Cooperation under Autonomy:

Building and Analyzing the Informal Intergovernmental Organizations 2.0 Data Set

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Abstract: Informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) such as the Proliferation Security Initiative and G20 increasingly play a central role in governing international relations. IIGOs are based on recurrent meetings among high-level state representatives but are *not legalized through a treaty* and have *no permanent secretariat*. They allow states to organize internationally without sacrificing autonomy to a supranational entity. We present the IIGO 2.0 dataset, the most comprehensive compilation of these institutions to date and illustrate their significance through several key empirical findings. First, while the creation of formal IGOs (FIGOs) has plateaued, states are increasingly creating IIGOs to address critical global issues. Second, states disproportionately use IIGOs for high politics issue areas including peace, security, and political agenda-setting which challenges conventional wisdom that IGOs (intergovernmental organizations) are less relevant in the security realm. Third, IIGOs are remarkably durable. Although states could readily formalize or abandon IIGOs, they generally organize cooperation informally for long periods. Finally, IIGOs are typically smaller than FIGOs and this design choice is increasingly used by states of all levels of development, power, and region. The availability of the IIGO 2.0 dataset will promote further analysis on the growing diversity of international institutions.

Introduction

In response to growing challenges posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the United States launched the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in 2003. Like other informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs), the PSI has no legal status, no secretariat, and no headquarters. Indeed, 'nations are willing to support the PSI in part because their support does not bind them to any decisions: There is no larger body making judgments on behalf of the supporters, and nations decide on a case-by-case basis whether they will participate in an exercise' (Kaplan, 2006). Nevertheless, since 2003, PSI membership has expanded sevenfold, and the program has organized significant seizures of WMD shipments.

How common is it for states to create IIGOs and what are the characteristics of the broader set of such cases? Since they organized the first identified IIGO – the Concert of Europe in 1815– to manage the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, states have created over 140 IIGOs to address significant international problems. Previous scholars have provided theoretical conceptualization and conjectures as to when and why states use informal agreements (Abbott & Snidal 2000; Lipson 1991) and IIGOs (Vabulas & Snidal 2013). Empirically, however, IIGOs have been studied in isolation rather than examined systematically as a form of international collaboration. This paper refines the definition of an IIGO and introduces the IIGO 2.0 dataset presented in the online Appendix. IIGO 2.0 provides a holistic look at the increasingly important role of IIGOs in global governance and is much more comprehensive both in the number of IIGOs identified and in the variables collected than Vabulas & Snidal (2013).

The IIGO 2.0 dataset shows that IIGOs are distinctive from formal intergovernmental organizations (FIGOs) in three important ways. First, states overwhelmingly use IIGOs for high politics issues such as peace, security, and political agenda-setting to facilitate interstate

cooperation while protecting state sovereignty and limiting IGO agency. In addition, states increasingly use IIGOs such as the G20 for top-level economic negotiations instead of—or in addition to—traditional FIGOs such as the IMF (Viola, 2015). This challenges earlier IO scholarship on institutional design which predicted that states would reach for highly binding and formal arrangements whenever stakes are high (Koremenos, Lipson & Snidal, 2001). The large number of high-politics-related IIGOs also refutes criticism that international institutions only focus on secondary issues and are thus epiphenomenal in world affairs (Mearsheimer, 1994). Moreover, these data show the need to look beyond FIGOs and examine IIGOs for a more comprehensive understanding of the full range of international institutions used to address security problems.

Figure 1 in here

Second, the creation rate of IIGOs is increasing whereas FIGO growth has stagnated (Barnett, Pevehouse & Raustiala, 2020). Figure 1 shows that from their shared origins in 1815, FIGOs and IIGOs barely grew in the nineteenth century. The number of FIGOs increased dramatically in the twentieth century, especially in the postwar period until the 1990s when it plateaued. By contrast, IIGOs began to grow dramatically in the 1980s and that growth is continuing. This represents an important shift in how states cooperate on critical issues. Perhaps counterintuitively, IIGOs are highly durable despite their limited institutionalization compared to FIGOs. Although sometimes IIGOs provide pathways to FIGOs, states typically use IIGOs over long periods without formalizing them. Informality is beneficial in its own right.

Third, membership patterns show that, on average, IIGOs are smaller than FIGOs and are increasingly being created by all sorts of states. Although initially used mainly by developed and larger states, especially European ones, they now involve all sorts of states across all regions of the world.

Below we expand on these three findings to show how our understanding of international organizations needs to move beyond traditional conceptions of IGOs as formal organizations. The IIGO 2.0 dataset provides a first step for future theoretical and empirical research by providing a carefully defined, measured, and documented source of IIGO information.

The concept of an IIGO

Informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) are (i) high-level associations of three or more states based on (ii) explicitly shared expectations but without a formal treaty that (iii) hold recurrent meetings but without any formal institutional arrangement such as a secretariat.[1] For example, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) IIGO 'is not a treaty and does not impose any legally binding obligations on Partners (members). Rather, it is an informal political understanding among states that seek to limit the proliferation of missiles and missile technology.'[2] The MTCR meets regularly and requires its 35 members to adhere to a common export policy (the Guidelines) for a tightly specified list of items (the MTCR Equipment, Software, and Technology Annex).

We define IIGOs in contrast to the 'standard' Correlates of War (COW) definition of a FIGO—which includes three or more member states under a legalized agreement who hold

[1] 'Recurrent' rather than 'regular' (Vabulas and Snidal 2013) indicates that meetings need not follow a precise schedule.
[2] Missile Technology Control Regime (2020) Frequently Asked Questions (http://mtcr.info/frequently-asked-questions-faqs/).

regular meetings organized through an independent institutional arrangement such as a secretariat (Pevehouse, Nordstrom & Warnke, 2004). Diverse examples of FIGOs include the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. IIGOs and FIGOs are ideal types; no empirical case necessarily fits either definition perfectly. They occupy intermediate levels of institutionalization along a broad spectrum of international institutions ranging from anarchy with minimal institutionalization to supranational organization approaching the 'strong state' of domestic governance. All three defining characteristics underlying the dichotomous ideal types are themselves continua, as we now discuss.

The first defining characteristic is that both IIGOs and FIGOs have states as primary members, although non-governmental organizations, other IGOs, and private firms may participate as observers or even members. Importantly, IIGO membership is defined by high-level participation —including Heads of Government, Ambassadors, or Ministers—with authority to make political commitments on behalf of their respective states.[3] The informal nature of IIGOs means that exactly 'who' represents the state at meetings is crucial.[4] Thus, we exclude lower-level transgovernmental networks (Slaughter, 2009) that are not authorized to make broad political commitments and primarily address technical and implementation decisions. Similarly, we exclude "coalition groups" that organize bargaining and negotiation *within* FIGOs[5] such as UN contact groups (Prantl, 2005) or Friends of Fish within the World

[3] 'High-level' depends on having significant authority rather than the title itself. For example, we include central bank governors as high-level. IGOs often designate meetings as 'High-level' or 'Ministerial.'
[4] While the technical and political often interact, high-level IIGO representatives have more political leeway to set policy whereas lower-level representatives are more closely bound by instructions from national capitals. For the interaction of political decisions in IIGOs with technical agencies, see Manulak and Snidal (2020).
[5] This corrects Vabulas and Snidal (2013) which included 'IIGOs within FIGOs'.

Trade Organization. By contrast, FIGO membership is defined by states' ratification of the underlying treaty.

Second, states can explicitly share expectations in many different ways including through press releases, joint statements, or communiques. Many contemporary IIGOs go further and issue 'Memoranda of Understanding' (MoU) or 'Declarations' to clarify expectations without creating legal obligations. MoUs avoid the higher costs of negotiating a treaty and maintain flexibility to adapt details as circumstances change; Declarations express stronger public commitments. FIGOs, by contrast, instantiate their shared expectations through legal treaties.

Finally, with respect to the third defining feature, IIGOs hold recurrent meetings[6] but have no significant formal institutionalization such as a secretariat or headquarters.[7] This design eliminates the potential for the IIGO to develop any independent agency (Vabulas & Snidal, 2013) and thus avoids potential pathologies associated with autonomous bureaucracies or runaway IGOs.[8] Although IIGOs have no secretariat, some minimal organizational arrangement is often necessary to perform administrative tasks such as organizing international meetings. IIGO member states often accomplish this by engaging a FIGO or member state to provide administrative functions without exercising any permanent independent authority (as the Australia Group does by having Australia and France host annual plenary sessions) or by organizing rotating chairs to provide temporary 'secretariats' (as in the G20). Alternatively, an IGO can maintain a 'virtual' secretariat that is sufficient to organize meetings but without

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[6] An expectation of future meetings provides continuity for setting policy. Meetings may be infrequent on an 'as needed' basis (as was the Concert of Europe) rather than on a fixed schedule, although most IIGOs hold regular meetings.

[7] Wallace and Singer, (1970: 246) note that the 'crucial distinction here is between ad hoc conferences or series of conferences whose staffs do not function between meetings and true organizations (even if labeled conferences or agreements) possessing secretariats which perform ongoing tasks.' We exclude 'ad hoc' conferences but include the organization of recurrent meetings as IIGOs.

[8] See Barnett & Finnemore (2004); Johnson (2015); Vaubel (2006); Weaver (2008).

capacity to go beyond that mandate (as in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism). FIGOs, by contrast, have a permanent, independent secretariat, bureaucracy, and headquarters. This centralized apparatus manages operational activities and organizes meetings but it also creates the potential for independent agency (which states sometimes value if they need a neutral party or to solve commitment problems) (Abbott & Snidal, 1998).

Few IGOs match either the IIGO or FIGO ideal types perfectly. Categorizing cases involves judgment calls regarding 'cutoffs' along each continuum and we provide 235 examples of 'close calls' in the data appendix. Furthermore, while both FIGOs and IIGOs require three or more states as primary members, the other two criteria create further combinations such as (1) IGOs with a secretariat but no treaty (e.g., the Asia-Pacific Group) and (2) IGOs with a treaty but no secretariat (e.g., the Euro-Group, starting in 2009). The IIGO 2.0 database focusses on 'pure' IIGOs that are neither legalized nor have a secretariat.[9]

Mapping IIGOs empirically

To build the IIGO 2.0 dataset, we began with the Union of International Association's Yearbook of International Organizations (2019) which lists all non-profit international organizations. From this highly inclusive list, we selected cases that met our three IIGO criteria. While we discarded many cases (because associations were not between top-level officials, for example), this provided our baseline. In order to not over-rely on the Yearbook, we scrutinized other lists of international institutions such as the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (ATOP) (Leeds et al 2002) and global summits (Patrick, 2017). As we assembled key IIGO information, we followed up on other related organizations as possible IIGOs (e.g.,

[9] See Wright (2020) on semi-formal organizations.

locating the G7 leads quickly to the G20). Much like a 'snowball sampling' technique (where one subject leads to other subjects), this added a few additional cases to the dataset. We also did general searches in diplomatic sources and queried experts in the field.

While we have been as comprehensive as possible, the informal nature of IIGOs has made this challenging. Our dataset may be biased towards IIGOs that are more likely to leave a trail because they are more established, have greater internet presence, are from developed countries, or have larger membership. Additionally, the dataset might be biased towards organizations that are interconnected and cross-referenced in each other's documents. In the end, the universe of IIGOs is a 'known unknown,'[10] as is the population of FIGOs, so it is highly unlikely that we have located all IIGOs. Nevertheless, the IIGO 2.0 dataset is very comprehensive. Future versions of the dataset can be updated with additional IIGO 'discoveries' as they emerge.

The temporal dimension of the IIGO 2.0 dataset deserves special attention. Its starting point is 1815 because the Concert of Europe is the earliest IIGO we have identified; the fact that it coincides with the Rhine Commission being created as the first FIGO is mainly coincidental. We write 'mainly' because the (Napoleonic) events preceding that year provoked states to think about organizing their relations in novel ways. The fact that only two more IIGOs (and only a few FIGOs) were created in the 19th century might indicate missing data because of the difficulty of locating informal arrangements in earlier periods. However, it can also be accounted for by two other factors. The first is material – IIGOs require recurrent meetings among high-level officials, which only became feasible on a wide scale with modern transportation and communication abilities.[11] The second is ideational – the idea of using IIGOs required learning

[10] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this phrase.

[11] Manulak & Snidal (2020) discuss the relation of changing transportation and communication to IGO design.

by states that they could be effective. Thus, the 1975 Rambouillet meeting was intended as a one-off event but its success led to the G7/8 and contributed to wider use of the IIGO model. Although missing data concerns are greater for earlier periods, we believe the paucity of IIGOs in the nineteenth century is an essentially correct representation and opens up interesting questions about the small number of IIGOs that do emerge in that period.

Our original dataset includes 149 IIGOs; the Appendix presents a codebook and brief descriptive information for each IIGO. This diverse set features a wide range of starting dates, issue areas, and membership. The following sections use the IIGO 2.0 data to demonstrate three important findings. First, states extensively use IIGOs to address 'high politics' security and political problems, probably because this institutional design protects member states' autonomy and secrecy. Second, IIGOs have flourished and shown durability, probably because of their low cost and flexibility. Third, IIGOs display important membership patterns: IIGOs are used by a wide range of states (e.g., both powerful and weak; developed and developing; across regions) and tend to be smaller than FIGOs. We unpack these findings below.

IIGOs are for 'high' politics[12]

Figure 2 shows that states disproportionately use IIGOs for high politics issues including peace, security, and top-level political or economic issues. For example, the Club de Berne provides a recurrent forum to discuss intelligence and security including coordinating responses to terrorist attacks; the Human Security Network promotes the abolishment of anti-personnel mines; and the Montreux Document Forum establishes good practices for private security

[12] High politics usually refers to issues that implicate state survival. Traditionally the term was restricted to security affairs but with rising interdependence, it is often extended to high-level economic issues too, and arguably should include emerging first rank problems such as cross-border health or climate change. Our discussion below applies across these differing conceptions.

companies during armed conflict. States also use IIGOs to orchestrate FIGOs, as the G20 does with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Viola, 2015: 90), and to circumvent FIGOs in favor of direct interaction among national line departments (Manulak & Snidal, 2020).

Figure 2 in here

We coded each IIGO's central issue area using the three categories (Politics, Economics, and Social Affairs) in the most recent COW dataset (Pevehouse et. al. 2018). We further sub-coded the Politics category to identify IGOs primarily focused on security.[13] Thirty-two percent of IIGOs address security versus 4% of FIGOs; similarly, 25% of IIGOs cover broad political issues versus 14% of FIGOs. This is significant given that critics of international collaboration (incorrectly) argue that IOs are mostly influential for 'softer' issues.[14]

Why are there so many security-related IIGOs when high-functioning FIGOs like the UN Security Council, NATO, and the IAEA are available? First, security is an area where states are especially sensitive to sovereignty costs. By pursuing common goals without making legally binding commitments or enabling independent international agency, states can cooperate while protecting their autonomy. For example, states likely created the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative – formed in 1996 to promote regional cooperation after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina – as an IIGO because ethnic tensions made them reticent to restrict their sovereignty. Similarly, the Shanghai Five IIGO—comprised of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan—has held annual presidential summits since 1996 focused on international

[13] Coding a single-issue area as the central area of governance is limiting as many organizations operate across multiple issues.
[14] See Mearsheimer (1994).

security both within and beyond their borders (Gill, 2001). Informality suits the group because internal differences including historical border disputes inhibit deeper commitments. Still, its informal organizational structure has facilitated impressive achievements including settling border disputes, introducing confidence-building measures, and combating terrorism and drug smuggling.

Second, IIGOs are particularly well suited to security issues where state leaders want to keep aspects of deliberations confidential. While states may want to publicize standards restricting nuclear-related exports, for example, they may not want attendant information required to implement these standards getting in the hands of rogue actors. IIGOs also bypass transparency requirements that have become standard with FIGOs (Grigorescu, 2003), which promotes frank discussions and information sharing because states typically do not have to record formal votes or leave paper trails. The large number of security-related IIGOs also challenges arguments that FIGOs 'with strong institutional capabilities to share information' are uniquely well suited to keeping clandestine information (Carnegie & Carson 2018). Instead, the predominance of nuclear-related IIGOs shows that in high security settings, states guard their sovereignty not by delegating to a strong FIGO secretariat, but by using an IIGO to maintain secrecy.

Last, during the Cold War, FIGOs enabled states to make clearly defined long-term commitments, but today's security goals tend to be shorter term with sometimes-changing coalitions. Rapid political and technological change increases uncertainty, making it difficult to consolidate formal agreements (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2009). Moreover, given that contemporary security-related crises present needs for quick resolution amidst increased constraints on foreign

policy (including scrutiny by legislature and publics) (Bach & Newman, 2014), states may prefer private informal arrangements (Lipson, 1991).

Together, these findings controvert arguments that IGOs are less relevant for security-related issues. Because states are reluctant to use FIGOs on issues that cut close to sovereignty, they use IIGOs extensively in security and other high politics areas. Indeed, IIGOs are a good indication of which issues states view as 'high politics' sufficient to demand the personal attention of their highest officials.

IIGOs are proliferating and durable

Figure 1 (above) showed that the number of IIGOs has been increasing rapidly over the past 40 years. Improved electronic communications starting in the 1980s and 1990s have made informal cooperation more feasible as a means to coordinate states (Manulak & Snidal, 2020). States are increasingly turning to IIGOs as their advantages and the limitations of FIGOs have become more apparent over time (Verdier, 2015).

While their informal institutionalization could make IIGOs easy to abandon, we find that IIGOs are remarkably durable. Figure 3 shows the distribution of IIGO ages. In 2017, 130 of 149 IIGOs were still in existence in some form[15] and the 94 continuing as "pure" IIGOs average 19 years in age.[16,17] The Nuclear Exporters (Zangger) Committee, for example, is nearly fifty years old and, though long gone, the Concert of Europe lasted over 40 years.[18] IIGOs may be durable

[15] This includes IIGOs that have since formalized by gaining a permanent secretariat and/or signing a treaty as discussed below.
[16] These timeframes are conservative due to a right censoring problem since we do not know whether and when current IIGOs will die.
[17] IIGOs that have been replaced by a subsequent IIGO or renamed are coded under their most recent name. For example, the G22 (or Willard Group) met in 1998 but was superseded by the G33 in 1999.
[18] The contested end date of the Concert provides the most complicated case for determining duration. It was definitively over when Austria-Hungary and Germany refused the British proposal for a conference to address the 1914 July crisis, but some historians argue that it was over as early as 1822-23. We use the end of the Crimean War

because their flexibility makes them 'particularly adept at responding to the new challenges that have emerged' (Dufour, 2016).

Figure 3 in here

Institutional death of IIGOs is uncommon.[19] Only 19 IIGOs (13% overall) have "died" without replacement. The primary reason for an IIGO ending is increased institutional formalization, which is observed in 36 cases (24%). Of these, four have adopted a legal treaty and 21 have added a secretariat. In 11 cases (8%), states have both legalized and added a secretariat to convert an IIGO into a FIGO, including the Arctic Council, ASEAN, and the CSCE into the OSCE. Even the European Council operated as an IIGO for more than its first dozen years of existence, until this series of summits was transformed into a key body for guiding the EU's overall political direction.[20] Some former IIGOs have been absorbed into FIGOs – as the interwar Conference of Ambassadors was absorbed into the League of Nations (Pink, 1942). When IIGOs do fully formalize, this slow process takes over 20 years on average. The Inter-American System of States took 122 years to fully formalize as the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Imperial Conference took 34 years to become the Commonwealth. We are

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in 1856 (and the admission of the Ottoman Empire) as the closest to a consensus view. Fortunately, other cases are more straightforward.

[19] Sometimes, 'death date' is easily determined from institutional histories. Otherwise, for comparability with Pevehouse et. al. (2004) and Eilstrup-Sangiovanni's (2018) analysis of FIGOs (below), we adopt a death criterion of not being active within the past 10 years, treating the last meeting as the date of death.

[20] European Council (2020) *History* (http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/history/?filters=2031). Accessed 14 May 2018. While the European Council began as an IIGO in the 1970s, it existed earlier on an even more informal basis (falling short of our criteria).

unaware of reversals where FIGOs have become IIGOs. The fate of IIGOs is summarized in Table I.

Table I in here

This leads to an interesting comparison of IIGOs to FIGOs in terms of duration. Recent work by Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2018) shows that 178 of the 528 FIGOs created from 1815-2015 (or 34%) are dead (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018; Dijkstra, 2019). As noted, only 13 % of IIGOs have died,[21] although this figure should be viewed with caution as IIGOs are generally 'younger' institutions and so have had less chance to die off.[22] Nevertheless, the durability of IIGOs is surprising because unlike FIGOs, they lack international bureaucracies with a strong interest in defending them. For that reason, many FIGOs 'limp along' (Gray, 2018). By contrast, IIGOs do not have their own bureaucracy to defend them and can be abandoned readily by dissatisfied states.

IIGO longevity may be explained by learning and adaptation. For example, although its first 1975 summit was intended to be a one-time event, positive feedback-effects have reinforced continued government commitments to the G7 annual meetings (Fioretos 2016). Similarly, because IIGOs are not tied to bureaucratic goals, states can adapt them as political circumstances change. For example, Germany, France, and Poland established the Weimar Triangle in 1991 to

[21] Even with a more stringent five-years of inactivity death criterion, the IIGO death rate is only18%.
[22] This is a 'right truncation' problem whereby longevity is hard to assess for subjects who have not yet died.

assist political reconciliation;[23] ten years later, it evolved to support Poland's accession to the EU; and after Poland's 2015 election brought to power the national-conservative Law and Justice Party, the Weimar Triangle relationship cooled. In 2018, German Chancellor Angela Merkel tried to reinvigorate the Weimar Triangle to address energy relations, tensions with Russia, and refugees (Scarsi, 2018).

IIGO membership

As shown in Figure 4, IIGOs range dramatically in membership size but are generally smaller than FIGOs. The overall distribution is highly skewed with the bulk of IIGOs in the small to mid-tier range, with an average membership of 24 and standard deviation of 28 (compared to FIGOs' average membership of 37 and standard deviation of 50). Most IIGOs (81%) have forty or fewer members (compared to 72% for FIGOs) while only 4% have over 100 members (compared to 13% of FIGOs). Their smaller size makes sense because IIGOs are primarily deliberative fora among states with shared preferences on a particular issue. In addition, since IIGOs have no bureaucratic capacity, they are less effective at coordinating larger numbers of members than are FIGOs.

Figure 4 in here

Who belongs to IIGOs? Figure 5 shows a histogram of the number of IIGOs to which states belong and identifies some states along the distribution. It is skewed right with two-thirds of states belonging to fewer than 20 IIGOs. More developed and larger states belong to the most

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[23] France Diplomatie (2020) The Weimar Triangle (https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/poland/the-weimar-triangle/).

IIGOs. Thus, the G8 are the top eight IIGO joiners (with 47-59 memberships each) and the G20 (which includes the G8) accounts for 17 of the top 25 (with 34 or more memberships). Other top joiners are mainly small, wealthy European or larger East Asian countries. The vast bulk of smaller, less developed countries belong to 10-20 IIGOs. States with the fewest number of IIGO memberships (5-10) include small sub-Saharan African states and Caribbean and Pacific island states.

Looking over time, European states were the first movers towards IIGOs (in the 1980s and 1990s), likely because Europe has a relatively high density of interaction and demand for IGOs in general. The United States was initially slower in moving to IIGOs but by the turn of the new century had become a frequent participant – as had China, India, and Korea. Africa remains the greatest laggard in adopting IIGOs. This may be because African states prefer joining FIGOs whose centralized capacity can provide them with technical and aid assistance, and also because FIGO secretariats provide attractive opportunities for elites from member states both as national representatives and as international bureaucrats (Gray 2018). Asian states have also used IIGOs to a significant extent – supporting the view that Asian states prefer less formal IGOs (Acharya & Johnston, 2007), although they are not as different from other states as such claims imply.

In summary, IIGO membership has been growing and spreading. It began with developed, large, and European states but has spread so that IIGOs are increasingly an institutional choice for states of different power, income, and region.

Figure 5 in here

Conclusion

IIGOs are an underappreciated organizational form that is increasingly shaping international politics. By laying out clear definitional criteria—that IIGOs are (i) high-level associations of states based on (ii) explicitly shared informal expectations but with no treaty basis and (iii) holding recurrent meetings but without independent institutionalization—we have contrasted them to FIGOs and discussed the range of intermediate variations. This comparison enables a more nuanced perspective on how states organize their most important relations on security and other high politics issues.

We have used this definition to build the IIGO 2.0 dataset, which is available in the on-line Appendix. This paper has provided an overview of IIGO 2.0 to show their proliferation, particularly in high politics issues covering nuclear weapons proliferation, financial crises, and human security. This discredits claims that IGOs only handle 'easy' international problems. Moreover, despite their lack of institutionalization, IIGOs have proved to be extremely durable. Only a few have died and a small number have transformed into important FIGOs. The increasing use of IIGOs allows states to cooperate without giving up sovereignty in sensitive areas. While states need FIGOs for centralized operational capacity or to strengthen commitments, states increasingly create IIGOs when their primary need is for deliberation, consensus building, and coordination while prioritizing autonomy.

These descriptive findings are a necessary first step in understanding the different ways in which states can institutionalize their cooperation. Unless we incorporate this data in our study of IGOs, we risk misunderstanding how states cooperate. Future research can build on our findings and data to address important questions such as how powerful states and rising powers use IIGOs to manage power shifts or how IIGO use differs across regions. Scholars should further examine

how IIGOs interconnect with other international organizations (Westerwinter, 2019) as part of the wider network of contested multilateralism (Morse and Keohane, 2014) and overlapping institutions (Alter and Meunier ,2009) that shape global governance. Similarly, the different agreements used to organize IGOs (e.g. MoUs versus Declarations versus treaties) and their different administrative arrangements (e.g. rotating chairs versus secretariats) are important design choices that deserve further scrutiny. We hope that future research will extend the IIGO 2.0 dataset by adding missing or newly created cases and by coding additional variables. All this will help us better understand how states' increasing reliance on IIGOs rather than traditional FIGOs is reshaping international relations.

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Tables and Figures

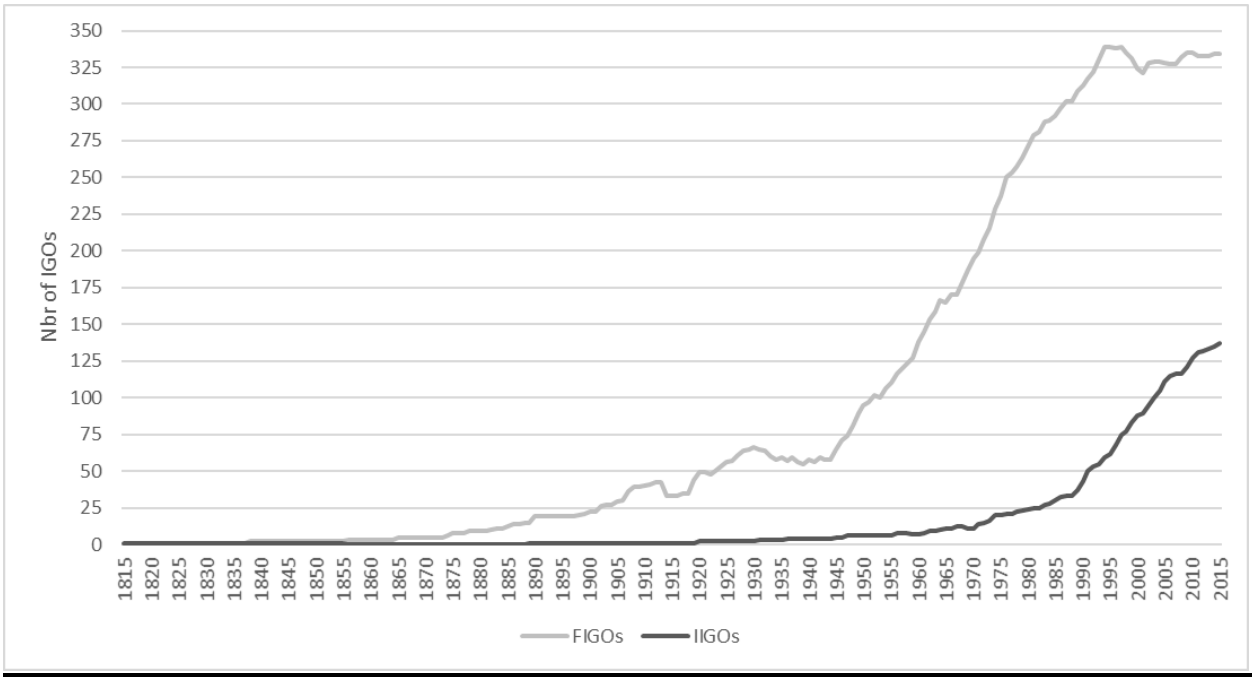

Figure 1. Number of IIGOs vs. FIGOs time

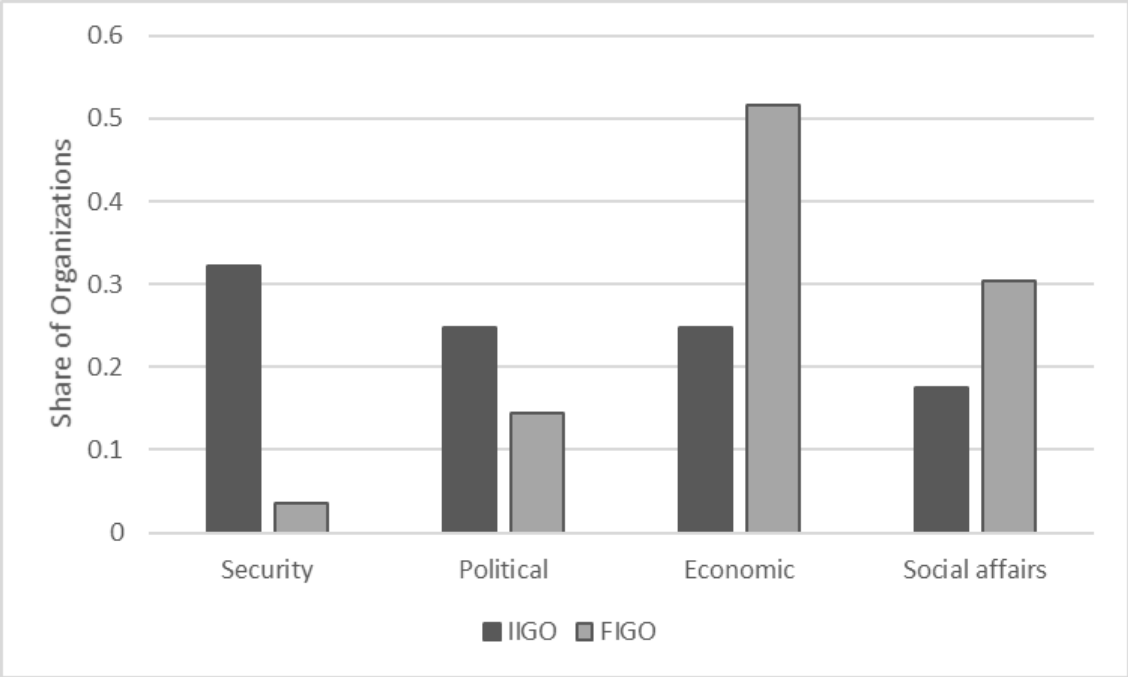

Figure 2. Issue Areas in IIGOs vs. FIGOs

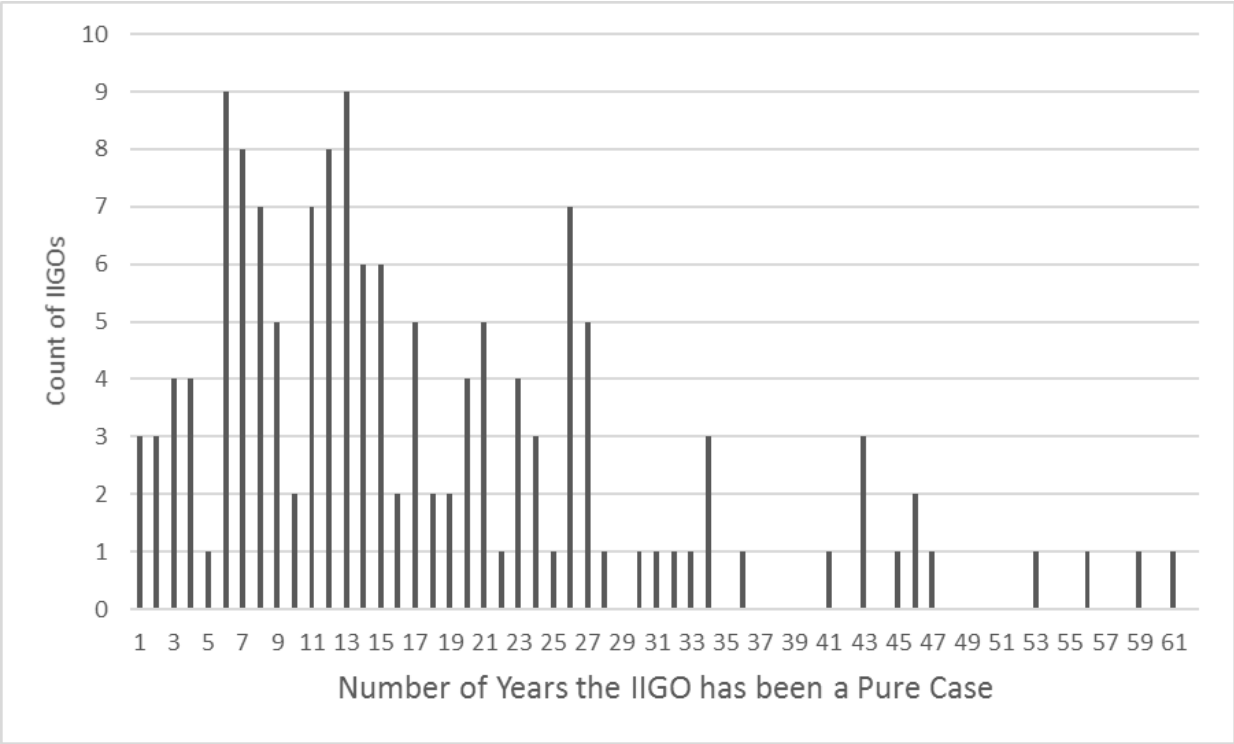

Figure 3. Age of IIGOs

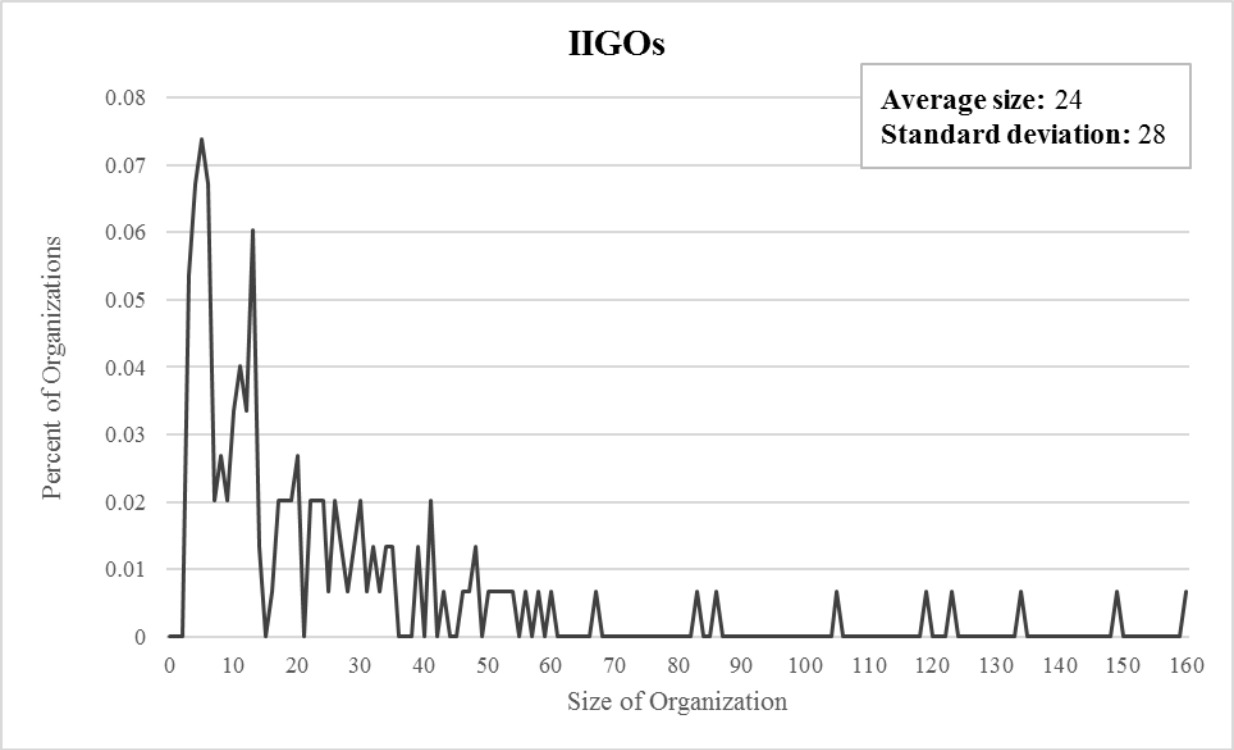

Figure 4a. Membership Size in IIGOs

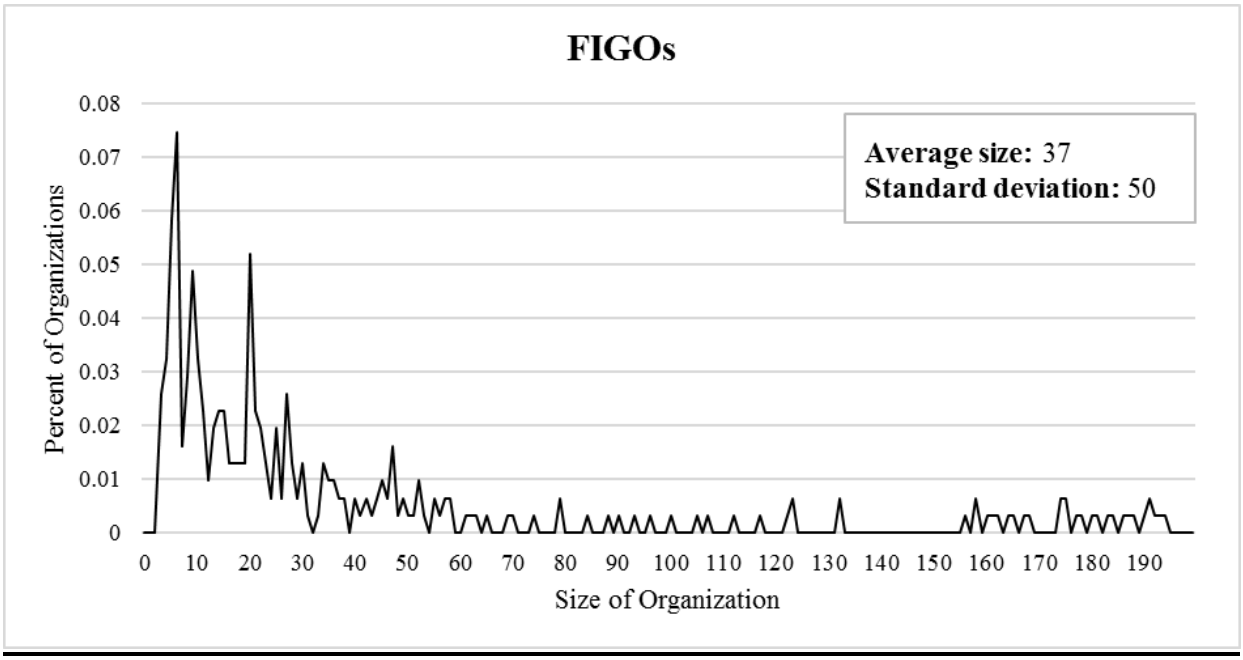

Figure 4b. Membership Size in FIGOs

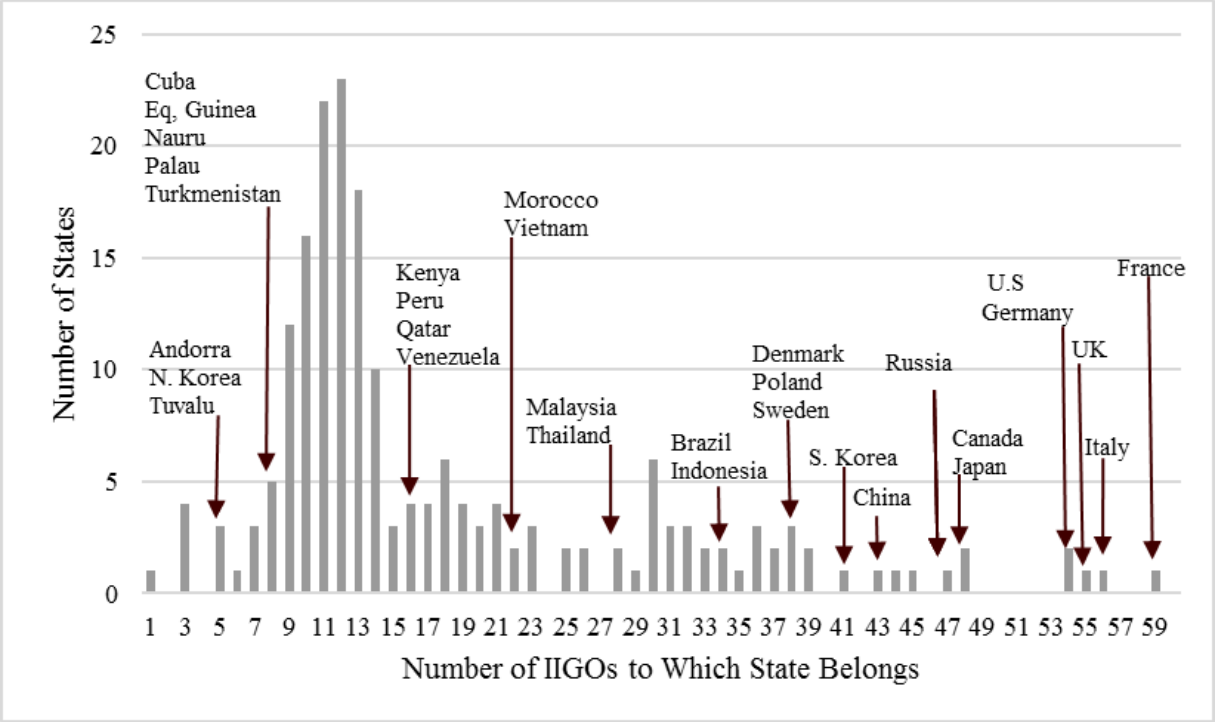

Figure 5. Number of IIGOs to Which States Belong

Table I. The Fate of IIGOs

The Fate of IIGOs	**Nbr.**
Continuing Pure IIGO	94
Legalized Through a Treaty	4
Added Permanent Secretariat	21
Both Treaty and Secretariat	11
Died without replacement	19
TOTAL	149

Appendix: Cooperation Under Autonomy Codebook for IIGO 2.0 Dataset

This is a living dataset. We would welcome the addition of other variables or cases. We would be pleased to incorporate them in IIGO 2.0 Dataset or to facilitate compatibility with other data files.

Codebook for IIGO 2.0 Dataset

Informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) meet three definitional criteria:

(i) high-level associations of three or more states;
(ii) based on explicitly shared expectations, but without a formal treaty and;
(iii) hold recurrent meetings but without a formal institutional arrangement such as a secretariat.

To build the IIGO 2.0 dataset, we began with the Union of International Association's (UIA) Yearbook of International Organizations (2019) which lists all non-profit international organizations. From this highly inclusive list, we selected cases that meet our three IIGO criteria (explained further below).

In order to not over-rely on the Yearbook, we also scrutinized several other lists of international institutions such as the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (ATOP) (Leeds et al 2002). We also examined lists of Global Summits (Patrick, 2017) to evaluate fit with our criteria.

As we assembled key information about each IIGO, we were careful to follow up on other related organizations that were possible IIGOs (e.g., locating the G7 leads quickly to the G20). Much like a 'snowball sampling' technique (where an interview with one subject leads to other subjects), this resulted in a few additional cases being added to the dataset. We also did general searches in diplomatic sources and queried experts in the field. We would welcome any suggestions of possible omissions.

Here we detail the coding principles that guided our decisions. We also provide a list of 250 organizations that were 'close calls' either because other experts asked us about them or because they had some (but not all attributes of IIGOs) that presented difficult decisions worthy of documentation and explanation. This list is not a comprehensive set of all 'close calls because that was not our research goal but simply a step towards developing a comprehensive dataset of 'pure' case IIGOs. Nonetheless, we provide this list for transparency and intellectual advancement. With regard to transparency, we want to show our thinking in determining the dataset and be clear about possible exclusions. In terms of intellectual advancement, we hope that the list of close calls can promote research on the growing number of other kinds of IGOs (that fall out of the pure case FIGO or IIGO definitions) that are not receiving sufficient attention in IR research.

Criteria for Identifying IIGOs

To be included in the IIGO 2.0 dataset, an IGO must satisfy three criteria:

(i) High-level association of three or more states

(a) States are the primary members. Although non-governmental organizations, FIGOs, and private firms may participate as observers or even members, it is key that the relationship is *intergovernmental*. States count as members when they attend IIGO meetings (see more below on high-level political participation), share in its activities, and are generally expected to participate in IIGO activities when they occur.

a. The list of valid states comes from Correlates of War.
b. Associations that are public-private partnerships were not included. For example, we do not include the World Economic Forum.
c. The list of members need not be 'set in stone' and many IIGOs have a fluctuating membership from one meeting to the next. Nevertheless, most IIGOs have a relatively stable membership or grow slowly over time.
d. Bilateral relationships are not included. For example, we do not include the Shimoda Conference.
e. Relationships between one state and a FIGO are not included if the main meetings are between one state and a representative of the FIGO rather than with high-level representatives of the member states of that FIGO. For example, we do not include the EU-China summit.
f. While one state sometimes plays an outsized role in creating an IIGO, or in supporting its operations (e.g. by providing administrative services), the relationship needs to be multilateral. For example, we exclude foreign policy initiatives of one state such as the Belt and Road Forum or the China-CEEC.

(b) IIGO membership is defined by high-level political participation. Heads of Government, Ambassadors, or Ministers—with the authority to make political commitments on behalf of their respective states—need to be regularly part of (some) meetings.

a. Lower-level transgovernmental networks solely among officials not authorized to make broad political commitments but who primarily address administrative or technical decisions are excluded. Terms like 'network' and 'administrators' often indicate the lower-level nature of officials. For example, we do not include the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand Electoral Administrators Network (PIANZEA) because the highest level attendees have insufficient authority to set policy on their own.
b. Lower-level officials can attend IIGO meetings, and often comprise technical working groups between plenary meetings, but high-level officials get together for key aspects of coordination. These high-level meetings are often referred to as 'ministerials'.
c. Central Bank governors count as high-level participants. For example, we include the Group of Ten because Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Governors are the key attendees. We do not include Central Bank Supervisors as high-level participants but instead consider them to be lower-level technocrats. For example, we do not include the International Conference of Banking Supervisors as an IIGO.

(c) The entity has to be a 'stand-alone' organization, not an 'IIGO within a FIGO.'
   a. 'Coalition groups' that organize bargaining/negotiation within FIGOs are excluded. For example, we exclude Friends of Fish because it primarily operates as a bloc within the World Trade Organization.
   b. Some entities have 'contact group' in their title that does not immediately disqualify them. We look for whether the group stands on its own.

(ii) Explicitly shared expectations but without a treaty

(a) Evidence of common goals or purpose establishes shared expectations, though their articulation need not be formal. Evidence can be established through the following (but not limited to):
   a. Joint Statements
   b. Communiques
   c. Websites
   d. Memoranda of Understanding
   e. Declarations
   f. Acts
   g. Guiding Principles
   h. Charter
   i. Framework
   j. Goals
   k. Plan of Action
   l. Programme
   m. Resolution

(b) States' shared expectations cannot be legally binding. The key disqualifier is whether the group was established by an international treaty (recorded in the UN Treaty Series).

(c) States' shared expectations should be related to an ongoing and open-ended purpose. This contrasts with ad hoc meetings to address problems and with conference series that have an immediate and specific purpose and are limited in duration. For example, we exclude the 19th century international monetary conference series which states used to negotiate institutions to regulate the international monetary and financial world order.

(d) Ascription of 'groupness' by third parties do not establish shared expectations of group members. For example, we do not include the Asian Tigers.

(iii) IIGOs hold recurrent meetings but have no significant formal institutionalization such as a secretariat or headquarters

(a) Meetings must be recurrent. States need not meet at *regular* intervals but there must be the expectation of future interactions related to the shared group expectations. Some IIGOs may take a hiatus for a long period and pick back up when conditions are more favorable or issues are more pressing.

(b) An IIGO does not have significant formal (permanent) institutionalization such as a secretariat or headquarters.
    a. Entities are excluded if they have a named secretariat that is housed in its own structure with a permanent address. For example, the Regional Cooperation Council does not qualify because it has a Secretariat based in Sarajevo, and a Liaison Office in Brussels.
    b. Entities are excluded if they have permanent staff (including a Secretary or Secretary General) that are hired by the organization itself (i.e. not on secondment from member states). For example, we exclude the Indian Ocean Rim Association because it has a permanent Secretary General responsible for assigning work, managing the budget, and facilitating meetings.
    c. Many IIGOs engage a FIGO or member state to provide administrative functions; they qualify as IIGOs if the relationship is not permanent (e.g. set up as a temporary service agreement, even if renewable) and if support positions are only to assist IIGO interactions rather than to exercise control. For example, the Global Forum on Migration and Development is chaired and hosted alternately by a developed country and a developing country, and has no permanent location. The annual Chair's work plan may be implemented in different places – most preparatory meetings are held in Geneva, while the final meeting is usually held in the host county. But it has a rudimentary administrative support structure – the Geneva-based GFMD Support Unit provides administrative and logistical support to the Chair-in-Office. The Support Unit is hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) but the IOM has no influence on the GFMD.
    d. The use of rotating chairs or meeting hosts who provide a "temporary secretariat" (as in the G20) often indicates an IIGO.
    e. Some IIGOs rely on 'virtual' secretariats that facilitate the organization of or hosting of (virtual) meetings.

Variables

The IIGO 2.0 dataset includes the following variables.

Name

The full name of the IIGO. Some IIGOs have changed names over time, often to add new mandates or modify aims. When there is a clear link and continuity from one entity to the next (i.e. they cover the same general issues, include some membership and do not exist at the same time), we group the organizations into one record so as to not artificially inflate the dataset with extra IIGOs. For example, we group the G22, 33, and 20 into the same record.

Abbrev
The abbreviation (or abbreviations) of the IIGO.

Issue Area

We code each IIGO into one of four mutually exclusive issue areas: Political, Economic, Security, and Social Affairs. We base this on a refinement of the three COW issue area categories where we separate the Security cases out of the Politics category.

Since many IIGOs cover multiple areas, we code issue areas according to what the IIGO does ‘most’. If it is truly a wide range, we code the issue area as ‘political’. This has implications: the security category, for example, is a conservative estimate of how many IIGOs handle security because IIGOs that handle security plus other issues are put in the political category.

The security category includes topics related to human security. For example, the Budapest Process is coded as 'security' because it is related to border management and asylum processes. IIGOs related to energy are coded as ‘economic’ to follow the COW coding (for example, which codes the IAEA as economic).

The Social affairs issue area includes a wide array of topics such as education, health, the environment etc.). If the entity is not obviously economic or political, we categorize it as social.

Regional

Coded 1 if the IIGO is comprised of geographically contiguous states

Coded 0 otherwise

Nbr_State_Mbrs_2017_or_end

Count of the number of member states in the IIGO in 2017 or when the IIGO ended (either formalized or died). While it would be optimal to record member states by year, this information was not systematically available across most IIGOs.

Observers, FIGO ‘members’ (such as the EU) are not considered in this count.

Beg Year

The earliest year the IIGO member states started to meet recurrently or showed evidence of coordinating shared expectations. Often this is the first summit meeting when a joint communique is released or the year a joint declaration is announced.

Formal_1_or_Dead_2

Coded 1 if the IIGO has formalized (by obtaining a secretariat or legalized treaty among member states).

Coded 2 if the IIGO has died. See below.

Otherwise, 0.

End_IIGO_Year

If the IIGO is no longer considered a 'pure case' IIGO (adhering to all three criteria above) and either formalizes or 'dies'), the year is recorded (see below). The IIGO is considered 'dead' after 10 consecutive years of no activity related to the group's shared expectations. Last meeting is taken as date of death.

If we know the IIGO has died but cannot confirm the date, it is recorded as 'UK' (unknown).

Otherwise, missing.

Ind._Sec_Year

If member states set up a permanent, formal secretariat with agency, the year is recorded. At this point in time, it is no longer considered a 'pure case' IIGO.

Otherwise, missing.

Formal_Treaty_Year

If member states sign a legalized treaty, the year the treaty goes into force is recorded. At this point in time, it is no longer considered a 'pure case' IIGO.

Otherwise, missing.

Follow_on_org

If the IIGO is preceded or superseded by another entity, the name is listed here. Otherwise coded as 0.

Three data files are stored separately as .xls files:

1. **Appendix Table I: IIGO 2.0 dataset**

2. **Appendix Table II: 'Close Calls' for IIGO 2.0 dataset**

   We provide a list of 'close call' cases that were considered for inclusion but ultimately rejected. The list includes the reason we did not include the case but there may be other reasons as well – we stopped the moment we found grounds not to include it. However, the reasons may provide insight to the coding in practice.

3. **Appendix Table III: IIGO by state 2017 (or end).**