

## **Informal Intergovernmental Organizations (IIGOs)**

Felicity Vabulas, University of Chicago, fvabulas@uchicago.edu  
Duncan Snidal, University of Oxford, duncan.snidal@politics.ox.ac.uk

September 2011

*Draft paper prepared for submission to the PEIO Conference, Villanova University, January 22-28, 2012. We are submitting this paper for consideration for the special issue on Informal Governance in International Organizations that Randy Stone is organizing for the Review of International Organizations. Comments welcome! Feel free to cite but please do not quote.*

### ***Note to Organizing Committee:***

This paper is a polished draft but we plan to extend it further before the PEIO Villanova conference. The current version develops the concept of an informal intergovernmental organization (IIGO), provides an empirical map of how IIGOs fit in the spectrum of all international institutions (from the null institution of anarchy through highly formalized organizations). We then explain why states choose to create IIGOs rather than formal IGOs or other institutional arrangements. All of this discussion is implicitly in terms of a symmetric situation where states are all similarly situated. The last part of the paper (currently underdeveloped) investigates IIGOs in the context of heterogeneity – that is, where there are power differences among states. The key question is whether (and when) IIGOs favor the powerful and their impact on other states in the system. We address this by bringing together realist power arguments (e.g., Krasner, Gruber) with institutionalist efficiency arguments (Keohane, Koremenos et. al.) to demonstrate how the interaction plays out.

### ***Abstract:***

The recent renaissance in the theoretical analysis of intergovernmental organizations has focused on formal IGOs—legalized interstate arrangements coordinated through permanent secretariats with varying degrees of autonomy. But many intergovernmental organizations are informal in nature—they are subject to no formal treaty and/or have no permanent secretariat. Important examples include the various G-groups that are the locus of much high-level interaction among states. What does the broader set of informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGO) look like? How can they best be conceptualized in relation to the full spectrum of international institutions? Why would states choose to create and work through an IIGO rather than a formal IGO? We build on the analysis of soft law, informal agreements, and informal governance to understand why IIGOs are important in their own right and more than just stepping stones to formal organizations—although we are also interested in that possibility. IIGOs act as complements for formal IGOs when states face high uncertainty surrounding other states' preferences and the state of the world; IIGOs offer a low risk forum for creating focal point solutions that can be implemented through coordinated state action or through formal entities. IIGOs act as substitutes for formal IGOs when states need increased flexibility, speed, ambiguity or weaker enforcement. We locate IIGOs along the spectrum of intergovernmental arrangements with varying degrees of formality and we supplement this theoretical analysis with an empirical analysis that develops a comprehensive list of informal intergovernmental organizations.

## Informal Intergovernmental Organizations (IIGOs)

Felicity Vabulas and Duncan Snidal

### 1. Introduction

International relations scholarship has increasingly focused on the role of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)<sup>1</sup> in wide-ranging questions about interstate cooperation and conflict. Attention has been focused almost exclusively on *formal* IGOs (FIGOs)—official interstate arrangements legalized through a charter or international treaty and coordinated by a permanent secretariat, staff, or headquarters. However, FIGOs are just one point in a full range of international institutions. In particular, *informal* intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs)—which are at the “lower” end of the institutional spectrum—are also ubiquitous in international politics but they have not been subject to the same rigorous theoretical analysis as formal IGOs. To be sure, this lack of attention would hardly seem important if IIGOs remained on the periphery of world politics. But one could hardly argue that this is true. Various IIGOs such as the “G groups” are a case in point: international policymakers regularly use G-20 venues to discuss the world’s biggest financial challenges; G-8 summits are attended by the world’s most powerful heads of state and vehemently criticized by ardent protestors. Examples also abound where weaker states use IIGOs as forums in international politics—the BRIC nations, for example, have increasingly used their forum to negotiate with powerful states and IGOs, most recently when they proposed a rescue plan for the Eurozone liquidity crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Opinions vary widely on the influence of informal IGOs—for example, the G-8 has been denigrated as a “global hot-tub party” (Wood 1988), criticized as a “private club for the

---

<sup>1</sup> We use the terminology intergovernmental organization (IGO) and international organization (IO) interchangeably throughout the paper.

<sup>2</sup> <http://blogs.ft.com/beyond-brics/2011/09/13/that-brics-rescue-plan-in-full-sort-of/?catid=666&SID=google#axzz1Xz4xJpwx>

plutocracy” (Gill 1999; Helleiner 2000) and even hailed by others as a “modern democratic concert of leaders” (Kirton 1999; Bayne 2000)—but the attention that both powerful and weak states give these entities cannot be denied. Theories of formal IGOs therefore overlook the fact that states can choose from a wide spectrum of institutional forms that vary on their level of formality. We do recognize, however, that international relations scholars have extensively discussed the concept of informal *norms* (March and Olsen 1998, Tannenwald 1999), which exist on the opposite end of the spectrum of formal IGOs. *Informal* intergovernmental organizations are an important category of international organizations that fall between norms and formal IGOs on the spectrum of institutional forms and arguably shape international politics. They are stand-alone institutions that do not only comprise the informal governance mechanisms that states can employ within formal IGOs. International relations scholars have not spelled out why informal IGOs exist, when states would choose to use them instead of or in addition to formal entities, nor established a clear sense of their empirical range and variation.

This paper theorizes informal intergovernmental organizations and examines why states might choose to work through them. We first look at the phenomenon of informal organizations writ large. We then locate informal IGOs conceptually—not as part of a bifurcation of intergovernmental organizations into formal and informal entities— but as one point along a spectrum of institutional choices. We adopt the perspective that there is a (multidimensional) continuum of institutional forms – with informal and formal organizations occupying two points on that spectrum (but not endpoints). Our effort here is to develop a conceptualization of informal international organizations that provides additional clarity both in thinking about this important institutional form and about the broader institutional spectrum.

Next, we draw on existing literatures on soft law, informal agreements, and informal governance to explain the conditions under which states will use IIGOs as complements to FIGOs and when they will use them as substitutes. These arguments primarily investigate the situation when states in an IGO are relatively symmetric in terms of power. We also recognize that IIGOs have significant limitations—for example, the low level of institutionalization is not always compatible with the bureaucratic challenges that arise from complex issues. We therefore provide an overview of the full set of IIGOs that we have been able to identify. Our goal is to use our preliminary theory as a guide to charting this empirical topography even as we provide some evidence on our theoretical conjectures. We close by relaxing our initial assumptions about state symmetry and instead explore the choices that states make in asymmetrical situations. We highlight some of the issues concerning power and the choices that different states might make about institutional form depending on the international environment.

## 2. Informal Organizations

IIGOs fall under the more general concept of *informal organizations* which is not specific to international politics<sup>3</sup>. We use the word organization deliberately—rather than alternatives such as institution, arrangement, or group—in part to emphasize that organizations do not have to be formal to be useful to states or other actors. International organizations can be “Organizations” or “organizations”—a spectrum of types exists—but the IR literature has come to think of IGOs only as formal entities (large O Organizations). Ironically, this was a reaction

---

<sup>3</sup> Helmke and Levitsky (2004) highlight a dearth in comparative institutional research on informal institutions that is similar to the shortage of analysis that we see in IR literature on informal intergovernmental organizations. Helmke and Levitsky define informal institutions as “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels.” For Helmke and Levitsky’s comparative focus, informal institutions can range from things like bureaucratic and legislative norms to such practices as clientelism and patrimonialism. On the other hand, they distinguish informal organizations by a focus on the players; at the comparative level this includes such notions as clans and mafias. Our research is compatible and we furthermore focus our attention on the intergovernmental rather than comparative level.

to the “regimes” literature (Krasner 1982) which usefully broadened the understanding of international organizations by moving away from an exclusive emphasis on formal organizations viewed as traditional forms of centralized governance. In doing however, we lost sight of formal organizations (Rochester 1986, Abbott and Snidal 1998). The IR field corrected this by developing a new understanding of how formal organizations can be effective through relatively weak means such as reducing transactions costs, supplying focal points, and changing information. The move back to focusing on formal IGOs, however, has not been accompanied by a careful theorization of how informal IGOs coexist and operate with FIGOs

Informal organizations exist in familiar settings, outside of international politics. Consider a neighborhood club as a familiar example of an informal organization at the local level: several people decide to come together on a regular basis to share information or discuss whether they should engage in joint action—but they may not need or want to formalize their relationship.<sup>4</sup> There exists a wide variety of motivations for local clubs: for example, forming parent-teacher relations, coordinating subdivision activities, or organizing sports. Clubs remain casual, but the group remains united around a common set of norms and beliefs about who will get together and what they will try to accomplish. Informal clubs can also entail rules that guide behavior and, more importantly, at least implicit rules about making rules.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> We find the concept of a club useful both because it allows us to provide analogous examples at the local level and also because of the foundational theory of club goods. Club theory can help us understand why small groups of states might sometimes choose to be exclusive in their interaction: club goods have a cost curve that must decline toward zero as more members join and contribute, but also a benefit curve that rises initially with new members but ultimately declines as they overwhelm the organization’s facilities. International organizations whose membership is selective or non-universal exhibit club qualities. Buchanan’s (1965) seminal analysis of clubs, however, does not help us understand why states sometimes keep club relations *informal* and other times they *formalize* ties.

<sup>5</sup> This concept is similar to HLA Hart's secondary rules of law.

<sup>6</sup> We emphasize that the group as *an entity or organization* is not legally bound, but this does not mean that the group cannot form stand-alone or one-off legally binding agreements. For example, the set of members that make up the group may agree to a legal treaty for which the members act as “contracting parties”. When changes need to be made to such arrangements, all contracting parties must renegotiate rather than referencing some legal framework within the organization that might provide structure to incremental changes.

Informal organizations sometimes become more formal over time—when participants become hard to organize or if the group needs central coordination of rules. The (British) Football Association (FA) of 1863 is an excellent example.<sup>7</sup> For centuries, there were no universally accepted rules for playing football—instead, local conditions and communities defined rules for school games. However, when schoolboys graduated to University, games were chaotic with no unified set of rules. Thirteen London football clubs therefore came together in 1862 to agree to a common set of rules. Although agreeing on a common set of rules could presumably be accomplished in a single or small number of meetings (and such a set of rules were codified by 1863), the London Association and the Sheffield Football Association continued to wrangle after these meetings. It meant that a more formal body, the FA, had to be created to put an end to the arguments (and the need was further heightened with the introduction of the Football Association Cup in 1871 and a sudden boom in spectators). Since 1863, the FA has met to manage the explosion of the game and incrementally adjust the rules over time. It became a Limited Company in 1903, joined FIFA after the Second World War, and has greatly added to its activities over the years.

This example shows that informal organizations might be stepping stones to more formalized entities. But there is nothing teleological about our argument. Informal organizations are also important in their own right and not just as a “phase” in the development of formal organizations. Indeed, attempts to formalize may only undermine the effectiveness of the informal arrangements (and thus should never be attempted). Alternatively, some actors may use informal organizations as a means to block the formation of more formal organizations that

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.thefa.com/>

would produce outcomes they do not desire. Thus some informal organizations will remain just that for their entire life span.

### 3. What is an Informal *Intergovernmental* Organization?

With the notion of a local club motivating our understanding of informal organizations writ large, we now narrow our focus towards a more precise definition of informal intergovernmental organizations. To do so, we distinguish them from what IR scholars generally mean by an IGO which is a *formal intergovernmental organization (FIGO)* defined as (Pevehouse et al 2004):

1. a **formal entity** (formed by an internationally recognized treaty)
2. with **three or more states as members**<sup>8</sup> and
3. a **permanent secretariat** or other significant institutionalization such as a headquarters and/or permanent staff

Pevehouse et al's tight nomenclature provides focused attention to the characteristics and patterns of formal intergovernmental entities and defines the set of FIGOs within the Correlates of War (COW) International Organizations dataset.<sup>9</sup> We develop in parallel with COW to draw on its strengths but also to make comparison possible. We emphasize that there are a number of significant IGOs that fall outside this tight definition of formal IGOs.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> For purposes of defining an Intergovernmental Organization, the Correlates of War (COW) dataset looks at entities between three or more states, meaning that bilateral organizations fall out. But they offer no clear theoretical distinction between bilateral and multilateral organizations and so we include both here..

<sup>9</sup> The Yearbook of International Organizations dataset created by the non-profit Union of International Associations is often also used by scholars when they list a universe of IGOs. This dataset, while more inclusive than the COW, should be used with caution because the data relies primarily on self-submissions of questionnaires by IGOs, and lacks some of the scholarly fact-checking and theoretical rigor of COW.

<sup>10</sup> The COW dataset does not include emanations—an increasingly important of international organizations whose creators are international organizations, not states (Shanks et al, 1996, Johnson 2010). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) are two familiar

Our definition of IIGOs is linked to the general idea of informal organizations presented above and also parallels the definition of a FIGO. IIGOs are defined as

1. a **shared expectation**—rather than a binding agreement—about purpose
2. among a **group of states**
3. participating in **regularized meetings** with **no independent secretariat** or other significant institutionalization such as a headquarters and/or permanent staff.

Because the two differentiating characteristics (1. the organizing principle and 3. the degree of organizational structure) between FIGOs and IIGOs are fairly continuous, there is in fact no bright line between FIGOs and IIGOs; our purpose is to develop a *spectrum* of international organizations and highlight IIGOs within this multidimensional spectrum to make these differences clear. Table 1 summarizes the key differences which we then elaborate below.

	<b>FIGO</b>	<b>IIGO</b>
	<b>Formal IGO (COW)</b>	<b>Informal IGO</b>
<b>Organizing Principle</b>	Formal treaty	Shared expectations about purpose
<b>Membership</b>	3 or more member states	Group of member states <sup>11</sup>
<b>Interaction</b> <b>Organizational Structure</b>	Regularized Meetings Independent Secretariat	Regularized Meetings No Independent Secretariat

**Table 1: Formal and Informal IGO Ideal Types**

---

examples. Emanations fall out of the conventional definition of an IGO but are theoretically different from informal intergovernmental organizations although some emanations could be IIGOs.

<sup>11</sup> COW limits the definition of FIGOs to entities between 3 or more states, arguing that bilateral IGOs are theoretically different than multilateral IGOs. We argue that bilateral IIGOs need not be theoretically different than multilateral IIGOs – or that any difference should itself be theorized -- and therefore include them in our set of feasible alternatives to formal IGOs.



We treat IIGO's as a theoretical construct or "ideal" type. Many informal organizations are less institutionalized (e.g., they have imperfectly defined expectations or membership) while others are more institutionalized (e.g., they have a rudimentary secretariat) than an IIGO while still not meeting the criteria of a FIGO. Our point is to use the ideal type to explore the variation in levels of formalization (as compared to the ideal type of FIGOs) and to better understand why less formal organizations are sometimes used by states. The G8 is a good example, for instance, of an IIGO that falls at the most institutionalized end of the IIGO category, without meeting the criteria of a FIGO: summit meetings comprise well-choreographed routines including photo opportunities and press releases, and Sherpa's follow rigorous norms in their coordination amongst parties. Still, no legal agreement dictates procedures nor binds member states to decisions made during organizational interactions.

**1. Shared expectations about purpose:** Members of an IIGO share an expectation about the purpose of coming together. They do not need to have an explicit agreement; an understanding, even if not made explicit, would suffice to form a shared expectation about purpose. Of course expectations may be made explicit, as in a diplomatic communiqué, but this shared expectation about the purpose of the organization is not created by or codified in international law.<sup>12</sup> For example, the Basel Committee, an IIGO, "does not possess any formal supranational supervisory authority, and its conclusions do not, and were never intended to, have legal force. Rather, it formulates broad supervisory standards and guidelines and recommends statements of best practice in the expectation that individual authorities will take steps to

---

<sup>12</sup> We emphasize that the group as *an entity or organization* is not legally bound, but this does not mean that the group cannot form stand-alone or one-off legally binding agreements. For example, the set of members that make up the group may agree to a legal treaty for which the members act as "contracting parties". When changes need to be made to such arrangements, all contracting parties must renegotiate rather than referencing some legal framework within the organization that might provide structure to incremental changes.

implement them through detailed arrangements - statutory or otherwise - which are best suited to their own national systems.”<sup>13,14</sup> Importantly, member states share a common goal for collective action, although they might be motivated to participate in the group based on divergent interests. In the Basel Committee, for example, member states share an overall desire to cooperate on banking supervision, but individual states have different interests in this overall purpose: Saudi Arabia’s interests are likely focused on advancing the perspectives of oil exporters, while Switzerland’s interests focus on the large amount of international banking conducted within its borders.

**2. Group of member states:** IIGOs are by definition *intergovernmental and so the key members of IIGOs are states.*<sup>15</sup> This does not preclude the inclusion of some nonstate members—such as other IGOs or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as observers—but it does mean that states must play the predominant role.<sup>16 17</sup> IIGOs can have a range of formality in membership – some IIGOs might have tight requirements including criteria for becoming a member of the organization whereas other IIGOs might have expansive or loose membership

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bis.org/bcbs/> However, the Basel Committee (BC) does not fit the IIGO ideal type perfectly since it now has a permanent secretariat and performs some operational activities such as research. However it’s most important function remains its role as a forum for members and managing meetings among them. The BC has also evolved over time and moved from the IIGO ideal type in the FIGO direction (e.g., when it adopted a permanent location at Basel in 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Pauwelyn’s (2010) work on *informal international public policy making* is directly on point here. He notes that international cooperation may be informal in the sense that it occurs in a loosely organized network or forum rather than a traditional international organization (IO) but that this forum informality does not prevent the existence of detailed *practice* (procedural rules, meetings, staff and headquarter operations.)

<sup>15</sup> Of course, there are informal international organizations (rather than intergovernmental) whose membership is not dominated by states. For example, IFISO—the Informal Forum of International Student Organisations—is an informal forum for NGOs. The IFISO network consists of a multi-disciplinary mix of 27 international student-run organizations. It is informal in that it has no by-laws, no obligations, no fees, and no official spokespersons or officers. <http://ifiso.org/>. Businesses may also create informal international groupings, although they may be deterred by concerns about competition laws.

<sup>16</sup> Many IGOs, both formal and informal, create observer statuses for non-state actors such as NGOs, firms, and other IGOs. We do not exclude IGOs with non-state observers from our analysis.

<sup>17</sup> Abbott and Snidal (2009) emphasize the emergence of transnational new-governance, which shows a heightened level of public-private partnerships, in their Governance Triangle. We note that informal public-private international organizations are also important but focus on intergovernmental relationships here.

criteria.<sup>18</sup> Membership of some IIGOs might be defined by geographical region whereas other IIGOs might be defined by substantive area. The Paris Club is an example of an IIGO with permanent members focused on a substantive area. It is an informal group of official creditors who help debtor countries with payment difficulties by rescheduling or reducing debt service obligations.<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> The Alliance of Small Island Nations (AOSIN) is an IIGO whose members come together primarily for geographic reasons. Members are low-lying coast and small island countries whose try to consolidate their voices to address global warming issues.

**3. Regularized meetings but no Independent Secretariat:** Member states of IIGOs conduct regularized meetings—relatively informal get-togethers for the purpose of discussing common concerns, sharing information, building consensus, and the possibility of agreeing on some form of joint action. This joint action could be a policy outcome such as agreeing to act in concert on a specific issue, agreeing on an informal rule to guide future conduct, or deciding that no joint action is currently necessary.<sup>21</sup> IIGO meetings are distinguished from other interactions that are not political in nature as well as from FIGO meetings that are more institutionalized through a permanent Secretariat. Most FIGO meetings also include ongoing sessions at the Secretariat between annual meetings—they are much “denser” than the annual meetings of

---

<sup>18</sup> While membership criteria in IIGOs can be expansive or loose, we emphasize that IIGOs are defined by the concept of members. *Conference series between states* (e.g. the Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Human Development and the Conference on Disarmament) therefore do not qualify as IIGOs. While a large purpose of these conferences is to allow a broader set of interlocutors—such as civil society organizations—to partake in discussions of global concern, attendees are not considered members of an organization but rather are invited guests to a discussion. Conferences might later become IIGOs as they gain an informal *organizational* structure.

<sup>19</sup> The Paris Club has 19 permanent members including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the U.S.A

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.clubdeparis.org/>

<sup>21</sup> Meetings may not always reach agreement or make a decision but that is one of the prime purposes of them. For example, consider a monetary conference where the goal is to ask whether some macroeconomic policy needs to be adopted or changed. The group members may decide not to change anything.

IIGOs. Some IIGOs will meet at alternating locations determined by a rotating Chairman but because of their informal nature, IIGOs will not have permanent, independent Secretariats.<sup>22</sup>

“Regularized” does not imply that meetings must occur on a fixed schedule; regularized meetings might mean sessions whose timing is driven by demand. The point is that the group expects to interact on the particular subject in the future—it is not a one-off occurrence. For example, the Nuclear Suppliers Group seeks to contribute to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons through the implementation of Guidelines for nuclear exports and nuclear related exports. The 46 member states meet annually in a plenary session but also more frequently in intercessional meetings at the Consultative Group and Information Exchange Meeting levels depending on specific needs.<sup>23</sup> IIGO member states can indeed create formal rules, but as they do so, they move along the spectrum closer to formal entities. IIGOs as ideal types are far more likely to create informal rules. Importantly, FIGOs can create both informal and formal rules.

Meetings are important to both IIGOs and FIGOs, but one of the central purposes of some IIGOs is to sponsor “summit meetings” attended by heads of government or state (HOGS) (whereas the bulk of FIGO meetings includes lower level technical meetings). Recurring IIGO summit meetings between high-level officials can be instrumental in improving communication between member states (Dunn 1996, Haftel 2011.) IIGO summits can provide HOGS an opportunity to discuss outstanding issues informally and to offer and extract promises of cooperation. These face-to-face high level meetings might in turn widen the bargaining range and improve the prospects of compromise exactly because they are not tied down in overly formal procedures or protocols. Recurrent face-to-face meetings can also help establish longer

---

<sup>22</sup> When states decide to have a permanent Secretariat or a rotating host (e.g., as we see with the G8 Secretariat), they face tradeoffs. On the one hand, states can gain from a rotating Secretariat due to less sovereignty costs and lower principal-agent concerns. On the other hand, states can lose the perks that an independent Secretariat can provide—rotating hosts often demand more discretion in determining the agenda for their meeting, for example.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nuclearsuppliersgroup.org/Leng/default.htm>

term equilibriums because they can foster inter-personal familiarity, trust, and mutual confidence which might be particularly important in subsequent crisis situations or unchartered issue areas.

IIGOs might have no centralized secretariat or they might rely on a minimal secretariat, but one that does not operate independently. In fact, one way for states to ensure that a secretariat does not have independence is to make sure that secretariats are not given permanence; it is impossible for the secretariat to operate autonomously if it has not been delegated minimal authority (Haftel and Thompson 2006). For example, several IIGOs lean on the institutional structure of other IGOs to form the organizational backbone for their entity. The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), for example, uses the UN offices of the Chairman's mission at that particular point in time. Of course, the independence of IGO secretariats varies. All IGO secretariats have a limited form of independence, for example to make small budgetary decisions or call meetings. At the higher end of independence, the secretariats of some FIGOs have significant independence as autonomous, permanent bodies. But the FIGO is very much an ideal type — few secretariats have true independence and states typically retain an element of control.

We emphasize that IIGOs and FIGOs are conceptual points on a multidimensional institutional spectrum. Actual intergovernmental institutions range between and beyond these ideal types that we have provided. The IIGO-FIGO spectrum varies across multiple dimensions (e.g., the extent of bureaucratization; the importance of decisions made), so we are cautious to create a sharp order amongst them.

#### 4. How Informal Intergovernmental Organizations Relate to Other Institutional Concepts

We are explicitly focusing on IIGOs because they have been overlooked in IR scholarship due to the focus on formal IGOs. However, we emphasize that IIGOs are not simply a residual category but are one point on a spectrum that includes institutions both above (e.g. FIGOs) and below (e.g. norms) in terms of their level of formal institutionalization. While seeking to explore a more inclusive definition of IGOs, we simultaneously put a lower bound on what we mean by IIGOs to avoid the potential for any and all diplomatic meetings to be included in what we term an IIGO. We illustrate several concepts below that are closely related to the concept of IIGOs.

**Regimes:** *Informal intergovernmental organization* is not simply a new label for *regime*<sup>24</sup>. The literature on international regimes was a major advance in IR scholarship because it focused attention on institutions without being constrained by the emphasis on formal centralized organizations that aimed for “government” at the international level. But the literature on regimes also served to frustrate the IR field because the generality of the concept meant that almost all entities in international politics could be considered regimes. The IR field responded by more closely focusing on the crisp concept of formal organizations. We seek not to return to the language of regimes but to broaden the investigation of IGOs to also include the theoretical concept of informal IGOs.

**Customary International Law:** IIGOs can be usefully distinguished from *customary international law (CIL)* which “...consists of rules of law derived from the consistent conduct of

---

<sup>24</sup> The standard definition of regime is in Krasner (1982): a set of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations.

States acting out of the belief that the law required them to act that way” (Rosenne 1970).<sup>25</sup> CIL is indicated by consensus among states and shown through widespread conduct and a discernible sense of obligation. The key difference between CIL and IIGOs is that while rules of behavior have been generalized to all states in CIL, this shared belief has not been operationalized into an *organization* that shares information or oversees the rules in some sense. CIL has no sense of club membership or regularized meetings between states.

**Soft Law:** The emphasis on *organization*—which differentiates IIGOs from customary international law—is also important in understanding how IIGOs relate to soft law (Abbott et al, 2000). Abbott et al delineate a range of hard to soft international legalization which is based on three characteristics: obligation, precision, and delegation. IIGOs do not neatly fall into one of Abbott et al’s eight categories which comprise high and low levels of these characteristics. IIGOs fall toward the bottom of the soft law spectrum (where obligation is low, precision is low, and delegation is low to moderate) because they aren’t legalized. But IIGOs entail some organization, which is why delegation is considered moderate, though it importantly remains informal. We therefore see IIGOs as corresponding to some forms of soft international law that have heretofore been paid scant attention. All IIGOs are based on soft law, but not all soft law is IIGOs. For example, Agenda 21, the Forest Principles, and other hortatory instruments adopted at the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development are precise agreements, but not legally binding (they are soft law) but there is no sense of an organization attached to these instruments.

**Transgovernmental Networks:** IIGOs share many similarities with Slaughter’s (2004) notion of transgovernmental networks. Transgovernmental networks are defined as “networks of

---

<sup>25</sup> Rosenne notes that CIL is recognized by the following: widespread repetition by States of similar international acts over time (state practice); acts must occur out of sense of obligation (opinion juris); acts must be taken by a significant number of states and not be rejected by a significant number of states.

officials—police investigators, financial regulators, even judges and legislators—who exchange information with their international counterparts and coordinate activity to address common problems on a global scale”. Slaughter highlights the increased scope and substance of these networks. Importantly, her concept can include sub-national connections whereas IIGOs are strictly statist by definition (interactions occur at the ministerial or executive level). IIGOs are similar to transgovernmental networks in that they are not formed by international treaty and their functions are compatible: “government networks can offer a flexible and relatively fast way to conduct the business of global governance, coordinating and even harmonizing national government action” (p. 11). IIGOs therefore share many of the same institutional examples as Slaughter, but the terms are not interchangeable. Of Slaughter’s state-level examples, IIGOs are a subset. Our point is to further conceptualize and define some of the concepts that Slaughter hints at. Furthermore, Slaughter’s scholarship is normative: she argues that transgovernmental networks provide a vision of good governance. We argue instead that IIGOs (or transgovernmental networks) are not better or worse than FIGOs but that states will choose different levels of formality based on a given situation.

**Informal governance:** IIGOs are stand-alone institutions and can therefore be different from the informal mechanisms that states use to operate more effectively *within* FIGOs. An emerging literature on *informal governance* focuses on the informal mechanisms, procedures, and spheres of activities that exist *within* FIGOs.<sup>26 27</sup> This literature recognizes that the policy

---

<sup>26</sup> See Randall Stone, 2011, *Controlling Institutions: International Organizations and the Global Economy*. See also working papers by Terrence Chapman, Songying Fang, and Randall Stone, “The Conditional Nature of the IMF Catalytic Effect”; Mareike Kleine “Making Cooperation Work Informal rules and flexibility in the European Union”; and Johannes Urpelainen “Unilateral Influence on International Bureaucrats: An International Delegation Problem”. All papers were presented at the University of Rochester Conference on Informal Governance in International Organizations in April 2011.

<sup>27</sup> This topic was covered in depth at an international workshop, “The Anatomy of Informal Governance: International Institutions, Power, Legitimacy, and Inequality.” Nuffield College, Oxford, 14-15 September, 2007. <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/minisite/prantl/page1.html>



outcomes of IGOs are more than a summation of formal voting criteria or detailed meeting rules but depend also on informal properties or modes of governance that can be used as alternatives in formal IGOs.<sup>28</sup> Stone (2009, 2011), for example, uses the IMF as a case study to show that states can adopt informal governance structures in international organizations—such as exercising exit options or pressing the IGO to make exceptions to strict rules—to accommodate their interests. In related work on informal governance, Hawes (2004) points out that states use informal governance structures within FIGOs such as re-contracting, withdrawing, acquiescing, or log-rolling to balance formal governance structures. Stone and Hawes do not recognize that informal governance does not just happen within existing FIGOs, but that states can also form stand-alone informal organizations.

**IIGOs within FIGOs:** Ad hoc committees,<sup>29</sup> working groups, and informal groups within IGOs can be classified as IIGOs within FIGOs.<sup>30</sup> IIGOs within FIGOs are different than the preceding category of informal governance because the level of organization is higher (group membership is clear, meetings might occur regularly, etc.) but these IIGOs within FIGOs are still not legalized. IR scholars argue that these IIGOs within FIGOs have proliferated as a mechanism to handle emerging challenges as intergovernmental organizations grow in size and

---

<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-061-23-0126/outputs/Outputs/Download/12021fd4-4d35-42c2-86d5-8c4466522bec>

<sup>28</sup> This research mirrors research in American Politics which extended congressional studies beyond analyses of roll-call votes.

<sup>29</sup> For example, ad hoc committees exist at the UN to eliminate international terrorism (<http://www.un.org/law/terrorism/index.html>), for the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/adhoccom.htm>), and on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission (<http://untreaty.un.org/cod/criminalaccountability/index.html>) to name just a few.

<sup>30</sup> We also note that *international acronyms* (such as the PIGS acronym referring to Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain) are do not constitute IIGOs when they are not organized in any substantive and, for example, do not meet together in any regularized fashion. We do note, however, that sometimes acronyms end up becoming more than shortcut phrases used by pundits. Acronyms based on shared likeness between countries may generate focal points that facilitate actual informal groupings, moving the group from a tacit to an explicit but not formal organization. For example, the acronym BRIC—which refers to the four largest developing nations, Brazil, Russia, India and China—began as an analysis grouping at Goldman Sachs, but their heads of state have met regularly over the last four years, emphasizing their plan to continue policy discussions in the future.

mandate. They offer organizational supplements to the larger bureaucracy. Prantl (2005, 2006), for example, has paid explicit attention to informal groups in the UN Security Council (UNSC) such as contact groups—the soft alliances between like-minded states who tend to vote together on UNSC resolutions. He argues that they are exclusive clubs meant to promote political cooperation amongst members and to extract political concessions from non-members of the informal group. Further examples of IIGOs within FIGOs include entities such as the NATO Quint group, UNSC core groups, and the EU3+3 groups.

**Overlapping institutions and regime complexes:** The international relations literature on overlapping institutions and regime complex is also relevant for understanding IIGOs because we see states choosing to use both FIGOs and IIGOs within the same issue area. Alter and Meunier (2006) define overlapping regimes when “multiple institutions have authority over an issue”. They emphasize that most functional areas in international politics are represented by multiple international organizations. Overlapping institutions can be beneficial to states because they may *reinforce each other, provide ways to avoid deadlock and paralysis, and through redundancy, they can carefully calibrate a system of risk management* (Kelley 2007). Overlapping institutions can also be costly to states. First, organizations who share purposes can quickly turn into *organizations that cross purposes by contradicting each other* (forum shopping). Second, overlapping regimes may lead to intra-organizational politics.<sup>31</sup> We see these same themes revealed when considering the universe of FIGOs and IIGOs that exist in a given issue area.

Raustiala and Victor (2004) and Keohane and Victor (2011) introduce the related concept of “regime complexes” – the existence of a collective of partially overlapping and

---

<sup>31</sup> This kind of organizational competition for resources and influence seems less likely to result from the overlap of FIGOs and IIGOs given that turf wars cannot arise where bureaucracies (in IIGOs) are kept to a minimum.

nonhierarchical regimes. These scholars note that with the increasing density of international institutions, it is becoming difficult to isolate and “decompose” individual institutions from one another. Discrete organizations do not solely operate individual international regimes; instead, institutional “interplay” is more the norm (even though existing scholarship focuses on individual organizational entities as units of analysis). The idea of regime complex is in line with the concept of IIGOs acting as both complements and substitutes (at different points in time or according to different actors) to FIGOs. While the overlapping institution and regime complex literatures highlight that states might sometimes choose to use different institutional forums for related end goals, our objective is to specifically address when different *types* of institutions—IIGOs and FIGOs—are sometimes better suited to work together or separately.

## **5. The Spectrum of Intergovernmental Arrangements**

States have a wide range of institutional arrangements to choose from when they form intergovernmental organizations, with IIGOs and FIGOs being two options in the spectrum. States often make the deliberate choice to engage with the non-legal status of IIGOs and in some cases this is superior to codifying their expectations in international law. At other times, the loose structure of an IIGO may not be beneficial and thus states do choose to formalize their arrangements. The rational design literature (Koremenos et al, 2001) shows that the design features of international organizations are intentional and focused. States purposefully choose how they will engage with one another in a way that best suits the particular area. We similarly argue that IIGOs are just one choice in a menu of institutional options.

IIGOs may (or may not) develop into FIGOs over time as the nature of the issue area or cooperation challenge develops and demands more commitment or complexity. In other words,

the choice that states make between using IIGOs and FIGOs does not just exist at one point in time, but instead exists at many points in time and over the complicated course of the development of an institution.

Table 2 gives us a better understanding of the full spectrum of organizational formality. Each row indicates the sources of expectations, members, contact, structure, rules and examples of each type of intergovernmental arrangement. As we move down the table, we move from the least formal to the most formal intergovernmental arrangements, though we emphasize that the ordering is somewhat imprecise because informality/formality is not a single dimension. By delineating the full spectrum, we can better understand what the tradeoffs are—and why states might (not) want to formalize in some settings.

We have shaded the institutional categories to emphasize increasing degrees of formality across a number of dimensions and to show the relation of different institutional alternatives to each other. We have also highlighted the IIGO and FIGO rows as special categories along the broader spectrum. Theoretically, IIGOs and FIGOs exist as ideal types, but empirically, there is much variation and very few “pure” or perfect candidates. Instead, there are many empirical examples that tend to fall along the full institutional spectrum. The table highlights the fact that formalization is too rough a category by itself—as the literature has recognized, it entails a number of different elements that need to be considered. While we have characterized FIGOs together in one group, there still exists varying degrees of formality within this larger set of entities.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> For example, Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom (2004) emphasize the varying degrees to which a FIGO is “institutionalized”. Haftel and Thompson (2006) have also argued that RTAs vary according to their level of “independence”. These topics of institutionalization and independence further emphasize that a continuum that exists amongst intergovernmental arrangements.

Table 2: The Formal-Informal Spectrum of Intergovernmental Arrangements

	Arrangement	Organizing Principle	Members	Interaction and Structure	Rules	Example
↑ More informal ↓ More formal	No organization	Anarchy	All or none	Spontaneous interactions	Self help	Hobbesian/theoretical world
	Norms/ Tacit understanding	Unspoken understanding	Implicit	Spontaneous order	Spontaneous rules emerge	CIL Expired treaty
	Explicit agreement	Oral Agreement, Communiqué	Parties to the conference	No independent secretariat	Verbal understanding	Louvre Accord Plaza Communiqué
	Formal consultations	Shared goal to work toward formal agreement	Parties to the conference	Limited meetings No independent secretariat	Diplomatic Protocol	Six party talks START negotiations
	Conference Series	Agreed agenda Shared goal of dialogue	Invited guests for duration	Limited meetings Borrowed secretariat	Attempting to form systematic rules	Earth Summit Copenhagen Climate Change Conference
	<b>Informal IGOs (IIGO)</b>	Shared expectations about practice	States are members	Regularized meetings No independent secretariat	Implicit rules	G8 G20 Concert of Europe
	Ad Hoc Formal Agreement	International treaty	States are members	Meetings for limited duration Potentially a secretariat	Codified rules	Convention Against Torture International Tribunal (Rwanda)
	IIGOs within FIGOs	Soft coalition	Sub-groups of FIGO members	Ad hoc meetings based on demand No independent secretariat	Uncodified rules	NATO Quint group UNSC Core group EU3+3
	Formal Committee or Working group within a FIGO	Shared focus on specialized issue area	Sub-groups of FIGO members	Meetings for limited duration Report to formal Secretariat	Codified rules borrowed from FIGO	WHO H groups UN working groups
	<b>Formal IGOs (FIGO)</b>	International Treaty	States are members	Regularized meetings Independent secretariat	Codified rules about rules	WTO Arab League NATO
<b>Autonomous Intergovernmental Organization</b>	International Treaty Creating the IGO	States are members	Regularized legislative meetings Independent secretariat	Institutionalized arrangements to make rules Centralized rule enforcement	European Union	

## 6. An Empirical Overview of Informal Intergovernmental Organizations

How do we know an informal intergovernmental organization when we see one? Our definition of IIGOs entails three components: (1) a *shared expectation—rather than a binding agreement—about purpose* (2) *among a group of states* (3) *participating in regularized meetings*

*without a permanent bureaucracy.* Groups of states as members and regularized meetings are relatively easy to observe (though it's not always clear when to look for them). Shared expectations about purpose are harder to pin down especially because we emphasize that IIGOs cover a range of degrees of formalization from tacit to explicit entities. The following characteristics suggest measurement strategies that show increasing degrees of formalization—but still fall short of the legally binding arrangements we see in FIGOs.

### 1. **Shared Expectations**

- a. **Public statements:** States in IIGOs might make public statements both as part of a regular meeting series or as a communiqué after a meeting. In this kind of public dialogue, states indicate their shared expectations about purpose, information they plan to share, or their plan for discussing joint action. Public statements can also reflect some cohesion between IIGO states on desired outcomes. Even though nonbinding agreements are not legal entities, they are not costless (Guzman 2002). They put reputation front and center. When states fail to honor nonbinding agreements, their violations of shared expectations can exact reputational costs, later impacting a country's ability to negotiate more formal treaties in the future.
- b. **Outputs and reports:** IIGO member state discussions do not have to be accompanied by documentation, but joint production of research or consolidated best practices provides one form of evidence that the group of states share a level of consensus and soft commitments they want to communicate with wider audiences. Outputs and reports also leave a trail that shows the evolution of state dialogue.

## 2. Group of States

- a. **Agreements:** IIGO member states often communicate shared expectations about purpose—both before meetings and after meeting to present results—in the form of an agreement. These agreements can be written down, but they do not have to be; agreements can be precise but are often vague. IIGO agreements are mostly not legalized<sup>33</sup>; instead, most agreements remain non-binding. Some agreements are quite general whereas others generate specific agreed-to action-plans with memorable names.

## 3. Regularized Meetings without an Independent Secretariat

- a. **Low-level permanence:** IIGOs incorporate mechanisms such as websites—these reflect a low level of permanence because they require some staff but do not create too much autonomy<sup>34</sup>. In order to produce a website, for example, member states have to reach a low level of consensus about purpose, even if these are very general principles.

---

<sup>33</sup> A group of states working through an IIGO might occasionally produce one-off legal agreements but the normal occurrence in IIGOs is for states to make agreements that fall short of binding commitments.

<sup>34</sup> Discussions about the definition of a FIGO have focused on these entities having permanent, independent Secretariats, and this has usually been interpreted as something that is present or not. Instead, we recognize that the level of institutional structure in an IGO's Secretariat can exist along a spectrum. For example, even within the set of FIGOs, permanent, independent Secretariats vary considerably. Consider some of the less "institutionalized" FIGOs: the North Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO) has a permanent Secretariat comprised of nine full time workers in Dartmouth, Canada and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna employs 27 full time workers in Madrid, Spain. This lies in sharp contrast to the highly institutionalized United Nations system which employs thousands of full-time workers all over the world. Similarly IIGOs, because they are organizations, show some permanence (low-level) but not the level of permanence exhibited by a FIGO.

<http://www.nafo.int/about/frames/about.html> and <http://www.iccat.es/en/introduction.htm>, both accessed on 8/1/2011.

- a. **Organizational structure:** IIGOs can exhibit a range of low level organizational structures from a rotating staff or Secretariat to a structure that leans heavily on an already existing Secretariat at a FIGO. For example, the GATT—a negotiated set of trade rules—was set up without a Secretariat of its own and operated as an IIGO for 47 years. In fact, it borrowed a Secretariat and organizational structures proposed for the International Trade Organization at the Havana Conference in 1947<sup>35</sup>. As the GATT was replaced by the WTO in 1995, it clearly graduated to a FIGO, comparing to the level of formality in the World Bank or IMF. Importantly, an IIGO does not have an independent secretariat (which would indicate formalization), but the concept of an IIGO—and the example of the GATT—emphasizes that “in between” levels of organizational structure can importantly exist. A loose organizational structure shows that states want to create some informal structure but avoid formal decision-making procedures or an autonomous actor, leaving a decision-making process that is instead open for deliberation to work.

States must have a shared expectation about purpose to be considered an IIGO rather than a one-time forum, special gathering or ad-hoc group, but this expectation can still reflect a level of ambiguity or open-endedness. As we showed earlier, this kind of flexibility is an important driving factor for why states might choose to join informal, rather than formal, IGOs. The idea of a “shared expectation of purpose” sets a lower bound for what constitutes an IIGO, but we also note that states within FIGOs also share an expectation of purpose. Many of the binary

---

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/min98\\_e/slide\\_e/slide\\_list.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min98_e/slide_e/slide_list.htm) and [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/fact4\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/fact4_e.htm), both accessed on 8/1/2011



constraints that distinguish international arrangements between norms and FIGOs, for example, should instead be re-conceptualized to include a set of continuous variables.

We now turn to identifying the set of existing informal intergovernmental organizations. Our universe of informal intergovernmental organizations has been established using a number of strategies. First, we compared the set of FIGOs in the Correlates of War dataset—which adheres to the strict coding definitions listed earlier—to the more loosely defined set of intergovernmental organizations in the Yearbook of International Organizations.<sup>36</sup> We analyzed the reasons why particular organizations did not overlap the two datasets. This helped us establish a beginning set of organizations which traditionally fall outside the COW as a starting point for research on intergovernmental organizations. As we discussed earlier, we found that many organizations that are excluded from COW but are included in the Yearbook of International Organizations are emanations—or intergovernmental organizations whose origins come from other IGOs rather than from states themselves. Just because an IGO is an emanation does not immediately classify it as an IIGO or not. But some emanations may be IIGOs—if they exhibit a degree of flexibility that we have emphasized in our definition above—and thus they would be included as IIGOs. In other words, the set of entities that are emanations do not strictly fall into the FIGO or IIGO categories, but instead, we had to look at each of these entities individually.

In the set of organizations reported in the Yearbook but not in COW, we found another category of exclusions: organizations whose members are IGOs instead of states and organizations which are public-private in nature. Even though they were excluded from the COW dataset, this set of entities did not meet our definition of IIGOs. On the other hand, we

---

<sup>36</sup> We thank Jon Pevehouse and his research team for sharing their comparison of Correlates of War and the Union of International Associations' Yearbook of International Organizations with us. Their team provided invaluable expertise on coding and measuring the organizations.

found a substantial set of IGOs eliminated from the COW (but included in the Yearbook) dataset because they lacked an independent secretariat or headquarters. These IGOs met our initial face validity test as IIGOs.

We supplemented this initial list by documenting a comprehensive set of “G-groups” and other informal entities that we came across during our research.<sup>37</sup> In some respects, it became a treasure-hunt. Once we uncovered a potential IIGO and tried to document its characteristics, we were often pointed to a similar or related organization. We tried to follow each lead. While we attempt to be comprehensive in the list that follows, we do not presume that our list is collectively exhaustive and instead look at this list as a preliminary snapshot in the ever-changing collection of IIGOs. Similarly, we recognize that some IIGOs might not have one of the operational standards listed above—this might just reflect an even deeper level of informality. The list we present, therefore, is a minimum set of the entities over which we theorize.

Table 3 lists 29 IIGOs that cover a wide range of issue areas, geographies, and tenure. We find that IIGOs exist in the environmental, economic, nuclear non-proliferation and general cooperation areas, to name a few. The size of these groups ranges from four to 131 member states. Some are regional entities whereas others reflect shared expectations of practice between developing or developed states. Several of the organizations have “died” while other IIGOs have lasted as long as 55 years.

---

<sup>37</sup> Slaughter (2004), for example, lists a wide range of international organizations in her dialogue on transgovernmental networks—including the International Organization of Securities Commissioners (IOSCO), The International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS), the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement (INECE), the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FINCEN), and the Egmont Group. Ultimately, we filtered out many of these because they did not meet one of our criteria (states as members).

Table 3: Examples of IIGOs

Organization Name	Issue area	Founded	Dead?	# States	Location	Meetings?	Statements?	Outputs?
Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)	Climate change	1991	No	39	Rotating (out of the UN)	Y	Y	Y
Australia Group	Nuclear non-proliferation	1985	No	40	Paris, France	Y	Not clear	Y
Basel Committee on Banking Supervision	Banking	1974	No	27	Basel, Switzerland	Y	Y	Y
BRIC	Economic, political	2008	No	4	Rotating	Y	Y	N
Cairns Group	Agriculture, trade	1986	No	19	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
Cartagena Group	Climate change	2010	No	27	Maldives	Y	Y	N
Club de Berne	Intelligence; counter-terrorism	1971	No	19	Berne, Switzerland	Y	N	N
Countries of Visegrad	Regional cooperation	1991	?	4	Bratislava, Slovakia	Y	Y	Y
EUROGROUP	Economic/monetary	1998	No	17	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF)	Money laundering	1989	No	36	OECD HQ, Paris	Y	Y	Y
Gas Exporting Countries Forum	Gas exports	2001	No (but became formal in 2008)	11	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
GATT	Trade	1947	Yes (Superseded by WTO in 1995)	123	Rotating rounds	Y	Y	Y
Group of 77 (G-77)	South-south cooperation	1964	No	131	UN HQ, NY	Y	Y	Y
Group of Eight (G-8)	General cooperation	1997	No	8	Rotating	Y	Y	N
Group of Eighteen (G-18)	International trade	1975	Yes (1985)	18	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
Group of Eleven (G-11)	Aid, investment, trade, debt relief	5-Jun	No	11	Jordan	Y	Y	Y
Group of Five (G-5)	Economic	1973	Yes (Superseded by G-6 in 1976)	5	Rotating	Y	Not clear	N
Group of Five (G-5)	General cooperation	2005	No	5	Rotating	Y	Y	Not clear
Group of Seven (G-7)	Economics, politics	1976	Superseded by G-8 in 1998 but still exists too	7	Rotating	Y	Y	Not clear
Group of Six (G-6)	Economic	1974	Yes (Superseded by G-7 in 1976)	6	Rotating	Y	Y	Not clear
Group of Six on Disarmament	Nuclear non-proliferation	2003	No	6	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
Group of 10 (G-10)	Economic	1962	No	11	At IMF/ WB meetings	Y	Y	Y
Group of Thirty Three (G-33)	Economic, finance	1999	Yes (superseded by the G-20 in 1999)	33	Rotating	Y	N	N
Group of Twenty	Economic	1999	No	20	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
Group of Twenty Two	International financial system	1997	Yes (superseded by the G-33 in 1999)	22	Washington D.C.	Y	N	N
Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety	Chemical safety		Yes 2009		Geneva, Switzerland	Y	Y	Y
Intergovernmental Group of 24	Monetary affairs and development	1971	No	24	At IMF HQ	Y	Y	Y
Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF)	Environment	2009	No	17	Rotating	Y	Y	Y
Nuclear Suppliers Group	Nuclear non-proliferation	1978	No	46		Y	Y	Y
Paris Club	Debt repayment	1956	No	19	Paris, France	Y	N	Y

## 7. Why do states work through Informal Intergovernmental Organizations?

Table 2 shows the spectrum of alternative intergovernmental cooperative arrangements from which states can choose to manage their relations. By contrast, the literature on IOs has thus far focused mainly on the ends of the spectrum and on why states would choose to form FIGOs rather than operate purely through norms and tacit arrangements. By filling in the spectrum in terms of levels of formalization, we move towards a more nuanced understanding of the benefits and costs of different levels of formalization.

We now canvass the conditions under which states might choose to work through IIGOs instead of or in addition to FIGOs. We emphasize that once states have decided that some form of international organization (small o) is beneficial (as opposed to no organizational structure or a norm), they can also choose whether an informal or formal level of organizational structure is the most beneficial. We first establish the general advantages of working through IIGOs. We then note that states will sometimes use IIGOs *in addition to* FIGOs and sometimes *instead of* FIGOs. In other words, IIGOs can be both *complements* and *substitutes* to FIGOs—but at different points in time, for different actors, and for different purposes.

States face tradeoffs when trying to achieve their international goals: they seek to maximize the benefits of collective action while minimizing sovereignty and transactions costs. This fundamental tradeoff means that IIGOs will sometimes be more advantageous than FIGOs in striking this balance. Specifically, IIGOs have the advantage of:

1. **Lower sovereignty costs:** States sacrifice less autonomy with informal arrangements.
2. **Greater flexibility/ avoid binding commitment:** States sometimes prefer an institutional arrangement that binds them less strictly, even if other states are also less tightly constrained.

This gives states greater leeway to adjust to unanticipated outcomes as circumstances evolve.

3. **More control over information and access:** The informal nature of IIGOs allows states to better regulate the flow of information to outside parties. Sometimes, states will use IIGOs to *tightly* control information—when states do not have to formalize transparency mechanisms, they can circumvent outside limitations on their arrangements and maintain secrecy. On the other hand, states can use IIGOs as a mechanism to provide more information and access—i.e. as a forum for transparency. Because of the informal nature of IIGOs, they might be much more porous or permeable than their formal counterparts, with non-state and sub-state (e.g., diplomats and regulators) actors working side-by-side with government representatives.
4. **Lower costs of negotiations:** When arrangements are flexible, do not create binding commitments, and are secret from possible opposition, negotiation costs may be lower. States can also exchange information easier and quicker—especially in crisis settings—when rigid organizational structure does not present a bureaucratic burden.

Given the lower costs of IIGOs, states will sometimes choose to use IIGOs to organize their interactions. Sometimes they use IIGO as *substitutes* to FIGOs and other times they use them as *complements* in addition to FIGOs. But whether an IIGO serves as a substitute or complement often depends on the perspective and participation of individual states. On the one hand, an IIGO can be considered as a complement to a FIGO by a symmetric group of states who all participate equally in both institutions. Here, the choice of which institution to use is a matter of deciding which one benefits states in general for that particular issue. On the other hand, among an asymmetric group of states, an IIGO can be considered a complement by states that participate in both institutional arrangements but as substitutes by states which are members of the corresponding FIGO but not members of the IIGO. For example, the G8 is a complementary

organization from the perspective of its eight member states trying to build consensus on financial matters in advance of IMF or World Bank meetings. But for those states not included in the G8 but still affected by the information shared at these gatherings or the focal point decisions made, the G8 is seen as a substitute organization, a place where the great powers go to exercise unilateral decision making and present their consensus to the IMF, for example, as a fait accompli. At any one point in time, an IIGO acts solely as a complement or substitute from the perspective of a particular state; however, at different points in time, the same IIGO can serve different purposes. We first look at whether IIGOs will serve as complements or substitutes when we have a symmetric group of states and we later address the role of power and asymmetric states in relation to institutional formality.

### 7.1 IIGOs as complements to FIGOs

IIGOs are complements when action in the IIGO is supportive of action in a FIGO (or vice versa). There is no definitive sequence; states can use an IIGO first, then support that action in a FIGO, or states can operate the other way around. IIGOs can be complements either at a point in time or over time. At a point in time (in the short term, for example), IIGOs can complement the capacities of a FIGO by being the site of activities that are too costly or difficult to organize through the formal structure. Over time—or in the long run—IIGOs can allow members to adapt to their relations in ways that formal rules might not allow. It is important to emphasize that the short and long run roles of the IIGO may differ; an IIGO may be a substitute in the short run, used to sidestep arduous processes in a FIGO, but still be a complement in the long run by supporting the overall goals of the FIGO. IIGOs can be *explicitly* tied to FIGOs in a complementary relationship outside the FIGO<sup>38</sup> as the EUROGROUP of finance ministers is to

---

<sup>38</sup> We note that IIGOs within FIGOs operate differently than IIGOs that are stand-alone institutions. For example, Kleine (2011) highlights the example of consensual outcomes (an informal rule) that operate extensively instead of

the EU. More commonly, an IIGO exists independently or *implicitly* as a complement to the FIGO, such as the G8 or G20 and the IMF. As noted above, the complementary relationship could exist for the FIGO as a whole, or instead for some subgroup of actors who are working against the goals of other members of the group.

To foreshadow our argument, IIGOs will act as complements to FIGOs for: (1) *centralized coordination* and (2) *agenda-setting*. When states face high uncertainty regarding other states' preferences and/or the state of the world, IIGOs offer a low risk forum for creating focal point solutions that can be implemented in FIGOs or through independent state action.

**1. Centralized Coordination:** Abbott and Snidal (1998) argue that FIGOs are effective because they provide states with *centralization* and *independence*. By contrast, IIGOs can provide some of the benefits of centralization but not independence. Of the five kinds of centralization that FIGOs can provide to states--support for state interactions, managing substantive operations, joint production, pooling, and norm elaboration and coordination--IIGOs can provide joint production, pooling and norm coordination for states. For instance, IIGOs allow states to combine information and coordinate on focal points where common interests dominate incentives to defect—the most recent G8 meeting included states brainstorming about the emerging issues of cyber security, for example. But when enforcement issues dominate shared information or coordination goals, IIGOs cannot provide an effective centralized mechanism for monitoring and prosecution.

Why are IIGOs sometimes needed then *in addition* to FIGOs (if can both can provide certain elements of centralization)? The Rational Design literature treats centralization as a binary “on-off” variable whereas we highlight the variety within the types of centralization that

---

formal Council voting in the EU—this would be an example of an IIGO within a FIGO. The informal organization in this example operates within a structure and setting of other formal rules that govern the IGO. In contrast, the G8 is an example of a stand-alone IIGO that does not operate in the shadow of a FIGO's rules and structures.

states need at different junctures. Specifically, IIGOs provide a flexible alternative for centralization. Achieving cooperative solutions through FIGOs can be difficult when states face high uncertainty (about the preferences of other states or about the state of the world) for a number of reasons. In these situations, some states can benefit from a low cost, outside forum where they can pre-establish common understandings and coordinate on positions in advance or sometimes even instead of a vote. In terms of the four advantages of IIGOs—lower sovereignty costs, increased flexibility/ avoidance of binding commitments, more control over information and access, and lower costs of negotiation—states benefit most from control over information and lower costs of negotiation when they want IIGOs to act as complements to FIGOs.

The Basel Committee on Banking Supervision is an excellent example of an IIGO that provides a mechanism of centralized coordination with lower sovereignty and transactions costs: “the Committee encourages convergence towards common approaches and common standards without attempting detailed harmonization of member countries' supervisory techniques.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, “the G-8 summit is not the place to flesh out the details of any difficult or controversial policy issue in the context of a three-day event. Rather, the meeting is to bring a range of complex and sometimes inter-related issues. The G8 summit brings leaders together not so they can dream up quick fixes, but to talk and think about them together” (Feldman 2008). In other words, IIGOs complement FIGOs when they allow states to centralize coordination efforts.

**2. Agenda Setting:** The second way that IIGOs complement FIGOs is by centralizing *agenda setting* outside the FIGO structure. Often FIGOs embrace a wide range of issues so that it can be difficult for states to agree on an agenda—especially when particular states lack formal agenda-setting powers. States can use IIGOs to build coalitions whom agree on a set of topics

---

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.bis.org/bcbs/>



that should be given priority on the international stage. This agenda can then be presented as a *fait accompli* to other states in the FIGO. IIGO coalitions can therefore help states manage the FIGO's agenda-setting process. The G-11 structure is exemplary in this regard. The G-11 website specifies that the G-11 "is a loose working relationship that will function in parallel with other existing multilateral structures and is intended to strengthen partnerships amongst us and build stronger bridges with other partners." We emphasize, however, that when we speak of IIGOs and FIGOs acting as complements, we do not mean to imply that there will always be a one-to-one mapping between one IIGO and one FIGO: for example, one IIGO can serve as a complement to two or three different FIGOs—the G8's relationship with both the World Bank and IMF is exemplary.

Crises provide particularly important situations in which IIGOs act as complements to FIGOs. Crises present unique conditions when leaders must act quickly and in a unified manner, often making it difficult for states to quickly secure collective agreement through the regular procedures of more bureaucratic FIGOs. During crises, states often need an option that bypasses formal rules but still allows for collective information sharing or joint action. States may therefore use an IIGO to (1) build consensus and coordinate and (2) set the agenda for how issues will be handled in the FIGO. Both the G8 and G20 played this role during the recent 2008 Global Financial Crisis (Alexandroff 2010, Kirton 2011). More recently, the South Korean government reported that in early August 2011, a conference call was held among the G20 states to discuss the most recent drop in the financial markets and further predicted instability.<sup>40</sup> The conference call was not officially announced to the public, and no formal agenda or minutes were published, giving the HOGS the flexibility to brainstorm and work through the crisis in

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://business.inquirer.net/11243/g20-holds-emergency-conference-call>

secret.<sup>41</sup> When there are multiple forums from which to choose, more powerful actors are advantaged in choosing amongst different IIGOs according to how the crisis affects them (and which agenda-setting forum will produce the best solution for them). For example, the leading state may want an inclusive FIGO to provide a general structure for an issue but then use a more exclusive IIGO to set the agenda and achieve prior agreement among key participants.

## 7.2 IIGOs as Substitutes to FIGOs

IIGOs act as substitutes to FIGOs *when action in the IIGO undermines or opposes what could be accomplished in a FIGO*. We assume that states will always prefer weaker institutions, *ceteris paribus*, and they will thus look for opportunities to accomplish their substantive goals while avoiding the sovereignty and other higher costs of FIGOs. To foreshadow our argument, we argue that IIGOs serve as substitutes for formal IGOs when states need (1) weaker enforcement mechanisms or (2) increased flexibility, speed, or ambiguity.

**1. Less need for independence and enforcement:** States go through FIGOs when centralization and independence are necessary to achieve some common goal. IIGOs can also provide some centralization (as explained in the complements section) but without creating independence: IIGOs cannot provide independent because they are not based on legally binding agreements, they do not have permanent secretariats, and they lack monitoring and oversight bodies.

IIGOs will therefore act as substitutes for FIGOs when independence is not a necessary component or enforcement issues are not central to the issue at hand. *Ceteris paribus*, states prefer not to create independent agencies unless they have to, and thus IIGOs will be superior choices in these situations. Weak demand for enforcement might arise when the nature of the

---

<sup>41</sup> In fact, institutionalized conference calls are becoming more regular in international politics. For example, the US Army regularly hosts Commander briefings to coordinate the different posts in both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

issue area does not lend itself to cheating, when renegeing does not produce externalities, or because states are unwilling to accept the high sovereignty costs in a sensitive area by putting themselves under the scrutiny of an outside observer. With a weaker ability to enforce cheating, IIGOs lower the political costs of noncompliance versus their formal counterparts (cf. Lipson's 1991 observation that informal agreements act the same way vis-à-vis treaties.) Likewise, states will substitute to FIGOs when they need independence or a stronger enforcement mechanism. This logic is also in line with arguments about hard versus soft law: international actors choose softer forms of legalized governance when the potential for opportunism and its costs are low (Abbott and Snidal 2000).

**2. Increased flexibility, speed, and ambiguity:** The second way that IIGOs might act as substitutes for FIGOs is when states need *increased flexibility, speed, and ambiguity*. Aust (1986) and Lipson's (1991) work on informal international agreements also helps in this area.<sup>42</sup> Lipson points out that informality in international arrangements is a device for minimizing the impediments to cooperation. It is no secret that intergovernmental cooperation is difficult<sup>43</sup>; states will thus try to ease the burdens of cooperation. IIGOs can substitute for FIGOs when they lower the costs of cooperation.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Lipson specifically focuses on informal international agreements—that is, promises that fall short of treaty ratification. For example, Lipson looks at why states might choose to rely on unspoken understandings, oral bargains, and adhere to treaties even after they have expired. These verbal contracts are part of IIGOs in that they could be considered the format by which IIGOs are governed. But verbal contracts are not synonymous with IIGOs when they lack an associated organization or shared sense of purpose.

<sup>43</sup> Barnett and Finnemore (1999), for example, highlight that organizational pathologies may emerge after states have cooperated and formed FIGOs. For example, FIGOs can begin to exercise autonomous power after their creation in ways that the state founders didn't intend, FIGOs can become dysfunctional and inefficient, and FIGOs can gain an insular culture that prides their own technical expertise and standard operating procedures over connections with the external world. By working through an IIGO as opposed to a FIGO, states try to reduce these costs of cooperation – we argue that IIGOs are one way to minimize Barnett and Finnemore's institutional pathologies *ex ante*.

<sup>44</sup> Lower costs of cooperation are also important in the agenda-setting explanation for IIGOs as complements to FIGOs. The difference here is that the whole range of FIGO activities are moved to the IIGO when it acts as a substitute. In practice, of course, these distinctions are often less clear.

First, informal intergovernmental arrangements are *more flexible* than their formal counterparts – “they are willows, not oaks” (Lipson pp. 500). States negotiating informal arrangements do not have to predict all future states of the world and systematically account for them, and they don’t have to worry about elaborate final clauses or formalities. Koremenos et al (2001) emphasize that some organizations are purposefully made to be more flexible—when there is high uncertainty about the state of the world and severe distribution problems. Furthermore, Abbott and Snidal (2000) elaborate that states will produce more flexible, softer law (informal arrangements) when they do not need or want high precision—that is (1) amongst states who have a difficult time committing to more stringent IGOs or (2) in club groupings where the need for an ex ante sorting device on commitment is not needed. The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety—an IIGO—is case in point. It “plays a unique multi-faceted role as a flexible, open and transparent brainstorming and bridge-building forum for Governments.”<sup>45</sup> Finally, states might use IIGOs as substitutes to FIGOs to maintain an exit option or to provide cover when they begin to feel overly constrained by a FIGO. In other words, choosing between IIGOs and FIGOs does not just happen at the design stage, but continuously throughout an institution’s life cycle.

Second, informal arrangements can remain *less public* which helps avoid outside opposition. Without onerous reporting or transparency rules, proceedings can also remain confidential. For example, the secret Club de Berne is an informal intergovernmental organization that was founded in Berne in 1971, supposedly to enable the exchange of classified information particularly on terrorism and subversion between the Intelligence and Security Services of Western, originally EU only, states. Today, this exclusive club unites the

---

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.who.int/ifcs/en/>

intelligence services of some 19 countries including Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, Holland, Denmark, Britain, Switzerland, France and the USA. While member countries presumably work together on these topics, its true activities, leadership and legal basis remain "top secret."<sup>46</sup>

Third, informal arrangements can be *concluded and implemented quickly* because they don't face the same bureaucratic hurdles, domestic politics, or entail strong binding commitments. This advantage exists both when an IIGO acts as a substitute as well as a complement. The Cartagena Group, a collection of 27 countries seeking ambitious outcomes from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is a good example of why states might choose an IIGO to circumvent domestic politics. Member states in this IIGO have specifically stated the need to address lower domestic carbon outputs. Because these topics could become contentious in any ratification process at home, member states of the Cartagena Group have agreed to meet regularly to promote dialogue in an informal arrangement.

IIGOs are not *always* chosen as complements or substitutes for FIGOs. As Lipson (1991) points out, flexibility means that informal arrangements can more easily be abandoned; the lack of a domestic ratification process can ruin the potential for garnering domestic public support; and the absence of public debate demolishes a potential force of accountability. In other words, the very things that make informal arrangements so appealing can also be their biggest weakness. These cautions remind us that even though IIGOs can have lower contracting costs, lower sovereignty costs, and a greater ability to deal with uncertainty, at times, states will sometimes find it more beneficial to accept these costs to get the benefits available in FIGOs.

---

<sup>46</sup><https://secure.gn.apc.org/members/www.bilderberg.org/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=709&start=0&postdays=0&postorder=asc&highlight=&sid=bfc0411a0feb80654a7cfc26f0cd9813>

Different issue areas—because of the nature of their different collective action problems—tend toward different levels of institutional formality. For example, international trade is an issue with high sovereignty costs and, at early stages of cooperation, relatively high uncertainty. The GATT was therefore established as a minimally formal organization with no secretariat, but was strengthened over time as members learned the benefits of cooperation and demanded a higher need for enforcement. International monetary issues also have high sovereignty costs and states demand a high degree of flexibility. Powerful states tend to use IIGOs (such as the G8) as forums for establishing focal point solutions in macroeconomic policy that can be implemented within FIGOs (i.e. the IMF). Strong formalization exists where weak countries have high demand and these FIGOs help strengthen the dominant position of powerful states.

## **8. Power and IIGOs**

The previous discussion has often treated states as being in symmetric relations and asked when they would choose IIGOs over FIGOs (or some other/ no institutional arrangement). However it is also important to consider the important case where states are differently positioned and ask when they might prefer informal intergovernmental organizations to formal entities. This taps into several larger questions: When do informal institutions benefit powerful states and when do informal institutions benefit the weak? Is there a clear power-formality nexus that explains how and when different kinds of states choose to form binding commitments versus off-the-record customs that guide behavior?

Most international relations literature views institutions as not being related to power (Keohane 1984) or under the realist critique that institutions are epiphenomenal and simply serve

the interests of the powerful (Grieco 1988, Krasner 1985, Krasner 1991, Gruber 2000, Mearsheimer 1995). Ikenberry (2003, 2001) addresses power and institutions by showing that the world's hegemon can achieve many of its goals without having to go through multilateral institutions, but it will often champion IGOs in order to lock other states into a stable and predictable policy orientation, reducing the need to use (potentially costlier) coercion later.

The literature to date tells us little about how power intersects with the level of formality in international institutions—but Stone (2011) is one of the first to do so. He argues that FIGOs *reflect the preferences of weak states* out of proportion to their resources. Powerful states thus use *informal* rules within FIGOs to gain exceptional access to decision making during extraordinary times, or when their core interests are affected most. In other words, the formal rules of FIGOs benefit the weak, but informal rules benefit the powerful. It is important to recognize that Stone's argument focuses on the *internal* governance mechanisms that states can employ in international organizations, whereas IIGOs focus on the *external* mechanisms that states can utilize.

Nonetheless, Stone's argument falls short in several ways. First, powerful states create formal institutions when informal institutions are not satisfactory for their particular purpose. In other words, FIGOs must at times benefit the powerful and do not always benefit the weak. For example, rules on TRIPs in the WTO are favorable to advanced countries such as the US and Europe. Issue areas like agriculture are excluded from these rules, severely undermining weaker developing states. To be sure, the WTO constrains the US at times, but it also offers the US many benefits. Furthermore, the formal rules of war are an example showing how formality often benefits the powerful: powerful states can employ such controversial tactics as firing from drones, but guerilla groups are prohibited from fighting if they do not wear uniforms.

Second, formal rules within an IGO often favor the powerful even when some voting rules appear “even.” Powerful countries often formalize veto or override procedures to tip outcomes in their favor. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)—where the US has a veto on constitutional decisions that require a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority or  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority of regional members—and the International Fund for Agriculture and Development (IFAD)—where voting rules changed in 1997 to reflect contributions to the fund rather than equality between states—serve as excellent examples.

Third, Stone’s argument falls short because *weak states* sometimes employ informal governance—it is not only the powerful states or hegemons who balance formal structure with informal mechanisms to their own benefit. Several empirical examples of IIGOs offer evidence: the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) include four rising, developing nations whose economic and population growth give them increased bargaining power at various international forums. Additionally, the G77 caucus group (IIGO) of developing nations has held up votes at UNCTAD until their demands have been met.

We argue that FIGOs are compromises between powerful states and weaker states. Powerful states get weaker states to accept their authority (through rules within the FIGO) and arrangements that serve the interests of the powerful in return for regularity and security from caprice as well as arrangements that are sufficient to induce participation by the weak. In other words, international organizations serve both efficiency and power goals. FIGOs are self-enforcing agreements where the gains from the arrangement are divided according to some bargaining model that also gives each party incentives to adhere. But commitments (like contracts) are never complete. IIGOs sometimes provide states with a way around their formal commitments and a mechanism for dealing with other countries on an ad hoc basis. The formal



rules in international organizations can benefit the strong and also protect the weak from the vagaries of power.

IIGOs can therefore act as both building blocks and stumbling blocks<sup>47</sup> to other forms of international cooperation. States can employ IIGOs as building blocks when all states use them—for example, in a new issue area where a FIGO has yet to be created. States can importantly use IIGOs to learn about the advantages of formal organization for a particular topic.<sup>48</sup> When IIGOs act as building blocks, they can progress all the way to FIGOs, or states may remain satisfied with an IIGO, depending on the various tradeoffs of the arrangement and their goals. Alternatively, IIGOs can act as stumbling blocks to broader forms of international cooperation—states might use IIGOs to pursue outcomes to their own advantage while preventing the development of FIGOs that might be more beneficial to a larger audience.

International politics is a fluid affair: issue areas can change, states can ebb and flow in terms of power, and crises can create extraordinary times for states when the formal structures they have signed on to no longer make sense. During these periods of flux, the original FIGO may become less attractive for some or all of its members, and thus states will look for alternative options to complement or supplement FIGOs (either internally, externally, or both). When the distribution of power shifts or uncertainty about the state of the world arises, powerful states are not the only ones who will try to adapt to the new situation; weak states can also use internal and external informal institutions to adjust to new realities. They can help provide states a way out of being “stuck” in institutions that no longer makes sense, or provide viable

---

<sup>47</sup> The building blocks and stumbling blocks language has often been used in the international trade literature when discussing the increasing overlap of regional trade organizations and multilateral trade organizations. We borrow this terminology because of the excellent analogy.

<sup>48</sup> The agenda of the latest G8 meeting in 2011 provides an excellent example of an IIGO acting as a potential building block to broader consensus: states discussed the topic of worldwide cyber security. At the time, there was no other focal institution for addressing this important new issue area.

alternatives to forming FIGOs when the costs of revising the FIGO or forming new binding commitments (etc.) are too high.

Our notion that weak states might opt to use IIGOs more when the balance of power is shifting aligns with ideas from hegemonic stability theory. When hegemony or the strength of the stabilizing state in the international system wanes, the stability of the system may be at risk too. This is when we might see an uptick in weaker states utilizing internal or external informal mechanisms. Our argument is not as stark as Ikenberry's: the old order does not have to fully break down, as in after a period of Great War and a clear hegemon does not have to emerge. Instead, informal governance mechanisms and IIGOs might be used when states are not 100 percent clear who the new powers are; the declining hegemon may want to stick with the status quo ante of formal rules in a FIGO but they know this is impossible. At the same time, it is also not clear who the new powers are, so no state is completely willing to lock into a new order yet. Informal governance structures and IIGOs can provide both strong and weak states an alternative mechanism for satisfying their preferences during these circumstances.

## **9. Conclusion**

IIGOs are important institutional forms of international governance. Heads of great powers choose to spend valuable time at IIGO summits, weaker states have successfully used IIGOs to change the outcomes at FIGOs, and IIGOs have shown endurance. IIGOs have also proliferated in the post-Cold War period, reflecting a potentially new pattern of global governance. The overlap of IIGOs and FIGOs that has emerged shows a pattern of “messy multilateralism” (Haas 2010), which is likely to continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, many IIGOs continue to exist even after their original informal mandate has shifted; the G7/8's

evolution from a purely financial forum to a deeper cooperative effort across a broad array of issue areas is an important case in point. IIGOs play a powerful role in the transformation of inter-state relations.

When they form intergovernmental arrangements, states make important institutional choices which reflect tradeoffs between cooperation and sovereignty costs, between flexibility and commitment, between secrecy and transparency, and between consensus and lower negotiation costs. The extent of institutional formalization is one of the most important dimensions of such institutional choice. While the traditional literature has focused on a singular choice between FIGOs and informal norms, we have developed the concept of IIGO to better understand the range of choices and the underlying tradeoffs. Furthermore, IIGOs and FIGOs are only two choices along a rich spectrum of intergovernmental arrangements that have arisen in international politics. States opt for less formal IGOs (i.e., closer to IIGOs) when they need lower sovereignty costs, more flexibility, more secrecy, and lower costs of negotiation. Further developing our theoretical understanding of these choices and of how states weigh different modes of international cooperation across time, issue areas, and geographies will then help us explain the complex empirical patterns of international institutionalization.

### Bibliography

- Abbott, Kenneth and Duncan Snidal. 2009. "Strengthening International Regulation Through Transnational New Governance: Overcoming the Orchestration Deficit." *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law* (42), pp. 501-578.
- Abbott, Kenneth and Duncan Snidal. 2009. "The Governance Triangle: Regulatory Standards Institutions and the Shadow of the State" in Mattli and Woods (ed.) *The Politics of Global Regulation*. Princeton University Press.
- Abbott, Kenneth and Duncan Snidal. 2000. "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance." *International Organization*, 54 (3), pp. 421-456.
- Abbott, Kenneth, Robert Keohane, Andrew Moravcsik, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Duncan Snidal. 2000. "The Concept of Legalization." *International Organization*, 54 (3), pp. 401-419.
- Abbott, Kenneth and Duncan Snidal. 1998. "Why States Act through Formal International Organizations." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42 (1), pp. 3-32.
- Adler, Emmanuel. 2005. *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations*. New York: Routledge.
- Alexandroff, Alan S. 2010. "Challenges in Global Governance: Opportunities for G-x Leadership." *The Stanley Foundation: Policy Analysis Brief*, March 2010.
- Alter, Karen J. and Sophie Meunier. 2006. "Nested and Overlapping Regimes in the Transatlantic Banana Trade Dispute," *Journal of European Public Policy*. 13(3) pp. 362-382.
- Anderson, Siwan, Jean-Marie Baland and Karl Ove Moene. 2003. "Sustainability and organizational design in informal groups: some evidence from Kenyan Roscas." Accessed: [http://ipl.econ.duke.edu/bread/papers/020703\\_Conference/enforce91.pdf](http://ipl.econ.duke.edu/bread/papers/020703_Conference/enforce91.pdf).
- Aust, Anthony. 1986. "The Theory and Practice of Informal International Instruments." *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 35, pp. 787-812.
- Barnett, Michael and Martha Finnemore. 1999. "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations." *International Organization*, 53, pp. 699-732.
- Bayne, Nicholas and Robert Putnam. 2000. *Hanging In There: The G7 and G8 Summit in Maturity and Renewal*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Benvenisti, Eyal and George Downs. 2007. "The Empire's New Clothes: Political Economy and the Fragmentation of International Law". *Stanford Law Review*, 60, pp. 599.
- Boehmer, Charles, Erik Gartzke and Timothy Nordstrom. 2004. "Do Intergovernmental Organizations Promote Peace?" *World Politics*, 57(1): pp. 1-38
- Buchanan, James. 1965. "An Economic Theory of Clubs," *Economica*, 32, pp. 1-14.
- Dunn, David H. 1996. "How Useful is Summitry?" In *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The Evolution of International Summitry*, edited by David H. Dunn, 249-268. New York: Macmillan Press.

- Feldman, Adam (July 7, 2008). "What's Wrong With The G-8." *Forbes* (New York). [http://www.forbes.com/opinions/2008/07/05/problems-unity-progress-oped-cx\\_af\\_summit08\\_0707feldman.html](http://www.forbes.com/opinions/2008/07/05/problems-unity-progress-oped-cx_af_summit08_0707feldman.html).
- Gill, Stephen. 1999. "Structural Changes in Multilateralism: The G7 Nexus and the Global Crisis." In Michael Schechter, Ed. *Innovation in Multilateralism*, pp. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Goldsmith, Jack, and Eric A. Posner. 2005. *The Limits of International Law*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldstein, Judith, Miles Kahler, Robert O. Keohane, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, eds. 2000. "Legalization and World Politics: A Special Issue of International Organization." *International Organization*, 54 (3).
- Guzman, Andrew. 2002. "A Compliance-Based Theory of International Law." *California Law Review*, 90(6):pp. 1823-1887.
- Haftel, Yoram. 2011. *Crafting Peace: How Regional Institutions Reduce Conflict*. Manuscript in progress.
- Haftel, Yoram and Alexander Thompson. 2006. "The Independence of International Organizations: Concept and Applications." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50: pp. 253
- Haass, Richard. 2010. "The Case for Messy Multilateralism." *Financial Times*, January 5 2010.
- Haggard, Stephen and Beth Simmons. 1987. "Theories of International Regimes," *International Organization* 41, pp. 491-518.
- Hawes, Michael. 2004. "Manipulative Multilateralism: Power and Informal Influence in International Organizations" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Mar 17, 2004.*
- Helleiner, Gerald. 2000. *Markets: Politics and Globalization: Can the Global Economy Be Civilized?* Geneva: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.
- Helmke, Gretchen and Steven Levitsky. 2004. "Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda", *Perspectives on Politics*, 2(4), pp. 725-740.
- Ho, Daniel E. 2002. "Compliance and International Soft Law: Why Do Countries Implement the Basle Accord?" *Journal of International Economic Law*, 5 (3), pp. 647-88.
- Hopf, Ted. 2002. *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Johnson, Tana. 2010. "Rethinking Non-State Actors: The Role and Impact of International Bureaucrats in Institutional Design." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago.
- Kelley, Judith. 2007. "Insights from Election Monitoring for the Politics of Nesting and Overlapping Regimes." *Unpublished manuscript for symposium: What Politics do Overlaps Engender?*
- Keohane, Robert O. and David G. Victor. 2011. "The Regime Complex for Climate Change." *Perspectives on Politics*, 9, pp. 7-23.

- Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. 2000. "Between Centralization and Fragmentation: The Club Model of Multilateral Cooperation and Problems of Democratic Legitimacy." *Paper prepared for the American Political Science Convention, Washington, D.C., August 31-September 3, 2000.*
- Keohane, Robert O. 1984. *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kirton, John and Jenilee M. Guebert. 2011. "G8, G20, and IMF: from Rivalry to Mutual Reinforcement." *Paper presented at the ISA annual conference, March 16-19 2011, Montreal.*
- Kirton, John J. (1999). "Explaining G8 Effectiveness." In Michael Hodges, John J. Kirton and Joseph P. Daniels, Eds., *The G8's Role in the New Millennium*, pp. 45-68. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Kirton, John J. 1989. "Contemporary Concert Diplomacy: The Seven-Power Summit and the Management of International Order." *Paper prepared for the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, London, March 29-April 1.*
- Koremenos, Barbara, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal. 2001. "The Rational Design of International Institutions." *International Organization*, 56, pp. 761-800.
- Krasner, Stephen. 1982. "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," *International Organization*, 36(2) pp. 185-205.
- Lake, David. 1996. "Anarchy, hierarchy, and the variety of international relations." *International Organization*, 50 (1), pp. 1 – 33.
- Lipson, Charles. 1991. "Why Are Some International Agreements Informal?" *International Organization*, 45, pp. 495-538.
- March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen. 1998. "The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders," *International Organization*, 52 (4), pp. 943-969
- Mearsheimer, John J. 1995. "The False Promise of International Institutions." *International Security*, 19(3), pp. 5-49.
- Mitzen, Jennifer. 2006. "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma." *European Journal of International Relations*, 12(3) pp. 341-70.
- Neumann, Iver B. 2002. Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy. *Millennium - Journal of International Studies*, 31(3) pp. 627-651.
- North, Douglass C. 1990. *Institutions, institutional change, and economic performance.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pauwelyn, Joost. 2010. "Informal International Public Policy making (IIPPM): Mapping the Action and Testing Concepts of Accountability and Effectiveness." *Project Framing Paper.* Accessed:  
[http://www.hiil.org/assets/902/Publication\\_TransnationalConstituionality\\_IIPPM\\_Framing\\_Paper\\_Pauwelyn\\_draft\\_31\\_May\\_2010.pdf](http://www.hiil.org/assets/902/Publication_TransnationalConstituionality_IIPPM_Framing_Paper_Pauwelyn_draft_31_May_2010.pdf).
- Pevehouse, Jon, Timothy Nordstrom and Kevin Warnke. 2004. "The Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations Data Version 2.0". *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. 21(2) pp. 101-119.

- Poast, Paul and Johannes Urpelainen. 2010. "Why Does Democratization Make States Join International Organizations?" *mimeo*.
- Pouliot, Vincent. 2008. "The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities". *International Organization*, 62(2) pp. 257-288.
- Prantl, Jochen. 2011. "Explaining Order Under Order Transition." *Paper presented at the ISA annual conference, March 16-19 2011, Montreal*.
- Prantl, Jochen. 2005. "The UN Security Council and Informal Groups of States: Complementing or Competing for Governance?" *International Organization*, 59(3), pp. 559-592.
- Prantl, Jochen. 2006. *ECOSOC ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict: the silent avant-garde*. United Nations Publications.
- Raustiala, Kal and David G. Victor. 2004. "The Regime Complex for Plant Genetic Resources". *International Organization*, 58, pp. 277-309.
- Rochester, J. Martin. 1986. "The Rise and Fall of International Organization as a Field of Study." *International Organization*, 40 (4).
- Rosecrance, Richard. 2001. "Has Realism Become Cost-Benefit Analysis: A Review Essay," *International Security*, 26(2), pp. 132-154.
- Rosecrance, Richard and Arthur Stein. 2001. "The Theory of Overlapping Clubs." In Rosecrance ed. *The New Great power Coalition: Toward a World Concert of Nations*. Boulder, Colorado: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Rosenne, Shabtai. 1970. *The law of treaties: a guide to the legislative history of the Vienna convention*. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications.
- Shanks, Cheryl, Harold Jacobson, and Jeffrey Kaplan. 1996. "Inertia and Change in the Constellation of International Governmental Organizations, 1981-1992". *International Organization*, 50, pp. 593-627.
- Slaughter, Anne-Marie. 2004. *A New World Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stein, Arthur. 1982. "Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World," *International Organization*, 36(2) pp. 299-324.
- Stone, Randall W. 2011. *Controlling Institutions: International Organizations and the Global Economy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, Randall W. 2009. "Informal Governance: International Organizations and the Limits of U.S. Power." *Working paper*. Accessed at <http://www.yale.edu/leitner/resources/papers/Stonechapters.pdf>.
- Tannenwald, Nina. 1999. "The Nuclear Taboo" *International Organization* 53(3), pp. 433-468.
- Williams, Michael C. 2007. *Culture and Security: Symbolic Power and the Politics of International Security*. New York: Routledge.
- Wood, Bernard. 1988. "Critical Choices." In John Holmes and John Kirton, Eds., *Canada and the New Internationalism*, pp. 134-137. Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs.

*Yearbook of International Organizations, 2007-2008*. Online database of International Organizations. <http://www.uia.be>.

Zaring, David. 2004-2005. "Informal Procedure, Hard and Soft, in International Administration," *Chicago Journal of International Law*, 5.