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Alexandru Grigorescu. 2015. *Democratic Intergovernmental Organizations? Normative Pressures and Decision-Making Rules* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press)

Tobias Lenz[1,2]

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The question of what explains change in the institutional design of international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) has become a central concern of recent institutionalist literature in International Relations (see, for example, Rixen et al. 2016; Lenz and Burilkov 2016). The literature has traditionally identified three generic logics that explain the creation of and adherence to institutional equilibria: the distribution of power, the pursuit of self-interest, and the normative appropriateness of the institution. This tripartite distinction maps different expectations about what drives institutional compliance and institutional change, such as changes in power (hegemonic decline, for example), utility loss, or legitimacy loss. Whereas most of the literature emphasizes changes in power or interests as important sources of institutional change, Alexandru Grigorescu's *Democratic Intergovernmental Organizations? Normative Pressures and Decision-Making Rules* advances a powerful argument about the importance of change in the appropriateness of institutions. In so doing, Grigorescu skillfully combines the long-standing debate in constructivist scholarship on the influence of norms in world politics with the growing interest in the sources of the design of IGOs, which has been dominated by rationalist and institutionalist approaches. The book successfully builds bridges across these theoretical approaches by demonstrating convincingly that what he terms "normative pressure" shapes the design of IGOs' rules.

Grigorescu examines how and when pressures to conform to democratic norms have affected the design of IGO rules over almost two centuries, from the nineteenth century until today. He shows that "although one certainly cannot yet characterize IGOs as 'democratic' (at least by purely domestic standards), the general trend over more than a century has been one

✉ Tobias Lenz
tobias.lenz@sowi.uni-goettingen.de

[1] Georg-August University of Göttingen, Goettingen, Germany

[2] GGIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, Germany

that has taken such IGOs closer to domestic democratic models" (17–18). The book develops an analytical framework to examine such normative pressures and the strategies that states use to defuse them (Chapter 2). Grigorescu argues that the strength of normative pressure–a necessary condition for institutional change–is a function of two independent conditions. The first is that norms, which are understood as shared expectations about appropriate behavior, need to be broadly accepted by the community of states (norm strength); the second is that the institutional status quo needs to be perceived as departing substantially from the norm's prescription–a condition that may be termed "norm deviation." Thus, Grigorescu hypothesizes that wider acceptance of democratic norms among the membership of an international organization (IO) and a lack of conformity to such norms in a specific instance will lead to higher normative pressure and, accordingly, to a higher chance of institutional change in line with domestic democratic standards, all else equal. However, states, especially powerful ones, are not passive "recipients" of democratic normative pressure. Instead, they use a variety of strategies to impede, diffuse, and reinterpret the pressure, thus leading to a variety of outcomes, including institutional change which is in line with the originally promoted change, an alternative type of change, change that is only partial, and even no institutional change at all. Strong normative pressures are linked to variation in outcomes by states' strategies, which can either challenge the interpretation of the democratic norm itself, in order to diffuse norm strength, or question its proposed applicability to the IGO in question, in an attempt to weaken norm deviation. Grigorescu further divides these two generic approaches into three types of strategies–challenging, narrowing, and broadening–giving rise to six different strategies that states use in order to reduce normative pressure (apart from yielding to the pressure *tout court* and simply withstanding it).

This conceptual apparatus provides a useful heuristic for exploring the role of normative pressure and states' counter-strategies in shaping the design of IGO rules, and it also offers an interesting combination of deductive and inductive theorizing. The notion of normative pressure is derived from the analogy with physics, where pressure is the amount of force acting per unit area. This deductive element of the framework provides Grigorescu with a clearly measurable and parsimonious way of gauging the legitimacy-driven sources of institutional change. This is a real strength of the framework. However, its relationship to a complex set of outcomes is less than clear, which leads Grigorescu to introduce inductively derived state strategies in order to connect normative pressure more reliably to outcomes. The associated typology helps shed light on the *politics* of legitimacy-driven institutional change and it enhances the overall explanatory power of the framework. Moreover, injecting a strategic notion of agency improves considerably upon the statism inherent in many models of norm-driven change, which focus on norm entrepreneurs, who "affect actors who do not defend themselves from such normative pressures in any way" (29); also, by conceiving actors as strategic, Grigorescu builds bridges to the concerns and assumptions of the rationalist and institutionalist literature on institutional design. However, inserting state strategies into the framework comes at the cost of theoretical parsimony and sacrifices rigor to a significant degree. Outcomes become the result of "a combination of the strength of norm pressure and the strategies chosen" (38), introducing variation along a relatively large number of dimensions, and it renders the empirical delineation of different strategies a "messy" enterprise.

The balance between explanatory power and parsimony/rigor may be a matter of taste, but in my view the main weakness of the framework is that it does not specify the

mechanism that connects normative pressure to outcomes. In what specific ways does normative pressure change the incentives of and constraints on state actors when they debate a change in IGO rules? Why would they resist demands for reform, given that states under high normative pressure to conform are themselves likely to be strong believers in the norm? Grigorescu mentions the need to maintain support for, and the legitimacy of, an IGO in order for it to function effectively, but this discussion only covers two short paragraphs (30). He seems to conceive of the dynamic, in very general terms, as a "rhetorical battle" between the proponents–states, but also other actors such as international bureaucrats, parliamentarians or actors from non-governmental organizations–and opponents (mainly states) of institutional change. But is this a story about persuasion (Betts 2010; Grobe 2010), about the "rhetorical entrapment" of opponents (Schimmelfennig 2001), or is it about the argumentative ammunition that normative arguments provide to supporters, thereby tipping the balance in their favor (Bacchini and Koenig-Archibugi 2014)? Do all of these mechanisms play a role, or none of them? The framework takes the second step before the first one: it explains extensively how states *react to* normative pressure, but fails to explicate how, specifically, normative pressure operates on states, and their interest in creating or changing IGOs, in the first place. More broadly, it seems difficult to explain how or when normative pressure translates into institutional change without some theory of how institutions change. Specifying the mechanism that connects normative pressure and outcomes is key, not only if scholars want to position legitimacy-driven sources of institutional change as a viable alternative to power- and interest-driven accounts of change, where such mechanisms are much better developed. It also seems important in view of the fact that one would expect the choice and success of counter-strategies to be dependent on the strategies that proponents of change use in order to advance their interests.

Grigorescu then uses the analytical framework to examine the process of institutional evolution in five substantive areas: decision-making rules and the norm of fair state participation (Chapter 3); voting rights and the norm of equality (Chapter 4); access to information and the transparency norm (Chapter 5); access to decision-making and the "pro-NGO norm" (Chapter 6); and control of executive decision-making and the norm of transnational parliamentary oversight (Chapter 7). This is done across an eclectic range of some of the most important IGOs in the world, including the League of Nations, the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the European Union, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization. The five empirical chapters are structured analogously. Each starts out with an overview of the respective norm at the domestic and the international levels, then describes long-term trends in the application of the norm to IGOs, and finally assesses the theoretical expectations by considering six key questions. These refer to the existence and strength of democratic norms that actors used to exert pressure for institutional change during the respective episode, the counter-strategies used by those states that opposed them, actual outcomes, and the explanatory power of the normative pressure argument when compared to plausible alternative explanations. The main result of the empirical analysis is that "normative pressures have indeed led to changes in IGO rules, even if in most cases such changes were not the exact ones that those seeking to alter the status quo had originally promoted" (266). Partial and alternative changes are the modal outcome of change episodes involving normative pressure. Moreover, Grigorescu finds that actors that are under normative pressure rarely simply yield to

or withstand such pressure, as the existing literature tends to suggest, but instead use a variety of strategies to defuse and alter them.

The empirical narratives in this book are well structured, well written, and carefully researched. Their temporal and spatial sweep is impressive and Grigorescu's analysis is notable for its effort to be transparent and systematic in the application of concepts and the evaluation of hypotheses. A major contribution of the book is the author's systematic attempt to measure variation in the strength of democratic normative pressure across time, IGOs, and norms–a task that students of norms have tended to shy away from. Unlike generic measures of "democratic density," which are widely used in the existing quantitative literature, norm strength–the first component of the concept of normative pressure–is gauged by averaging domestic characteristics of member states *separately* for each of the five norms over time. Thus, norm strength may vary across different norms within the same member state. The second component, norm deviation, is measured by quantifiable features of the major reform proponents' main critique, as well as by the degree of deviation of the practice of newly created IOs from those of past practices in established IOs. It can therefore move more quickly than the structural features underlying norm strength. Combining the two measures provides Grigorescu with a clear and transparent baseline for evaluating his arguments vis-à-vis power- and interest-based explanations. However, he finds "only lukewarm" support for a causal relationship between normative pressure and institutional change (267). This is a somewhat dissatisfying result, and I wish that he had probed it more deeply. Specifically, the result points to the need to think thoroughly about the scope conditions of legitimacy-driven institutional change, which his study offers ample opportunity to do. For example, there is some interesting variation across different norms. The correlation appears fairly robust regarding the norms of fair state representation and fair voting, but it is not well supported in the case of parliamentary oversight. Similarly, we find variation across IGOs. The League of Nations and the World Bank conform much better to the expectations, whereas the International Labour Organization or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization do not really fit the pattern. What explains such differences?

In sum, Grigorescu's study makes a convincing case that normative pressure matters to our understanding of international institutional design. In view of the dominance of power- and interest-oriented accounts in this debate, showing the relevance of arguments that focus on the legitimacy-driven sources of institutional design and change is an important contribution. However, future research on this topic should specify more clearly the underlying causal mechanism(s) as well as the scope conditions of such arguments. The challenge mounted by legitimacy-based arguments to power- and interest-based accounts of institutional change is only beginning.

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