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Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney (eds.): *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations*

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Steffen Bauer

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Delegation and Agency in International Organizations is a timely contribution to the recent quest to overcome widespread neglect for international organizations in international relations scholarship. It is all the more welcome, as its editors, Darren G. Hawkins, David A. Lake, Daniel L. Nielson, and Michael J. Tierney, view IOs as actors in their own right that should be understood as bureaucracies. Whether such actors are obedient servants of powerful (hegemonic) states or whether they evolve into "institutional Frankensteins terrorizing the global countryside" or even "double agents" (p. 4) are questions that outline the political context of this book. The pertinent research questions are, however, why states choose to delegate authoritative tasks and responsibilities to IOs over unilateral action or direct forms of cooperation in the first place, and whether and how they achieve control over IO behavior once authority has been delegated. Answers to these questions are explicitly sought within the rationalist confines of principal–agent (PA) theory. More specifically, the editors maintain that the causes and consequences of delegation to IOs are remarkably similar to those found in domestic politics (to which PA is typically applied)—in spite of the anarchical nature of the international system.

The bulk of the volume consists of two main sections of five chapters each. The first section addresses variation in principal preferences and structures as well as decision making rules and benefits. Conversely, agent preferences and functions as well as issues of legitimacy, agent strategies and permeability are at the focus of the second section. A concluding chapter by co-editor David Lake and veteran PA scholar Matthew McCubbins, rather than synthesizing the discussions of individual chapters, concerns future directions for research on delegation and agency in a global governance perspective (thereby pointing to the potential importance of third parties).

S. Bauer (✉)
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik/German Development Institute (DIE),
Tulpenfeld 6, 53113 Bonn, Germany
e-mail: steffen.bauer@die-gdi.de

At the outset, the editors provide the reader with a thorough introduction to key concepts of PA and its application to the analysis of IOs. At its core, delegation is defined as a "conditional grant of authority from a principal to an agent that empowers the latter to act on behalf of the former" and that "must be revocable" (p. 7). Delegated authority in turn provides the basis for agency on the part of IOs and thus is a precondition for IO autonomy. In contrast with social constructivists, who discern various manifestations of authority (e.g. Barnett and Finnemore 2004), Hawkins and colleagues are exclusively concerned with the authority IOs obtain through delegation from member states. From this vantage point, they develop an explanatory framework, according to which the likelihood of states to delegate to IOs and to tolerate IO autonomy will increase with the benefits that they may expect. Moreover, the political context is expected to be favorable to delegation if state preferences are homogenous and if IOs accurately reflect member states' power relations.

The second chapter by Lyne, Nielson, and Tierney expands on the introduction as it zooms in on how to analyze principals more accurately. In their view, attributions of delegation failure are often flawed, because they rest on incomplete assumptions about principal behavior. Drawing from an analysis of US development aid policy towards multilateral and domestic agents, they argue persuasively for scholars to distinguish more thoroughly between single, multiple, and collective principals. Further chapters in this section emphasize different independent variables taken from the editors' framework to explain delegation and control by principals, but, by and large, support the case of applying PA to the analysis of state behavior vis-à-vis IO agents (although the chapter by Broz and Hawes really is concerned with US domestic policy).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the more challenging demands facing the application of PA in an IR context emerge in the section on agent behavior. In view of a wide variety of strategies agents potentially employ to circumvent principal control and to increase their autonomy, Hawkins and Jacoby argue that meaningful analyses of principal–agent–interactions will "need to understand agents in greater detail" (p. 200). Although they pledge allegiance to the PA approach, their chapter should ultimately encourage scholars to draw more readily from sociological insights into organizational behavior. It may thus be read as a welcome contribution to bridging the rationalist–constructivist divide in the study of international organization.

In a similar vein, Cortell and Peterson's comparative study of the WHO and the WTO as well as Gould's analysis of IMF conditionality highlight PA's limitations in accounting for whether and when agents actually take advantage of the autonomy or slack that they potentially enjoy. Gould, in particular, argues that the PA toolbox is inherently insufficient to amend this shortcoming. She suggests that it may be worthwhile instead to turn to sociological and historical institutionalism in order to gain a better understanding of actual IO activity as opposed to "the potential ranges of IO activity and mechanisms of state control" (p. 311). Finally, Alter explicitly questions the alleged similarity of delegation in the international and domestic realms as she exposes the political and institutional limitations states face once they have delegated authority to international courts. While it may be going too far to

reject the editors' claim altogether, the fundamentally different political contexts of international courts ("trustee–agents," p. 334) and the majority of non-judicial IOs arguably justify a qualification. Indeed, although it is clearly a matter of delegated authority, the motivation of states to seek compulsory jurisdiction from international courts may represent a puzzle beyond the scope of PA.

This leads to more general questions regarding the empirical cases of individual IOs presented in this book. For the most part, authors refer to the usual suspects. The book thus hardly reflects the full spectrum of IOs, even as the editors emphasize that "incompatible perceptions of IOs persist in part because international organizations themselves vary widely in their range of activities and autonomy" (p. 4). It is somewhat intriguing then, that three out of ten empirical chapters revolve around the IMF, even as contributing authors point to the "absence of transparency" (Broz and Hawes, p. 79) at the Fund, which renders "a definitive study of the agency issue difficult" (Martin, p. 141). Hence, while the political relevance of the IMF is beyond doubt, one may wonder whether it presents the most insightful case for the purpose of this book. Likewise, the European Union represents an outlier given the unique context of European integration and ensuing questions of "why the EU has so far outpaced other international organizations in the delegation of powers to supranational agents" (Pollack, p. 195). This said, Pollack's chapter is certainly a worthwhile read for novices to the PA literature. Though it provides little news for those familiar with his seminal *Engines of European Integration* (2003), he aptly relates his case to theoretical discussions within the volume (notably Lyne et al. and Hawkins and Jacoby).

On a taxonomic note, it is regrettable that all contributors remain ambiguous about IO agents. While it can be assumed in most cases that the agents they are referring to are international bureaucracies rather than IO governing bodies, this is not always entirely clear. With the exception of Cortell and Peterson, who at least explicitly distinguish IO "administrative elements," the book perpetuates an ubiquitous flaw in IR literature even as it makes a valuable contribution to the analysis of international bureaucracies.

On balance, *Delegation and Agency in International Organizations* provides a stimulating contribution to the analysis of international organization. While the editors' claim that their authors' "joint efforts greatly outweigh the sum of individual contributions" (p. xvi) may be a little too enthusiastic, their volume is appreciably more than just another collection of descriptive essays on some IOs. Well-grounded in a solid theoretical framework, it will help readers to adopt a more nuanced perspective on international cooperation through international organizations and it provides ample food for thought with a view to further research on the complex relationships between IO agents, state principals, and potentially intervening third parties.

References

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