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WHAT CONSENSUS?: EXPLAINING THE RISE OF CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS[1]

Erica R. Gould
Program in International Relations
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305-6045
egould@stanford.edu

Abstract:
This paper introduces a new dataset, which codes 248 international organizations according to their decision-making rules. The dataset reveals several broad changes in international organizational voting rules. However, this paper will focus on one of the most intriguing of these changes: the widespread and abrupt increase in the use of consensus decision-making. What explains this increase and what are the political and distributional implications of this increase? I test six competing hypotheses to explain this shift in the design of international institutional rules. I argue that the increasing use of consensus decision-making is a move towards greater opacity and away from transparency. Democratic governments appreciate this opacity in order to be able to negotiate international bargains behind a veil of secrecy.

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I. Introduction

This paper is concerned with a little-known empirical fact in international politics: the decision-making rules used by states to direct and govern international organizations are changing. In particular, this paper is focused on the rise of consensus decision-making. There has been an abrupt increase in the use of consensus decision-making since 1990, and as of 2012 over 40 percent of the international organizations sampled use consensus decision-making from the Association of African Central Banks to the World Trade Organization. Why have we seen this increase? What are the implications of the use of this rule for international governance and affairs?

This is a particularly important question because of the broader debates surrounding changes in voting rules and vote shares in IOs. Normative scholars, representatives from BRIC countries, INGO protesters and others have argued for years that international organizations' voting rules calcify inequalities. They have called for reform, suggesting that a change in voting rules would remedy some of these inequalities. For example with respect to the IMF, Kapur and Naim (2005) and Kelkar, Yadav and Chaudry (2004) advocated reforming the IMF's weighted voting system, including the allocation of quotas and seats of the Fund's Executive Board.[2] Woods (2000, 2006) argues for new rules that would require double-majorities of both voting power and membership; Strand and Rapkin (2005) model the double-majority rules and argue this would substantially change Fund activity.[3] In response to protests for reform, the Fund's Board of Governors passed "far-reaching reforms of the institution's governance" in 2008 and then again "historic and far-reaching changes" in 2010 that helped reallocate vote and quota shares—a distributional shift from European to BRIC countries—and reformed how Executive Directors are chosen.[4] The aftermath of this governance reform was equally contentious, with

[2] Kapur and Naim 2005, 95; Kelkar, Yadav and Chaudry 2005, 730-31.
[3] Woods 1998, see also Woods 2006, 210; Woods 2000; Strand and Rapkin 2005, 247.
[4] International Monetary Fund 2016; International Monetary Fund 2010; International Monetary Fund 2008.

the U.S. Congress initially failing to ratify governance changes, Occupy.com writing that "the overall distribution of power within the Fund remains relatively unchanged," and BRIC countries choosing to create two new international lending institutions—the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank—due to their frustrations with the governance reforms.[5] One interesting fact skirted by this debate is that the bulk of decisions by the IMF's Executive Board are taken by consensus without resorting to formal vote-taking at all.

International organizational governance reform debates have become high politics and are not limited to the IMF. Scholars and activists also argue that the UN, WHO, WTO, G8 Summit and others require governance reform in order to make these institutions more representative, responsive, legitimate and effective.[6] In the case of the WTO, a concern about the glacial pace of the latest global trade liberalization rounds has led to calls for reform of the WTO's consensus decision-making procedures in 2014. Jones (2014) and others have argued that a move away from consensus decision-making "might boost efficiency, but …also could jeopardize one of the WTO's greatest assets: its legitimacy."

This is also particularly important to the scholarly community because of a heightened interest in institutional rules and their precision, but also because of the reliance on voting outcomes as metrics within political science.[7]

This paper introduces a new dataset, which codes 248 international organizations according to their decision-making rules. The dataset reveals several broad changes in international organizational voting rules. However, this paper will focus on one of the most intriguing of these changes: the widespread and abrupt increase in the use of consensus decision-making. What explains this increase and what are the political and distributional implications of this increase? I argue the move towards consensus decision-making is a move towards greater

[5] Marshall 2015; Summers 2015.
[W] World Health Organization 2016; Bradford and Linn 2007; Jones 2014; Tadokoro 1997.
[7] See for example Koremenos et al 2001 on the first, and Dreher and Sturm 2012 on the second.

opacity and away from transparency. Democratic governments appreciate this opacity in order to be able to negotiate international bargains behind a veil of secrecy.

The paper will proceed as follows. First, I will review the literature which has encouraged scholars to study decision-making rules of IOs, and the limited knowledge accrued thusfar. Second, I will focus on the literature concerning consensus in particular, how that decision-making rule has been interpreted and analyzed within the political science and international legal community, and then discuss six competing hypotheses to explain the increasing prevalence of consensus in international organizations. Third, I will introduce the dataset on IO decision-making rules, and compare it to a dataset recently released by Blake and Payton (2015) which similarly codes IO decision-making rules, although not consensus explicitly. Fourth, I will present some descriptive statistics regarding how decision-making rules have changed over time. Fifth, I will test the competing hypotheses and present evidence that the rise in the adoption of consensus decision-making is due, at least in part, to democratic domestic politicians' desire to conduct international bargains in relative secrecy**.** Finally, the paper will discuss some of the political consequences from the rise of consensus decision-making, in particular a decrease in the ability of domestic groups to hold their politicians accountable.

II. Literature Review on Voting Rules

As political scientists, we know surprisingly little about international organizational decision-making rules. Yet three concurrent trends in the international relations literature suggest that renewed focus is warranted. [8]

First, there has been a general push to analyze international organizational rules and practices in a detailed, specific way. The Goldstein et al (2000) "Legalization and World

[8] Despite the fact that several special volumes over the past fifteen or so years have advocated focusing attention on the increasing precision of institutional rules like decision-making rules, questions of institutional design, and decision-making processes in particular, scholars have studied decision-making processes in a limited way. One exception is Blake and Payton (2015). In the meantime, states and international non-profits have pushed for voting reform (i.e. International Monetary Fund 2016).

Politics" special issue of *International Organization* focused scholars' attention on the increasing legalization of international institutions, including decision-making procedures. They develop a framework whereby scholars can analyze institutional features and changes by their degree of obligation, precision and delegation, encouraging a focus on specific features of institutional design. Continuing in this vein, Koremenos et al 2001 encouraged scholars to consider international institutional variation as the "self-conscious creation of states." (762) Their "rational design" approach focuses on several design features, one of which—"control"—relates specifically to decision-making rules.

Second, IO voting—particularly within the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)—has become a frequent and important independent variable used in a variety of international relations studies. For example, Voeten (2000) and Kim and Russett (1997) analyze roll-call voting in the UNGA to glean the structure of Cold War and post-Cold War conflict. The implication is that conflicts in international politics show up in the UNGA votes, that state representatives vote their interests and that voting in IOs reflects real conflicts. Voeten argues that analyzing UNGA voting is "one of the best ways to systematically explore the questions that the current debate about the structure of post-Cold War global politics tend to address in an ad hoc fashion." [9] O'Neill (1997) analyzes the power ("and satisfaction") conferred from the United Nations Security Council's formal voting rules.[10] Axel Dreher and colleagues have developed a research program linking a country's IMF conditional loan program with their UN voting. Countries who vote with the U.S. in the UNGA (Dreher and Jensen) or who are temporary members of the UNSC (Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland) tend to receive more, and easier, IMF conditionality loans.[11] Similarly Thacker and Barro and Lee have found that a country's voting record in the UNGA (in relation to the U.S. position) is a good predictor of whether or not they will receive a Fund loan.[12] The implication is that votes in the UNGA and UNSC are politically significant, mainly as a signal of alliance with the U.S., and that countries allied with the U.S. are repaid with more favorable IMF loans. Countries receiving loans from the World

[9] Voeten 2000, 186; Kim and Russett 1997.
[10] O'Neill 1997.
[11] Dreher and Jensen 2007; Dreher, Sturm and Vreeland 2006.
[12] Barro and Lee 2005; Thacker 1999.

Bank are conversely more likely to vote with the U.S. in the UNGA.[13] Scholars have also analyzed voting in the European Union and the International Monetary Fund using "power indices."[14] For instance, Leech (2002) analyzes the IMF's weighted voting by computing power indices according to the formal voting weights and voting rules. Leech acknowledges that votes are rarely taken, especially in the Executive Board, but still emphasizes the importance of formal voting rules. He writes, "…formal voting procedures have a fundamental influence over the *de facto* decision making process; power relationships are fundamentally determined by relative voting strengths and the fact that member countries or directors are not called on to cast their votes in meetings is a reflection that these are well understood."[15]

The third trend suggesting the importance of decision-making rules is perhaps the most significant. Studies of individual case studies of international organizations have emphasized the role of decision-making rules (and rule changes) for organizational outcomes. Most noteworthy is a literature on the influence of institutions in general, and in some cases voting rules in particular, on European Community and European Union policy outcomes. This literature highlights how preferences aggregated according to different formulae will result in different policy outcomes. It also highlights the importance of agenda-setting powers. It is an incredibly effective demonstration of how voting rules matter in the international context. For example, Garrett and Tsebelis demonstrate how the consultation, cooperation and codecision procedures result in more integrationist policies than qualified majority voting.[16] Meunier shows how different EU decision-making rules impact the EU's trade negotiations with the U.S.[17] In addition to these studies of the EU, there have been numerous other case studies which have emphasized the importance of IO decision-making rules. [18]

[13] Dreher and Sturm 2012.
[14] This analysis of voting by power indices is considered misguided by Garrett and Tsebelis 1996. See also, Hosli 1993, 1995 for examples of this literature with respect to the EU.
[15] Leech 2002, 379.
[16] See for example, Garrett and Tsebelis 1996; Tsebelis and Garrett 2001; Tsebelis 2002.
[17] Meunier 2000.
[18] See for example, Reinalda and Verbeek 2004.

In addition to these three trends in IR scholarship, numerous other arguments suggest that IO decision-making rules may be impact IO activities in a variety of ways. Decision-making rules allow states to control the organization hence prevent runaway IOs.[19] Different decision-making rules may amplify or diminish specific states' influence over organizational outcomes. For example, Talberg, Sommerer and Squatrito (2015) argue that decisionmaking rules mediate the influence of democracies on potential openness (to transnational actor) reforms**.**[20] Certain rules—like unanimity, formal vetoes or effective vetoes enabled by weighted voting—allow states to cooperate with other states through an international organization without fear of being constrained by the IO's decision. These rules may incent them to cooperate when they otherwise would fear tying their hands. If formal IO decision-making rules govern international decisions, then preferences, rationality and rules reign over power, might and coercion. Decision-making rules may cast a long shadow and govern activities even in the absence of a vote if states and IO staff anticipate vote outcomes.[21] Decision-making rules may not only influence activities, but also compliance rates and enforcement. Zamora (1980) argues that "the way in which decisions are made [in IGOs] will have a direct and immediate effect on the members' observance of them."[22] Voting rules may also influence the efficacy, speed and amount of activity by an IO. For example, some voting rules, like majority rule, may slow the rate of activity and responsiveness of the IO to global events.

Until recently our knowledge of IO decision-making rules rested largely on a limited number of individual case studies from the political science literature and also from descriptions of individual IOs' decision-making rules, characterizations of broader trends and taxonomies from the international law literature. For example in an oft-cited article, Zamora (1980) traces the move away from sovereign equality and unanimity as the favored rules for international economic organizations. He is writing in response to political pressure by developing countries to have more voting power within economic IGOs. He argues that the developing country push for more voting power is misguided because economic IGOs need to have rules that reflect

[19] See for example, Hawkins, Lake, Nielson and Tierney 2006.
[20] Note that since they use Blake and Payton 2015 data, the implication of their findings may be misleading.
[21] Steinberg 2002
[22] Zamora 1980, 566 quoted in Blake and Payton 2015, 383.

existing power distributions, without which their decisions would be ignored. In legalistic fashion, he details the different forms of weighted voting, special majorities and different decision-making bodies in order to detail how powerful state power is preserved. In line with a realist interpretation, he argues that, "[i]nternational economic organizations are consequences of the world economic system; they are not determinants of that system."[23] International legal textbooks have descriptions of the decision-making rules of international organizations, including numerous individual examples.[24] However, surprisingly little was known about decision-making rules across the population of international organizations.[25]

One recent attempt to remedy this lacuna came from Haftel and Thompson (2006), who propose and test six institutional design features to explain international organizational independence. Two of these institutional design features concern decision-making procedures, and one concerns the type of decision-making rule. Specifically, they distinguish between consensus/unanimity (which they equate and conflate) and majority rule. They write:

> *Voting rules* have important implications for the degree of IO independence, especially with respect to the autonomy dimension. A key distinction is between decision made by consensus, or unanimity, and decisions made by some type of majority rule. As the size of the veto group becomes larger, states increasingly relinquish control….Rule by consensus, on the other hand, is intended to protect state sovereignty and reign in IO autonomy since no obligation can be imposed without each member's consent."[26]

They code thirty regional integration arrangements as either majority decision-making or not, with 29 coded as unanimity/consensus and only one coded as majority.[27] This initial attempt to code the decision-making procedures across a range of IOs was important, but flawed for a variety of reasons. The sample was small and not representative in terms of issue area or substantive focus. There is also very little variation in the coding of the decision-making

[23] Zamora 1980, 602
[24] See for example, Schermers and Blokker 2003, 782-786.
[25] See Hafner-Burton, von Stein and Gartzke 2008 who argue that scholars should shift focus to how IGOs work and particularly test ideas based on large-N quantitative studies, instead of relying on individual case studies, and Milner 2008 who emphasizes developing "finer grained data on the differences between international institutions." (336).
[26] Haftel and Thompson 2006, 258
[27] 262. They also code which decision-making body makes decisions relevant for IO independence, a body of representatives or one made up of heads of state. (258-9)

procedures. They also conflate unanimity and consensus, which obscures an important trend worth investigating.

Blake and Payton (2015) has been the most significant contribution to our knowledge of decision-making rules across a wide group of international organizations to date. They constructed a new data set of the voting rules of 266 international organizations and code voting rules as either unanimity, majoritarian or weighted. This is a large advance and represents the first effort to provide data on a large, representative group of international organizations, and not just the "'usual suspects'" of the IMF, World Bank and UN.[28] In addition to coding the main decision-making rule for these 266 IOs, Blake and Payton also test four hypotheses regarding decision-making rules design. They find mixed results whether IOs that focus on states' "core interests" of economic and security issues are more likely to have a unanimity rule. IOs with larger memberships tend to be more likely to have majoritarian rule. They find some support that commodity organizations and banks/funds, for which "membership of certain states is critical to an organization's effectiveness," are more likely to have weighted voting. They find stronger support for the claim that if "major powers are founding members of an IGO," then weighted voting is more likely.[29]

While Blake and Payton (2015) represent an important advance in our understanding of IO decision-making rules, some of their data collection and research design choices obscure significant trends in IO decision-making. Their three mutually-exclusive categories—unanimity, majoritarian and weighted—leave a number of unanswered questions. Most important for this study and also for our understanding of the trends in decision-making procedures is their choice to conflate and equate unanimity and consensus.[30] Obviously, one is not able to observe or study

[28] As Haftel and Thompson 2006, 254 have put it.
[29] Blake and Payton 2015, 393-395.
[30] They code consensus as unanimity, but their language backs off of this proposition. They write, "Decisions taken by consensus in IGOs do not always reflect genuine unanimous support by all states. Rather, they indicate an awareness among member states that under the IGO's voting procedures sufficient support for a proposed measure exists to pass it and therefore opponents see little value in forcing a formal vote and/or officially noting their opposition to the measure." (Blake and Payton 2015, 381). Given that they equate consensus and unanimity in their coding and the rest of their analysis, however, I believe this critique is warranted.

the rise in consensus decision-making procedures if it is not explicitly coded. However, we also are not able to disentangle the changes in decision-making procedures overall. They note that unanimity has become "more prevalent when compared to majoritarian."[31] In fact, our data reveals that this has been an increase in consensus decision-making with over 40 per cent of IOs using consensus as their default decision-making rule by 2012, not unanimity per se**.** In fact, the use of unanimity has leveled out and remains the least prevalent of the decision-making rules, when one codes for consensus as distinct from unanimity. They find an increasing prevalence of "unanimity" in non-bank, non-commodity economic IGOs and security IGOs—these are the ones that represent "core" interests, in their view. If this trend is actually an increase in consensus decision-making then perhaps the implication is the opposite or at least different. States tend to pursue an opaque form of non-public voting in the case of consensus decision-making. The impact of the conflation is that one of the most intriguing changes in decision-making rules--- alluded to in one line in their paper—goes largely unnoticed.

I. On Consensus

a. How consensus has been defined

There is a lot we do not know about consensus. Firstly, what does it mean in practice to "decide by consensus"? While the academic treatment of consensus in political science has been notably spare, there are two general understandings of consensus decision-making.

First, scholars have assumed that "consensus" as an international organizational decision-making process is equivalent to the colloquial usage of the word "consensus." In a colloquial sense, we use "consensus" to mean broad agreement. Scholars have adopted this understanding and have chosen to define consensus as equivalent to unanimity. In fact, several have actually conflated—that is, failed to distinguish any difference between—unanimity and consensus.[32]

[31] Blake and Payton 2015, 397.

[32] Blake and Payton (2015), Haftel and Thompson (2006).

In sharp contrast, a second group of scholars has argued that consensus decision-making actually allows a small group of states—powerful states—to exercise broad influence over outcomes. [Insert Steinberg, Stone] Decisions reflect some degree of agreement, but allow powerful states to significantly influence outcomes and effectively exercise veto authority over outcomes.

Scholars have tended to define consensus decision-making as they would any other decision-making rule—by the percentage of the vote required for passage or, inversely, the percentage of the vote with veto power. While this continuum makes sense to distinguish between majority, supermajority and unanimity rules, for consensus it proves less helpful. As Graph 1 depicts, scholars vary on the basic question of whether the decision-making rule underlying consensus is closer to unanimity or supermajority (whether all or particular states are able to exercise an effective veto). (Note that majority rule would be located off of this continuum to the left; scholars have not argued that consensus should be understood as equivalent to majority rule.) The implications for predicted outcomes are potentially quite disparate depending on whether supermajority or unanimity is assumed.

Insert Graph 1

International law texts are more nuanced in their distinctions and disagreements, but still frequently differ with respect to what is consensus' underlying decision-making rule. Some suggest that consensus resembles unanimity. For example, Klabbers writes in an introductory text on international organization law, "there is precious little difference between deciding by unanimity and deciding by consensus."[33] Others draw a nuanced, yet sharp contrast between unanimity, which requires "that decisions receive the common consent of every participating nation," and consensus.[34] Consensus may be reached when there is a lack of formal, stated

[33] Klabbers p. 178; He also cites Ulf Lindell, *Modern Multilateral Negotiation: The Consensus Rule and its Implications in International Conferences (Lund, 1988)* cited in Klabbers, p. 178, on this point.
[34] Footer 1996/97, 659.

opposition. This understanding generally comports with the one given by the UN's Office of Legal Affairs:

> …consensus is generally understood to mean adoption of a decision without formal objections and vote; this being possible only when no delegation formally objects to a consensus being recorded, though some delegations may have reservations to the substantive matter at issue or a part of it.[35]

In their widely-used *International Institutional Law* textbook, Schermers and Blokker note that in practice consensus "has often been defined in a negative way" as the absence of objection or, as Footer calls it, a "passive consensus."[36] Consensus decision making may also approximate majority, or weighted majority, decision-making in some instances.[37] For example, in the case of the IMF the Chairman sums up the consensus and "shall ordinarily ascertain the sense of the meeting in lieu of a formal vote." The "sense of the meeting" has a particular meaning for the IMF and:

> …is understood as a position supported by Executive Directors having sufficient votes to carry the question if a vote were taken. In summing up, the Chairman reflects the Board discussion in wording that is precise enough for operational purposes, yet broad and subtle enough to capture significant nuances of Executive Directors' views.[38]

In other words, the understanding is that vote weights are part and parcel of the Fund's consensus decision-making process. As Footer writes, "the consensus technique in the absence of a formal vote, reinforces the underlying balance of economic power implicit in weighted voting organizations."[39] The meaning of "consensus" and the particular formula used to assess whether "consensus" has been reached varies widely—from "active consensus" or unanimity to "passive consensus" to unanimity minus one (or two) to weighted voting.[40]

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[35] UNJY (1987), pp. 174-5 cited in Klabbers 2015, 177.
[36] Schermers and Blokker 2003, (773); Footer 1996/1997.
[37] For example, Footer states "Decision-making by consensus is not mutually exclusive of decisions taken by majority voting." Footer 1996/1997, 658
[38] https://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/misc/qualifiers.htm Accessed 7/26/16.
[39] Footer 1996/1997, 669.
[40] In her comparison of the peacekeeping operations of the UN, NATO and the EU, Dijkstra (2010) writes "While the consensus rule in these organizations is crucial, there are differences in terms of the flexibility of the rule and its codification." Hylke Dijkstra. "The Institutional Design of Peacekeeping Operations: United Nations, NATO and the European Union" Annual Conference of UACES in Brugge, Belgium, 6-8 September 2010 and the conference of the ECPR Standing Group on International Relations in Stockholm Sweden, 9-11 September 2010, p. 2.

This variation and disagreement may appear puzzling until one consults the governance documents of specific IOs. Often the text simply and obliquely states that "member states decide by consensus;" however, in some cases there are specific directions regarding how "consensus" should be interpreted and measured. Three different examples of consensus rules are provided for context below:

> Decisions of the Council of Heads of State and Heads of Government adopted by common consent - consensus.[41]

> Consensus shall be understood as the absence of any objection expressed by any Member State and presented by the Latter as constituting an obstacle to the taking of the decision in question.[42]

> Decisions on matters of substance shall be taken by consensus of the Members present. If no consensus can be reached, consensus shall be considered achieved if no more than 2 Members object, unless the Statute provides otherwise[43]

The first from the Commonwealth of Independent States' Article 23 is oblique, offering little clarification other than indicating that consensus equates common consent. Yet it remains unclear how common consent should be assessed. The second example comes from the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation's Article 11 and defines consensus much more explicitly as the "absence of any objection" by a member state. In other words, a member would need to actively object in order to upset a consensus decision; unanimity support is not required, but lack of explicit objection is. In the third and final example from the International Renewable Energy Alliance's Article IX, Section F, consensus means something quite different. Up to two members can *actively object* and decisions can still be considered to be made by consensus.

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[41] The Commonwealth of Independent States, *Charter of the Commonwealth of Independent States*, January 3, 2005, http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=187 (accessed July 28, 2016).
[42] The Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation, *Rules of Procedure The Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation,* Tenth MMFA, October 22, 2007 (accessed July 28, 2016).
[43] International Renewable Energy Alliance, *Statute of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA),* Bonn, January 26, 2009 (accessed July 28th 2016)

In short, the variation in interpretation reflected in both the political science and legal scholarship reflects real differences in the underlying decision-making rules for consensus decision-making in international organizations. Because there is such wide variation in the actual practices and rules of consensus, I argue that consensus decision-making should not be understood and defined by underlying decision-making rules. Consensus is not equivalent to unanimity or supermajority, and should not be analyzed as such. Given that there is little agreement about a consistent decision-making rule, it raises the question whether "consensus" should even be analyzed as a unified category at all.

b. *Consensus, redefined*

The rise of consensus decision-making does not reflect a sea change in the underlying decision-making rule or decisive percentage, but it does reflect a unified change in the decision-making practices in international organizations. I argue that the rise in consensus decision-making reflects a change in the degree of opacity in international organizational decision-making. Despite all of the variations in interpretations and practice, one constant undergirds the concept of consensus: a lack of voting. Footer defines consensus decisions as those "…that have been adopted by acclamation."[55] Similarly, Schermers and Blokker describe consensus decision-making as decisions "taken not by voting, but by consensus (acclamation)."[56] Acclamation, according to Merriam-Webster is either "strong and enthusiastic approval or praise" or "a vote to accept or approve someone or something that is done by cheers, shouts or applause."[57] Neither definition is perfectly accurate in this case; we are neither expecting IGO decisions by consensus to involve cheers and applause, nor necessarily strong and enthusiastic approval. However, instead it is useful to consider that the consensus decisions are tallied according to oral discussions, and not formal, public votes. In line with this understanding, Buzan (1981) writes that "consensus is loosely taken to mean some form of decision making by consent that does not involve recourse to voting."[58]

[55] Footer 1996/1997, 658; see also "without a vote" on p. 664
[56] Schermers and Blokker 2003, 771.
[57] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/acclamation
[58] Buzan 1981, 326

In short, we know very little about how member states come to a "consensus" and what constitutes a "consensus." While it does seem to represent some sort of broad agreement, *how* broad is really a source of contention. We do not know if it more often approximates unanimity or some form of supermajority or weighted voting (with particular states having effective veto power). What we do know is that consensus decision-making is opaque. Formal votes are not taken. Member state positions are not public. Hence domestic publics have a more difficult time holding their representatives accountable for international organizational decisions. Politicians have an easier time negotiating international bargains behind closed doors. Politicians may also have an easier time deflecting responsibility for policies their publics may not favor. While many institutions are becoming more legalized and precise in international affairs, here is an important example of a move in the opposite direction towards imprecision and obscurity. Why have decision-making rules moved—so dramatically, and yet so quietly—from the formal to the informal?[59]

c. The Quiet Rise of Consensus Decisionmaking in International Organizations

The broad shift towards consensus decision-making in international organizations has occurred with very little fanfare or attention due both to a lack of data and a lack of appreciation for the political differences between unanimity and consensus as decision-making processes. The lack of data has resulted in some generalizations being made, largely in the legal literature, which we now know to be inaccurate. For example, Footer and Schermers and Blokker suggest that consensus decision-making in international organizations increased in the 1960s as the number of developing countries joining IGOs increased. As a result of this increase in numbers and change in membership, they argue, both majority and unanimity voting procedures fell out of favor. Majority voting "because of the danger of alienating powerful majorities or producing important disaffected minorities;" unanimity was particularly unwieldy and would endow smaller, weaker states with the capacity to block a potential bargain. According to Footer, consensus represented a mechanism for powerful states to retain *de facto* control while also ensuring "broader-based support."[60] The implication is that it maintains power for the strong

[59] Goldstein et al 2000**;** Abbott, Keohane, Moravcsik, Slaughter and Snidal 2000.
[60] Footer 1996/1997, 664; Schermers and Blokker 2003.

without alienating the weak. Unfortunately, these conclusions are based on an impression of the broader trends that turned out to be inaccurate, as will be shown later in this paper. Widespread, representative data on international organizations had not yet been collected.

Insert Graph 3

The data presented in this paper indicate that there has been an abrupt and widespread increase in the use of consensus since 1990. 27.2 percent of the international organizations founded between 1945 and 1989 used consensus as their primary decision-making rule. Meanwhile, a whopping 60 percent of IOs founded between 1990 and 2012 use consensus as their primary decision-making rule. Graph 3 represents the percent of total international organizations that use consensus as their primary decision-making process. Between 1944 and 1980, the proportion of international organizations using consensus increased; however, year-to-year there were clear fluctuations. Since 1990, though, the increase has been steady and dramatic. This increase in the use of consensus has gone unnoticed by scholars of international relations and institutional rules. The next section will propose several testable hypotheses to explain this change.

II. Competing Explanations for the Rise of Consensus

The widespread and abrupt increase in the use of consensus as a decision-making rule in international governance has not been a widely known fact and, as a result, there is not a literature to address it. Moreover and was discussed earlier in this paper, scholars also disagree about the political and distributional implications of consensus. Nonetheless, we can isolate six potential explanations of this increase.

First and in a realist vein, scholars have argued that powerful states prefer consensus decision-making as a useful mechanism to preserve their influence over outcomes. As mentioned above, Schermers and Blokker and Footer argue as developing country numbers in IOs increased, the interests of the majority and the powerful members diverged. Consensus represented a more practical alternative to majority voting, which powerful states would have

opposed.[61] The most common interpretation of this potential trend is that powerful states pushed for consensus because it was a decision-making rule that would preserve their influence, while having other potential advantages. For example, Jonathan Charney argued that consensus:

> …assured that decision-making…will not be dominated by the numerical superiority of any group of nations" and is "'an egalitarian procedure which in practice may assure that multilateral negotiations reflect the real geopolitical power of the participating nations.[62]

Footer 1996/1997 notes that consensus was proposed as a rule change at the First Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change because proponents believed this would give them power to veto emissions' controls. Emissions control advocates recognized this and pushed for majority rule instead.[63]

While political scientists have paid scant (or at least intermittent) attention to consensus, Steinberg (2002) is an exception**.** His article focused on the question: why would powerful states choose to have decisions in the GATT/WTO through consensus or "sovereign equality"? In a detailed case study which examines both successive trade round launches and trade round conclusions, he argues that powerful states are able to exercise "invisible weighted voting" through the consensus procedures and effectively coerce less powerful states into "asymmetrical" bargains that reflect their (powerful state) preferences. Consensus offers two main advantages over visible weighted voting to powerful states, according to Steinberg. First, consensus provides powerful states with reliable and detailed information on weaker state preferences so that they can craft outcomes that are more advantageous to their own interests, but also that will pass under the consensus rule. Second, consensus decision-making confers

[61] Schermers and Blokker, 784.
[62] Quoted in Footer 1996/97 and in Buzan 1981, 327, suggests consensus Jonathan I. Charney, "United States Interestin a Convention on the Law of the Sea; The Case for Continued Efforts," 11 *Vand. J. Transnational Law* 39, 43 (1978) cited in Footer 1996/97, 666.
[63] Footer 1997/1997, 679.

legitimacy to the bargaining outcomes and thus makes them more sticky, more likely to be implemented and less politically costly.[64]

Stone 2011 makes a very similar realist-esque argument that powerful states are able to use international organizations (here his evidence comes mainly from the IMF, but also to some extent from the WTO and EU) to serve their interests, but they do so using informal procedures so as not to undermine the organization's legitimacy. Like Steinberg, he emphasizes powerful states' exit option, weak Secretariats that are dominated by powerful state preferences, and informal channels of influence. Stone is not specifically concerned with consensus decision-making; instead his emphasis is on how informal mechanisms, with consensus being one example, allow the U.S. to exercise influence beyond the limits of its official weighted voting power (only 17 percent at the time). As he writes:

> Ultimately, institutional design depends upon the distribution of power and interests. Informal governance persists because it is useful for the United States to be able to manipulate IMF policies under special circumstances, and other countries acquiesce in institutional arrangements—a strong management, a weak Executive Board, and substantial secrecy—that makes the costs of manipulating the organization low enough to be tolerable for the leading power.[65]

Informal mechanisms have the advantage of allowing powerful states to control an international organization without undermining its legitimacy. Following the logic of Charney, Steinberg, Stone and others, the first hypothesis is:

H1: If powerful states are members of an international organization, then consensus should be more likely.

[64] Steinberg 2002 unpacks some very specific details about how consensus works in practice at the GATT/WTO. However, even with this single case, the evidence offers only partial support of his argument. Consensus does not seem to be consistently producing results that favor the powerful. He considers two cases of trade round closings. He considers two trade rounds. The first (the Tokyo Round) appears to be bargained in the "shadow of the law" and to better reflected developing country preferences. The second (the Uruguay Round) appears to have been bargained in the "shadow of power" and better reflect U.S. and EC preferences.

[65] Stone 2011, 79.

The second argument views decision-making rules through a functionalist lens. Task-oriented international organizations, more concerned with efficiency, may be more likely to have majoritarian rule that allows speedier decisions. Blake and Payton (2015) hypothesize that "states are more likely to favor majoritarian voting when membership is large in order to ensure the IGO maintains a minimum level of responsiveness."[69] They equate consensus with unanimity, and hence would expect that there should be a negative relationship between the size of an IO's membership and the propensity to have consensus as a decision-making rule. If consensus requires most, or even all, of the membership to accede to a particular decision, then consensus should function best in an organization with smaller membership numbers. Hence the second hypothesis is:

H2: If IO has smaller membership, then more consensus.

Third, a normative shift may have led to this widespread shift in the design of international organizational decision-making rules. For example, the deepening of the European project and the European identity may have led European countries to prefer consensus forms of decision-making for their regional organizations. While this does not do normative arguments full justice, it is a first attempt at suggesting an argument and testing it:

H3: If international organizations are European regional organizations, then more consensus.

Fourth, the Rational Design volume suggests several clear hypotheses with respect to institutional design. Three of their conjectures concern decision-making rules, and one is potentially relevant to this discussion.[70] V2 suggests that if there is a greater asymmetry of contributors, then there will be a greater asymmetry of control. In other words, they would expect that when some states contribute more financially to the IO or are otherwise crucial to its mission, then they will have greater influence over its decisions. International organizations which depend on particular states for their mission or funding would also have decision-making rules that reflect this importance. Blake and Payton (2015) consider this argument and thus hypothesize that organizations which rely heavily on a few states for their mission success and/or

[69] Blake and Payton 2015, 394.
[70] Koremenos et al 2001, 791-792

budget—they operationalize this as banks/funds and commodity organizations—would be more likely to have weighted majority voting and find support for this proposition.[71] Consensus may also be a decision rule that provides certain states with more control over the organization, as suggested by Steinberg, Stone, Charney and others in the discussion above. If this is the case, then we would expect:

H4: If contributions to an IO's mission or budget are unequal, then consensus is more likely.

Fifth, one of the major changes in the population of international organizations since the 1990s that has been observed by political scientists has been the increase in regional IOs.[72] In the same vein as the functionalist argument above, perhaps regional organizations use more consensus not only due to smaller numbers, but greater incentives to achieve results with widespread support. As a result, a fifth hypothesis is:

H5: If international organizations are regional, then more consensus.

Sixth, consensus suggests opacity and provides domestic politicians with political cover. Domestic politicians are playing a "two-level game." On the one hand they need to be responsive to domestic constituencies and demands, and on the other hand they are engaging in negotiations and striking bargains with international counterparts.[73] Judith Goldstein demonstrated how international institutions may help serve specific domestic political purposes for politicians. The U.S. President used the dispute settlement procedures of the Canadian-U.S. Free Trade Agreement to achieve policy outcomes (more liberal trade) and also gain power vis-à-vis the more protectionist trade bureaucracy.[74] Vreeland has similarly argued that international institutions, in his case the International Monetary Fund's conditional loan agreements, serve domestic political purposes. He argues that politicians use the IMF as a scapegoat in order to credibly commit to, and ultimately implement, domestically-unpopular policies.[75] This literature emphasizes how state representatives negotiating at the international level may embrace policies

[71] Blake and Payton 2015, 384, 394-6.
[72] See for example, Mansfield and Milner 1999.
[73] Putnam 1988.
[74] Goldstein 1996.
[75] Vreeland.

and constraints that do not necessarily play well at home. As a result, politicians may rail bitterly against the constraints of international institutions, and yet appreciate the ties that bind their hands.

Consensus represents a decision-making process that provides domestic politicians with a cloak of secrecy about how they have negotiated and what positions they have taken at the international level. Votes are not formally and publicly tallied. As a result, domestic politicians may voice support for a bargain among international counterparts, while complaining about the outcomes of international bargains to their domestic constituents. The value of these international constraints can be particularly valuable to democratic leaders.[76] David Stasavage has enumerated the costs and benefits associated with open- and closed-door negotiations and proposed, among other things, that politicians who care relatively more about their reputation ipso facto will be more likely to prefer closed-door negotiations.[77] Since authoritarian leaders face less of a threat of sanction regarding their commitments at the international level, they do not require a cloak of secrecy in order to make such international commitments. By contrast, a cloak of secrecy can afford democratic politicians, who are more concerned with reputation and sanction, with a useful veil behind which to negotiate useful bargains that may not play well at home.

As a result, we may expect democracies to push for consensus as a decision-making rule, in order to allow themselves greater discretion and flexibility at the international negotiating table. Authoritarian governments, by contrast, do not need the cloak of secrecy and actually may prefer a more public tallying of votes. Hence the fourth hypothesis is:

H6: If IOs have a membership constituted of relatively more democracies than autocracies, then the use of consensus increases.

In order to test this hypothesis, we constructed a democratic density variable similar to the "level of democracy" variable used by Tallberg et. al (2014). We followed Tallberg et al (2014)'s lead

[76] Fearon 1994.
[77] Stasavage 2004, 681.

and used Polity IV "institutionalized democracy" scores "as weights for the COW-IGO data on membership in IOs" for the founding year of each IGO.[78] Given many of the IGOs in our dataset are either not included in the COW-IGO dataset or represented missing data from the COW-IGO dataset, we supplemented missing membership data by referring to *YIO* print editions and organizational histories. Our democratic density variable is the average Polity IV score for founding members of an IGO.[79]

Finally, international institutional design may be motivated less by rationalist calculations, than by the logic of appropriateness. Sociological institutionalists like John Meyer and his colleagues have argued that international organizations often adopt the same rules, goals and forms because those forms have a certain legitimacy in themselves.[80] We should expect "isomorphic" organizational forms. As a result, another alternative argument is that institutional details, like the decision-making procedures, are adopted because they are "institutional myths" adopted for legitimacy reasons, or adopted because of the proselytizing pressure by epistemic community actors. As a result, a time trend variable will be included in order to help capture the argument that institutional features may be increasingly adopted as they are viewed as appropriate or legitimate institutional forms.

III. Research Design and Dataset Description

In order to document the change in the decision-making rules of international organizations and particularly explain the rise of consensus decision-making, I constructed which codes 225 diverse intergovernmental organizations. For the purposes of this study,

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[78] Tallberg et al 2014, 759. For the updated and original versions of COW-IGO, see Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Warnke 2004; Wallace and Singer 1970. We used COW-IGO version 2.3 in this analysis, available at http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/IGOs (Accessed August 19, 2016). The Polity IV Annual Time-Series, 1800-2015 data is available at http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html (Accessed August 19, 2016). On democratic density, see Pevehouse 2005.

[79] Technically, we used the POLITY2 variable, which ranges consistently between -10 and 10. We only included founding members for which Polity IV scores were available. There is some missing data in the Polity IV dataset, as well as certain countries that are systematically excluded from the dataset such as Belize, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

[80] Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer et al 1997.

intergovernmental organizations (IGOs or IOs) are defined as formal bodies established by at least three state members, and whose activities are formally funding and directed by state members. They are not purely fora for multilateral conferences. As a result, the IO consists of a bureaucracy of some sort with staff, offices and resources. In order to select the IGOs that were coded, I started with the 2012 *Yearbook of International Organizations*, a print and on-line resource that compiles data on an incredibly diverse group of organizations and as of 2012 included information on 65,589 organizations. Of those 65,589, only 7,688 were considered to be international governmental organizations (IGOs) by the *YIO*. Of those 7,688, only 248 met the definition of IGO used in this study or concerned issue areas/activities that proscribe or coordinate state action. 225 of those 248 were able to be coded.

For all 225 organizations, a "long form" coding was completed first. The long form coding entailed filling out information in text on a sheet of paper about each international organization. The following information was collected: the organization's name; organization's URL; the year it was founded; the number of members as of 2012; if the United States is a member; if the organization is regional, international or other; a summary of the organization's purpose and/or activities; a description of its structure; if the organization has a board (smaller group of members who make decisions); the ratio of members to board members; how board members are selected; decision-making *rule* summary; decision-making *weights* summary; brief description of veto provisions; and brief description of variations in rules across different types of decisions.

After long-form coding was completed, we completed the "short-form coding" and translated the substantive data from the long-form coding into numerical data. Specific rules and details of decision-making rules and structures were coded as categorical, often represented numerically. (See Appendix 2 for specifics of that coding.) Twenty columns or variables, including: name of the IGO, the type of organization (environmental, cooperation, etc.); if the organization is a subsidiary of another IGO; if it is a subsidiary with a separate decision-making rule; year founded; number of current (as of 2012) members; whether the U.S. is a member; the scope of membership (international/universal, regional or other); the default decision making rule (majority, supermajority and unanimity being mutually exclusive categories; consensus may

be coded on its own or with one of the previous three); the secondary decision-making rule (majority, supermajority, unanimity and consensus; these four are not mutually exclusive); weighted voting (when the rules defined some states as having more votes than others); and one-state/one-vote.[81]

Blake and Payton (2015) also introduced a dataset on the voting rules, so it is useful to compare this dataset with that one briefly. Their dataset is also interested in coding the rules of international organizations that impact state policies. As they write, they code rules that "shape how they affect the core design objectives outlined above," namely "control effective membership, compliance and responsiveness."[82] They code each rule as being either majority, weighted voting or unanimity. According to their definitions, unanimity means equal votes and every state retains veto power. Majority means equal votes, but "no single state" can block votes. Weighted voting "refers to those voting practices where some members…have greater voting power than others, giving the former greater influence over IGO decisions."[83] Most noteworthy for this study is that they do not code consensus as a unique category, but instead conflate it with unanimity. In addition to coding the decision-making rules, they also collect data on founding membership, foundation date and issue area (international security, economics, health, transportation, labor, environment, human rights, science and education, telecommunications and multi-issue). They also coded three sub-sets of economic organizations: commodity, bank/funds and other. For their case selection, Blake and Payton start with the Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Wamke's Correlates of War 2 International Governmental Organizations 2.0 dataset, which is an update of Wallace and Singer (1970). They originally find 338 IGOs from PNW established after 1943, but linewise delete four that do not meet their criteria, leaving a universe of 334 IGOs. They were able to code 266 of those IGOs, omitting others due to data limitations. Similar to this dataset, they use a variety of (often primary) documents to code the decision-making rules of the IGO's main decision-making body.[84]

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[81] Please refer to the "Voting Rules of International Organizations Dataset" description for more information about case selection and coding.
[82] Blake and Payton 2015, 380.
[83] Blake and Payton 2015, 382.
[84] Blake and Payton 2015, 386.

While the purpose of Blake and Payton's and this dataset are similar—to code the decision-making rules of IGOs—a few key differences are worth highlighting. First and most important for this paper, they do not code consensus explicitly, and instead conflate it with unanimity. This conflation is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it does not allow us to study the explicit rise of consensus (rather than unanimity) in recent years. Second, their coding is more limited in other ways. For example, they only code default decision-making rules, whereas my dataset codes both default and secondary decision-making rules. Third, we select cases differently. Again Blake and Payton (2015) start with the COW-IGO dataset, whereas I began with case selection from the *YIO* itself. They claim that the IGOs in their dataset "represent 80% of post-1943 IGOs," but what they really mean is 80% of COW-IGOs (although given that COW-IGO v 2.3 lists 434 IGOs founded after 1943, that number should be 61 percent of post-1943 IGOs).[85] 90 IGOs overlap between our two datasets. The number of IGOs coded is similar, although they code more (266 versus 225).

IV. Empirical Work

Descriptive Statistics

How have the decision-making rules of international organizations changed over time? Graph 1 depicts the change in decision-making rules from 1910 until 2012. Remember that this dataset codes supermajority, unanimity and majority as mutually exclusive categories, whereas consensus is not. Since the 1940s, a consistent trend emerges. Majority appears to be more frequently adopted than supermajority, which in turn has been more frequently adopted than unanimity. In fact (and in contrast to Blake and Payton's findings), the adoption of unanimity levels off in the 2000s all together. Consensus, however, has increased dramatically, especially since 1990.

Insert Graph 4

[85] Blake and Payton 2015, 391.

Deep diving into individual decades provides a bit more information about how IO decision-making rules have varied and changed over time. For example during the 1960s (1960-1969), thirty-five new IOs were established that are included in our dataset. Of those, 34 percent have majority, 23 percent super majority and 9 percent unanimity as their default decision-making rule. 34 percent used consensus decision-making. Of the 43 IOs created in the 2000s included in this dataset, 19 percent have majority, another 19 percent have super majority and 7 percent have unanimity as their default rule. Meanwhile 63 percent use consensus decision-making.

Chart 1 depicts how the use of consensus has varied across different types of IGOs. For example, banks are least likely to use consensus, whereas peace and security organizations are most likely to use consensus. Across the substantive issue areas, other trends emerge regarding how decision-making rules vary across types of IOs. For example, banks as a group have a great deal of uniformity in their decision-making processes. Over seventy per cent of banks use weighted majority voting. For example, the Inter-American Development bank assigns members a base vote level (135) plus additional votes based on their capital contribution. The default voting rule for both the Board of Governors and the Board of Executive Directors is a "majority of the total voting power of the member countries." [86] A high percentage of health and human rights organizations also use a default majority rule (sixty per cent), although weighted voting is not prevalent. Unanimity is the least frequently adopted decision-making rule, but is most frequently adopted by IOs concerned with development (27 per cent). By contrast, consensus is the most frequently adopted decision-making procedure, and it is most frequently adopted by peace and security IOs (64 per cent).

Insert Chart 1

International organizations also vary in terms of their size. Smaller international organizations tend to be more likely to use unanimity. Fifteen percent of IOs with current

[86] *Agreement Establishing the Inter-American Development Bank.* Article VIII, Section 4, d, iii (30 December 1959) Available at: http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=781584. Accessed on 29 August 2016.

membership under thirty members used unanimity, whereas no IOs with membership over 61 used unanimity. One could imagine that unanimity would be relatively impractical in larger membership organizations, so this pattern is not surprising. On the flip side of this logic, we should expect majority rule to be more likely with larger organizations. True to form, under thirty percent of IOs with a membership of 90 or fewer states use majority rule, whereas 64 per cent of IOs with a membership over 91 use majority rule.

Testing

You will recall that there were six main hypotheses regarding what has contributed to the increase in the use of consensus in the last several decades. The first hypothesis is**: (H1)** If powerful states are members of the international organization, then consensus should be more likely. In order to operationalize this hypothesis, I consider whether the U.S. is a member of the international organization (variable US). If the U.S. was one of the founding members of an international organization, then presumably it should be more likely that consensus would be used as a decision-making rule.

The second hypothesis is: **(H2)** If IO has smaller membership, then more consensus. In order to test this hypothesis, I include a variable NUMBER which represents a count variable: the number of original members when the international organization was founded. When available, this number was gleaned from COW-IGO in the year of the IGO's founding.[87] Because COW-IGO data is only available in five year increments prior to 1965, the COW-IGO membership data nearest to the founding year (for example 1955 for an IGO founded in 1952) was used in those cases. Several of the IGOs were not coded in IGO, either because they are not part of the COW-IGO dataset or because their membership data was missing. For those IGOs, membership data was retrieved by consulting early IGO documents, previous editions of the *Yearbook of International Organizations* and IGO histories.

[87] Pevehouse, Nordstrom and Wamke 2004 ad Wallace and Singer 1970.

The third hypothesis is (**H3)** if international organizations are European regional organizations, then there should be more consensus. One of the variables coded in my dataset was membership scope. IGOs were categorized as international (meaning that the members are geographically diverse), regional (meaning that all members came from the same geographic region, which could be defined by the member states as a continent, hemisphere or a body of water), and other (which includes organizations that are not purely international, but maybe restricted to two regions such as Europe and Asia, or may be largely regional but include certain members, often the U.S., outside of that particular region). To test the third hypothesis, I constructed a variable that was a subset of the regional organizations above and included Western European regional organizations (EUROREGION). Organizations that were Eastern European, often including Russia, the former Soviet Union or Turkey, did not fit the normative logic of the hypothesis and were therefore not included.

The fourth hypothesis is (**H4)** if contributions to an IO's mission or budget are unequal, then consensus is more likely. This variable is included, despite the fact that I think the underlying interpretation of consensus is flawed. Blake and Payton (2015), who isolate banks/funds and commodity organizations as IGOs that particularly rely on a few states for their success. In this dataset, I do not include commodity organizations, like the Asian and Pacific Coconut Community, International Grains Council and International Coffee Organization.[88] However, following Blake and Payton (2015)'s lead I do use a bank/fund dummy variable (BANKFUND) to test Hypothesis 4. The variable used to test this hypothesis is a dummy variable coded 1 if the IO is a bank or fund, with a predicted positive relationship.

[88] Note: the lion's share of the organizations that were excluded from the technical category were not commodity organizations.

Hypothesis 5, which states if international organizations are regional, then there should be more consensus, relates to both Hypothesis 2 in terms of logic (as mentioned previously) and Hypothesis 3 in terms of coding. As discussed above, I coded a variable that indicated whether IGOs are regional, whereby regional means that all members come from the same geographic region, which could be defined by the member states as a continent, hemisphere or body of water. This variable REGION is included to test whether regional IGOs are more likely to adopt and use consensus.

The sixth hypothesis states: If IOs have a membership constituted of relatively more democracies than autocracies, then the use of consensus increases. The variable used to test this hypothesis is a democratic density (DEMDENSITY) variable inspired by Tallberg et al (2014) and Pevehouse (2005). It is the average Polity score of all of the founding members (for whom Polity scores are available) divided by ten, and thus ranges from -.95 to 1. The predicted relationship is positive. As the membership becomes relatively more democratic, then consensus should be more likely to be adopted.

Finally, a time trend (YEAR) was also included in the analysis, both to test a Meyer-like argument about the increasing legitimacy of consensus decision-making in IGOs or other XXX-type arguments. Other possible controls: year (problematic because sucks up everything—can I legitimately omit?), regional variable (rise of regional institutions in post-1990 period as well… is it related?), nature of cooperation hypothesis (PD-like incentives aka security/environmental vs. pooled resources aka development agency).

To assess which factors contributed to the increase in consensus decision-making in the population of IGOs, I estimate the following logit model:

$$Pr(Consensus=1)=f(\beta_0+\beta_1 US+\beta_2 NUMBER+\beta_3 EUROREGION+ \beta_4 BANKFUND+\beta_5 REGION+\beta_6 DEMDENSITY+ \beta_7 YEAR+\varepsilon)$$

The dependent variable, CONSENSUS, is coded 1 if consensus is a primary decision-making rule in 2012 and 0 if consensus is not a default decisionmaking rule in 2012. The results of this logits are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Analysis of Consensus Decision-Making in International Organizations

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
USA	-.1309 (.5323)	-.1823342 (.5064513)	-.1797531 (.459677)	-.8946271 (.4097331)**
Orig_member	.0145 (.0096)	.0181756 (.0090142)**	.0182094 (.0085758)**	.0220188 (.00842)***
Euroregion	-1.5600 (.6061)***	-1.747331 (.5863723)***	-1.748741 (.57476)***	-2.165438 (.5520902)***
BankFund	-1.7669 (.4284)***			
Regional	-.3461 (.5100)	-.0056556 (.4657176)		
DemDensity	.7495 (.4334)*	.9581288 (.4145866)**	.9587574 (.4113563)**	1.507742 (.3878605)***
Year	.0366 (.0100)***	.0358244 (.0097007)***	.0357961 (.0094158)***	
Intercept	-72.2658 (19.7934)***	-71.38077 (19.14916)***	-71.32976 (18.681)***	-.3484337 (.2190339)
Log Likelihood	-117.13437	-128.44769	-128.44776	-136.65941
Pseudo R2	0.2192	0.1481	0.1481	0.0936
N	217	218	218	218

Standard errors are in parentheses. *p<=0.1, **p<=0.05, ***p<=0.01

Empirical results suggest support for the sixth hypotheses, and cast doubt on the first, second, third, fourth and fifth hypotheses. Democratic density is a good predictor of whether an international organization will use consensus as a default decision-making rule. When more democratic states come together to create an IGO, they are more likely to adopt consensus as a

default decision-making rule than when the membership on balance includes more autocracies, holding other variables constant (H6). The YEAR variable is also consistently significant and positive, as predicted. This may reflect the increasing legitimacy associated with adopting consensus decision-making rules or some other, as-yet-unspecified overtime trend. Empirical results cast doubt on the remaining hypotheses. Surprisingly, the number of original members was positive and significant in three of the four specifications (H2). However, the direction of the effect was not in the direction hypothesized. More original members, not fewer, are associated with greater use of consensus. European regional organizations are less likely to employ consensus, whereas H3 suggested that relationship should be positive (H3). The EUROREGION variable was consistently negative and significant, suggesting that if there was a cultural norm of consensus, it did not originate in or pervade Western European international organizations. Similarly, the BANKFUND variable's proved to be negative and significant, contrary to the fourth hypothesis. International organizations which are banks or funds are less likely to use consensus decision-making (H4). The U.S. also does not seem to be the driving force behind the increase in consensus. The U.S. membership variable was often not significant, but consistently was negative suggesting that IOs with the U.S. as a founding member are less likely to use consensus decision-making, not more (H1).

V. Conclusion

This paper has introduced a new dataset, which codes the decision-making rules of international organizations, and has provided some initial descriptive statistics on how the decision-making rules of international organizations vary over time, by substantive issue and size. One of the most interesting trends revealed by this dataset is an abrupt and dramatic increase in the use of consensus decision-making. The paper unpacks what consensus means and how it has been interpreted in the past before hypothesizing why this increase has taken place.

For example, consensus has sometimes been conflated with unanimity, but I argue that the unifying feature of consensus decision-making is the lack of explicit and public voting. While the empirical work has not yet been completed, initial empirical tests support the argument that democracies push for consensus decision-making in order to allow themselves greater discretion and flexibility at the international negotiating table. Consensus represents decision-making without a vote and thus a move towards greater opacity. Democratic governments appreciate this opacity in order to be able to negotiate international bargains behind a veil of secrecy. The political implication is that the increase in consensus decision-making may thus diminish the degree to which domestic groups can hold their leaders accountable for bargains stuck at the international negotiating table.

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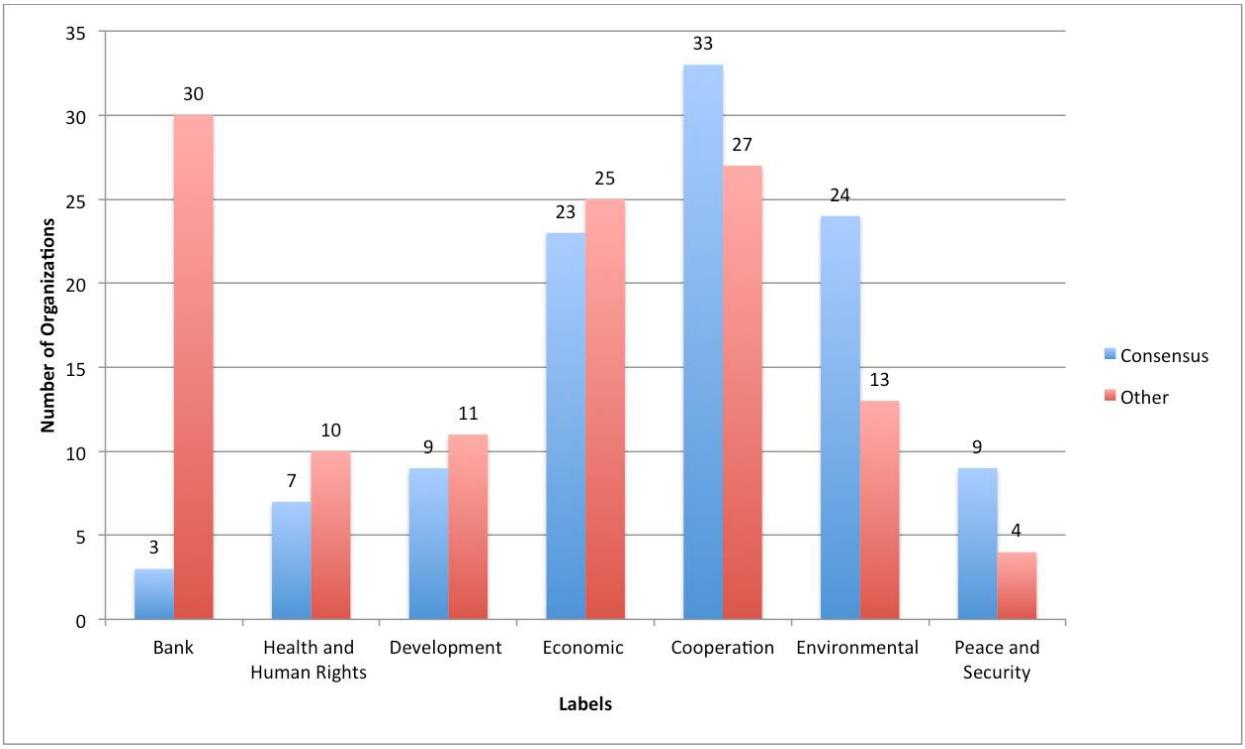
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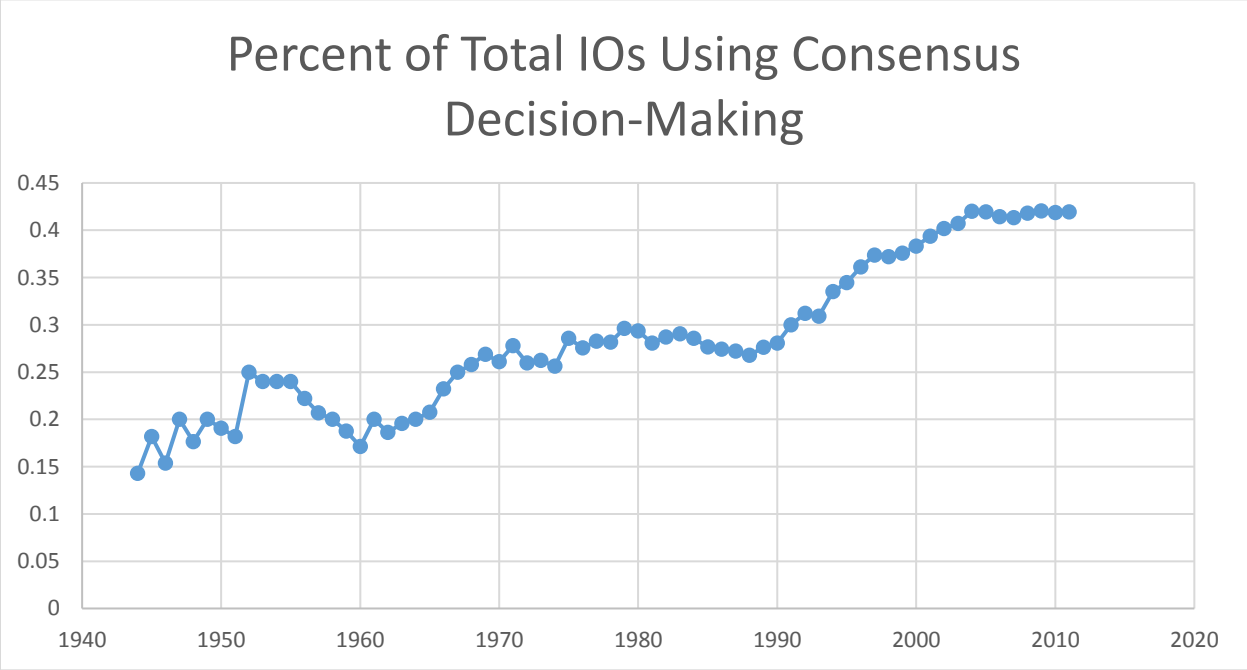
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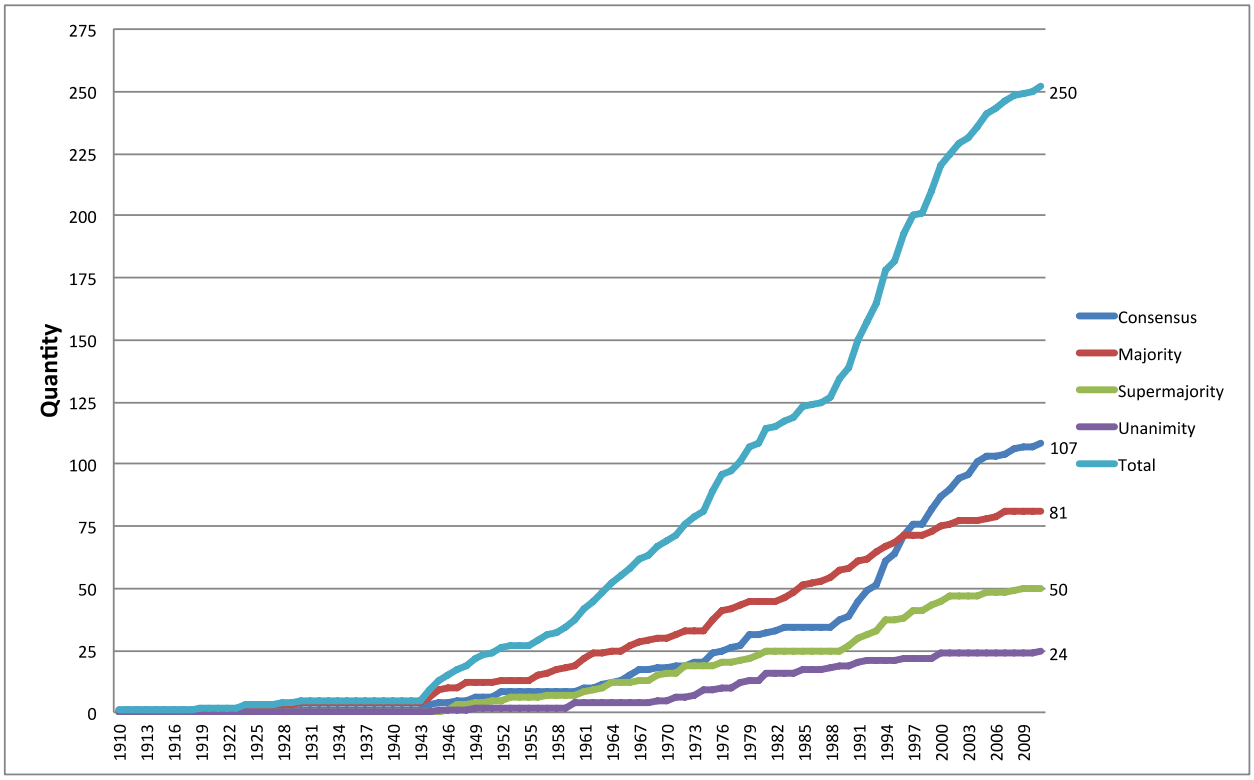
Chart 1: Use of Consensus by Type of IO



Graph 3: Relative Increase in the Use of Consensus, 1944-2012



Graph 4: How Decision-making Rules Have Changed Over Time



Graphic 1: Consensus: Continuum of Veto Player Percentage

Consensus as powerful state veto

Consensus as unanimity

Small percentage veto

Large percentage veto

Graphic 2: Consensus: Continua of Veto Player Percentage and Opacity

