3** Effects of communication about institutional qualities, by global organization

*Notes:* Average treatment effects with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. See Online Appendix O4 for detailed results.
Results

Figure 6.3 suggests that all treatments are effective in relation to the IMF, with the exception of the treatment on fair procedure. By contrast, in the context of the UNSC and UNFCCC, fewer treatments are statistically significant. In the UNSC, democracy-related qualities matter, and in the UNFCCC, we find no significant effects. Figure 6.4 shows that no significant treatment effects were found for the regional organizations. However, it should be noted the analyses of the regional organizations are based on a considerably smaller sample of respondents – only one country per IO.

These results suggest four observations. First, they confirm that communication regarding both procedural and performance qualities matters for the perceived legitimacy of IOs, also when we break down the effects by IO. In the context of IOs with significant treatment effects (IMF, UNSC), both procedure and performance are important. Second, treatments are most effective in the US, when compared to Germany, the Philippines, and South Africa. Third, the findings suggest that

Figure 6.4 Effects of communication about institutional qualities, by regional organization
Notes: Average treatment effects with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. See Online Appendix O4 for detailed results.
communication regarding institutional qualities is of varying importance for global organizations, mattering most for legitimacy perceptions toward the IMF, less for the UNSC, and least for the UNFCCC. Finally, the varying occurrence of treatment effects at the level of countries and IOs reduces potential concerns that the homogenously positive and significant effects established earlier at the aggregate level would result from a general framing effect in the experiment.

Focusing specifically on the variation in treatment effects across IOs, five interpretations are conceivable. First, variation may reflect the respective missions of the IOs. As previously noted, it may be that some organizational purposes generate legitimacy beliefs more than others because these mandates are perceived to be intrinsically good and uncontestable (Scott 1991; Lenz and Viola 2017). If this logic is at play, it may affect the relative importance of other institutional qualities as sources of legitimacy. For example, the UN’s attention to climate change may generate legitimacy beliefs by itself and thereby reduce the relative importance of procedural and performance features. In contrast, the IMF pursues objectives that are perceived to be more contestable, which may elevate the relative importance of procedural and performance sources of legitimacy.

Second, differences across issue areas could reflect varying levels of authority among the IOs in question. According to one argument, the standards that an IO must reach to be considered legitimate depend on its level of policy competence (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Institutions that possess higher levels of authority must meet more demanding standards of procedure and performance or else they will suffer a legitimacy deficit. This logic may help to explain why the full range of institutional qualities matter for legitimacy beliefs toward the IMF, which has far-reaching formal authority. Consistent with this interpretation, fewer institutional qualities matter in the case of the UNSC, which possesses medium authority, and none at all in the case of the UNFCCC, which has limited formal authority (Hooghe et al. 2017; Zürn 2018). In Chapter 7, we will systematically examine effects of purpose and authority in conjunction with procedure and performance.

Third, citizens could evaluate some IOs on a broader range of parameters than others. This interpretation ties in well with previous anecdotal evidence on sources of contestation in global governance. Consistent with our experimental findings, public opposition to IOs in the area of economic governance invokes a broad range of criticisms,
including democratic shortcomings, perceived injustices of neoliberal doctrine, and ineffective policies (O’Brien et al. 2000; Rauh and Zürn 2020). Similarly, and in keeping with the results here, earlier research on the legitimacy of the UNSC shows that its democratic limitations have attracted particular criticism (Binder and Heupel 2015).

Fourth, the observed pattern of variation across IOs is consistent with the possibility that citizens respond more strongly to new information about IOs they know less well (cf. Chong and Druckman 2007a). As we theorized in Chapter 3, the object of messages may matter for communication effects if citizens have stronger priors toward some IOs than others. Earlier survey data suggest that the UN is more known to citizens in a global sample of countries than the IMF (Gallup International Association 2005; Dellmuth et al. 2022b, ch. 2). This finding is further corroborated by evidence from a question in our survey on factual knowledge about the IMF and the UN (Figure 6.5)

Figure 6.5 Political knowledge about IOs
Notes: Weighted percentages. Left panel shows responses to a question about knowledge about where the headquarters of the IMF are located. Answer categories: “A) Washington, DC, B) London, C) Geneva, D) Don’t know.” Right panel shows responses to a question about knowledge about which of the following countries does not have a permanent seat on the Security Council of the United Nations. Answer categories: “A) France, B) China, C) India, D) Don’t know.”
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(Mondak 1999; Jessee 2017). In addition, the four regional IOs are likely better known among citizens than the global IOs, as suggested by data from the Gallup International Association (2005, 2011) analyzed in Chapter 4. Thus, the broader range of treatment effects for the IMF may partly reflect respondents’ greater sensitivity to new information about this IO, compared to the other two global IOs, and the absence of treatment effects for the regional IOs may partly reflect citizens’ more well-developed priors regarding these organizations.

Fifth, and related, variation in treatment effects may be shaped by contextual factors, such as whether an IO is subject to intense public debate at a certain point in time. Much like general knowledge about an IO, intense public debate around a particular organization can lead to more developed opinions (cf. Bakaki and Bernauer 2017) and therefore less responsiveness to treatment manipulation. For example, the timing of our survey experiment less than a year after the signing of the Paris Agreement might have contributed to the lack of treatment effects in relation to climate governance. Conversely, contextual events can sensitize people to a particular aspect of an IO’s work, leading to larger treatment effects on that dimension. For instance, the results for problem-solving (technocratic performance) in respect of the UNSC might have been different twenty years ago in the aftermath of its shortfalls in Rwanda and Bosnia. Similarly, the treatment effects in relation to the IMF could potentially have been even stronger in the 1990s when the Fund’s structural adjustment programs were intensely contested.

Disaggregating Treatment Effects across Countries

Next, we examine whether the effects of communication regarding procedure- and performance-related institutional qualities vary across countries. Figure 6.6 calculates the differences in average confidence between the control group and the respondents receiving treatments for each country separately. It suggests several interesting patterns.

First, the results at the country level are heterogeneous and quite weak. Citizen opinions generally move in the expected directed in two countries (South Africa and US), move little at all in one country (Germany), and move in the opposite direction than expected in one country (Philippines). However, only few treatments are significant. This may partly be the result of lower statistical power, since the N in each category is considerably smaller when we analyze these treatment effects by country (Online Appendix O5).
Results

Second, if we focus on the significant effects, Figure 6.6 reveals that information about technocratic procedure and fair performance leads US citizens to update their opinions about IOs. By contrast, we do not find any treatment effects in Germany and South Africa. In the Philippines, we observe one treatment effect, albeit in the negative direction: Information about technocratic performance appears to weaken legitimacy beliefs in IOs. This deviant result could potentially be understood against the background that public opinion toward IOs in the Philippines is more positive than in other countries (see also Dellmuth et al. 2022a). In our data, mean confidence in IOs in the Philippines is 6.2, while it is much lower in the other three countries (4.8 in South Africa, and 3.9 in Germany and 3.6 the US). The high degree of confidence in IOs in the Philippines is also a consistent pattern in WVS data

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2 Mean confidence in the control group, based on data pooled across all IOs studied in this chapter: N = 577 in the Philippines, N = 539 in South Africa, N = 1,441 in Germany, and N = 532 in the US. Survey weights applied to estimate population mean.
over time. WVS data from 1994 through 2019 indicate that respondents in the Philippines on average have particularly high levels of confidence in the UN compared to respondents in other countries.\(^3\) Thus, it could be that citizens in the Philippines, because of the high degree of confidence in IOs, have particularly high expectations and therefore are little moved by positive treatments – indeed, may even be disappointed by the additional information.

**Validity and Robustness Checks**

We conclude this analysis with a number of validity and robustness checks. To test the internal validity of the experiment, we report a series of balance tests. These tests are based on the responses to several additional questions asked in the survey, capturing, *inter alia*, political knowledge about global governance. The tests check if the randomized allocation of respondents across treatment groups has worked by assessing if there is a statistically significant difference in mean confidence across levels of these variables. The tests reveal only eight imbalances for sixty tests, which should not compromise causal inference (Online Appendix P).

Moreover, we examine if the results could have been moderated by people’s confidence in the domestic government or the interest they have in specific IOs. To begin with, we examine for each country separately if treatment effects depend on confidence in domestic government, as more trusting people might have more fixed opinions about institutions in general and therefore be less swayed by elite communication. However, we do not find evidence for this intuition (Online Appendix Q1). Moreover, the results do not depend on respondent’s interest in the respective global organizations (UN or IMF) (Online Appendix Q2).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored how communicated institutional qualities of IOs affect citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward these organizations. Moving beyond existing research, it has sought to evaluate the causal

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\(^3\) This result for the Philippines does not appear to be an artifact of data generation. The WVS questionnaire was translated into the seven languages used in the Philippines and not only the language of a narrow elite. Moreover, representation by age, ethnic groups, and spoken languages was to be reached via the random choice elements included at every stage (see documentation for the Philippines at [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)).
significance of procedure and performance, to unpack these two dimensions into specific institutional qualities, and to offer a comparative analysis across IOs in different issue areas. In terms of theory, the chapter has presented a more encompassing and precise sixfold typology of institutional qualities that may affect citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. In terms of empirics, the chapter has presented the findings from a survey experiment among 5,700 respondents in four countries. The diversity of these countries suggests that results from the combined sample have broad applicability.

The central findings are threefold. First, the results indicate that information about both procedure and performance affects citizen legitimacy beliefs about IOs. Second, within procedure and performance, democratic, technocratic, and fair qualities all matter for people’s legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Third, the effects of communicated institutional qualities vary across IO and country contexts. A broader range of institutional qualities are important for legitimacy beliefs toward IOs in the US and the Philippines compared to Germany and South Africa. Moreover, we find more treatment effects in the context of global than regional IOs, and among the global organizations, in the context of the IMF than the UNFCCC and UNSC.

Our findings suggest four broader implications. First, this chapter corroborates the assumption of earlier research, from Weber to Scharpf, that citizens care about institutional qualities when forming legitimacy beliefs. Arriving at this conclusion from a focus on six procedure- and performance-related qualities does not presume that no other institutional features may matter. Indeed, in Chapter 7, we extend this analysis to include two additional institutional features: an IO’s purpose and authority.

Second, the importance of multiple institutional sources for IO legitimacy invites additional research on their combined effects in elite messages. For example, invoking several institutional features jointly might exert stronger and mutually reinforcing (de)legitimating effects. Thus, an IO could attract greater legitimacy when elites present it as having, say, efficient process together with fair outcome than when messages focus on only one or the other of these two qualities. Alternatively, positive communication on one institutional dimension might be cancelled out by negative communication on another (Bernauer et al. 2020). For instance, democratic procedure might cease to trigger
legitimacy beliefs if it is coupled with ineffective problem-solving. This chapter has identified how certain communicated institutional features, taken individually, matter for IO legitimacy; however, future studies can be encouraged to examine institutional factors in combination. In Chapter 7, we take one important step in that direction.

Third, the results suggest that supporters and opponents of IOs may be right to address institutional qualities in their respective strategies to legitimate or delegitimate these organizations. In this context, the existence of multiple institutional sources of legitimacy can present an opportunity for both proponents and critics of IOs. Supporters of an IO need not focus their communication on a single overriding institutional quality. Instead, they can potentially bolster the IO’s public standing by speaking to a variety of features, perhaps concentrating efforts on the qualities that the organization can most easily improve. Likewise, critics can target a wide menu of institutional features in their strivings to delegitimate an IO, possibly focusing their energies on the qualities that are most vulnerable to critique. As a result, legitimators and delegitimators may in their contention around a given IO emphasize different institutional attributes.

Finally, this research has shown that a comparative approach is useful when studying communicated institutional qualities as sources of IO legitimacy. Focusing on single countries and IOs can yield particularistic findings without demonstrating broader patterns and relationships. This chapter has demonstrated how results may vary across countries and IOs, and offered tentative interpretations of these patterns. Future research could deepen and extend such comparisons, for instance, by assessing variation across IOs of different types (e.g., intergovernmental versus hybrid), of different functions (e.g., courts versus executives), and in a larger sample of countries.
When global and domestic elites communicate about IOs, they do not only invoke IOs’ procedures and performances in support of their positions but also the authority and purposes of these organizations. The authority of IOs is frequently cited when critics accuse IOs of undermining state sovereignty, or when supporters praise IOs as arenas for transnational problem-solving. Consider the slogan of the Leave campaign in the run-up to the British referendum on EU membership – “Take back control!” – which accused the EU of being too powerful and urges the UK to resurrect its national sovereignty. Conversely, others, like Guy Verhofstadt, Belgian Member of the European Parliament, have called for more authority for the EU in the fight against the coronavirus: “People want the EU to act decisively, but few want the EU to have the powers to make this possible. Individual governments think they can do it better until it is too late. We are now trying to fight a pandemic with our hands tied!” (Express, April 8, 2020).

Similarly, the social purpose of an IO is an integral part of the message when elites express concern or support for the policy goals of an organization, as shown in Chapter 2. Consider how Nikki Haley, then US Ambassador to the UN, accused the UN Human Rights Council of betraying its purpose, when justifying the US decision to withdraw from the body: “I want to make it crystal clear that this step is not a retreat from human rights commitments. On the contrary, we take this step because our commitment does not allow us to remain a part of a hypocritical and self-serving organization that makes a mockery of human rights” (NPR, June 19, 2018). In contrast, the UN itself invokes human rights as one of its principal aims and purposes when presenting itself on its homepage: “In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights brought human rights into the realm of international law. Since then, the Organization has diligently protected human rights through legal instruments and on-the-ground activities” (UN 2020).
In one way, it is the authority and purpose of an IO that make it an inherently political institution – not only in terms of machinery for political decision-making but also in terms of the political aims and means of the organization. It is by setting goals for an IO and by empowering this IO that states constitute IOs as political institutions. Yet, so far, we know little about the effects on popular legitimacy of elites invoking the authority and purposes of IOs in their communication about these organizations. While earlier research presents expectations that authority (Zürn et al. 2012; Zürn 2018) and purpose (Barnett 1997; Lenz and Viola 2017) may matter for the legitimacy of IOs, it has not subjected these claims to systematic analysis. Does it matter for people’s evaluations of IOs whether these organizations possess more or less authority, and if so how? Likewise, does it matter for people’s opinions toward IOs whether these organizations work to fight poverty, ensure peace, combat climate change, or promote free trade, irrespective of other institutional features?

In this chapter, we offer a second analysis of how the content of elite communication impacts citizen legitimacy beliefs. We move beyond Chapter 6 in two important respects. First, we extend the analysis from an exclusive focus on procedure and performance to also consider the impact of authority and purpose on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We thereby offer the first systematic analysis of organizational authority and purpose, as well as the most comprehensive assessment of how information on multiple qualities of IOs affects popular legitimacy. Second, we take up the challenge identified in Chapter 6 to consider the impact of institutional qualities in combination. For this purpose, we shift from a vignette experimental design to a conjoint experimental design, specifically developed to assess how a particular dimension of an object matters relative to other dimensions when their impact is assessed simultaneously (Hainmueller et al. 2014).

We evaluate the impact of communication about an IO’s authority, purpose, procedures, and performance on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs through a conjoint experiment in Germany and the US. While both are advanced industrialized democracies with federal political systems, these two countries differ in two factors that we expect could moderate the impact of authority and purpose, respectively: internationalist attitudes and political ideology. The conjoint experiment
confronts respondents with two hypothetical IOs that vary in terms of the four examined institutional qualities and then asks the respondents to choose between the two, as well as evaluate the two choices. This design allows us to estimate the causal effect of information about each quality on respondents’ legitimacy beliefs, while simultaneously taking into consideration the impact of the other institutional features.

The main findings are threefold. First, communication about both the authority and the purpose of IOs matters for people’s legitimacy beliefs. When IOs are presented as having extensive authority over member states, this results in less confidence in these organizations. Similarly, the social purposes of IOs have an independent impact on legitimacy beliefs. For instance, promoting free trade has a negative effect on the perceived legitimacy of an IO, compared to ensuring peace and security. Second, the strength of these effects depends on citizens’ attitudes toward international cooperation and their political beliefs in the US but not in Germany, suggesting that IOs’ substantive goals can be a boost or a drag on their legitimacy, depending on people’s ideological priors and the country. Third, procedure and performance remain influential as sources of legitimacy when the effects of all four institutional features are assessed simultaneously in a conjoint design. In fact, communication about an IO’s procedures and performance has larger effects than information about its authority and purpose.

The chapter proceeds in four steps. We begin by developing the theoretical argument for why an IO’s authority and purpose may matter for people’s legitimacy beliefs and why these effects are likely to depend on people’s attitudes toward international cooperation and their political ideology. The chapter then presents the survey experimental design, laying out the merits of conjoint experiments, the execution of the survey, and the design of the experimental component. The third section presents the empirical results, beginning with the general effect of information on the four institutional qualities of IOs in Germany and the US, before considering how internationalist attitudes and political ideology condition these effects and reporting a number of validity and robustness checks. The fourth part of the chapter engages in a broader discussion of the findings, where we consider different interpretations and relate these results to earlier research. The chapter concludes by discussing the broader implications of our findings.

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Hypotheses

Why would information about the authority and purposes of IOs affect citizens’ legitimacy beliefs? Like in Chapter 6, we start from the assumption that people are sensitive to information about an IO’s institutional qualities. However, different from previous research, we extend the range of qualities theorized to the authority and purpose of an IO, which we expect could have independent effects on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs.

Authority

We conceptualize authority and legitimacy as distinct but related entities. Whereas authority refers to an organization having the right to make decisions within a particular area, legitimacy refers to the perception that these rights are appropriately exercised (Tallberg and Zürn 2019, 586). This analytical separation of legitimacy from authority is well anchored in parts of social theory.¹ Weber (1922/1978, 213), for instance, speaks of how every system of authority “attempts to establish and to cultivate a belief in its legitimacy.” At the same time, authority and legitimacy are related, in so far as legitimacy only becomes an issue once an institution possesses authority. In the absence of authority, the question of legitimacy becomes uninteresting.

Empirically, the authority of IOs is captured by three components (Hooghe et al. 2017; Zürn et al. 2021). First, IOs enjoy greater authority when they have been conferred greater policy-making competences in issue domains that previously were regulated at the domestic level or not at all (Zürn et al. 2012). Second, IOs enjoy greater authority when the member states move away from intergovernmental cooperation by delegating increasing power to autonomous supranational bodies (Tallberg 2002; Hawkins et al. 2006). Third, IOs have greater authority when the member states pool power within intergovernmental bodies by shifting toward forms of majority voting that remove each state’s veto over decisions (Keohane and Hoffmann 1991; Moravcsik 1998).

By these criteria, the authority of IOs has expanded considerably over recent decades (Hooghe et al. 2017; Zürn et al. 2021). States have

¹ In an alternative view, legitimacy is a prerequisite for authority (see Hurd 2007, 60–61; Lake 2007).
empowered IOs with authority in more policy domains, delegated more authority to supranational bodies, and pooled more authority in collective decision-making. The growth in IO authority is particularly notable after the end of the Cold War. That said, IOs continue to vary in the authority they possess, ranging from greatly empowered organizations such as the EU, which scores high on all three components, to less empowered organizations such as NAFTA (and its successor, the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement [USMCA]), which scores low on all components.

We expect information about the authority of IOs to matter for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. Specifically, we anticipate that IOs with greater authority will have a harder time securing legitimacy from citizens, all else equal (Zürn 2018; Anderson et al. 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). When IOs enjoy extensive authority, they also have to meet demanding procedural and performance standards, or they will suffer from legitimacy deficits. When IOs enjoy less authority, the procedural and performance requirements they have to meet to be deemed legitimate are less demanding.

The EU is often said to offer an illustration of this logic (Banchoff and Smith 1999; Hooghe and Marks 2009; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). The greater the authority of the EU, the higher the demands on the organization to take decisions democratically and to solve problems effectively. As the EU often has fallen short of these expectations, despite more democratic procedures and effective performance than most IOs, legitimacy problems have arisen, reflected in low turnouts in European elections, rejections of new EU treaties in national referenda, and a decision on the part of the UK to leave the organization.

There is to date no systematic empirical evidence for a negative authority-legitimacy linkage, as the only empirical study so far on the relationship between authority and legitimacy finds no effect in either negative or positive direction. As Anderson et al. (2019, 663) conclude, based on a survey experiment in the context of global environmental governance: “[E]ven important shifts of authority from the national to the global level, such as majority decision making at the international level and automatic implementation of international decisions domestically, do not significantly affect citizens’ legitimacy perceptions on average.”

However, given that greater authority should set the bar higher for IOs to fare well in peoples’ perceptions, we expect a negative relationship between IO authority and legitimacy beliefs. In addition, we

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expect this negative relationship to be moderated by the degree to which citizens hold internationalist attitudes (Schlipphak et al. 2021). When citizens are more positive toward international cooperation in general terms, we expect the negative effect of authority on legitimacy to be weaker. Conversely, when citizens are more negative toward international cooperation in general terms, we expect this attitude to strengthen the negative effect of IO authority on legitimacy beliefs.

We advance two hypotheses on the basis of this argument. First, we formulate a general expectation about the effect of IO authority on people’s legitimacy beliefs. Second, we formulate a conditional expectation about heterogeneity in effects depending on the degree to which citizens hold internationalist attitudes.

H1a: Communication about an IO’s level of authority affects its perceived legitimacy.

H1b: The effect of communication about an IO’s level of authority on legitimacy beliefs (H1a) is conditioned by people’s attitudes toward international cooperation.

Purpose

The notion that an organization’s social purpose would affect perceptions of its legitimacy is not novel, even if the logic has never been fully theorized or tested. The earliest considerations of purpose hark back to pioneers in the general study of political legitimacy. Easton (1975, 452), for instance, argued that political institutions may obtain legitimacy on the grounds of people’s ideological beliefs or moral convictions, next to their beliefs in the appropriateness of institutions and the personal qualities of rulers. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975, 126), in another seminal account, distinguished between the operation, output, and “the goals or domain of activity” of the organization as three sources of legitimacy. Scott (1991, 169), similarly, speaks of how legitimacy for an institution may derive primarily from “societal evaluations of organizational goals.” In the study of global governance, Barnett (1997, 539) offers an early discussion of the “substantive legitimacy” of IOs, understood as the “ends that are considered desirable,” to be distinguished from procedural legitimacy, or how IOs make decisions to reach those ends. Yet, despite these attempts, the idea of social purpose as an additional institutional source of legitimacy never truly took off. Possibly, such a development was stymied
by Scharpf’s (1999) influential dichotomy between input (procedure) and output (performance).

In recent years, a number of contributions have again suggested that organizational purpose may present a driver of legitimacy beliefs in global governance. These accounts typically conceive of social purpose as an institutional quality on par with procedure and performance. Scholte and Tallberg (2018, 64) acknowledge that the common distinction between procedure and performance misses potential “substance-grounded” legitimacy beliefs. Lenz and Viola (2017) explicitly speak of procedure, performance, and purpose as the three central organizational features of IOs that feed into assessments of their legitimacy. Nielson et al. (2019, 692) suggest that “actors may assess organizations not merely on how they operate and whether they accomplish their goals, but on what the goals themselves are and whether these are normatively desirable.” Taken together, these contributions suggest that citizens would be sensitive to information about an IO’s social purpose when forming legitimacy beliefs vis-à-vis IOs.

Developing this intuition further, we expect the communicated purposes of IOs to matter for legitimacy beliefs because of how they activate citizens’ ideological priors. Political ideologies are systems of normative ideas that bundle ideological content in ways that help people to orient themselves on the political spectrum and to arrive at political choices (Hamill et al. 1985; Sniderman et al. 1986). When citizens hold a particular ideological orientation, this offers them a shortcut to political positions on a whole range of issues interpretable in ideological terms (Jost et al. 2013).

We suggest that an IO’s social purpose often is perceived as inherently political or normative. Promoting free trade, combatting poverty, or protecting human rights may not be regarded by citizens as neutral exercises of international problem-solving, but as associated with the furthering of certain political ideals rather than others. In some cases, these ideals are closely linked to traditional political ideologies and cleavages in society, such as the left–right dimension. For instance, free trade and deregulation are often associated with market liberalism, while redistribution and social rights are associated with socialism or social democracy. When IOs promote purposes that are interpreted by citizens as political, we would expect citizens to use information about purpose when forming opinions about IOs. Organizations with purposes that accord more with a person’s political
priors are more likely to be regarded as legitimate, while IOs that promote goals that diverge from a person’s ideological leanings are less likely to be seen as legitimate.

We advance two hypotheses on the basis of this argument. First, we formulate a general expectation about the effect of social purpose on people’s legitimacy beliefs. Second, we formulate a conditional expectation about heterogeneity in effects depending on people’s political priors.

\[ H2a: \] Communication about an IO’s social purpose affects its perceived legitimacy.

\[ H2b: \] The effect of communication about an IO’s social purpose on legitimacy beliefs (\( H2a \)) is conditioned by people’s political ideology.

Research Design

The conjoint experiment exposes participants to hypothetical IOs that differ with respect to authority, purpose, and other institutional qualities. Its primary objective is to test hypotheses about how important communicated levels of authority and social purposes are for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs, and how internationalist attitudes and political ideology affect these relationships.

Survey Design

The experiment is embedded in an online survey with nationally representative samples of German (\( N = 2,044 \)) and American respondents (\( N = 2,048 \)). This cross-country design extends prior experimental studies on the effects of institutional qualities on legitimacy beliefs that have focused on a single country – the US (cf. Anderson et al. 2019). An important rationale for selecting Germany and the US is the general differences between the two countries in our moderating factors – political ideology and internationalist attitudes (cf. Chapter 5). The US is a liberal market economy with a two-party system and strong public opinion polarization, as well as an ambivalent approach to international cooperation, alternating between isolationism and

\[ 2 \] The experiment is preregistered with EGAP (No. 20190507AA). See: http://egap.org/registration/5711.
internationalism. Germany is a coordinated market economy with a multiparty system and less polarized public opinion, as well as a strong commitment to international cooperation. At the same time, the two countries are similar across several important contextual conditions, including their federal political systems, their high levels of economic development, and their political centrality in most IOs of which they are members, allowing us to hold potentially confounding context factors constant. The survey was implemented by YouGov in May 2019 (see Online Appendix A).

Experimental Design

We use a conjoint experiment to test our hypotheses about the effect of communication about an IO’s authority and purpose, respectively, on legitimacy beliefs. Conjoint analysis methods were developed in psychology and marketing, and have become increasingly common in political science in recent years (Hainmueller et al. 2014). In a conjoint experiment, respondents typically receive two alternative descriptions of cases and are then asked to rank or rate these two hypothetical alternatives. These two alternative cases have multiple attributes with differing values. By systematically varying how these cases are described, analysts can estimate the importance of each attribute on respondents’ combined choices. In the context of global governance, scholars have used conjoint experiments to assess, for instance, which institutional qualities generate public support for international environmental agreements (Bechtel and Scheve 2013; Bernauer et al. 2020).

We devised a conjoint experiment in which each respondent is shown screens with two hypothetical IOs in comparison. Each IO has a set of distinct attributes. Respondents are then asked to rate their confidence in each IO. This design allows us to assess how information about different institutional features of IOs affects respondents’ legitimacy beliefs. Using hypothetical IOs allows us to estimate the effects of communicated IO attributes systematically and with great precision. While using real-world IOs would have added an element of realism to the experiment, it would have made it impossible to vary IO attributes systematically in the comparisons in such a way that effects could be established confidently. In addition, respondents may have been influenced by preexisting beliefs and knowledge about IOs when asked to choose between them.
This experimental component of the survey was introduced through a text providing context and instructions (Figure 7.1).

After this introductory screen, each respondent received four randomly allocated screens. Each of these four screens compared two hypothetical IOs and asked the respondent to choose between them and to indicate its level of confidence in them. This comparison worked as follows. The order of the institutional qualities of the two IOs was randomly assigned across respondents, but consistent across the four binary comparisons for each respondent to avoid confusion. The values of the institutional qualities were fully randomized, with two exceptions. First, respondents were never given the same value on an institutional quality in a comparison across two IOs. Second, respondents were never confronted with the same screen twice.

The number of institutional qualities presented to the respondents in the experiment is well in line with the number of items respondents can meaningfully evaluate in the context of a conjoint experiment (Bansak et al. 2018). Authority is operationalized through a categorical variable capturing the power an IO exerts over member states. This measure includes both formal – codified – and informal – social – power (Barnett and Duvall 2005). We focus on IO authority as degrees of power over member states, partly because this conceptualization captures the implications of delegation and pooling for individual states (Hooghe and Marks 2015) and partly because it captures how IO authority typically is expressed in elite communication. Purpose is measured using descriptions of hypothetical core mandates of IOs that are relevant in global governance, such as the protection of human rights or poverty reduction. This measure captures the moral dimension of purpose (cf. Lenz and Viola 2017). When measuring procedures, we highlight
two central aspects of IOs – transparency and participation. While we could have selected other procedural features, such as accountability and fairness, transparency and participation are two central procedural dimensions that have received much attention in prior studies in international relations. Similarly, we select two central aspects of performance – fair outcomes and problem-solving capacity (cf. Scholte and Tallberg 2018). Table 7.1 summarizes the institutional features varied in the conjoint design. Figure 7.2 offers an example of what such a screen might look like.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional qualities varied in the experiment</th>
<th>Institutional quality</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>The organization [...]</td>
<td>has limited power over member countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>has some power over member countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>has extensive power over member countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>The organization works to [...]</td>
<td>protect human rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>promote public health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reduce poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>promote free trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ensure peace and security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>combat climate change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>(i) Transparency: Information about the organization’s decision-making [...]</td>
<td>is public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>is partially public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>is confidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Participation: In the organization’s decision-making [...]</td>
<td>citizens have a say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NGOs have a say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>all countries have an equal say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>only the powerful countries have a say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>(i) Fair outcome: The decisions of the organization [...]</td>
<td>benefit all countries equally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>benefit some countries more than others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Problem-solving: The decisions of the organization [...]</td>
<td>solve most important problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>solve some important problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>solve few important problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In operationalizing these institutional qualities, we faced a choice between nuanced and stark alternatives. We opted for more nuanced alternatives, since we believe those better capture the variation that exists in real-world global governance. For example, we chose to operationalize the dimension of authority by distinguishing between an IO having “limited,” “some,” or “extensive” power over member states, rather than simply “no” or “extensive” power.

The two outcome variables of interest tap into individuals’ confidence in IOs. Our preferred measure of legitimacy beliefs is the degree of confidence (see Chapter 3). We measure this degree on a scale from 1 (no confidence at all) to 9 (complete confidence) (Figure 7.2). For the purpose of robustness checks and to assess the sensitivity of experimental results across subgroups, we also ask respondents to indicate which of the two hypothetical IOs they would prefer. Answering this latter question only requires choosing between two,
which is cognitively less demanding for respondents than indicating their confidence in either IO.

The experiment was preceded by indicators for the purpose of balance tests and additional robustness checks: intentional media consumption, cognitive mobilization, generalized trust, confidence in domestic government, and knowledge about global governance. The experiment was followed by an attention check. We use the information from this attention check to limit the sample in the main analysis to those respondents who correctly passed this test. Finally, YouGov provides demographic and political data on the respondents as background information, such as information on gender, age, education, and geographical region (see Online Appendix R for the entire questionnaire in English and German).

Measuring Internationalist Attitudes and Political Ideology

To explore H1b and H2b about a conditioning effect of attitudes toward international cooperation and political ideology on treatment effects, the survey assessed respondents’ opinions on international cooperation and partisan identification. The first indicator asked respondents to indicate if they think that international cooperation is a “good thing,” a “bad thing,” or “neither good nor bad.” The answers to this question reveal that similarly high shares of the population in both countries (between 71 and 74 percent) indicate that they think international cooperation is a good thing (Figure 7.3).

The indicator for partisan identification is created based on a standard question about whether there is a particular political party they feel closer to than all the other parties. We described the patterns for this indicator in Chapter 5, which uses the same respondents for its two experiments. In short, partisan identification differs between Germany and the US. US public opinion is more polarized, since only about 18 percent of US citizens are estimated to be independents and the rest are either Democrats or Republicans. In Germany, about 22 percent are independents and the rest identify with a much larger number of political parties (Figure 5.1). That US opinion is more polarized than German public opinion can also be seen when looking at the distribution of left–right ideology (Figure 7.4).
Communication about Authority and Purpose

Figure 7.3 Internationalist attitudes in Germany and the US
Notes: Weighted percentage of those thinking that international cooperation is a bad thing, neither good nor bad, or a good thing.

Figure 7.4 Left–right ideology in Germany and the US
Notes: Weighted percentage.
Results

We begin by presenting the effects of communication about authority and purpose, and then turn to an analysis of the conditioning impact of internationalist attitudes and partisanship on these effects. We conclude by presenting a range of validity and robustness checks.

Effects of Communication about Authority and Purpose

Figures 7.5 and 7.6 show our estimates of authority and purpose as well as the other institutional qualities on confidence. The dots represent the estimated average marginal component effects (AMCEs) of a given value for each quality on individual confidence toward the packaged IO profile, relative to a reference category or baseline. In other words, the AMCEs express the degree to which an IO feature increases (or decreases) citizen confidence in an IO. The bars indicate 95 percent confidence intervals, and the points without bars indicate the baseline for a given value of an institutional quality. The interpretation of each estimate is relative to the baseline for that dimension.

To examine if authority and purpose matter, we need to decide on a baseline for each indicator. For all indicators except purpose, we use the lowest category as a baseline. That is, unlike in other experiments such as vignette experiments, there is no control group but a baseline. For example, for authority, we compare the effects of “some” and “extensive” power over member states to “limited” power. For the purpose, this logic is not applicable and we need another motivation. Here, we assume that there may be different understandings of social purpose among citizens, where ensuring peace and security arguably is one of the least contentious purposes of an IO. We thus use the protection of peace and security as a baseline.

The results clearly show that authority matters, thereby supporting H1a in both Germany and the US. Moving from an IO with limited power over its member states to one with extensive power over its member states decreases legitimacy beliefs by 0.221 in the US ($p < 0.000$, Figure 7.5) and 0.182 points in Germany ($p < 0.000$, Figure 7.6) on the 1–9 confidence scale. By contrast, moving from limited to some power does not have any effect on confidence. This finding suggests that respondents react to the formulation “extensive power” and not “some power.”
Communication about Authority and Purpose

Figure 7.5 Effects of institutional qualities in the US

Notes: Sample includes attentive respondents only. AMCEs with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Vignette descriptions shortened for the sake of presentation.

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Results

- Limited power
- Some power
- Extensive power

Social Purpose
- Ensure peace and security
- Reduce poverty
- Protect human rights
- Promote free trade
- Combat climate change
- Promote public health

Transparency
- Is confidential
- Is partially public
- Is public

Participation
- Only powerful countries have a say
- All countries have an equal say
- NGOs have a say
- Citizens have a say

Fair Outcome
- Benefit some countries more
- Benefit all countries equally

Problem-solving
- Solve few important problems
- Solve some important problems
- Solve most important problems

Figure 7.6 Effects of institutional qualities in Germany
Notes: Sample includes attentive respondents only. AMCEs with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Vignette descriptions shortened for the sake of presentation.
In addition, the results indicate that social purpose matters, thereby corroborating H2a in both countries. In the US (Figure 7.5), the purpose of combating climate change leads to a 0.309 point decrease on the confidence scale ($p < 0.000$). This is the strongest purpose effect on legitimacy beliefs when compared to the baseline of ensuring peace and security. We also find that moving from the baseline to the purpose of promoting free trade leads to a 0.177 point decrease ($p < 0.007$) – the second strongest effect.

In Germany, two effects are significant (Figure 7.6). The strongest effect is recorded for free trade. Moving from the baseline to the promotion of free trade represents a 0.401 point decrease on the confidence scale ($p < 0.000$). Similarly, moving from the baseline to the promotion of public health leads to a decrease of 0.267 points ($p < 0.000$). Taken together, these findings suggest similar results for Germany and the US in the sense that social purpose matters for legitimacy beliefs.

Communication of other institutional qualities also matters for legitimacy beliefs, further strengthening our confidence in the findings in Chapter 6. The effects are very similar in the two countries. We start with procedure-related qualities. In the case of transparency, moving from the baseline of a confidential organization to one that is public increases confidence by about 0.457 points ($p < 0.000$) in both the US and Germany. In the case of participation, moving from the baseline of an IO in which only powerful countries have a say to an IO in which citizens have a say increases confidence by an estimated 0.554 points in the US ($p < 0.000$) and 0.634 in Germany ($p < 0.000$). We then turn to performance-related qualities. In the case of fair outcomes, moving from the baseline of an IO that benefits some countries more than others to an IO that benefits all members equally raises confidence by 0.316 points ($p < 0.000$) in the US and 0.374 points ($p < 0.000$) in Germany. Finally, in the case of problem-solving, moving from the baseline of an IO that solves few important problems to an IO that solves the most important problems increases confidence by 0.293 points ($p < 0.000$) in the US and 0.393 points ($p < 0.000$) in Germany.

Can we expect information about the institutional design of IOs to lead to substantial shifts in confidence in the real world? We examine this by predicting levels of confidence for two hypothetical IOs (cf. Bechtel and Scheve 2013). By prediction, we mean the computation of levels of confidence for each of the hypothetical IOs based on 1,000 country-specific simulations using the results of respondents’
Results

certainty ratings (see King 2000, for a discussion of the methodology). The first IO is one that has unattractive characteristics based on our experimental results: Its purpose is to combat climate change in the US (and promote free trade in Germany), it has extensive power over member states, it solves few important problems, it yields benefits for specific countries at the expense of others, it provides only powerful states with a say, and it is confidential. The second IO has all the features of an attractive design based on our experimental results: Its mandate is to ensure peace and security, it has limited power over member states, it solves most important problems, it yields equal benefits for all countries, it provides citizens with a say, and it is public.

This additional analysis suggests that information on how IOs are designed, from the most unpopular design to the most popular, may lead to noteworthy shifts in legitimacy beliefs. In Germany, average confidence is predicted to be 4.2 for an IO with an unattractive design on the 1–9 confidence scale, but as much as 5.9 in the case of an IO with popular design features. Similar results are found in the US, where we predict an average confidence level of about 4.3 for the unattractive IO design and about 6 for the attractive IO design.

Finally, we are interested in whether the findings on authority and purpose depend on respondents’ level of political awareness, as theorized in Chapter 3. To this end, we examine differences in effect sizes for subgroups that differ in their level of education and knowledge about global governance, respectively. Looking at differences in AMCEs, we do not find any systematic moderating effects of either indicator on authority and purpose effects (Online Appendices S1 and S2).

Interaction Analysis

Next, we examine H1b and H2b, which predict that the effects of authority and purpose on legitimacy beliefs are moderated by people’s preexisting political beliefs. To test H1b, we focus on attitudes toward international cooperation as a potential moderating factor. To test H2b, we concentrate on partisan identification.

For this analysis, we use a different way of calculating and comparing treatment effects, since each subgroup will have a different average value on the baseline quality used to identify effect strength. We, therefore, complement AMCEs (used to infer differences in causal effects within subgroups) with marginal means (MMs) (used to infer
if subgroups differ in how they value specific institutional qualities) (Hainmueller et al. 2014; Leeper et al. 2020). MMs express the preferences of respondents for all institutional features; these quantities are column and row mean outcomes for each institutional feature level, averaging across all other features. We calculate differences between MMs to check whether observed differences between MMs of two subgroups are statistically significant with regard to a specific institutional feature. If they are, then that feature can be assumed to shape confidence more in a particular subgroup than in another. As suggested by Leeper et al. (2020), we use the discrete choice outcome variable to estimate AMCEs for each institutional feature separately and then compare those estimates to MMs to ascertain the sensitivity of the analysis (see Online Appendix S for detailed results).

Figure 7.7 shows the results for H1b in the US. We find that attitudes toward international cooperation, indeed, moderate the effects of authority on IO legitimacy beliefs. However, the effect is partly the opposite of what we theorized. The AMCEs suggest that Americans with positive or neutral attitudes toward international cooperation react with weaker confidence to information that IOs have extensive power compared to the baseline of limited power. This negative effect is not found among citizens with more nationalist attitudes. The MMs indicate that this negative effect on confidence is stronger among those people who are neutral toward international cooperation than among those who are with internationalist attitudes $(p < 0.023)$.

This result is puzzling in view of our expectation that people with more internationalist attitudes would be more tolerant of greater IO authority. However, the finding makes more sense if we consider that people with negative attitudes toward international cooperation generally are less receptive to information about IOs than people with positive attitudes, as we discovered in Chapter 5. Those people who are negatively predisposed appear to already have strong opinions that are less malleable. That said, the results also provide some evidence consistent with our original expectation, since people with neutral attitudes toward international cooperation appear to react more negatively to information about IOs having extensive power than people with positive attitudes.

Figure 7.8 shows the corresponding results for Germany, where we do not find that internationalist attitudes systematically condition the relationship between authority and confidence, which contradicts H1b. While we find a negative effect of an IO having extensive authority among those neutral toward international cooperation (as
Figure 7.7 Effects of authority in the US, by internationalism

Notes: Sample includes attentive respondents only. AMCEs and MM with their respective 95% confidence intervals. Weighted data. Answers to the question: “Do you think international cooperation is: a bad thing, a good thing, or neither good nor bad?” Dependent variable: Discrete choice between two organizations. See Online Appendix S3 for detailed results.
Figure 7.8 Effects of authority in Germany, by internationalism
Notes: Sample includes attentive respondents only. AMCEs and MMs with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Answers to the question: “Do you think international cooperation is: a bad thing, a good thing, or neither good nor bad?” Dependent variable: Discrete choice between two organizations. See Online Appendix S4 for detailed results.
in the US), differences in MMs among subgroups are not statistically significant, indicating that the three subgroups do not hold different preferences regarding the authority of IOs in Germany.

Next, we are interested in whether partisan identification moderates the effects of an IO’s social purpose on citizens’ confidence in this organization (H2b). The results for the US are in line with this hypothesis (Figure 7.9). The AMCEs indicate that Democrats respond with greater confidence when informed that an IO engages in poverty alleviation compared to the baseline of ensuring peace and security, and with weaker confidence when the IO promotes free trade. Republicans, on the one hand, respond negatively to information about IOs fighting poverty and climate change compared to the baseline. The differences in MMs between Democrats and Republicans are statistically significant (except in the area of public health), indicating that partisan identification systematically moderates the effects of different social purposes on IO confidence.

In Germany, we examine H2b across partisans of the historically two largest parties, the CDU/CSU and SPD, which are also featured in Chapter 5, to make the analysis more comparable to the one of the US. The results do not support H2b (Figure 7.10). The AMCEs show that the effects of social purpose on confidence are quite similar across all subgroups, largely reflecting the aggregate pattern in Figure 7.6. The exception is the group of partisans who are neither SPD nor CDU/CSU, which appear to be more easily affected by an IO’s social purpose. In this group, all purposes except poverty alleviation lead to lower IO confidence compared to the baseline purpose of ensuring peace and security. However, the MMs for each purpose are not statistically different from each other across subgroups, suggesting that different groups of partisans in Germany do not have different preferences regarding the social purposes of IOs.

Taken together, the evidence from the interaction analysis is mixed in that H1b and H2b are only supported in the US. We attribute this result partially to the level of polarization in public opinion and the political party landscape in the US. Against this backdrop, it is not so surprising that we do not find CDU and SPD partisans to react differently to information about the authority and purpose of IOs.

**Validity and Robustness Checks**

We perform several validity and robustness checks, which corroborate our findings about the effects of communicated authority and purpose
Figure 7.9 Effects of social purpose in the US, by partisanship

Notes: Sample includes attentive respondents only. AMCEs and MMs with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Answers to the question: “Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?” Dependent variable: Discrete choice between two organizations. See Online Appendix S5 for detailed results.
Figure 7.10 Effects of social purpose in Germany, by partisanship

Notes: Sample includes attentive respondents only. AMCEs and MMs with their respective 95 percent confidence intervals. Weighted data. Answers to the question: “Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?” Dependent variable: Discrete choice between two organizations. See Online Appendix S6 for detailed results.
on legitimacy beliefs (Figure 7.5). First, we conduct balance checks to assess whether the randomization produced well-balanced experimental groups (cf. Hainmueller et al. 2014), which indicate that the attributes are jointly balanced (Online Appendices T1–T2).

Second, we replicate the analyses using the alternative dependent variable indicating whether respondents chose organization 1 or 2. Respondents were asked to make this discrete choice right after they were presented with the different institutional qualities, as described earlier. Respondents tended to be consistent in indicating relatively high levels of confidence in the organization they chose, and lower levels of confidence in the organization they did not choose. Interestingly, in Germany, a larger number of social purpose cues have effects when examining organization choice than when examining confidence in an IO, potentially because it is an easier task to choose between two organizations than to rate confidence in both. The social purposes of human rights, free trade, climate change, and public health all make an organization less likely to be chosen compared to the baseline security IO (Online Appendix T1).

Third, we checked whether our results in Figures 7.5 and 7.6 are conditional upon other individual characteristics than those we hypothesized, such as confidence in government. For this purpose, we use responses to a question about a respondent’s confidence in the government on a scale from no confidence at all (0) to complete confidence (10). Results suggest that there are no differences in AMCEs at different levels of confidence in government, so we do not investigate this further through MMs (Online Appendix T2).

Fourth and finally, we run the analysis from Figure 7.5 by including both attentive and nonattentive respondents. Our attention check asked respondents the following question after they had completed about 70 percent of the survey: “We are interested in learning about your preferences on a variety of topics, including colors. To demonstrate that you’ve read this much, just go ahead and select both red and green among the alternatives below, no matter what your favorite color is. Yes, ignore the question below and select both of those options. What is your favorite color?” Correct answers were coded as one and incorrect answers as zero (Bechtel and Scheve 2013). About 66 percent of US respondents were attentive, while only 54 percent of German respondents were attentive. When we test the robustness of the experimental results using the full sample, which also includes the nonattentive respondents, results vary slightly. In the US, a free trade purpose does
not have the same negative effect when including nonattentive respondents as well; however, a climate change purpose continues to have a negative effect on confidence in IOs compared to the baseline security purpose. In Germany, the main results are robust, with the addition that also a human rights purpose has a negative effect of confidence on IOs compared to the baseline security purpose (Online Appendix T3).

Discussion

The analysis supports our expectation that communication about an IO’s authority and purpose impacts citizen legitimacy beliefs. First, the findings suggest that authority shapes legitimacy beliefs in the sense that IOs presented as having extensive power over member states are perceived as less legitimate than IOs with limited power over member states. This finding is robust in both Germany and the US, and consistent with previously untested expectations that authority breeds contestation and legitimacy deficits (Zürn et al. 2012; Zürn 2018). However, it is only in the US that authority has a weaker negative effect on legitimacy beliefs among citizens more in favor of international cooperation, as we expected. In this respect, our findings deviate somewhat from results in another recent study, which concludes that authority has a positive effect on legitimacy beliefs among more internationalist citizens and a negative effect among more nationalist citizens (Schlipphak et al. 2021).

Second, the evidence strongly suggests that information about an IO’s social purpose matters for legitimacy beliefs. This finding supports the supposition that an organization’s social purpose is important in and of itself – irrespective of other institutional qualities (Scott 1991; Barnett 1997; Lenz and Viola 2017). In both countries, free trade cues stand out as having particularly strong effects. In addition, in the US, presenting an IOs as involved in climate change decreases perceptions of IO legitimacy, while, in Germany, the same effect results when presenting an IO as involved in health. Political ideology conditions the effects of social purpose in predictable ways in the US, with Democrats being positively affected, and Republicans negatively affected, by a poverty alleviation purpose.

Third, these findings confirm the positive results from Chapter 6 about the impact of communication regarding the procedures and performances of IOs. This finding is also in line with a large literature on
legitimacy in domestic and global governance emphasizing the importance of procedure and performance (e.g., Tyler 2006; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Anderson et al. 2019; Esaiasson et al. 2019). Importantly, this chapter now establishes the effects of procedure and performance also when assessing them simultaneously with each other and with the effects of authority and purpose. The results demonstrate that people are more sensitive to information about an IO’s procedure and performance when forming legitimacy beliefs compared to information about its authority and purpose. While both procedure and performance have strong effects, procedure-related qualities appear particularly important in both countries.

Taken together, these results suggest that citizens care about the inherently political nature of IOs manifested in their power and purpose. When forming beliefs about the legitimacy of IOs, citizens do not only consider how IOs take decisions and whether those decisions are effective but also if IOs pursue social aims citizens agree with and whether the authority of these organizations clashes with state autonomy. Whether and to what extent the authority and purpose of IOs function as a boost or a drag on legitimacy depends on citizens’ political priors.

While our findings are reasonably similar across the two countries, there is also some variation in effects, which calls for interpretation. First, we observe that internationalist attitudes condition the negative effects of authority on legitimacy beliefs in the US but not in Germany. One explanation for the absence of a moderating effect of internationalist attitudes in Germany might be that citizens in this country already are accustomed to an IO with high levels of authority (the EU), which potentially could reduce the differences across subgroups.

Second, we observe that the specific purposes of IOs which matter for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs partly vary between the two countries. In order to understand this variation, we need to consider how these issues unite and divide citizens differently in the two countries. In this respect, the aggregate effects at the country level hide partisan dynamics that are quite different in the US and Germany. In the US, the purposes of IOs divide citizens along partisan lines: While climate change and poverty mandates have negative effects on legitimacy beliefs among Republicans compared to a baseline of ensuring peace and security, a poverty mandate has a positive effect, and a free trade purpose a negative effect among Democrats. In Germany, systematic partisan divisions are not found: CDU/CSU and SPD partisans respond
in very similar ways to communicate about purpose. We suspect that these differences reflect the varying degrees of partisan polarization in the US and Germany, as discussed in Chapter 5.

This combination of extensive similarities and some variations in effects underlines the importance of examining the effects of authority and purpose in a comparative setting. Our findings confirm that these effects are not specific to a single country but also suggest that country context may shape their exact nature. Future studies could fruitfully build on our study of the US and Germany to examine how IO authority and purpose matter in a broader sample of IOs and countries. Likewise, future research could usefully extend the range of social purposes examined to other issues salient in public debate, such as migration.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how communication about the authority and purpose of IOs affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward these organizations. While a growing literature has examined a variety of institutional qualities linked to the procedures and performances of IOs, this chapter is the first attempt to assess systematically the effects of an IO’s authority and purpose. Theoretically, we have developed arguments for why citizens should be sensitive to information about an IO’s authority and purpose, which in many ways are highly political aspects of IOs. Empirically, we have evaluated the effects of institutional features related to authority, purpose, procedure, and performance on legitimacy beliefs in Germany and the US, using a conjoint experimental design with hypothetical IOs.

The central findings are threefold. First, communication about an IO’s authority and purpose matters for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. When IOs are presented as having more authority over member states, this results in more negative assessments of their legitimacy. And when IOs are presented as serving some social purposes rather than others, this shapes how citizens perceive their legitimacy. Second, the strength of these effects depends on citizens’ political priors in the US (but not in Germany), in terms of their attitudes toward international cooperation and their partisanship. Third, information about procedure and performance remains very important as a source of legitimacy for IOs when the effects of all four institutional features are assessed simultaneously in a conjoint design.
These findings suggest two broader implications. First, they indicate that elites’ efforts to invoke the authority and purpose of IOs when communicating about these organizations are hitting home. When Boris Johnson calls on the UK to take back control from the EU, or when Guy Verhofstadt explains that the EU needs more power to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, they tap into concerns that people care about. Likewise, the way in which elites present the social purposes of IOs has predictable effects on people’s perceptions of these organizations. While, for sure, elites cannot stray too far from IOs’ actual authority and purpose, their communication can frame these features of IOs in ways that make people more or less positive toward them. Do IOs control member states or have the authority to tackle joint cross-border problems? Are IOs seeking to ensure peace and security or are they engaged in military interventions? Recent mobilization of public opinion against IOs by antiglobalist elites successfully exploits people’s concerns with these highly political features of IOs and the scope for communication to shape attitudes (De Vries et al. 2021).

Second, this chapter’s examination of authority and purpose exemplifies how research on politics in the global realm can take us into novel territory in scholarship on the sources of political legitimacy in general. Studies in comparative politics typically take the authority of governments as given and do not consider purpose, since governments by nature have general-purpose orientations. In contrast, task-specific orientations are more common in global governance (Lenz et al. 2015; Hooghe et al. 2019). With the exception of the UN and a number of regional IOs, which approximate general-purpose organizations, other IOs are specialized vehicles for the advancement of particular political goals. Consider the WTO (free trade), ILO (labor rights), IMF (financial stability), UNFCCC (climate sustainability), and UN Women (female empowerment). These organizations not only present arenas for dealing with the specific policy problems but usually also have these goals inscribed into their mandates and are known to actively “teach” these norms to state and nonstate audiences (Finnemore 1993). By exploiting variation that exists in the global realm, we can thus contribute novel knowledge about the importance of organizational purpose for legitimacy beliefs.
Elite contestation over IOs is a prominent feature of contemporary world politics. While historically firm supporters of international cooperation, elites are increasingly divided over IOs. And while international cooperation once was little politicized in the public realm, elites nowadays work intensely to win the hearts and minds of citizens for their cause, aided by new channels of communication.

The ambition of this book has been to better understand the consequences of this development, with a particular focus on the popular legitimacy of IOs. In an age of democratic governance, popular legitimacy is crucial for IOs to thrive and survive. In the book, we have sought to offer the first systematic assessment of whether, when, and why elite communication affects citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. We have explored this question in ways that bridge scholarship in cognitive psychology, comparative politics, and international relations. Our strategy has come in three parts. First, we have developed a novel theory, specifying why elite communication should influence citizen legitimacy beliefs and when those effects should be particularly strong. Second, we have offered a comprehensive empirical examination of the effects of elite communication in global governance, drawing on comparative evidence from multiple IOs and countries. Third, we have relied on experimental methods for causal inference, particularly well suited for establishing the effects of elite communication.

In this concluding chapter, our intentions are twofold. In the first part of the chapter, we summarize the findings of the book’s empirical analysis. In the second part of the chapter, we discuss the broader implications of the book’s findings.

**Summary of the Findings**

The central results of this book can be summarized in two points. First, elite communication affects the way citizens perceive the legitimacy of
IOs. When elites endorse or criticize IOs in public, citizens take notice and adjust their opinions. This ability to shape public opinion extends across both global and domestic elites. Moreover, it may be achieved by invoking a broad range of institutional qualities of IOs. Second, elites are more likely to shape citizen opinion toward IOs under some conditions than others. Key moderating factors in the communicative context pertain to elites, messages, and citizens. In the following, we elaborate on these key findings.

**Elite Communication Matters for Legitimacy Beliefs**

Our general expectation for why citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs would be receptive to elite communication was grounded in three assumptions: Citizens’ political awareness tends to be low, citizens therefore rely on heuristics to form political opinions, and reliance on heuristics makes citizens susceptible to elite influence. These assumptions are anchored in cognitive psychology and inform research on opinion formation in domestic politics. We saw no reason why they would not be equally applicable in the context of global governance. In fact, we suspected they might be even more relevant in this setting, as citizens tend to be even less aware of global politics than domestic politics.

The findings lend extensive support to our general expectation: Citizens rely on elite communication as a cognitive shortcut to opinions about IOs, and elites are thereby given an opportunity to shape how citizens evaluate IOs. Our analyses show this effect for a variety of elites and for messages invoking a broad range of institutional qualities of IOs. These findings tie in well with earlier observational research on public opinion toward the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Gabel and Scheve 2007; De Vries and Edwards 2009), but establish these effects with greater causal certainty and for a broader sample of IOs.

First, a multitude of elites affects how citizens conceive of IOs, from the domestic party elites that people usually turn to for guidance to the global elites that always compete for influence in world politics. We arrived at this result by first examining member governments, NGOs, and IOs as globally active elites, exploring their influence comparatively across five prominent global or regional IOs (EU, IMF, NAFTA, UN, and WTO) based on a vignette experiment with citizens in three countries (Germany, the UK, and the US) (Chapter 4).
All three types of elites are frequent communicators about the merits and demerits of IOs, and therefore the key focus of research on legitimation and delegitimation in global governance. Our analyses establish that these communicative acts by member governments, NGOs, and IOs, indeed, have effects on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs, albeit not to the same extent for all three actor categories, as we discuss further below.

We then turned to domestically oriented elites, examining the effects of cues from political parties based on two vignette experiments involving party communication regarding two IOs (NATO and UN) in two countries (Germany and the US) (Chapter 5). Political parties and candidates frequently communicate about IOs when debating political issues with an international dimension, but have traditionally received limited attention in global governance research. Our findings show that communication by political parties can effectively shape how citizens perceive the legitimacy of IOs, even if these effects are subject to variation.

Second, elites may choose from a large menu of salient institutional features in order to influence the legitimacy perceptions of citizens toward IO. We first established this finding for the procedures and performances of IOs, whose influence on legitimacy beliefs is debated in a large literature. We explored this issue comparatively across seven IOs in different issue areas (ASEAN, AU, EU, IMF, NAFTA, UNSC, and UNFCCC) based on a vignette experiment with citizens in four countries in diverse world regions (Germany, the Philippines, South Africa, and the US) (Chapter 6). Our analyses confirm that information about both types of qualities impact people’s legitimacy beliefs, contrary to a common expectation that public opinion toward IOs would be driven primarily by procedural (input) or performance (output) considerations.

We then extended this analysis by also considering the potential importance of an IO’s authority and purpose for its perceived legitimacy. Recent studies suggest that these two qualities may shape people’s opinions about IOs, but do not properly test these expectations. We examined this issue across hypothetical IOs and based on a conjoint experiment with citizens in two countries (Germany and the US) (Chapter 7). Our results show that both an IO’s authority and its social purpose matter for citizens as they form opinions about its legitimacy, even when considering its procedures and performance.
Yet, in terms of the strength of the effects, procedure and performance remain the more important qualities.

**Effects Are Conditioned by the Communicative Setting**

Next to its general expectation, our theory produced a set of conditional expectations about the circumstances under which elite communication should have particularly strong or weak effects on legitimacy beliefs. We argued that elite influence is likely to vary with conditions associated with three features of the communicative setting: the elite, the message, and the citizen. Specifically, we identified six moderating factors: elite credibility, elite polarization, tone of the message, object of the message, citizens’ political awareness, and citizens’ political beliefs. Our empirical analyses broadly support these expectations but also point to interesting exceptions. In the following, we discuss the findings on each factor individually, integrating evidence from across the four empirical chapters. Overall, our findings resonate well with observational research highlighting some of the same factors we emphasize (Hooghe and Marks 2005; Gabel and Scheve 2007; Bechtel et al. 2015), which further strengthens our confidence in these results.

We expected the credibility of elites to condition the impact of their communication on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. When elites are perceived to be more credible, they should be more likely to sway the opinions of citizens. In this respect, citizens are not mindless followers of elites, but selective in listening to those elites who enjoy the most credibility in their eyes. In the domestic context, in which issues usually are more ideologically polarized, we expected partisanship to be the central source of credibility for elites. In the global context, in which issues often are less polarized and elites less strongly linked to specific partisan positions, we expected credibility instead to be tied to perceptions of impartiality.

Our analyses offered evidence on elite credibility in the domestic context, when exploring the influence of party cues on partisans and independents in the US and Germany (Chapter 5). Specifically, we examined whether citizens are more receptive to party elites they sympathize with than to party elites they disagree with or do not identify with. Our findings offer support for this expectation, but not unreservedly. Party cue effects are primarily identified in the US setting and mainly concentrated on the Democrats. Yet, if we take citizens’
pretreatment opinions into consideration, then party cue effects are significantly stronger across the board for those citizens with more positive attitudes toward the IOs and issues in question. We will shortly return to the question of why party cue effects were stronger in the US than in Germany, when we consider elite polarization as a conditioning factor.

In addition, we evaluated the importance of elite credibility in the global context, when examining whether elites perceived as more impartial and unbiased are better positioned to shape citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs (Chapter 4). Specifically, we expected NGOs to be perceived as most credible, member governments as slightly less credible, and IOs themselves as least credible, resulting in corresponding patterns in influence. The findings are largely consistent with our expectations. Communication effects tend to be stronger for more credible elites – NGOs and member governments – than for less credible elites – IOs themselves. IOs are not found to be effective when communicating positive messages about themselves; however, when admitting to mistakes, their communication has a strong negative effect on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs, likely reflecting the greater credibility of this admission. Contrary to the pattern for domestic party elites, these globally oriented elites are more influential in Germany and the UK than in the US, indicating that country context shapes citizens’ relative susceptibility to communication by varying types of elites.

The second elite factor that we expected would have a conditioning effect was the polarization of elites. This expectation is rooted in research on party cueing, where polarization is seen to have two parts: the ideological distance between parties and the ideological homogeneity within each party. The expectation is that greater polarization in both respects leads to stronger party cue effects, since it makes it easier for partisans to identify and follow the party line.

We found significant support for this expectation when examining the influence of party elites in the US and Germany (Chapter 5). Overall, party elites are considerably more effective communicators in the more polarized US context compared to the less polarized German setting, confirming the importance of ideological distance between the parties. The polarization between Democrats and Republicans in the US two-party system greatly facilitates elite influence compared to the German multiparty system, where the two main contending parties – CDU/CSU and SPD – even have ruled together in a grand coalition

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since 2013. There is more mixed evidence that ideological homogeneity within parties matters for their effects on citizens’ legitimacy perceptions. When manipulating the information respondents received about the homogeneity within parties on the issues in question, we could establish a conditioning effect among Republican and CDU/CSU partisans, but not among Democratic and SPD partisans. Possibly, this mixed record reflects a stronger pretreatment expectation of intraparty homogeneity for the first two parties, especially the US Republicans, compared to the latter two parties, especially the US Democrats.

Turning to the communication as such, we expected the tone of the message to condition its impact on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. Building on research in comparative politics, economics, and psychology, we theorized that negative elite messages would have stronger effects on legitimacy perceptions than positive messages. This expectation recognizes that communication about IOs seldom is neutral, but charged with an evaluative tone, making it an act of legitimization or delegitimation. It is by praising or criticizing IOs that elites seek to influence the public perception of these organizations.

We found strong support for this expectation when evaluating tone as a conditioning factor (Chapter 4). The tone of a message matters for the likelihood that it catches people’s attention and influences their opinions of IOs. Negative messages are more effective than positive. This is true regardless of whether elites invoke the procedures or the performances of IOs in their communication. We also found this result to hold at the level of individual countries and IOs. Negative messages have a stronger effect on legitimacy beliefs in all three countries (Germany, UK, and US). In addition, negative messages have a stronger impact in the case of all IOs for which significant effects were identified (EU, IMF, UN, and WTO). When we disaggregated the analysis to specific IOs in specific countries, the results were more variegated, but broadly consistent with the overall pattern.

A second feature of the message that we expected would have a conditioning effect was the object of communication. Does the communication refer to IOs that have been subject to high levels of prior contestation and on which citizens already have hardened opinions, or to IOs that have been less publicly debated and on which people’s opinions are less crystallized? Drawing on research on attitude strength and motivated reasoning, we expected the level of prior contestation of an IO to condition the effectiveness of elite communication.
Summary of the Findings

This expectation offered a valuable way of interpreting variation across IOs observed in several analyses. Patterns in the effectiveness of elite communication closely fit the notion that citizens respond less strongly to messages about IOs that have been subject to more intense public debate in the past, leading people to develop stronger priors. We found that elite communication more often was effective in the context of the IMF, UN, and WTO, than in the context of the EU and NAFTA (Chapter 4). We observed this pattern regardless of whether we focused on the communicating elites, the features of IOs invoked in these messages, or the tone of the communication. While, for sure, the IMF, UN, and WTO do not fly beneath the radar of public attention, they have been far less intensely debated in recent years than the EU and NAFTA. European integration has been highly politicized in the member states for a long period of time – a pattern lately reinforced by populist mobilization against the EU and Britain’s choice to leave the organization. NAFTA, too, has been subject to extensive domestic contestation, especially in the US, which was a contributing factor behind its recent renegotiation and conversion into the USMCA. This interpretation also helped us to understand the variation in communication effects we observed in a comparison between the IMF, UNFCCC, and UNSC (Chapter 6). The analysis showed that citizens’ legitimacy beliefs were more easily swayed in the case of the IMF than in the case of the UNSC and especially the UNFCCC. This pattern well reflects people’s level of familiarity with these IOs and the salience of climate change in public debate in recent years.

As a third category, we theorized the moderating impact of factors associated with citizens themselves. To begin with, we expected citizens’ political awareness to shape their receptivity to elite communication. Specifically, the more politically aware citizens are, the more responsive they should be to elite cues about IOs. This expectation builds on an influential literature in political communication, theorizing that politically more sophisticated citizens are more likely to make use of heuristics as a shortcut to opinions. Integrating new information is aided by a preexisting level of political awareness that allows individuals to interpret and systematize this information.

We found only weak support for this expectation. Our analyses of communication by global elites (Chapter 4) and communication on procedure and performance (Chapter 6) offered no support for a conditioning effect of citizens’ political awareness, using two alternative
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indicators – discussion of politics and education. Similarly, our analysis of communication about authority and purpose (Chapter 7) found that neither political knowledge nor education affected citizens’ receptivity to information about these qualities of an IO. However, our analysis of communication by domestic elites (Chapter 5) established that knowledge about global governance strengthens the effects of party cues in the expected direction among Democratic partisans in the US, but not among Republican partisans in the US or among CDU/CSU or SPD partisans in Germany. Taken together, these results indicate that political awareness is not a decisive conditioning factor for citizens’ receptivity to elite communication. This may reflect a simultaneous occurrence of two forces pulling in different directions: on the one hand, less politically aware citizens demanding guidance from elites to a greater extent; on the other hand, more politically aware citizens being able to integrate information from elites to a greater extent.

Finally, we expected citizens’ political beliefs to matter in multiple ways for the impact of elite communication. This expectation goes hand in hand with the idea that political parties are important communicators on issues of global governance, shaping the opinions of partisans, as discussed earlier. Citizens should then be most receptive to elite communication when they are ideologically proximate to the elites issuing these messages. In addition, this expectation builds on the idea that citizens may interpret the same information about IOs in different ways, and with different consequences for legitimacy beliefs, depending on their preexisting political beliefs. In all, this expectation underlines the inherently political nature of elite communication and its effects on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs.

We found moderate support for this expectation. Our analysis of communication by domestic party elites (Chapter 5) showed that citizens’ partisan identity affects the impact of party cues on legitimacy beliefs. When supporters of the main political parties in the US and Germany were confronted with basic information on the parties’ positions on issues of global governance, their legitimacy beliefs toward IOs shifted in the expected direction. Yet statistically significant effects were mainly concentrated on Democratic partisans in the US. We also examined whether the strength of a citizen’s partisan identification mattered for the impact of party cues and found mixed evidence. For Democratic partisans, the strength of the identification had a positive impact.
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on their receptivity to party cues in the context of NATO. However, similar effects could not be established for the UN, for Republicans, or for partisans in Germany. This mixed record should be understood against the backdrop of varying degrees of political polarization in the US and Germany, not only among elites, as discussed earlier, but also among citizens. Supporters of the Democrats and Republicans were much more likely to hold different pretreatment opinions on global governance issues than supporters of the CDU/CSU and SPD. Moreover, US respondents were considerably more likely to recall the cued information on party positions than German respondents, pointing to the larger role of partisan identification in the US context.

Our analysis of communication on the social purposes of IOs (Chapter 7) presented clear evidence that citizens’ political beliefs matter in how they evaluate such information. In both the US and Germany, information on the social purposes of IOs yielded effects on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs, consistent with the idea that such purposes are politically interpreted by citizens. Compared to a baseline of ensuring peace and security, the social purposes of climate change and free trade had clear negative effects on IO legitimacy in the US. In Germany, similar negative effects were recorded for free trade and public health. To further evaluate this link, we also examined if these effects were conditioned by citizens’ level of political ideology and found evidence for this in the US but not in Germany. For Democrats, a purpose of poverty alleviation contributes positively to legitimacy beliefs, while a purpose of free trade promotion has a negative effect, compared to a baseline purpose of ensuring peace and security. For Republicans, both poverty and climate change mandates lead to less confidence in IOs. In Germany, the results were not contingent on partisan identification, likely reflecting a lower level of partisan polarization over international issues.

Taken together, our findings show that elite communication shapes citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Citizens are sensitive to communication by global as well as domestic elites, and to messages that invoke a variety of IO features, from the purpose and authority of these organizations to their procedures and performance. These effects tend to be particularly strong under certain conditions – when elites enjoy greater credibility and are more polarized, when messages are negative in tone and focus on IOs less contested in the past, and when citizens hold firmer political beliefs. Conversely, the impact of elite
communication tends to be weaker, or even nonexistent, when elites are less credible and polarized, messages are positive and focused on highly contested IOs, and citizens hold softer political beliefs. Citizens’ political awareness does not appear to matter systematically for the effectiveness of elite communication, contrary to well-established expectations in earlier research.

**Generalizability**

Our confidence in these findings is boosted by the reliance on experimental methods for causal inference, which have allowed us to by-pass problems of complex causality and omitted variables that typically afflict observational studies of elite influence. In addition, we have established these results through a comparative analysis that encompasses multiple and diverse IOs and countries. These strengths notwithstanding, we should recognize the limitations of our design and how they may be addressed in future research.

First, future research may benefit from evaluating our theory in other IO and country contexts as well. While broad in scope compared to most experimental designs, our study is still limited to a handful of IOs and countries, with an emphasis on relatively well-known organizations and advanced democracies. Our findings suggest that some conditions at the level of IOs (prior contestation) and countries (elite polarization) systematically shape how elite communication influences the legitimacy beliefs of citizens, but a broader sample may yield additional insights (Guisinger and Saunders 2017).

Second, future research may usefully extend the analysis to more complex communicative settings. While we examined a variety of elites and messages, our design focused exclusively on one-off effects of elite communication. This was an essential first step for this research agenda. Next steps could involve examining elite communication in contexts characterized by competing elite messages (Chong and Druckman 2007b; Ghassim 2022), simultaneous cues from social peers (Kertzer and Zeitoff 2017; Isani and Schlipphak 2020), longer time horizons (Druckman et al. 2010), and reciprocal effects between elites and publics (Steenbergen et al. 2007).

Third, we arrived at our results using survey-experimental methods. While these methods have advantages in terms of identifying causality, they raise the question of whether we should expect to
find the same effects outside the survey experimental setting. In this book, we have worked with a three-pronged strategy to address this concern: designing experiments in ways that mimick real-world conditions, relying on population-based samples, and discussing our findings in view of available observational evidence. In addition, we note that systematic comparisons between experimental results and real-world outcomes reveal a high level of external validity (Hainmueller et al. 2015). Going forward, we see extensive potential in combining observational and experimental methods in ways that are complementary and help to ensure both internal and external validity. On the observational side, big data on social media offer new opportunities to study communication effects. On the experimental side, survey experiments may be complemented by field experiments, which can be designed in ways that are very similar to real-world elite communication (cf. Broockman and Butler 2017; Nielson et al. 2019).

Broader Implications

What are the implications of these findings for the understanding of politics? We identify four areas for which our results carry particular consequences: legitimacy and legitimation in global governance, elite communication and public opinion, elite influence in a democratic perspective, and the backlash against international cooperation.

Legitimacy and Legitimation in Global Governance

Most obviously, our findings have implications for the understanding of legitimacy and legitimation in global governance. Recent years have seen an upsurge of interest in legitimacy, understood as audience beliefs about an IO’s exercise of authority, and in legitimation, understood as the process by which actors seek to influence such beliefs (for overviews, see Tallberg et al. 2018; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Our results support a perspective on legitimacy beliefs as formed in a social process of legitimation and delegitimation, where evaluative claims in the public realm shape individual attitudes. As such, our findings have consequences both for research on the sources of legitimacy for IOs and for scholarship on legitimation and delegitimation processes in global governance.
The literature on sources of legitimacy for IOs seeks to identify the principal drivers of such beliefs (e.g., Hurd 2007; Norris 2009; Johnson 2011; Voeten 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015, 2020; Schlipphak 2015; Scholte and Tallberg 2018; Anderson et al. 2019; Nielson et al. 2019; Tallberg and Zürn 2019; Bernauer et al. 2020; Dellmuth et al. 2022b). Earlier research has suggested that legitimacy beliefs are shaped by individual-level factors (such as cosmopolitan identity), organization-level factors (such as institutional procedures), and societal-level factors (such as a country’s prior experiences with an IO). Our findings show that elite communication constitutes a fourth, independent type of explanation for citizens’ legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Indeed, our design allowed us to establish that elite communication matters irrespective of other potential drivers of legitimacy beliefs. Legitimacy perceptions are not set, but continuously evolving, as citizens integrate arguments and information from trusted elites.

It may even be that elite communication as a process shapes other factors contributing to citizens’ legitimacy beliefs. Also accounts that emphasize institutional or societal factors are essentially information based (Mansfield and Mutz 2009, 432; Curtis et al. 2014, 721). Since citizens have few personal experiences of IOs, elite communication in news media and social media becomes the primary way by which they acquire information about an IO’s institutional qualities and a country’s experiences with an IO. In practice, then, institutional and societal factors may not affect legitimacy beliefs independently of elite communication, but as mediated through elite communication.

Our findings are of particular importance for the debate on institutional sources of legitimacy beliefs (Scharpf 1999; Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015; Scholte and Tallberg 2018; Anderson et al. 2019; Dellmuth et al. 2019; Bernauer et al. 2020). Our results suggest that citizens care equally about IOs’ procedures and performance when developing legitimacy perceptions. In addition, they demonstrate, for the first time, that citizens care about the authority and purpose of IOs. Theoretical accounts that privilege the one or the other institutional quality, therefore, appear misguided.

Establishing elite communication as a driver of legitimacy beliefs also has implications for the large literature on legitimation and delegitimation in global governance (e.g., Zaum 2013; Binder and Heupel 2015; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018; Zürn 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019; von Billerbeck 2020; Bexell et al. 2022).
While earlier research has made important advances in mapping and explaining the communicative practices that defenders and opponents of IOs use, studies of the effects of legitimation and delegitimation on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs are scant. This book offers such an analysis. Our findings confirm that discursive legitimation and delegitimation matter and identify the conditions under which such practices are particularly impactful. They suggest that the success of legitimation and delegitimation in changing opinions toward IOs varies systematically with features of the communicative situation – the elites, the messages, and the citizens. While a large variety of elites aim to influence public perceptions of IOs using a broad range of messages, some communication gets through to citizens more effectively than other communication.

Specifically, our findings suggest that legitimation and delegitimation by member governments and NGOs are more effective in shaping popular legitimacy beliefs than self-legitimation by IOs. A large part of the literature thus appears to focus on practices – IO self-legitimation – that ultimately carry less significance for the perceived legitimacy of these organizations. While these studies are still revealing in terms of how IOs choose to present themselves to the outside world, future research could devote more sustained attention to legitimation and delegitimation by more impactful actors. Notably, our research underlines the importance of member governments as key actors shaping the perceived legitimacy of IOs. Citizens tend to listen to their national government in debates over international cooperation, especially when they identify with the party in office. Similarly, NGOs wield influence over how citizens regard the legitimacy of IOs, irrespective of whether they criticize or praise these organizations. This result ties in well with earlier research on the framing power of NGOs in global governance (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Joachim 2003). Finally, our findings underline the importance of extending the study of legitimation and delegitimation of IOs to domestic partisan elites. Political parties communicate about IOs in ways that matter for popular legitimacy, especially in more polarized environments, but have so far been absent from the study of legitimation and delegitimation in international relations.

Elite Communication and Public Opinion

Our findings also have consequences for the understanding of elite communication in politics generally (e.g., Zaller 1992; Chong and
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Druckman 2007a; Gabel and Scheve 2007; Levendusky 2010; Bullock 2011; Druckman et al. 2013; Guisinger and Saunders 2017; Torcal et al. 2018). While research in American and comparative politics has spearheaded the analysis of elite influence, it remains focused on political parties and candidates as communicators in domestic political settings. Yet elites are not only national in orientation, and even domestic elites communicate about international politics as well. This book joins the few contributions that examine how elite communication operates under conditions of global governance. With the growing internationalization of politics, it becomes increasingly important for public opinion research to explore how political communication and opinion formation work in the global realm. By expanding the scope, our analysis yields novel insights for the general study of elite communication.

To start with, it shows that citizens form opinions on global politics in ways very similar to how they form opinions on domestic politics or other matters in their everyday lives. When confronting informational constraints, people rely on heuristics to make decisions. Just as previous analyses have confirmed the importance of elite communication in the domestic context, we have demonstrated how elite communication shapes people’s attitudes toward global politics. In addition, our analyses show that factors that are known to moderate the impact of elite communication in the domestic context also explain variation in these effects in the global setting – the role of partisanship as a source of elite credibility, the degree of polarization among elites, the tone of messages, and the strength of citizens’ partisan identification. The exception is citizens’ political awareness, which is a well-known moderating factor in the domestic context (Sniderman et al. 1991; Zaller 1992), but which did not systematically shape the impact of elite communication in our analyses.

Yet our findings also show that the specific political context of global governance matters for how elite communication influences public opinion. Two broad contextual differences merit particular attention: The elites and the issues debated.

The elites that engage in communication about global politics are broader than the partisan elites who dominate domestic politics. Understanding elite influence in the context of global governance, therefore, requires an appreciation of the breadth and diversity of these elites, as well as the specific conditions under which they operate. As we have
shown, elite credibility in the global context is not always down to partisanship. While partisanship is a central source of credibility for domestic political elites, other sources of credibility are at play for the range of elites active in the global setting. For member governments, NGOs, and IOs themselves, being perceived as an impartial source of accurate information is particularly important when seeking to influence people’s legitimacy beliefs. Tellingly, IOs appear incapable of shifting people’s opinions when communicating positively about their own operations and activities, reflecting their low credibility as sources of unbiased information about themselves. In contrast, IOs are a credible and influential source of information when communicating about other actors, such as states (Chapman 2009). Our findings tie in well with other recent research, which shows that epistemic communities may influence public support for international cooperation (Maliniak et al. 2021), underscoring how elite credibility in the global domain often is linked to other sources than partisanship. In all, examining elite communication across a broader range of elites than is conventional in this field allows us to identify novel conditions and dynamics shaping their influence.

In addition, the issues that elites communicate about in global politics have features that matter for the impact on public opinion. At a general level, the public tends to be less informed about international issues (Delli Karpini and Keeter 1996), tends to find international issues less politically salient (Aldrich et al. 2006), and tends to have more ambivalent attitudes on international issues (De Vries 2018), compared to domestic political issues. For all these reasons, public opinion on international issues should be particularly malleable by elites. Our findings support this expectation, showing how multiple types of elites can influence people’s legitimacy beliefs toward a broad range of IOs in a diverse set of countries. Global politics appears to present an unusually hospitable environment for elite influence. It occupies that soft spot where the public is aware of an issue and finds it reasonably important, but does not have sufficiently hardened attitudes to resist elite communication.

At the same, the issues that elites communicate about in global politics vary in ways that matter for the impact on public opinion (Guisinger and Saunders 2017). Our findings show that the level of prior contestation of an issue shapes the ease with which elites can sway citizen opinions. When issues have been more extensively contested in the past, citizens are more likely to have developed hardened attitudes on these issues, making elite influence less likely. These results underline
the importance of studying elite communication comparatively across issues. For instance, had we only focused on the EU, as in most existing studies, we would have underestimated the effects of elite communication about IOs. As Guisinger and Saunders (2017, 425) put it: “[T]he single-issue nature of most survey experiments masks systematic variation in how elite cues affect attitudes across international issues.” In all, global governance presents a context that is particularly conducive to exploring how the nature of issues affects the scope for elite influence.

**Elite Influence in a Democratic Perspective**

Our findings also raise an important normative issue: Is it good or bad from a democratic perspective that citizens’ evaluations of IOs are susceptible to elite communication? Should we celebrate or lament the fact that elites appear quite capable of shaping citizens’ perceptions of IO legitimacy?

As political authority increasingly has moved from the national to the international level, the conditions for democratic engagement by citizens have changed as well. Whereas, before, citizens needed to understand the basics of national politics in order to exercise their role as democratic subjects, they must nowadays also comprehend and develop opinions toward global politics. With the shift of power to political institutions beyond the nation-state comes new expectations on citizens. What is the role of elite communication in helping people navigate the new landscape of global politics?

It is well known that citizens experience competence constraints already in the domestic context (e.g., Converse 1964; Sniderman et al. 1991; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Kuklinski 2001; Achen and Bartels 2016; Lupia 2016). People tend to be relatively unaware and unknowledgeable about politics. And while there is variation in this respect, such differences only underscore the inequalities involved in citizens’ potential for democratic engagement. These challenges are likely compounded in the international context, since people tend to be even less aware and knowledgeable about global issues (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). Having the requisite competence and resources as a citizen to develop opinions and make political choices in global politics is demanding (Dingwerth 2014).

Elite communication has the potential of both frustrating and helping citizens as democratic subjects in global politics. According to the
pessimistic interpretation, elite communication exploits citizens’ informational deficits and manipulates their opinions. If citizens possess such limited information about politics that their opinions on policies, politicians, and institutions can be easily manipulated by elites, this is bad news for democratic politics. Then citizens have no genuine interests and beliefs, and public preferences no stability. In this view, reliance on elite communication may lead citizens to disregard the policy information they possess, to shy away from independently assessing the merits of different positions, and to arrive at positions that do not fully reflect their preferences. As Bullock (2011, 496) puts it: “[T]he greatest concern about elite influence on public opinion has been that it causes people to hold positions that they would not hold if they knew more facts.” In a larger perspective, substituting one’s own judgment with a mechanical adoption of elite positions, even those of political parties, may be to the detriment of democracy (Achen and Bartels 2016). This concern is rooted in theories of democracy that stress the importance of bottom-up processes of preference formation and representation (Pate-man 1970; Pitkin 1972).

The optimistic interpretation instead emphasizes communication from elites as part of a democratic learning process. Elite communication and contestation are natural and necessary components of the process through which individuals develop political attitudes. Most information about politics that citizens acquire originates with elites, and forming an opinion involves assessing, accepting, or rejecting competing messages communicated in the public realm. When elites systematically influence the choices that citizens make, this contributes to greater democratic effectiveness by aiding citizens in the “correct” political choices in view of their preferences (Kuklinski and Quirk 2001). As Sniderman and Bullock (2004, 346) explain in the context of party influence: “Citizens in representative democracies can coordinate their choices insofar as the choices themselves are coordinated by political parties.” This optimistic view is rooted in theories privileging elite competition as a normal component of democratic rule (Schumpeter 1947).

These drawbacks and benefits of elite communication are particularly salient in the context of global governance. Since citizens typically are less informed about global politics, they are not only more vulnerable to elite influence but also more likely to be aided by it. Moreover, since the public sphere is less developed in global politics,
it is more easily captured by determined elites but also in greater need of enrichment from political and societal elites.

Adjudicating whether elite influence on balance is positive or negative from a democratic perspective is difficult on both empirical and normative grounds. Yet only recognizing this issue presents us with a set of important questions for future research to explore. How is citizen competence on global issues distributed across groups in society? Do structural conditions allow for a multitude of elite voices to be heard on global issues? Are citizens exposed to competing elite messages or only messages from likeminded elites? Are there systematic biases in terms of how elite communication affects citizens? Some of these questions have recently become topical as we seek to understand the recent backlash against IOs.

The Backlash against International Cooperation

Finally, our findings have implications for how to understand the backlash against IOs. The past decade has witnessed growing resistance to IOs, expressed in a variety of ways. States have chosen to withdraw from IOs such as the EU, ICC, UNESCO, and WHO (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019; Voeten 2020). Voters in several countries have used popular referenda to challenge the terms of international agreements (Walter 2020). Populists with antiglobalization messages have been elected to government in, for instance, Brazil, India, the Philippines, and the US, and gained strong electoral support in a broad range of countries (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019; Hooghe et al. 2019).

A common explanation for this backlash refers to globalization’s effects on societies, which are seen to have caused public grievances with international cooperation. As globalization has deepened, spurred by the actions and policies of IOs, it has affected societies in ways that have led people to turn against international cooperation. Some studies emphasize the economic consequences of globalization, pointing to rising inequality and an ensuing division of society into winners and losers (e.g., Rodrik 2018). Other studies stress noneconomic consequences of globalization, such as cultural concerns, value shifts, and a rise in antiimmigration attitudes, as sources of growing discontent (e.g., Norris and Inglehart 2019). The emerging consensus is that both economic and noneconomic concerns contribute to the backlash against globalization (Walter 2021).
At the same time, there is little empirical support for a large-scale shift toward more negative public attitudes vis-à-vis IOs. As discussed in Chapter 2, public support for IOs appears to hold quite steady over time, even if there is variation across IOs and countries. The UN experienced a decline in average confidence until 2014, but has seen growing support since. The EU witnessed a decline in average trust during the Eurozone crisis, but has experienced a significant rise since 2013. Average support for the AU has declined slightly since 2009, but overall remained at a high level. Public support for Mercosur has been on a solid rise since 2002. Moreover, IOs still tend to enjoy greater support than national governments in most countries. These patterns echo findings in other studies which show that public opinion toward IOs is moderately supportive in general (Dellmuth et al. 2022b) and hardly on a clear downward trajectory over the past decade (Nguyen and Spilker 2019; Tallberg 2021; Walter 2021; however, see Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019). A recent comprehensive study of trends in more than thirty IOs concludes that there is no such thing as a general legitimacy crisis in global governance (Sommerer et al. 2022). Many IOs have not experienced any legitimacy crises over the past 35 years, and among those who have, the timing varies and appears largely dictated by contextual circumstances.

How can this paradox be explained? While we have witnessed a political backlash against IOs, involving actions by voters in elections and referenda, public opinion toward IOs has held quite steady. Our findings can help to shed light on this puzzle. They support the interpretation that the recent backlash against IOs reflects the success of political entrepreneurs in exploiting specific public grievances for political gain (De Vries and Hobolt 2020; Walter 2021). While IOs continue to enjoy reasonably broad public support across the membership, antiglobalization elites have been skilled in identifying and nurturing grievances in particular groups and countries. As De Vries et al. (2021, 314) put it: “Political entrepreneurs try to successfully ignite opinions that lay dormant or mobilize aspects of preexisting discontent that are most advantageous to politicize. In doing so, political entrepreneurs seek to gain electoral advantage from driving a wedge between mainstream elites and their supporters by mobilizing opposition to international cooperation.”

Communication is the method of persuasion for both antiglobalization elites and the elites who rush to the defense of international
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Our findings suggest why the advocates of global governance so far have come up short against its critics. To begin with, negative communication about IOs is considerably more common than positive communication (Chapter 2). While likely more numerous, the elites supportive of global governance are also more silent. In addition, negative communication about IOs is more effective than positive communication (Chapter 4). In particular, citizens are often not convinced by IOs’ own attempts to talk up their legitimacy. The elites of discontent thus appear to hold the upper hand, and there is a risk of a downward spiral in IO legitimacy as a result.

For advocates of global governance, eager to push back against anti-globalization elites, the lessons are threefold. First, they need to step up their efforts. The supporters of international cooperation have to be as energetic in their defense as the opponents are in their offensive. And there is no reason to wait until IOs are under attack to explain the benefits of international cooperation. Recent research shows that positive communication about IOs can help to neutralize the effects of negative communication (Ghassim 2022). Second, advocates of global governance need to work through the channels that are most credible in the eyes of citizens. Mobilizing civil society and national political elites to speak up on behalf of IOs is more effective than having these organizations trumpet their own credentials. Leaving the legitimacy of global governance to the public communication departments of IOs is a losing strategy. Instead, NGOs, national governments, and political parties need to shoulder their responsibility in countering antiglobalist narratives. Third, advocates of global governance should work to reform IOs in ways that yield greater legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. When IOs are perceived as more democratic, effective, and fair, they are also rewarded with greater legitimacy. While institutional reforms involve significant hurdles, steps to enhance transparency, participation, efficiency, problem-solving, impartiality, and fair distribution will not only improve the inherent qualities of global governance but also have positive knock-on effects on its popular legitimacy.
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