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Whose legitimacy beliefs count? Targeted audiences in global governance legitimation processes

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Abstract Which groups do global governance institutions address in their efforts to legitimate themselves? Global governance institutions are increasingly attempting to present themselves as legitimate *vis-à-vis* both internal and external audiences. Yet, empirical research on these legitimation audiences is still nascent. This article proposes a conceptual framework that highlights the selection of audiences by global governance institutions as a key element of their self-legitimation. Specifically, we argue that our approach addresses three continuing challenges in empirical research on self-legitimation. First, it emphasizes how different actors within the institution may pursue multiple, and potentially conflicting, strategies with regard to the legitimation audiences they address. Second, our framework calls attention to what we call intermediary legitimation audiences, that is, audiences targeted with the expectation that they will in turn convince other audiences of the institution's legitimacy. Finally, instead of taking for granted that external critique steers who is targeted by self-legitimation, our approach highlights that an institution's internal assessment of such critique is decisive. We demonstrate the wide applicability of our framework through exploratory studies of three global governance

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institutions that differ with regard to their membership compositions: the World Health Organization, the International Criminal Court and the Forest Stewardship Council.

Keywords Legitimacy, Legitimation, Self-legitimation, Global Governance, World Health Organization, International Criminal Court, Forest Stewardship Council

Introduction

Recent scholarship on authority and rule beyond the nation state has increasingly recognized a need to study legitimation processes and the strategies that global governance institutions use to justify their exercise of power (e.g., Beetham 2013; Zaum 2013). One core reason for such an interest is the assumption that higher levels of legitimacy improve compliance (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). Rising levels of politicization, and the legitimacy crises experienced by several international institutions in recent years, have further accentuated the importance of such research (Zürn 2018: 137-167). Despite increasing interest in empirically researching legitimacy beliefs and the ways in which global governance institutions seek to legitimate themselves in their public communication, legitimation audiences have received little scholarly attention. As Jonathan Symons (2011: 2562) has pointed out, "the lack of a theoretical language for identifying the relevant social constituency of legitimation limits analysis." Researchers have thus far only begun to conceptualize and empirically study those whose legitimacy beliefs global governance institutions try to influence (Bernstein 2011; Chapman 2009; Dingwerth et al. 2019; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Symons 2011).

In this article, we aim to advance the study of audiences of legitimation by asking: Which audiences do global governance institutions target in their self-legitimation attempts? What organizational considerations and factors shape who is targeted by self-legitimation, and who is overlooked? And how can we best study legitimation audiences empirically? We develop a

conceptual framework for researching which audiences global governance institutions seek to convince of their legitimacy that goes beyond the application of pre-set, ideal-type categorizations. Building on research that approaches legitimation (more or less explicitly) as a strategic process (e.g., Dingwerth et al. 2019; Goddard and Krebs 2015: 15-6; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Tallberg and Zürn 2019), we delve further into this process by exploring more specifically which audiences global governance institutions decide to focus on in their efforts to legitimize themselves. This question is important because, while previous research found that global governance institutions seek legitimacy from an increasingly broad set of different audiences (e.g., Dingwerth et al. 2019: 34), little is known on how and with which consequences they choose between potential legitimation audiences. However, these choices matter: As Jennifer Gronau and Henning Schmidtke (2016) have shown, legitimation strategies directed at different audiences may contradict and even undermine each other. In order to identify which audiences global governance institutions target, factors shaping such strategic choices (also) have to be investigated empirically rather than assumed (cf. Anderl et al. 2019: 50, 63; Lenz and Viola 2017: 959). To demonstrate the applicability of our approach across institutions with varying constituencies, we analyse the self-legitimation attempts of the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). While the WHO is a longstanding intergovernmental organization with universal membership, the ICC is much younger and non-universal. The FSC, in turn, has a mixed membership as a non-state based, rule-making organization.

We conceptualize legitimacy in its empirical sense as a set of beliefs that is held by *groups of actors*, while (self-)legitimation denotes the process of attempting to convince *these actors* that an institution is legitimate (see Bernstein 2011; Gronau 2016: 111-2). As Matthias Ecker-Ehrhardt (2018) has argued in a recent article in this journal, however, such attempts at self-legitimation may marginalize some criticisms *vis-à-vis* others, for example by underplaying

concerns about the transparency and inclusiveness of an institution. Prior research neglects that due to limited resources, selecting which groups to address becomes an important choice, and that the act of targeting certain groups is constitutive of their status as audiences of legitimation (Bexell and Jönsson 2018). As we return to below, selecting which audiences to address is an act of exercising power of recognition because this selection elevates the status of the beliefs and norms of certain groups, potentially to the disadvantage of others. As succinctly put by Klaus Dingwerth et al. (2019: 6), "those who wield the capacity to define the conceptual terrain on which legitimation takes place wield power." Consequently, who is recognized as an audience of self-legitimation is a power-imbued question itself (see also Meine 2016; Oates 2016).

Through our approach, we pinpoint – and offer a solution for moving beyond – three continuing challenges in the study of self-legitimation that we argue require more nuanced discussion. First, it provides an avenue for going beyond a conceptualization of global governance institutions as speaking with one voice. Instead, it emphasizes – and allows for the empirical study of – a potentially diverse set of self-legitimating communication flows that result especially from the decentralized structure of many global governance institutions. Second, instead of depicting these institutions as engaging directly with their legitimation audiences, our approach allows for the study of self-legitimation processes as a complex system in which some groups may be targeted indirectly through what we call intermediary legitimation audiences. Finally, within the literature on legitimacy and legitimation, critical audiences are almost by default considered to be potential audiences of self-legitimation. Empirically, however, the extent to which critique steers self-legitimation remains an open question, and a question that may be answered by asking which audiences global governance institutions intend to convince of their legitimacy. While we present these challenges separately for analytical purposes, it should be noted that they are interlinked. Specifically, going beyond

a unitary view of the agent of self-legitimation enables a richer analysis of both intermediary legitimation audiences and of the internal assessment of external critique.

The article makes three main contributions, which we focus on in turn. First, we develop a conceptual framework for studying legitimation audiences that highlights organizational choice and delineates such audiences based on whether they are targeted by self-legitimation or not. It thereby calls attention to the constitutive nature of self-legitimation for the creation of audiences. In a second step, we identify solutions to key methodological elements that require consideration when empirically researching which audiences global governance institutions target. Finally, through our exploratory case studies, we demonstrate how our approach addresses the three challenges for empirical research on self-legitimation pointed to above.

Conceptual framework: Targeted audiences of self-legitimation in global governance

Legitimacy, legitimation and audiences of (de)legitimation

Global governance is a multi-layered system of rule containing various "spheres of authority" (Rosenau 2007). This basic structure raises deep challenges for both the study of its legitimacy and for legitimacy claims issued by its political institutions (Zürn 2018). Political legitimacy means that a governing institution's exercise of authority is in line with one or several of many possible sources of appropriate rule (Tallberg et al. 2018; Tallberg and Zürn 2019). The decision on the legitimacy of a concrete instance in which power is exercised can be made in different ways. For instance, a researcher may assess to what extent an institution lives up to a set of theoretically derived sources of legitimacy, such as democracy, justice or efficient problem-solving. Alternatively, such a decision may also be made by those who are subject to

that institution's authority, such as member state citizens assessing, for example, the legitimacy of the United Nations. Such legitimacy perceptions can in turn be studied empirically (Tallberg et al. 2018). According to this perspective, legitimacy is thus understood as a property attributed to an organization, policy or actor, while legitimation refers to attempts to affect perceptions of legitimacy in a positive direction (Reus-Smit 2007: 159). A legitimation strategy can be defined as "the use of public and recognized reasons to justify a claim to an issue", which is always embedded in a broader social context that sets the frames of legitimation processes (Goddard 2006: 40). Delegitimation, in contrast, denotes attempts to affect legitimacy perceptions negatively, which can range from state critique (e.g., Binder and Heupel 2015) to social civil society protest (e.g., Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018). Such actors who undertake legitimation or delegitimation attempts can be called agents of (de)legitimation. In the context of strategic legitimation, legitimation audiences are the actors on the "receiving end" of legitimation and delegitimation attempts, i.e., those whose legitimacy beliefs are supposed to be affected by such attempts (Bexell and Jönsson 2018).

Our more precise interest in the present article is in the subcategory of self-legitimation, which is the active attempt by an agent of legitimation – in our case a global governance institution – to boost perceptions of its own legitimacy (Gronau 2016; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016; Steffek 2003). Self-legitimation strategies contain statements with an evaluative component indicating that the way in which the institution exercises its own authority is indeed appropriate. Only those actors explicitly addressed in such statements should qualify as audiences of self-legitimation (see generally Schneider et al. 2007: 134-5). The object of legitimation is the "self", while the audience of self-legitimation may be external as well as

internal to the institution, as they may or may not include an institution's own bureaucratic staff.[4]

Furthermore, this article focuses on the audiences that global governance institutions target in their legitimation attempts, i.e., the intended recipients of legitimation claims.[5] Depending on the core mission of the institution or its organizational set up, some groups are more obvious candidates for institutions as potential addressees of their legitimation claims. To begin with, a key expectation is that it is especially those groups that the institution exercises authority over – i.e., member states and potentially their citizens – that institutions will focus on in their efforts to convince outside (and inside) actors of its legitimacy (Beetham 2013: 271; Bernstein 2011: 21, 27-8; Dingwerth et al. 2019: 34; Bexell and Jönsson 2018). In this context, Jonas Tallberg and Michael Zürn (2019: 586) introduced the distinction between *constituencies*, i.e., audiences with institutionalized political bonds to a governing authority, and *observers*, who lack such a connection.

While previous research indeed indicated that international organizations are particularly prone to target their constituencies in their efforts to legitimize themselves, it is also clear that international organizations have in recent years diversified which audiences they reach out to (Dingwerth et al. 2014; Zaum 2013: 16-9). There are several reasons why global governance institutions might reach out beyond their constituencies in their self-legitimation, such as functional benefits, taming opposition and the strength of participatory norms in global governance (Tallberg et al. 2013). Especially in the case of subject-specific institutions that rely on their technocratic expertise as a source of legitimacy, expert communities might be a particularly important legitimation audience, such as economists in the case of the IMF (Moschella 2010). Finally, as private governance mechanisms not set up by states may have

[4] Note that other authors may use the term self-legitimation to refer to internally directed legitimation attempts, rather than in order to specify the object of legitimation as we do here (e.g. von Billerbeck 2019).
[5] In this article, we therefore do not focus on self-appointed audiences, i.e., audiences that might react to legitimation claims on their own accord (Bexell and Jönsson 2018).

more difficulty in convincing audiences of their legitimacy, they may compensate by reaching out to a broader set of audiences as a result (Bernstein 2011). Indeed, the distinction between constituencies and observers is generally less clear for private governance institutions that may not even count states among their members (Bexell and Jönsson 2018: 125).

In sum, while at least in the case of inter-governmental organizations, member states and their citizens as the institution's constituencies are likely to be targeted audiences, the groups that global governance institutions address in their self-legitimation attempts have broadened substantially in recent years, to the extent that is it by now far from clear which groups would be targeted, especially in the case of private governance. In a context in which global governance institutions reach out to an increasingly diverse set of audiences, with at times contradictory legitimation claims and with limited resources, the question remains how institutions select between different potential audiences, and with which consequences.

Which audiences global governance institutions target in their legitimation attempts is a particularly important question because such a choice not only reflects, but may also reinforce or even impact on underlying power dynamics. In most general terms, legitimation processes are necessarily charged with power given that they concern strategic attempts to justify existing power and authority relations as embodied through global governance institutions. Consequently, the mutual constitution of legitimacy-claiming and legitimacy-granting practices is always shaped by intricate political and power relations (Bernstein 2011; Bernstein 2018; Clark 2005: 254).

More specifically for the purposes of this article, which audiences global governance institutions regard as important enough to address in their legitimation attempts itself reflects and potentially reinforces underlying power structures. As Dingwerth et al. (2019: 5-6) point out, if an institution changes its legitimation attempts to cater more to new audiences with different normative assumptions, such a decision matters, as it in turn provides these new

audiences with the ability to set the benchmark against which the legitimacy of the institution is assessed. Furthermore, global governance institutions may be more likely to target non-constituent audiences rich in influence and resources (Bexell and Jönsson 2018: 128). The most apparent example are groups that an institution might approach for funding in cases in which its budget is supplemented by private, non-state contributions. Another example is the increased engagement of global governance institutions with civil society actors. For instance, the IMF has broaden participation in, and transparency of, its decision-making processes to increase its legitimacy after the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Woods 2001). However, as Jan Aart Scholte (2012: 187) has shown, in Sub-Sahara Africa, the IMF's engagement with civil society organizations remained "noticeably skewed toward urban, professional, propertied, male, and culturally Western circles." In the end, the increased participation of such selected civil society actors thus reinforced the exclusion of marginalized groups (Scholte 2012). At the same time, even attempts to address more marginalized groups may lead to contradictory consequences. While self-legitimation may address marginalized groups that otherwise gain little recognition in global settings, it may do so on arbitrary grounds or with exclusionary implications for other groups (see also Pouliot and Thérien 2018).

Setting the selection of audiences centre stage

While constituting a crucial first step, prior literature has left the selection of audiences by global governance institutions underexplored, partly because it either focused on one specific type of audience or relied on a predetermined, ideal-type distinction between legitimation audiences. For instance, Gronau and Schmidtke (2016: 543) distinguish between self-legitimation attempts aimed at three different "ideal typical constituencies": member states, an institution's own bureaucracy and the general public (see also Gronau 2016: 111-2). The way

in which they define the "wider public" as the audience of legitimation attempts remains very broad, and "includes citizens, the media, NGOs and other private actors, but also other international institutions and non-member states" (Gronau and Schmidtke 2015: 545; see also Hurrelmann 2017: 69). Their framework therefore cannot capture – and even risks rendering invisible – tensions that may exist beyond these three ideal types as well as within their broad category of the general public.

In a key contribution, Steven Bernstein (2011) goes beyond an ideal-type distinction by arguing that standards of legitimacy are formed through interactions of legitimacy-granting communities with broader social structures. As a consequence, how legitimacy is perceived might differ across global governance institutions. Bernstein acknowledges that identifying who belongs to such legitimacy-granting communities consequently turns into a crucial endeavour. However, in his otherwise sophisticated framework, it remains less clear how such communities are to be identified empirically, a problem that Bernstein admits himself (Bernstein 2011: 21, 28). Moreover, he seems to default to a distinction between constituencies and observers as a starting point, to then focus on the extent to which different groups might share common norms. His approach concentrates on identifying standards of legitimacy held by different groups, and potential tensions among them, rather than focusing on which audiences global governance institutions address in the first place (Bernstein 2011; see also Bernstein 2018).

In a recent important contribution, Dingwerth et al. (2019: 41) acknowledge that "international organizations do not confront a ready-made and clearly discernible public as the main addressee of their claims to legitimacy." Furthermore, their framework emphasizes how actors compete over the ability to set the terms against which to assess an institution's legitimacy, and how audiences exert power by accepting some legitimacy claims but dismissing others. However, while approaching the "audience dimension of legitimacy in its plural"

(Dingwerth et al. 2019: 34), how global governance institutions distinguish between, and based on this distinction strategically target, specific audience groups is not the main focus of their analysis. Indeed, they acknowledge that their approach is unable to capture all non-constituent audiences, and only focus on groups that have acquired formal accreditation (Dingwerth et al. 2019: 41)

To emphasize how legitimation audiences are constituted by the institutions targeting them and to argue that power is exercised through this process, we conceptualize legitimation audiences not based on an *a priori* distinction indicating which groups are likely to be a key audience, but instead based on an empirical analysis of which groups global governance institutions intend to address in their self-legitimation attempts. As a consequence, we define targeted legitimation audiences as *the sets of actors that a global governance institution explicitly acknowledges as an audience it intends to address in its efforts to legitimize itself.* Such a conceptualization accentuates that the communities that grant legitimacy are far from pre-set and stable, but are constructed by and through their interaction with the global governance institution that seeks to present itself as legitimate. Inquiring into the selections made by legitimation agents also offers a way of moving beyond three key challenges for current empirical legitimation research. Below we briefly outline each of these challenges in turn.

Moving beyond unitary agents of self-legitimation

To begin with, our approach offers one possible avenue for going beyond a view of global governance institutions as homogenous entities engaging in self-legitimation, as it requires asking whose intentions and choices shape the direction of self-legitimation. With institutions typically depicted as unitary actors of legitimation, Dominik Zaum (2013: 15) has called for

additional attention to potentially contradictory processes that take place among an institution's different organs, and how these tensions may shape self-legitimation. In a prior contribution to this journal, Ecker-Ehrhardt (2018) has usefully gone beyond treating global governance institutions as uniform actors, even though self-legitimation is only one of several logics of public communication that he explores. Clearly, while international organizations' public communication is increasingly centralized (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2017), public communication departments are not the only interface through which global governance institutions engage with external actors – or with their own bureaucracies. For example, public communication units report to, and are instructed by, an institution's leadership, who also themselves engage in self-legitimation, be it in public speeches or through their messages in annual reports. Consequently, it might well be the case that specific audiences are targeted by an institution's public communication unit, but remain overlooked within the institution's leadership. Especially for institutions with a complex organizational structure, which audiences are targeted may differ markedly between staff working at the institution's headquarters and at its regional or country offices. By focusing on which groups an institution intends to convince of its legitimacy, our approach ultimately requires attention to the individuals that hold such intentions, and to potential disagreements between them.

Emphasizing intermediary legitimation audiences

Second, while legitimation is often in large parts (and more or less implicitly) depicted as a direct relationship between global governance institutions and their audiences, asking which groups institutional actors choose to target allows for an analysis of the prevalence – and consequences – of targeting legitimation audiences indirectly. In this context, we propose the concept of intermediary legitimation audiences to highlight the possibility that self-legitimation

may be filtered through several layers of audiences, as global governance institutions may address one audience with the aim that this audience would in turn convince another group of the institution's legitimacy.[6] Focusing on the audiences that global governance institutions actually choose to address thus provides us with additional insights on the role of these layers and the relationship between them. Intermediary legitimation audiences are attractive targets because they hold the potential to multiply the number of audiences reached. The media, for instance, is an intermediary that both transmits legitimation claims and affects public opinion by shaping discussions in deliberative settings (Bohman 2007). Intermediaries' own credibility (or lack thereof) may therefore influence the degree to which they impact other audiences' legitimacy perceptions of the institution in question. In addition, instead of merely being used to help increase an institution's legitimacy in the eyes of another audience, such intermediaries may themselves be treated as a legitimation audience in their own right.

Examining the role of critique

Thirdly, critical audiences are almost by default seen as key targeted audiences, as commonly reflected in articles starting with a statement that global governance institutions have become more politicized and therefore engage increasingly in self-legitimation (this article included; see also e.g. Zürn 2018). Beyond this general assumption, it is less clear when global governance institutions choose to respond to critique. We account for this crucial question by asking representatives of global governance institutions what kind of critique they observe, and whether they seek to address that critique. Ultimately, our approach thus allows for insights into the role of delegitimation attempts – such as protests – for institutional self-legitimation. Such an emphasis thereby resonates with, and is able to draw on, recent contributions by

[6] Note that the concept of intermediary legitimation audiences thus diverges from the concept of regulatory intermediaries due to its focus on (self-)legitimation (Abbott et al. 2017).

Bernstein (2018), Anderl et al. (2019) and Catia Gregoratti and Anders Uhlin (2018), who pointed to the importance of studying the extent to which global governance institutions recognize protesters as significant. Those institutions recognize protests conducted by different actors to different degrees, depending for instance on protesters' ability to impact public opinion or the institution's key constituencies (Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018: 141). If protesters are recognized by the institution to be significant in shaping perceptions of its legitimacy, it is more likely that they are targeted by self-legitimation attempts. Treating a group as a legitimation audience provides it with recognition and – ultimately – legitimacy by acknowledging that their critique matters. Through this process, global governance institutions can privilege, for example, civil society groups that express less far-reaching demands, while excluding more fundamentally critical groups (e.g. Anderl et al. 2019).

Based on this conceptual framework, the following section discusses methodological issues faced in empirical research on which audiences global governance institutions seek to reach out to in their self-legitimation attempts.

Methodological considerations

There are several methodological difficulties involved in determining empirically which groups a global governance institution targets in its self-legitimation attempts. Below, we outline a response to three aspects that are particularly challenging: (1) what kind of material allows us to decide what groups are targeted as audiences of legitimation; (2) how to differentiate self-legitimation from other types of public communication; and (3) the need for analytical thresholds for deciding whether or not a group is targeted.

Empirical basis for studying targeted audiences

Who is or is not a constituency can easily be determined from studying founding statutes and legal agreements. What evidence is needed to identify targeted groups, however, is less evident. One way to study targeted legitimation audiences is by analysing the institution's written and oral communication, ranging from annual reports and press releases to information published on an institution's websites, as well as their (often multiple) social media accounts. Within its written or oral communication, the institution may outline explicitly which audiences this material is intended for. Indeed, annual reports' descriptions of the audiences that the institution has reached out to in its activities may itself constitute an act of self-legitimation. Furthermore, speeches delivered by the institution's representatives inherently specify its audiences, as they are necessarily always intended for – at the very least – the audience physically present. With an increasing number of documents made available online, global governance institutions often include specific sections on their websites explicitly dedicated to different audiences.

However, one of the main challenges when studying legitimation audiences empirically is that most external communication material – typically published online – does not specify who the intended audiences are. Instead, the targeted audiences of such communication are usually implicit. As a result, an analysis of institutional publications alone is likely to provide an incomplete picture, as some audiences that are not explicitly specified might be overlooked. Additional evidence can then be provided by policy documents that global governance institutions publish about their own public engagement strategy. Those documents at times include information on which audiences the institution seeks to reach out to, and which types of messages it intends to convey. Another fruitful option is to conduct interviews with staff engaged in the institution's external relations and public communication, who decide on which groups the institution engages with.

Consequently, our empirical discussion is based on analysis of public communication documents, including annual reports and news items available online, policy documents, the general structure and content of the institutions' official websites, as well as 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with staff members and secondary literature. Interviews were conducted with staff members working with external actors, be it member states, external experts or affected communities. For all three institutions, these interviewees included communications directors in charge of the institution's public communications via the institutions' websites and social media, which makes the comparatively small number of interviews conducted for each institution sufficient for the purposes of this exploratory study.

Clearly, interviews can only offer an indirect view on the legitimation audiences a global governance institution targets, given that they are based on the account of its staff members. Such interviews may themselves become a legitimation attempt, in which the interviewee seeks to convince the researcher (as the audience of this legitimation act) that the global governance institution exercises its authority in a rightful way. Such a situation might especially arise in cases in which the question of audiences and external communications that a particular institution engages in is contested. As a result, we chose to treat the interviews we conducted as supplementary to our document analysis, instead of relying exclusively on interview material.

Distinguishing self-legitimation from other types of external communication

Not all external communication an institution produces may be categorized as self-legitimation. Specifically, Ecker-Ehrhardt (2018: 6-9) usefully differentiated between three different logics of international organization public communication: a "logic of public information" intended to spread information about the institution; a "logic of governance" that seeks to realize social

change; and a "logic of self-legitimation" that aims to generate support for the institution among the general public. In practice, however, it is often difficult to distinguish between different drivers behind an institution's outreach attempts. After all, some news items published by an institution might be highly descriptive and factual in character. However, the decision to publish such news items in the first place might have been taken with the aim of depicting the institution as informative and transparent, and with the intention to convince its audiences of the institution's legitimacy.

This example therefore again underlines the added value of supplementing an analysis of institutions' external communication with semi-structured interviews. At the same time, research on institutional self-legitimation might run the risk of being over-inclusive by branding just any communicative act or, indeed, institutional decision as an act of self-legitimation. To respond to this challenge, we propose a dual approach for distinguishing between self-legitimation and other types of external communication. We include communication documents that explicitly outline the audiences targeted if those documents contain legitimation statements with an evaluative component. Such a component suggests that the way in which the institution exercises its authority is indeed appropriate (Schneider et al. 2007: 134-5). Only in this case, such explicitly addressed audiences become audiences of self-legitimation. With regard to the use of interviews, we suggest to identify targeted legitimation audiences by asking employees whom they select to reach out to in their external communications, for which purposes they do so, and which groups they seek to address explicitly with the aim of convincing them of the institution's legitimacy. Such an approach not only enables us to highlight strategic choices, but also to limit the focus of the interviews to legitimation audiences more specifically.

Analytical threshold for identifying targeted audiences

A final methodological challenge concerns the question which threshold criteria to use when determining that a group is actually a targeted legitimation audience. Such thresholds are crucial to assess the intensity of an institution's targeting efforts, as the intensity with which a global governance institution focuses on a particular group might well vary over time, for example. Due to our focus on strategic choice, a group or actor qualifies as a targeted audience when it is explicitly mentioned as targeted by an interviewee or in a written document or oral statement by the institution. We do not employ a numerical threshold for deciding whether or not a group qualifies as a targeted audience.

To illustrate the added value of our conceptual and methodological approach, we apply our framework to the study of legitimation audiences addressed by the WHO, the ICC and the FSC. Specifically, we use our cases to discuss the challenges identified in our conceptual framework. It should be noted that our empirical discussion is not intended to serve as an in-depth comparison of the audiences targeted by these three institutions. Instead, we employ an exploratory approach to demonstrate the added value of our framework for identifying which and how audiences of self-legitimation are targeted as a key part of the self-legitimation process. Our decision to focus on the legitimation audiences targeted by the WHO, the ICC and the FSC is motivated by two main considerations. First, these institutions are comparatively well-known, but differ with regard to their constituent membership, institutional design and age, and substantive governance area. In particular, the WHO is an older intergovernmental institution with universal membership, compared to the ICC as a comparatively new intergovernmental institution with non-universal membership, and the FSC as a young, private governance institution with a diverse membership base. Including the non-state based FSC thereby probes the applicability of our framework across a diversity of contemporary global governance institutions. Second, all of these institutions have experienced significant challenges to their legitimacy in recent years.

As a consequence, focusing on these institutions is potentially insightful for analysing how external criticism impacts who is targeted in their self-legitimation attempts. At the same time, it should be noted that this exploratory study may only provide a first step into this direction. Most importantly, our sample is confined to single-issue institutions, which may be particularly prone to target expert communities in their self-legitimation. Furthermore, given the considerable diversity among non-state global governance institutions, a focus on the FSC may only provide preliminary insights. As a consequence, future research will need to explore to what extent the framework needs to be modified to be relevant in studies of multi-issue institutions and non-state institutions other than private certification schemes such as the FSC.

Targeted audiences of the WHO, the ICC and the FSC

This section first provides overarching observations from the cases, and then examines more specifically what the cases tell us about the challenges identified in our framework: how to conceptualize the agent of legitimation; the relationship between legitimation agents and their audiences; and the role of external critique. Based on our empirical work on these three institutions, the following discussion thereby seeks to give a first answer to the question of which audiences are targeted, and why.

Despite core differences in institutional design, governance field and age, our analysis found that all three institutions went well beyond their constituencies in their legitimation attempts. As the WHO receives an increasingly large share of its financial resources from funders beyond member states (WHO 2018), non-conventional funders such as major philanthropic foundations have become a main targeted audience. Another key audience beyond the WHO's constituencies are academics, who act as both external critics and supporters, and who are engaged with the organization through WHO expert panels (WHO 2016; Interviews 4-8). Similarly, the ICC's Public Affairs Unit seeks to provide information

for a "legal community" (including legal experts and academics) particularly in countries in which investigations have been opened, in addition to reaching out to the public more broadly in both member and non-member states (Interview 1). Both the ICC and the WHO's self-legitimation are thus in line with the expectation that issue-specific institutions tend to seek legitimacy from expert communities. Furthermore, interactions with especially civil society representatives are frequent, including through an institutionalized annual ICC-NGO roundtable attended by both international and local human rights NGOs (Interviews 1, 3; see also e.g. Lohne 2018). Finally, at the FSC, key policy documents list a broad set of potential legitimation audiences ranging from actors in market spheres to civil society and governments, as well as from international to national and local levels (FSC 2015: 11; FSC 2017; FSC 2018). While the FSC membership base includes both companies and non-profit social and environmental actors, the FSC's targeted audiences increasingly include two large non-member audiences, namely individual consumers and FSC certificate holder companies (Interviews 9-12). Indeed, the FSC as a non-state global governance institution seems to address a particularly diverse set of legitimation audiences.

This broad list of legitimation audiences should not obscure that members nevertheless remained the primary group that all three institutions target in their self-legitimation attempts. The WHO works primarily through member states and their ministries of health, which are seen as ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of their citizens (Interviews 4-8; WHO 1946). In the case of the ICC, court staff highlight the importance of both member states and communities affected by the investigated crimes, as well as citizens more generally (Interviews 1, 2). Similarly, also FSC interviewees testify that members are prioritized in FSC communication: "We spend most of our energy communicating with members. Then certificate holders and then we try to squeeze in consumers where we can" (Interview 11). Indeed, all three of our case studies emphasized strongly that, due to limited financial resources, global governance

institutions need to prioritize among the groups in whose eyes they might want to boost their legitimacy.

Which audiences global governance institutions perceive as important is thereby clearly a reflection of a broader normative context provided not the least by the issue area in which these institutions operate. Indeed, differing normative assumptions across audiences may turn into a central challenge for the institution (Zaum 2013: 16-9; Dingwerth et al 2014; Gronau and Schmidtke 2015). Consequently, which underlying norms these institutions highlight in their self-legitimation attempts differs across our three cases, as all three institutions are situated in different governance fields. WHO communication mainly refers to expertise as a source of the institution's legitimacy. "We uphold the highest standards of professionalism across all roles and specializations. We are guided by the best available science, evidence and technical expertise" (https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/our-values (2 July 2019)). The very identity of the WHO is technocratic and built on being the major hub of knowledge production and expert advice in the field of global health (Interview 4-8; Kickbusch et al. 2010; WHO 2019: 41). ICC self-legitimation, in turn, highlights the court's contribution to justice. Consequently, the court describes its "primary objective [as] being an independent and credible institution of international criminal justice" (ICC 2004: 1) and, according to the current ICC President, Judge Chile Eboe-Osuji, an institution which "work[s] in the service of justice and the rule of law" (https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=181005-pres-stat (26 October 2018)). Finally, the FSC mainly emphasizes its democratic composition and decision-making procedures, which are designed to strive for both north-south parity and a balance between economic, social and environmental constituent parties (Interviews 9-12; Dingwerth 2008; Pattberg 2011).

Moving beyond a view of global governance institutions as uniform agents of self-legitimation

Studying legitimation audiences through the lens of global governance institutions, and how they themselves frame and perceive these groups, provides an avenue for moving beyond a depiction of legitimation agents as homogenous. After all, focusing on which groups global governance institutions intend to convince of their legitimacy implicitly entails – at least on an empirical level – inquiries into how the selection of audiences is made within the institution. Indeed, all of our three cases emphasize how the question of which audiences to target can be highly contested especially across institutional bodies and regional offices. This observation, in turn, sets the question of whose views might gain prominence beyond an institution's leadership centre stage. While international organizations have been shown to centralize their public communication efforts (Ecker-Ehrhardt 2017), our research indicates in contrast that institutional self-legitimation may be conducted by a multitude of units, sections and individuals working at the institution's interface with outside actors. Compared to Gronau and Schmidtke's (2016) finding that global governance institutions may direct different – and potentially contradictory – legitimation strategies at different audiences, our study thus adds an additional level of complexity.

To begin with, our analysis of the legitimation audiences targeted by the WHO emphasizes that it is especially problematic to treat global governance institutions as unitary legitimation subjects in cases of decentralized institutions that maintain substantial regional or domestic presences. While headquartered in Geneva, the WHO has six regional and more than 150 national offices, which have their own communication units, cooperation strategies and outreach activities. It is this rather complex "structure of WHO [that] makes it difficult to speak with one voice" *vis-à-vis* different potential audiences (Interview 6). In other words, targeted audiences may vary between different administrative levels and geographical regions. Sometimes the same campaigns are pursued from the headquarters and the regional offices,

while their approaches might differ at other times. In addition, also the relevance of funders differs across contexts, depending on epidemiological patterns and the needs of the region in question. For example, the European Office sees the European Commission as a key legitimation audience, while the African Office to a larger extent needs to target philanthropic foundations in order to get support for various disease-specific programmes. Communication officers are well aware of this tension and struggle to meet different expectations among different audiences (Interview 8). Moreover, the WHO General-Director is also a strong voice with his or her own strategic priorities, thereby adding another level of complexity. For example, the current General-Director, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has expressed the wish to strengthen the political leadership of the WHO by working more closely with heads of states and ministers of finance and foreign affairs than his predecessors (Interviews 4, 5, 8; WHO 2019: 19, 33; https://www.who.int/dg/vision (2 July 2019).

FSC has a similarly complex organizational structure, subject to on-going governance review as demanded by FSC members (FSC 2018: 21-22; FSC 2015: 24), against the backdrop of self-legitimation claims based on democracy: "As our membership grows, so does the strength of our democratic system" (FSC 2017: 21). National FSC bodies have independent organizational status and are governed by their own boards. As a result, self-legitimation is again also undertaken by organizational entities other than the FSC International Secretariat. These national FSC bodies focus especially on the domestic level when attempting to win the support of companies along the domestic forest supply chain. Interviewees even point to advantages held by the FSC national office level (compared to FSC International) when engaging in external self-legitimation: "It is not as clumsy, it does not have to go [through] as many processes. You have more direct access to the stakeholders you need to speak to. It is a quicker response time if there is a problem or you have to be proactive. There is more room to be proactive. There is more direct stakeholder engagement" (Interview 11). At the same time,

FSC International supports national FSC offices in handling criticism. One interviewee explains that all the "big legitimacy issues" get elevated to the international FSC level if they have the potential to threaten the credibility of the organization (Interview 11). As a result, self-legitimation and the targeting of legitimation audiences becomes a complex, multi-organ process.

At the ICC, in turn, functional differentiation across the court's organs makes inquiries into the potentially heterogeneous character of this agent of self-legitimation particularly fruitful. Indeed, a large number of units and sections within the court interact with external actors, all of which may seek to convince these different groups of the court's legitimacy. The court itself distinguishes between three types of engagement with outside actors: *external relations* (focusing on "building and maintaining support and cooperation" with "key partners" such as member states and civil society organizations), *public information* and *outreach* to communities affected by the crimes under investigation (ICC 2005: 3). All of these forms of engagement are largely conducted by different units located within the court's administrative body, the Registry. However, also the Office of the Prosecutor, which actively conducts investigations, has its own news desk. Indeed, when engaging with external actors, officers at the Registry even emphasize that the Registry is different from the Office of the Prosecutor. The Registry's mandate is to be impartial as opposed to a party in the proceeding – with this impartiality hence turning into a main source of the Registry's (communicated) legitimacy (Interview 3). In other words, the ICC is a particularly poignant example for why looking inside the institution is particularly important when studying its self-legitimation, as it is in fact part of one organ's self-legitimation to distance itself from another part of the institution. As a consequence, going beyond a unitary view of the agent of legitimation allows for a rich empirical answer to the question of who is targeted by self-legitimation and what organizational tensions and contradictions appear as a result.

Identifying intermediary legitimation audiences

In response to the second challenge identified above, we went beyond a conceptualization of self-legitimation as a direct communication process between legitimation agents and their audiences. We found that, in addition to directly reaching out to certain legitimation audiences, all three institutions targeted what we call intermediary legitimation audiences. These intermediaries are legitimation audiences that were addressed with the expectation that they would in turn convince other audiences of the institution's legitimacy. The use of such intermediary legitimation audiences is particularly developed at the ICC. Several of the ICC's external communication units employ a complex system of indirectly targeting certain groups through multiple layers of legitimation audiences. To facilitate cooperation with the court, the ICC's Public Affairs section attempts to engage not only state governments, but also, for example, the general public, civil society organizations and legal experts, based on the assumption that their support would make such state cooperation more likely (Interview 1; specifically with regard to NGOs, see also De Silva 2017). Furthermore, as the ICC's Spokesperson explains, in situations in which local leaders might be the best avenue for reaching out to affected communities, for example, the court first needs to engage with these leaders in order to convince them that the court is indeed legitimate (Interview 1).

Similarly, at the WHO, it is considered important that the institution generates and maintains a good reputation in the eyes of the general public. Instead of reaching the general public directly, however, several interviewees voiced the view that government entities, such as Ministries of Health, act as intermediaries in relation to their citizens, given that it is these ministries that implement the WHO guidelines, for example. In this context, one interviewee even indicates that it is not important if people know about the WHO itself, the important point

is that they know how to protect themselves from diseases (Interview 7). At the same time, social media is to some extent changing this situation by allowing WHO to connect more directly with the public through, for example, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (Interviews 7, 8). Academics, including editorial teams at high-profile scientific journals, serve as key intermediary legitimation audiences reaching out to research communities as well as to practitioners through publications, editorials, blogs, etc. (see e.g. WHO 2016). Furthermore, goodwill ambassadors are frequently used for advocacy work and to mobilize the international community to advance the WHO agenda, creating an additional layer of actors involved in self-legitimation.

Finally, as mentioned above, the FSC seeks to reach out to consumers as one of its key targeted audiences, based on its own surveys of consumer perceptions of the FSC brand (FSC 2018: 39-41; FSC 2015: 20-22). Policy documents as well as interviews show increasing FSC acknowledgement of the role of the market for FSC certification. This strengthens the status of consumer preferences in FSC self-legitimation attempts, as illustrated in the FSC Annual Report 2017: "We aim to substantially increase our promotion of FSC as a consumer brand" (FSC 2018: 39). Specifically, all FSC interviewees put especially young consumers first among the audiences they would like to reach more in the future, given that they will be the decision-makers of tomorrow (Interviews 9-12). However, such attempts are constrained by limited organizational resources. Due to budgetary constraints FSC does not target consumers directly, but by reaching out to companies that are considered close to consumer, and specifically retailers of large brands. These companies are again used as intermediary legitimation audiences with the intention that they would, in turn, spread knowledge and a positive view of FSC certification among consumers: "These companies are the ones carrying our message through to consumers […] Therefore it is very important for us that these intermediary companies find FSC to be legitimate and useful in their communication with consumers"

(Interview 12). The role of companies is also emphasized in the 2017 FSC *Vancouver Declaration*, a public promise that companies can make to endorse FSC and work towards more sustainable sourcing of forest products (Vancouver Declaration 2017). In the case of the FSC, intermediary legitimation audiences are targeted as a response to insufficient organizational capacity to reach important audiences, in this case consumers that ultimately determine the spread of FSC certification.

Ultimately, our three cases highlight that focusing on which groups institutions intend to address is key for going beyond an understanding of self-legitimation as a direct interaction between an institution and its legitimation audiences. This is crucial as the decision to rely on intermediary legitimation audiences is far from inconsequential. In particular, such intermediaries might actually be empowered through this process, such as academic experts in the case of the WHO and companies close to consumers and large-brand retailers in the case of the FSC. In the case of the ICC, the court has been criticized for potentially glossing over the actual voices of victims when relying too heavily on civil society organizations in its communication with affected communities (Mégret 2015: 40; see similarly Lohne 2018: 462-3). After all, being directly addressed by an institution provides both access to the institution and recognition of the group that is being addressed. This is a position that is not shared by those that are only (and potentially unsuccessfully) reached indirectly. What is more, in a situation in which it may be advantageous for the court to portray itself as benefiting victims, a lack of unified representation and a focus on NGOs seen as acting on behalf of victims may allow the court to "claim 'the victim's voice,' even against actual victims' voices" (Mégret 2015: 40; see similarly Kendall and Nouwen 2013). At the same time, while it is often the preferred approach within the ICC (Ullrich 2016: 545), the court may face considerable practical challenges when attempting to directly engage with citizens especially in countries in which investigations are being conducted, including due to limited resources and security

considerations (see e.g. Dutton 2017). In the end, the case of the ICC therefore illustrates the possibly sensitive power relations involved in the use of intermediary legitimation audiences, which may empower these groups over others. Similarly, depicting affected communities as one of the court's main legitimation audiences illustrates how prioritizing some legitimation audiences over others may itself be a contested question in need of legitimation, and potentially subject to critique – an aspect that a pre-set, ideal-type distinction between different legitimation audiences would not be able to uncover.

Highlighting the role of internal assessment of critique

Thirdly, studying the groups that global governance institutions target has the potential to shed light on the extent to which external criticism steers the direction of their self-legitimation attempts. Our case studies indicate that all three institutions experienced substantial challenges to their legitimacy. But only in the case of the FSC did attempts to counter opposition clearly explain which legitimation audiences the institution chose to address. Interestingly, when deciding whether to respond to critique in their self-legitimation attempts, and whether to engage with those criticizing them, the internal assessment of such critique seems to be decisive.

To begin, FSC policy documents do not much bring up the role of critique with the exception that the FSC Implementation Plan includes "[t]ak[ing] action against false claims in high risk supply chains" as one of its immediate priorities (FSC 2017: 9, 12). However, both our interviews and academic publications point to the role of critique for FSC operations. Staff at the FSC evaluate challenges to the institution as fundamental, and even as potentially undermining the institution. Since its creation, the FSC has been under repeated criticism from environmental NGOs, which resulted in several prominent NGOs withdrawing from the

institution and its domestic branches (including, most recently, Greenpeace International). Indeed, environmental NGOs have regularly issued critical reports on the FSC since its inception. The FSC has since its early days faced "counter-institutionalization" (Zürn 2018: 96, 170-94), in the form of the creation of the competing, less demanding, Pan-European Forest Certification (Johansson 2012; Moog et al 2015). In this situation, our interviews reveal that the FSC spends much of its organizational resources responding to critics, regardless of whether they are FSC members. The internal assessment of the threat posed to FSC's credibility by this critique appears to have been decisive for the decision of whether to respond. Especially in situations in which the organization perceives external criticism as potentially undermining the legitimacy of the organization, it prioritizes to respond and explain its views on the matter at hand (Interviews 10-12).

More specifically, critique from members weighs heaviest in the eyes of FSC employees, followed by critique from large social and environmental NGOs (Interview 11). In the eyes of FSC employees, NGO critique is potentially a great challenge to FSC's legitimacy. Most critique from NGOs concerns practices of large, FSC-certified forest companies. Responding to such critique through information and debate is therefore considered vital for maintaining the credibility of FSC certification standards, especially given that the use of social media platforms has amplified the voices of some critics. One FSC employee reflects that "I feel a lot of what we do is to intervene in crises situations" (Interview 11). Another employee conveys that "[s]omething we haven't done before is proactively speak about our work, due to resources more than anything else, but we haven't proactively spoken about our successes, we tend to react a lot to this negative press" (Interview 10). In sum, responding to critique is a clear priority of FSC secretariat staff, directing self-legitimation attempts towards vocal external critics in the public sphere.

A contrasting case is provided by the ICC where the internal perception of critique is more ambiguous. The court has come under substantial challenge in recent years especially from the African Union amid criticism of bias, which culminated in several member states either withdrawing or threatening to withdraw from the court. In the reasons provided for its decision to withdraw from the ICC (which has since been withdrawn itself following a judgment of the South African High Court (High Court of South Africa 2017)), South Africa explicitly cited "perceptions of inequality and unfairness in the practice of the ICC," partly due to "the perceived focus of the ICC on African states, notwithstanding clear evidence of violations by others" (Depository Notification 2016: 1-2). As the most recent developments, the Philippines deposited their formal withdrawal notice from the court on 17 March 2018 (effective 17 March 2019), following a decision by the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor to open a preliminary examination of the situation in the Philippines. Furthermore, at the December 2019 session of the Assembly of States Parties, South Africa emphasized that "we are still deliberating on the issue of withdrawal from the Rome Statute as the matter is still to be considered by our Parliament" (https://asp.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/asp_docs/ASP18/GD.SOU.2.12.pdf (8 February 2020). Regarding counter-institutionalization, it should be noted that the Malabo Protocol intended to create an international criminal law section within the African Court of Justice and Human and Peoples' Rights has been understood as such an attempt (see Vilmer 2016: 1340; De Silva 2016; Malabo Protocol 2014).

At least during the time that the interviews for this project were conducted at the ICC in mid-2018, even quite dramatic decisions such as member states withdrawing from the court were not considered to be necessarily a sign of a legitimacy crisis. Instead, increased pressure on the court was also seen as potentially a reaction to the opening of investigations against powerful individuals – as well as the result of a changing international political landscape in which the court operates more generally – than as an indication of a legitimacy crisis of the

court (Interviews 1, 2). While acknowledged to be prevalent, such criticisms are also assessed as possibly part of the normal backdrop to any court proceeding (Interview 2). At least potentially as a consequence, responses to such critique and increasing pressure did not seem to play a major part in the court's selection of which legitimation audiences to target. Indeed, while different actors at the court agreed upon how to respond to the critique of a perceived bias against Africans once it was raised (Interview 2), at least the ICC's institutionalized engagement with the African Union in recent years, for example, seems to have remained largely unchanged (Interview 3). In particular, the ICC continued to organize annual retreats with African States Parties and African Union member states with the goal of demonstrating that the court is willing to engage in a continuous dialogue (Interview 3; see also www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=PR%201263 (24 October 2018)). At the same time, it should be noted that as recently as December 2019, the Assembly of States Parties decided to create an Independent Expert Review with the aim to "enhanc[e] the performance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Court and the Rome Statute system as a whole," with one out of several areas the review shall give "special attention to" listed as "[s]trengthening public awareness and [the] image of the Court" (Assembly of States Parties 2019, 2, Annex 2).

Finally, the WHO case falls in-between FSC and ICC. There is great awareness that critique directed towards WHO may potentially challenge its legitimacy, with implications for its operations. This is reflected in speeches by the Director General as well as in the literature (e.g. Lidén 2014; van Schaik and van de Pas 2014) and among our interviewees, pointing out that "criticism impacts reputation and the flow of funds" (Interview 5). It is noteworthy that some 80 per cent of the money spent by WHO in recent years comes from earmarked voluntary "extrabudgetary" contributions, making the organisation dependent on the goodwill of donors and thereby vulnerable to criticism that in turn may affect such goodwill. Twenty contributors, primarily industrialised member states and philanthropic foundations, supply almost 80 per cent

of all funds, making their perceptions of WHO particularly important (Cueto et al. 2019: 326; Rached and Ventura 2017: 2). "We have to nurture our relationship with funders, because we have a funding gap" (Interview 7). And like FSC and ICC, the WHO has been exposed to counter-institutionalization as a result of discontent among member states with the creation of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in the 1990s as a prominent example (Zürn 2018: 191-2).

Several WHO reforms have been initiated over the years to counter critique on everything from poor management of epidemics, especially the Ebola epidemic in 2014, to an inefficient bureaucracy (Interviews 4-8; Lidén 2014: 143; McInnes 2015; Ruger 2014). For example, former Director General Margaret Chan initiated a reform concerning programmatic priority-setting, governance structures and management efficiency (WHO 2017). This reform effort is arguably conducted in order to satisfy critique from member states, but also other donors as well as WHO's own staff. Another recent reform aims to strengthen engagement with NGOs, private sector entities, philanthropic foundations and academic institutions. It has been described as a way to convince the public and "a complex set of actors", including its member states, that WHO "relations with non-state actors are clearly framed" and not unduly influenced by philanthropic foundations or big industries (Rached and Ventura 2017: 9). Yet, despite awareness within WHO of strong critique against it, our interviewees were convinced that the organization's legitimacy remained strong. One interviewee underlined that receiving and acting on criticism is important for the legitimacy of WHO (Interview 8). In other words, critique is taken seriously by WHO and it does guide self-legitimation attempts to improve the organization's reputation and secure funding. At the same time, responses from our interviewees indicate that the legitimacy of the WHO is not perceived to be threatened by external critique to the same extent as appears to be the case for FSC.

In sum, the extent to which external critique steers the selection of targeted legitimation audiences depends on internal perceptions of critics and their objections and of how seriously their critique can hurt the organization. The non-state-based identity of the FSC is likely to explain its greater internal sensitivity to critique. In contrast to the WHO and the ICC, the FSC cannot rely on an (imagined) chain conferring legitimacy from citizens to states to intergovernmental organizations and therefore needs to claim legitimacy by more proactively addressing critics.

Concluding remarks

Global governance institutions seek legitimacy among a broad range of actors, and increasingly beyond those who are formally bound by their authority. Addressing self-legitimation claims towards particular actors indicates that the legitimacy beliefs of those actors matter to the institution. Treating a group as a legitimation audience increases those actors' status, power and visibility within the legitimation process by impacting the choice of norms and practices an institution refers to in order to justify its authority. In this article, we have argued that inquiring into which groups legitimation agents choose to address not only provides an avenue for making this dynamic visible both conceptually and empirically, but also indicates a way to move beyond three key continuing challenges in the nascent field of empirical legitimation studies.

Employing our conceptual framework in exploratory studies of the WHO, the ICC and the FSC showed the importance of going beyond a unitary view of the agent of legitimation. Indeed, our case studies indicate that internal organizational considerations and tensions among different branches and units within global governance institutions are influential in determining who is targeted. We also found that all three institutions targeted intermediary legitimation audiences, with the expectation that these intermediaries would in turn convince other

audiences of the institution's legitimacy. Finally, our cases indicated that an institutions' assessment of critique against it plays a key role for the extent to which such critique impacts the selection of targeted legitimation audiences.

Such a more nuanced picture better captures organizational considerations embedded within global governance institutions, as well as power relations between institutions and their targeted audiences. However, our illustrative case studies also put the methodological challenges involved in studying targeted audiences empirically into sharp relief. Multiple channels of self-legitimation and several layers of legitimation audiences make legitimation processes intricate to trace. Future studies could consider additional ways of inquiring into whether or not a particular group qualifies as a targeted audience. Moreover, further empirical studies of targeted audiences of legitimation have the potential to provide new insights into broader theoretical debates on inclusion and exclusion in global governance. Our empirical discussion also raises questions on the role and responsibility of scholars themselves – including those investigating legitimacy and legitimation empirically – given that our interviewees across institutions have indicated that they perceive academics as a legitimation audience.

Furthermore, our case studies confirm that the institutionalized political authority relationship that privileged constituencies as legitimation audiences is no longer an obvious starting point for the study of self-legitimation. The cases shed further light on potential tensions between self-legitimation attempts directed at different audiences and possible consequences of shifting legitimation attempts towards non-constituent parties. Directing more attention to certain vocal audiences may leave the global governance institution open to legitimacy challenges from other audiences, given limited organizational resources, contested representational claims and possibly competing interests between audiences. While a global governance institution might claim to represent a certain group as a way of legitimizing itself, this group may not necessarily be the primary legitimation audience. For instance, the ICC

frequently depicts affected communities as one of the court's main audiences. Yet, as mentioned above, some commentators pointed out that tensions may nevertheless arise between the choices favoured by affected communities and by the ICC. The FSC case, in turn, points to tensions between market dynamics that directs self-legitimation towards consumers, and democratic norms that direct self-legitimation towards FSC constituencies. If FSC self-legitimation increasingly emphasises market attractiveness, it may lose ground among audiences who are more likely to be convinced by its claims to democratic legitimacy. Finally, the case of the WHO especially highlights tensions between private and public health actors. When directing self-legitimation attempts towards the private industry, accusations regarding a lack of independence follow that may lead to legitimacy challenges in the eyes of other parties. Therefore, exploring these and other tensions involved in legitimation processes further is a fruitful way forward for the continued study of those groups whose legitimacy beliefs global governance institutions seek to affect.

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