

How to systematically study the policy influence of International Public Administrations? Some pragmatic propositions to improve empirical research

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Abstract:

In this paper, we propose an approach to conceptualize and systematically analyze the influence of International Public Administrations (IPAs) on policy-making in international (governmental) organizations (IOs). IPAs, i.e., the secretariats of IOs that constitute the international counterparts to national administrative bodies, wield independent influence on the development and implementation of public policies. Previous research has identified different administrative, political and context-related factors that might enable administrative influence to occur. However, integrative approaches that allow for a comparative empirical analysis of crucial explanatory factors under a common theoretical framework are rare. Thus, we still lack *systematic* knowledge of how international administrative bodies affect policy-making processes of IOs and global governance more generally. Against this background, we put forward five pragmatic propositions that may help scholars to overcome some of the current challenges in research on international administrative influence and increase our knowledge as regards when and under which precise conditions IPA influence occurs.

1 Introduction

International Public Administrations (IPAs), i.e., the secretariats of international organizations (IOs) that constitute the international counterparts to administrative bodies at national and subnational levels, have attracted substantial scholarly attention in recent years (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Ege and Bauer 2013; Liese and Weinlich 2006). While this research has offered new insights into the administrative patterns and operations of IOs, there is an emerging consensus that IPAs wield independent influence on the development and implementation of public policies (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009a; Nay 2012; Reinalda and Verbeek 2004; Stone and Ladi 2015). But when and under which precise conditions such international administrative influence occurs is still debated (Eckhard and Ege 2016).

Proceeding from the conclusion that we still lack systematic knowledge of how IPAs affect policy-making processes of IOs, the approach of the present paper is primarily a conceptual and programmatic one. We take stock of the current debates related to the role of IPAs in public policy-making and, against the dearth of comparative research and a lack of cumulative knowledge, suggest avenues for future research. More concretely we suggest five propositions that are – in our view – able to improve our understanding of IPA influence beyond single cases. Taken together, these propositions may form a more comprehensive research framework to set the stage for an empirical investigation of whether, under which conditions, and how IPAs are able to influence the output of IO policy-making.

The approach outlined here contributes to current research in two important ways: First, it will help to develop a broadly applicable and systematic measurement of administrative influence at the international level. This measure will enable us to identify different degrees of IPA influence and provides a solid ground for cross-case comparisons. Second, as we conceptualize the link between structural autonomy and influence as an empirical question, we will be able to separate structural bureaucratic capacities from actual influence and empirically evaluate the explanatory power of different context conditions. The paper is structured as follows: Next, we take stock of the state of the art of research that deals with international bureaucracies' influence on policy-making. Based on the shortcoming we identify in this literature, we present five suggestions in form of proposition in order to improve our understanding of international administrative influence and its causes.

2 State of the art: International bureaucracies' influence on policy-making

When and how are IPAs able to exert influence upon organizational policy-making? Scholars have investigated various instances of bureaucratic influence on international policy-making. Cox and

Jacobson (1973) were among the first to study patterns of IO decision-making from a comparative perspective. The authors found that the influence of political and administrative actors inside the eight IOs studied primarily depends on the kind of decisional output. More recently, Weinlich (2014) came to a similar conclusion when studying the influence of the UN secretariat on three crucial decisions during the evolution of peacekeeping. In her analysis, she found that especially during agenda-setting and policy formulation phases, bureaucratic influence is strong (but less so during policy adoption). Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009a) have conducted an insightful comparative study, which is limited, however, to the field of environmental governance. The authors focus on nine secretariats to identify the mechanisms and conditions for autonomous bureaucratic influence in this field. Their results suggest that a secretariat is particularly influential if the solution to the problem at hand is inexpensive or of minor political salience for national decision makers. While formally delegated competences seem less important, the project group finds evidence that intra-organizational factors related to staff characteristics and organizational structure are more decisive (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b: 337–44).

Because of the general trade-off between analytic depth and breadth, empirical research (often implicitly) focuses on either *conditions* or *mechanisms* of influence. On the one hand, comparative studies ask about the conditions that need to be present/absent for influence to occur/not occur. The specific causal drivers behind its occurrence, however, remain often underspecified. On the other hand, case studies of specific instances of administrative influence dedicate more attention to the mechanism of how the observed influence took place, but often fall short of describing the relevant context conditions. Owing to these two perspectives, it is useful to separately consider the most relevant explanatory factors, which have been studied by an increasing number of empirical studies (for a summary see also Eckhard and Ege 2016).

With regard to *context conditions*, the literature identifies different explanatory factors to affect the capacities of IPAs to influence policy-making, of which functional factors, power-related factors, and structural factors appear most relevant. Functional factors are related to the underlying policy (or the initial problem). It is argued, for instance, that a bureaucracy wields *more* influence when complex technical problems are concerned (Bohne 2010; Xu and Weller 2004) and states depend on bureaucratic expertise to solve them (Johnson and Urpelainen 2014; see also Liese and Weinlich 2006: 515).¹ Power-related factors, in contrast, concern the policy preferences of the most important member states and stakeholders (Copelovitch 2010; Urpelainen 2012). While some scholars study power-related factors under the term ‘politicization’ (see Elsig 2010), others frame them as a major

¹ The causal effects of the underlying policy, however, are often difficult to compare because these features are studied at different analytical levels. Liese and Weinlich’s (2006) review article, for instance, identifies effects of policy-related features within issue areas, at the organizational level, and at the level of individual decisions.

aspect of 'political salience' (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b: 334). Overall, there is a general consensus, however, that strong political preferences are associated with *less* bureaucratic influence and that the administration cannot exert influence against the clearly articulated will of the states that make up an IO's 'governing coalition'.² Finally, some studies suggest that structural features related to intra-organizational design (such as executive characteristics, administrative resources and organizational competences, which can be conceptualized as components of structural bureaucratic autonomy) are relevant explanatory factors for IPA influence. Scholars studying (potential) administrative influence across organizations and thus focusing on the IPA as central unit of analysis, in particular, have identified structural prerequisites as relevant for the explanation of IO outputs and behavior (Bauer and Ege 2016; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b; Trondal 2011; Weinlich 2014). Overall, however, studying the impact of structure on IPA influence across cases is not very prominent in contemporary empirical works. In contrast, structural features are more commonly the focus of in-depth policy studies, where such features are conceptualized as causal mechanisms through which IPA influence operates during the policy process.

In these case studies, the *mechanisms* behind successful IPA influence are attributed to the characteristics of the administration itself (Nay 2011; Xu and Weller 2008: 39–43; see also Mayntz 1978: 82). Scholars emphasize that IPAs wield influence by classifying information, fixing meanings, and diffusing norms (Barnett and Finnemore 1999, 2004). It is argued that IPA authority reaches substantially beyond their rational-legal character and delegated tasks. Instead, it is their superior moral authority and specialized knowledge vis-à-vis member states that bestow IPAs' power. According to this perspective, bureaucratic authority (such as the perceived expert status of the IPA, professional experience, the control over information, and IPA neutrality) are considered the most important mechanisms through which IPAs are able to influence policy output (see Busch and Liese 2017). A prominent research strategy is to trace influence back to crucial individuals within the organization who are able to promote change of an institutional or content-related nature by acting as policy entrepreneurs (Nay 2011; Kamradt-Scott 2010; Jörgens *et al.* 2017). Even though recent research has contributed to this debate by taking stock of formal and informal administrative patterns (see e.g., Bauer *et al.* 2017; Trondal *et al.* 2012), a systematic empirical analysis that links administrative patterns to IO policy-making and IPA influence, however, is still missing.

In sum, scholars have collected evidence supporting the proposition that international bureaucracies can be powerful actors who may use their central position with the organizational structure, their privileged access to information, and their professional authority to decisively influence the course of action. While the causal mechanisms through which IPAs can influence policy-making are

² 'Governing coalition' refers to the group of those member states that together meet the threshold necessary to pass a decision in an IO's legislative body (see Bayram and Graham 2015: 3).

relatively well understood, the *conditions* under this influence occurs (and their relative importance in terms of explanatory power) are still a matter of academic controversy. It has been critically observed that “[m]any current accounts either dismiss secretariats as faceless clerks, concerned chiefly with convening debates among states, or lionize them through empirical descriptions of influence” (Manulak 2016: 2). One of the main reasons for these contradictory findings is that most of the research is characterized by a focus on single instances of influence and by a bias toward positive (or successful) instances of IPA influence (Busch 2014: 57). Cases where influence is absent are rarely included in the analysis. Truncating the property space of the phenomenon of influence is problematic because this makes it difficult to test the explanatory power of the different causes of influence and to take into account the possibility of asymmetric causality (i.e., that the explanation of the occurrence of influence may differ from the explanation of its absence). Thus, while previous studies have – often inductively – identified several factors at different analytical levels that might enable influence to occur (see e.g., Liese and Weinlich 2006: 515), neither a more consistent theory of IPA influence nor an integrative approach that allows for the analysis of several explanatory factors under a common theoretical framework has yet emerged.

3 Synthesis: Five propositions

In view of the deficiencies outlined above, scholars interested in the consequences of IPAs internal set-up and those studying IO policies more generally face several challenges. How can research on the internal functioning of IPAs and their policy influence be integrated? What kind of research design is conducive to a systematic analysis that can improve our systematic knowledge of IPA influence? How can IPA influence be systematically measured and compared across cases? What are the factors found in the literature that may account for differences in administrative influence? These are only some but in our view the most pressing challenges within the current debate. In order to work toward the resolution of these challenges, we make five propositions that we think researcher are well-advised to consider if they want to improve the state of the art and enhance the basis for systematic research with the aim to accumulate knowledge on IPA influence.

- 1) Conceptual proposition I: Separating bureaucratic factors from influence
- 2) Conceptual proposition II: Focusing on policy outputs.
- 3) Research design proposition: Two step analysis and two step case selection
- 4) Measurement proposition: How to measure influence on policy output?
- 5) Analytical proposition: Some preliminary expectations for an explanatory framework

3.1 Conceptual proposition I: Separating bureaucratic factors from influence. Our first proposition concerns the conceptualization of dependent and independent variables in influence research. It holds that a separation of bureaucratic factors and actual influence is essential for improving the systematic understanding of IPA influence. Only by distinguishing bureaucratic factors from administrative influence conceptually does it become possible to link them in a causal-analytical manner.

The previous section shows that recent research on IOs acknowledges the importance of intra-organizational factors, but also highlights that systematic accounts of which concrete bureaucratic features of IOs are important and how these features translate into influence are rare. If the aim is to focus on the influence of IPAs, and work towards a comparison between greater numbers of cases, recourse to studies of national public administrations may seem a sensible option. Domestically-oriented Public Administration research regularly investigates the impact of organizational structures and personnel of ministerial bureaucracies and executive agencies on policy-making (Aberbach *et al.* 1981; Mayntz 1978; Schnapp 2004; Workman 2015). But also here, a clear analytical separation of bureaucratic factors and actual influence and the analytical establishment of a causal link between the two concepts is similarly problematic. However, viewing bureaucratic features as parts of more abstract concepts such as bureaucratic autonomy, which in turn constitute a precondition for influence are found helpful to deal with this problem analytically (Maggetti and Verhoest 2014). The work of Schnapp (2004) is exemplary here. It constitutes a comprehensive comparative study of the preconditions for influence of national ministerial bureaucracies, which are found in bureaucratic characteristics of internal cohesion (among staff), as well as internal capacities to gather and process policy-relevant information. Schnapp thus provides a measurement framework that enables a large-n comparison of the (structurally defined) bureaucratic potential to influence policy-making. Unfortunately, testing whether this potential is actually used at the policy level and translated into influence remains outside the scope of Schnapp's study. It demonstrates, however, that separating bureaucratic factors from influence by viewing certain structural features as a necessary but not sufficient condition for influence is essential. At the level of global policies, similar attempts have been made. For instance, Weinlich acknowledges that autonomy and policy influence are two different concepts that must be kept analytically distinct (see Weinlich 2014: 57). This allows her to study the influence of the UN administration in three policy instances. A similar argument is also supported by Haftel and Thompson, who point out that 'even if an actor has autonomy [...], it may still have very little influence' (2006: 256). Thus, distinguishing bureaucratic factors from influence and subsuming them under the umbrella of a suitable 'systematized concept' (Adcock and Collier 2001: 531) such as autonomy may be a fruitful strategy to empirically link internal organizational features to international administrative influence.

3.2 Conceptual proposition II: Focusing on policy outputs. Proceeding from the previous proposition, it becomes obvious that in contrast to autonomy, influence cannot be assessed at the abstract organizational level. The study of actual influence requires a definition of the substance matter because influence without a concrete object remains an empty category. Thus, the second conceptual proposition holds that the object of influence is – at least at the current state – most promisingly selected at the level of policy output and focus on both the *adoption* and *application* of policies.

Policy output is defined as the direct result of the decision-making process and thus refers to the content of a decision and the activities that immediately result from this decision. For the study of global policies, focusing on policy output is a natural starting point because the analysis of direct organizational outputs is a prerequisite for understanding policy effects (outcomes and impacts) in the broader policy domain and should therefore precede the analysis of the latter (see also Tallberg *et al.* 2016). An output-oriented perspective has already been successfully applied in the study of IO decision-making (Cox and Jacobson 1973). This research is primarily concerned with the policy output of IO's political bodies (the so called 'governing bodies' such as the legislative assembly and the executive board).³ In their quest to explain policy output, scholars are either concerned with the sum of an IO's policy decisions in a in a given time period or with individual policy outputs. For the study of bureaucratic influence, it is especially this later perspective on individual policy outputs that is relevant.

The process leading to a policy decision can – at least in principle - be influenced by the IPA and is thus relevant for our research. Limiting the analysis of administrative influence to the *adoption* of a policy, however, would not only disregard the influential role that international bureaucrats and policy experts play during policy application (Joachim *et al.* 2008; Lindvall 2009) but also assume the *automatic* translation of agreed-upon rules into practice, which is in stark contrast to the established understanding in policy studies (Bondarouk and Mastenbroek 2017). Schaffrin and colleagues, for instance, argue that “a conceptualization of policy output should focus on the dimension of policy means including all three components, the ‘instrument logic,’ ‘mechanisms,’ and ‘calibrations’ as the tools to reach objectives and general goals on the dimension of ends or aims” (2015: 259). Thus, in order to capture the phenomenon of bureaucratic influence more comprehensively, scholars should also include the way a decision is specified (i.e. put into practice) and study policy *application*.⁴ Such a broad but differentiated reading of the output concept has not only proved useful for the study of

³ Implicitly or explicitly, the decisions of these bodies are usually equated with the output of the organization as a whole.

⁴ To be sure, this is not the same as considering outcomes in the sense of the “consequences of a decision” (Schmitt 2013: 30–31) but only a decisions specification into concrete measures. This is also described as “practical implementation”, consisting of *final policy formation on the ground* and *actual policy delivery* (Bondarouk and Mastenbroek 2017).

domestic policy change (see e.g. Hall 1993; Knill *et al.* 2009) but also builds on some earlier definitions of policy output in the IO literature (). It is again Weinlich, who argues that “the output of an international organisation comprises their policies and the activities that result from these policies” (2014: 59).⁵

While such a differentiated perspective helps us to get a better understanding of IOs policy outputs, two additional specifications seem important to improve the empirical analysis. First, we should initially limit our investigation to policies *developed within the framework of one IO* and not cover policies in which more than one organization is involved (see Knill and Bauer 2016: 951). Similar to the restriction on policy outputs, such a limitation on single IO policies is a prerequisite for understanding policy effects in the broader policy field and should therefore be considered a fruitful point of departure for the analysis of IPA influence. Second, one should not forget to include cases of institutional policies into the study of IPA influence. A policy output is viewed as ‘institutional’ if it concerns the competences and functioning of the administration itself or aims to alter the formal relationship between member states and the IPA. A policy output is considered ‘substantive’ if its goal is to influence the behavior of actors with the IO’s membership.⁶ Taking into account instances of both substantive and institutional policies is important because IPA influence may vary accordingly and neglecting one type or the other will distort the results and not lead to a general theory of IPA influence. According to these specifications, we suggest defining policy output as the sum of instruments and actions adopted and specified within a formal IO decision that changes the regulatory status quo within the issue area or institutional set-up of this organization.

3.3 Research design proposition: Two step analysis and two step case selection. This proposition concerns two design parameters that bear a high potential for improving research on IPA influence. Based on the current state of the art, the first proposition suggests a two-step analysis (conditions versus mechanism) and the second suggestion aims at improving the analysis by showing how case selection strategy can shift from the organizational level to individual policies.

First, we argue that one option to increase the analytical leverage is the application of a two-step analysis based on a nested case design (Lieberman 2005; see also Rohlfing and Schneider 2016),

⁵ There are also studies that subsume decisions and action actions of the secretariat under the output concept (Freitas 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009b). For instance, Biermann *et al.* in their seminal work refer to “the output of the international bureaucracy” as an IPA’s “actual activity and productivity such as laws and standards enacted, publications and scientific findings disseminated, money spent, or advisors dispatched” (2009: 42). It is important here, however, to distinguish between the output of IOs and the output of IPAs. Since we are interested in administrative influence, our reference point is IO output because it would make no sense to capture the influence of the IPA on its own output, which – almost by definition – is always high.

⁶ In the typology of Tallberg *et al.* (2016: 1085), substantive policy output refers to the regulatory, distributive and declarative decisions, while institutional output refers to constitutional and administrative policies (for another differentiation of IO decisions, see Cox and Jacobson 1973).

where the analysis of conditions is separated from the analysis of the mechanisms of influence. A first analytical step would identify the conditions under which international bureaucratic autonomy impacts IPAs' influence on policy output. The results may then be used to examine the administrative capacities for policy-related action available to IPAs and identify the strategies international bureaucrats actually employ to wield administrative influence. The major advantage of separating the analysis of conditions from the analysis of the underlying mechanisms is that the latter benefits greatly from the results of the former: Selecting those policy cases for in-depth analysis that most closely resemble the empirical configurations of independent and dependent factors identified in the previous analysis would enable us to discern the causal mechanisms behind the previously identified pattern (Schneider and Rohlfing 2013).

Second, it needs to be emphasized that the adequate selection of cases is crucial because it has important consequences for the generalizability of findings (King *et al.* 1994). This generally applicable advice concerning the adequate research design is particularly important for studies on IPA influence. For instance, selecting cases with high administrative influence would not only lead us to overestimate the general relevance of IPAs in policy-making but also bias our results. Thus, one should avoid selecting on the dependent variable and focus on cases of policy output irrespective of the role of the IPA during their adoption and application. In order to systematically sample such policy cases, we propose a two-step selection procedure that starts at the organizational level and then shifts to individual policies. At the organizational level, case selection could be based on a 'most similar systems design' (Przeworski and Teune 1982: 32), because it allows us to hold a number of IO-related factors constant and hence focus the analysis on selected explanatory factors that vary across cases. After suitable IOs are selected, cases of policy output could be sampled by random selection from the IO policy repository or via a survey among IO staff and stakeholders. We opt for the latter and suggest asking the people involved in the preparation, adoption and implementation of policy decisions. This selection strategy is particularly useful to identify individual policy decisions that also bear particular importance within the context of the policy portfolio of the IO. More specifically, we suggest identifying relevant policy cases by means of a small online survey among IPA staff members and stakeholders of the four IOs.⁷ By asking about important policies without referring to the role of the administration, one can make sure to select cases with both positive and negative instances of IPA influence. This allows us to assess whether the explanation of the occurrence of successful influence differs from the explanation of its absence.

⁷ In order to increase the response rate, the online survey needs to remain limited to only a small number of precise questions. Its completion should not take more than five minutes. Senior managers and members of the diplomatic missions of member states will be asked in neutral language to enumerate five institutional decisions (for respondents working in administrative departments) or policy decisions (in policy department) that they consider most relevant within the issue area of their IO. The answers will enable us to rank the cases mentioned and select from the top-scoring (i.e., most important) cases.

3.4 Measurement proposition: How to measure influence on policy output? After it has been argued that the unit of analysis is best selected at the level of policy output and should include both policy adoption and application, we now turn to the concept of administrative influence and propose a way to measure influence in a comparative manner.

We suggest conceiving of ‘administrative influence’ as that particular aspect of a policy output that can be attributed to the presence or specific behavior of the international administration. It is based on the counter-factual reasoning that if the administration had not been there (or had not acted the way it did), the result would have been different (see e.g., Busch 2014). Following Biermann et al. (2009: 41), IPA influence is thus ‘the sum of all effects observable for, and attributable to, an international bureaucracy’ (see also Liese and Weinlich 2006: 504; Weinlich 2014: 60–61). In order to specify influence beyond this prominent but rather general definition, we start from the assumption that successful IPA influence has three constitutive elements: 1) the involvement of the IPA in the preparation of the policy output, 2) the existence of explicit administrative preferences in favor of a particular policy option and efforts on the part of the IPA to justify or defend this option and 3) the congruence between IPA preferences and the final policy output to finally assess the “degree of preference attainment” (Dür 2008: 566).

These elements not only provide us with observable implications for influence to be considered successful (i.e., all elements need to be present), but also allow for a more nuanced assessment of different degrees of influence. Moreover, we have suggested to differentiate between IPA influence on policy adoption and IPA influence in policy application (Schaffrin *et al.* 2015; Howlett and Cashore 2009: 39; Weinlich 2014). While *influence on policy adoption* captures the degree to which the bureaucracy is able to affect the objectives and on-the-ground setting of the policy (i.e., policy ends), *influence on policy application* is concerned with the bureaucracy’s effect on the specific type of policy instrument utilized and its calibration (i.e., policy means). A similar distinction can also be found in the study of institutional policies (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; Schön-Quinlivan 2011).

Systematically measuring policy influence is challenging but also highly relevant for political science (March 1955). Especially research on interest group lobbying has provided advanced approaches to the systematic measurement of influence. The following statement can also be used to describe a suitable approach to the study of administrative influence in IOs:

“Even if social scientists are never able to pinpoint precisely the true goals of advocates, or identify every possible factor driving influence, we can still achieve a better understanding [by] interviewing those involved on all sides, asking them what they were trying to make happen, and then seeing what actually occurred. Some might get lucky and see their goal attained through no action of their own, some might do everything right but still not succeed through no fault of their own, but across many

issues and hundreds of actors the ‘ noise’ will wash out and the signal will emerge.”
(Mahoney 2007: 38)

Based on this logic of inquiry, we suggest coding the degree of influence in each case of policy output by first screening existing academic and popular publications as well as available official organizational documents related to this particular decision. Such documents may include, for instance, the provisional agenda, minutes of meetings, the final decision as well as subsequent specifications and amendments. In a second step, the document analysis can be complemented by semi-structured face-to-face interviews at the IO headquarters and the permanent representations of selected member countries. Combining the information from documentary analysis and interviews allows us to code for each policy case the degree of IPA influence and the four conditions. Table 2 summarizes how the three constitutive elements of influence as theorized above can be used to design a measure of IPA influence that is applicable across policies and IOs.

Table 1: Measuring IPA influence

Constitutive element	Description	Influence	Indicator value
Involvement	The IPA was involved but its policy-related preferences remain unclear or unspecified.	No influence	0
Involvement + Preferences	The IPA was involved and expressed clear preferences in favor of a specific policy option and there are visible efforts to defend this option.	Rather unsuccessful influence	0.33
Involvement + Preferences + Congruence (partly)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect but only parts of its preferences are reflected in the policy output.	Rather successful influence	0.66
Involvement + Preferences + Congruence (fully)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect and its preferences are reflected in the policy output to a major degree.	Fully successful influence	1

Such a measurement can then be separately applied to the two dimensions of influence that related research has identified as crucial in this regard (see Howlett and Cashore 2009): the influence on policy adoption and the influence on policy application. In the appendix, we present in more detail how the measurement tool sketched out in table 1 can be applied to both dimensions. In light of the first empirical results, the measurement definitions and scores can still be adjusted and further specified (see Adcock and Collier 2001: 531).⁸ Based on the final coding, it will eventually become possible to assess if the two dimensions can be combined into a single measure of influence or if two separate analyses need to be conducted.

⁸ Scholars studying IPA influence sometimes argue that instead of openly stating their most preferable policy solution, IPAs are more comfortable acting behind the scenes and exercise influence in a rather ‘informal’ fashion (Bauer 2006: 43; Bohne 2010: 116). However, viewing IPAs as ‘attention-seeking policy advocates or policy brokers who actively feed their policy-relevant information into the multilateral decision-making process’ (Jörgens *et al.* 2017) gives reason to be more optimistic about the willingness of international civil servants to express their policy preferences also during interview situations.

3.5 Analytical proposition: The final proposition concerns the question as to why IPA influence occurs and why it varies between policy cases. Based on previous research, some tentative expectations regarding the causes of influence can be summarized from the literature.

The theoretical background of an analysis of administrative influence is best rooted in organizational theory, which posits that formal organizational factors have an impact on governance processes and policy outputs (Gulick 1937; Hammond 1990; March and Olsen 1984; Simon 1947). Similar to the perspective of actor-centered institutionalism (Scharpf 1997), its proponents do not claim that policy content is *fully* determined by the organization of an organization. However, “organizational factors (independent variables) might intervene in governance processes (dependent variables) and create a systematic bias, thus making some process characteristics and outputs more likely than others.” (Egeberg *et al.* 2016: 20). Thus, in order to explain IPA influence, we can build on existing research and differentiate between structural (i.e. organizational), functional, and power-related conditions.

Structural conditions: Recent research suggests that the policies adopted by organizations with autonomous bureaucracies show high levels of IPA influence (see Weinlich 2014: 62). It is expected that “[v]ariation in the design of international organizations appears to have important implications for **the degree of autonomy** that secretariats can exercise. Differences in the structure of international bureaucracy afford leading officials with varying degrees of political and procedural influence over the organizations that they manage” (Manulak 2016: 6). There is much debate about which specific structural factors (such as e.g., executive characteristics, administrative resources and organizational competences) render international bureaucracies more autonomous and eventually enable them to exert influence on policy output (Eckhard and Ege 2016). Thus, in order to inform empirical research, one possible strategy to study the impact of structural factors on policy-making would be to start from a theory-driven conceptualization of the most important structural characteristics of IPAs, which may be subsumed under the concept of bureaucratic autonomy (Ege 2017). In a second step, the question if and when autonomy translates into influence can be answered.

Functional condition: Biermann and Siebenhüner (2009a), among others, have pointed to the importance of the specific policy problem when explaining why international bureaucracies yield more or less influence in policy-making (for a similar argument see Maggetti and Verhoest 2014: 247). In essence, this explanation is based on rational functionalist reasoning: If member states rely on the expertise of the administration (because they do not possess the policy-relevant knowledge themselves), they will involve the administration in the policy-making process (Johnson and Urpelainen 2014). This is also in line with the results of studies on NGO influence, where a similar mechanism of information-access exchange is found (Tallberg *et al.* 2015) Thus, we expect that an

IPA is able to yield more influence if the policy at hand is characterized by high **complexity** (i.e., when cause-and-effect relationships are controversial). In the case of more standardized and routine issues bureaucratic influence is expected to be limited (Head and Alford 2015: 716–17).

Power-related condition: From this perspective, whether an international bureaucracy can influence policy-making might depend not so much on bureaucratic structures or functional demands, but rather on the preferences of political actors (North 1990). Such reasoning would lead us to expect that if a policy is characterized by high **political salience**, i.e., national governments come to view a particular problem as a political priority (see e.g., Koop 2011), they will be less inclined to leave the design of solutions and its subsequent management to international bureaucrats. In contrast to functional benefits, the power-related condition is characterized by strong and observable preferences of the most important member states. Overall, we expect that political salience is particularly important to explain the absence of bureaucratic influence because if member states see a policy as a political priority, they will make sure the policy is designed and managed in their interests.

Thinking of these explanatory factors in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions seems a particularly fruitful perspective because it becomes possible to investigate whether, and if so, in which constellations, IPA influence occurs in specific policy cases. For the empirical study of these conditions, fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) might be the method of choice (Ragin 2000). Even though QCA has a strong theory-generating element, it is also successfully used to evaluate predefined theoretical expectations (Schneider and Wagemann 2012: 295–305). Shaped by the back-and-forth between ideas and empirics, QCA allows us to focus on the causal complexity and conditionality behind IPA influence. This entails the assumption of *causal asymmetry* – the idea that occurrence of influence can have a different explanation than its absence. What is more, “[i]nstead of assuming isolated effects of single variables, the assumption of *conjunctural causation* foresees the effect of a single condition unfolding only in combination with other [...] conditions” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012: 78, emphasis in original). Since we seek to disentangle the effect of bureaucratic autonomy on IPA influence, and its interplay with functional and power-related factors, QCA is a particularly suitable method for this analytical step.

4 Conclusion

This paper starts from the observations that theoretically integrative and empirically comparative approaches are rare in the study of administrative influence at the international level and that, therefore, we lack *systematic* knowledge of how international administrative bodies affect policy-making processes of IOs. Against this background, we have put forward five hands-on propositions that together may form a suitable approach to conceptualize, measure and comparatively analyze

IPA influence on IO policy-making. Explicating programmatic options on how to increase our knowledge of IPA influence is of course only a first step with the intent to spark the discussion. Whether or not these suggestions are helpful and have the potential to actually improve current research needs to be shown by empirical applications.

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Appendix

A1: Operationalizing IPA influence on policy adoption

Definition		Measurement	Calibration	
Constitutive element	Description	Evidence or examples	Calibration anchors	Membership of case in outcome "influence"
	The IPA was not involved in the policy process.	There is no evidence the IPA was involved in the adoption of the policy in any significant way.	0	No influence
Involvement	The IPA was involved but its policy-related preferences remain unclear or unspecified.	Examples of unspecified administrative preferences are, for instance, the publication of reports laying out possible policy options without explicit proposals or suggestions.	0	No influence
Involvement + Preferences	The IPA was involved and expressed clear preferences in favor of a specific policy option and there are visible efforts to defend this option.	Examples are entrepreneurial activities to defend or justify policy solutions. The expressed preferences and efforts may concern either the on-the-ground requirements (policy settings) or in the policy objectives.	0.33	Rather unsuccessful influence
Involvement + Preferences + Congruence (partly)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect but only parts of its preferences are reflected in the policy output.	In the final decision, parts of the position of the IPA were included in either the on-the-ground requirements or the policy objectives to a minor degree.	0.66	(cross-over point: 0.5) Rather successful influence
Involvement + Preferences + Congruence (fully)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect and its preferences are reflected in the policy output to a major degree.	In the final decision, the position of the IPA was included in either the on-the-ground requirements or the policy objectives to a major degree.	1	Fully successful influence

A2: Operationalizing IPA influence on policy application

Definition		Measurement	Calibration	
Constitutive element	Description	Specification and examples	Calibration anchors	Membership of case in outcome "influence"
	The IPA was not involved in the policy process.	There is no evidence the IPA was involved in the process determining the application of the policy in any significant way.	0	No influence
Involvement	The IPA was involved in the process determining the application of the policy but its policy-related preferences remain unclear or unspecified.	Examples of unspecified administrative preferences are, for instance, the publication of reports laying out possible policy applications without explicit proposals or suggestions.	0	No influence
Involvement + Preferences	The IPA was involved and expressed clear preferences in favor of a specific policy option and there are visible efforts to defend this option.	Examples are entrepreneurial activities to defend or justify policy certain ways of policy application. The expressed preferences and efforts may concern either policy	0.33	Rather unsuccessful influence

		mechanisms or their calibrations.		
Involvement + Preferences + Congruence (partly)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect but only parts of its preferences are reflected in the policy output.	In the rules specifying policy application, part of the position of the IPA was included in either policy mechanisms and their calibrations.	0.66	(cross-over point: 0.5) Rather successful influence
Involvement + Preferences + Congruence (fully)	The IPA was able to achieve an observable effect and its preferences are reflected in the policy output to a major degree.	In the rules specifying policy application, the position of the IPA was included in either the on-the-ground requirements or the policy objectives to a major degree of.	1	Fully successful influence