

# Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations

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International-relations scholars tend to focus on the formation, design, and effects of international organizations (IOs). However, the vitality of IOs varies tremendously. I argue that IOs end up in one of three situations. They could die off altogether, though this happens infrequently. More commonly, many IOs become “zombies.” They continue to operate, but without any progress toward their mandates. A third category includes IOs that are alive and functioning. I develop a theory to explain an organization’s vitality, hinging on the quality of the bureaucracy. In an environment where IOs with similar goals, and with many overlapping members, compete for bureaucrats, the ability of the secretariats to attract talented staff and to enact policy autonomously are associated with whether organizations truly stay active, simply endure, or die off. I demonstrate this proposition using a new measure of the vitality of international economic organizations from 1950 to the present. Around 52 percent of the organizations in the sample are alive and functioning, around 10 percent are essentially dead, and nearly 38 percent are zombies. Using these original data, tests of these propositions support the theory.

## Introduction

Research on the link between international organizations (IOs) and cooperation tends to simply count the number or design of IOs to which a state belongs, without giving weight to how active those organizations are or whether they fade into obsolescence.<sup>1</sup> But levels of vitality—that is, regular convocation and a basic level of output consistent with their goals—vary widely across and within IOs. No matter how constraining an IO’s charter, the organization can easily drift into stasis or die off altogether. For example, the Arab Maghreb Union—an economic agreement founded in 1988—went dormant only four months after its founding, due to an uprising in Algeria. The organization continued to convene meetings until 1994, when Libya refused to take over the rotating presidency. Algerian officials tried to reignite the organization by holding a summit in 2001, but the Moroccan foreign minister did not attend, and the meeting collapsed. In 2012, after the Arab Spring, the group finally met in full for the first time in eighteen years. Such a trajectory is not uncommon, but many scholars treat vitality as constant.

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<sup>1</sup>Although [Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke \(2004, 102\)](#) technically define an IO as needing to have regular meetings, their coding only counts for the de jure number of times the organization convenes, not how active they are subsequent to the time of their founding—and this level of activity can vary dramatically over time. Nonetheless, most researchers assume that IOs function from the outset and then continue apace, not taking into account the possibility that they may become moribund. The AMU, described above, appears in that dataset simply as a “1” in a binary coding subsequent to its establishment in 1988. Similarly, the [Volgy et al. \(2008\)](#) dataset—which covers three years at different time periods (1979, 1989, and 2010)—codes it as “alive after 1975, still alive in 1989” and “born between 1981–1989 and still alive 2004.” This indicates that a simple live/dead distinction may miss IOs that organizationally drift.

The mechanisms through which IOs promote cooperative behavior do not begin and end at the organization’s signing ceremony. But researchers often assume these activities occur based merely on the intentions stated in an IO’s founding documentation. Cooperative outcomes supposedly achieved through, for example, the transmission of information ([Fang 2009; Chaudoin 2014](#)) or socialization ([Finnemore and Sikkink 1998](#)) simply cannot occur if those IOs do not function on a regular basis. Similarly, many of the constructivist arguments about cooperation through socialization in IOs ([Checkel 1999; Johnston 2001; Schimmelfennig 2005](#)) cannot take place without organizations remaining vital.

Existing literature fails to account for this pattern. [Strange \(1998, 213\)](#) once asked why some IOs never die, but much of the international-relations literature considers neither IO death nor the persistence of IOs that have lost their effectiveness. The rational design literature (see [Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001](#)) assumes that IOs will be renegotiated if they do not fulfill their original purpose and fails to acknowledge the possibility of bureaucratic drift. Research on IO design rarely addresses the possibility that states may form even unsuccessful IOs with good intentions, or that over time, even IOs with similar designs and aims can experience wide variation in vitality.

The world’s IOs exist in three categories of vitality: those that are alive and functioning; those that are effectively dead, through exit or abandonment; and those that remain comatose or “zombies,” where their offices stay open and some minimal activity persists, but they make few meaningful advances in cooperation.<sup>2</sup> IO bureaucratic capacity helps explain this variation.<sup>3</sup> States tend not to design IOs to fail endogenously; indeed, the principal-agent literature suggests that incompatible states for whom cooperation is more difficult ought to build greater autonomy into their

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<sup>2</sup>An exception to these three categories can occur when IOs pursue new missions than those in their founding charter; no cooperation can be observed in their initial area of focus, but they can persist having taken on other mandates altogether. I discuss this possibility further in the section on rival explanations.

<sup>3</sup>[Biermann and Siebenhuener \(2009a, 2\)](#) define IOs as an institutional arrangement that combines bureaucracies—each of which has its own organizational culture and behavior—with a normative framework set up by states. However, many IO scholars do not consider the role of bureaucracies in IO functioning.

agreements. However, the decisions that states make at the organization's outset, including secretariat locale, can shape an organization's functioning in the long run. Given competition among IOs, the geographic pull of a secretariat's location and the policymaking autonomy of the bureaucracy can explain whether an IO stays alive, dies off, or limps along. The relative attractiveness of a post can draw better quality bureaucrats, enabling the implementation of the mandate in the face of competition.

I test this argument with new data on international economic organizations.<sup>4</sup> Many scholars link these organizations' proliferation to not just increased trade but also advances in democracy and reduction in conflict (Mansfield and Milner 1997; Solingen 1998). The empirical analysis focuses on economic organizations, but similar thinking could be applied to other types of organizations, both international and domestic.<sup>5</sup>

IOs are not just contracts but are living organisms that change over time (Colgan, Keohane, and Van de Graaf 2012). Simply looking at features of an institution's design may be insufficient to predict its effects on cooperation. Plenty of IOs may seem impressive on paper, but if their bureaucracies are not empowered to make decisions or if they cannot attract good staff, they may persist in a comatose state or die altogether.

IO research only erratically examines performance and the role of bureaucracies. Much IO research focuses on variation in either the initial design of an organization or the configuration of members that join organizations and their attendant effects on those members. No study, at least to date, systematically examines variation in the vitality of organizations over time—even across IOs that have similar designs and that are signed by similar groups of states. Many studies in comparative regionalism and in European Union scholarship discuss how bureaucracies can shape the functioning of IOs, but they tend to be single-organization studies. This study brings these insights into a broader empirical framework.

### Organizations and Their Discontents

Although many scholars laud the proliferation of IOs as a sign of increased cooperation in the international system, others express skepticism. They note that states are happy to join organizations but often fail to comply with IO provisions (Tallberg 2002), or that states only join IOs that reflect behavior in which they would have otherwise engaged (Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom 1996; von Stein 2005; Mitchell and Hensel 2007). Others note substantial overlap among similar organizations in terms of their mandates and goals. They question the ability to which states can uphold these

overlapping commitments (Alter and Meunier 2009). Recent studies of IO performance (Gutner and Thompson 2010) acknowledge that IOs may not meet the goals they set out for themselves, despite impressive-looking legal design (Kono 2007; Jo and Namgung 2012). All of this points to extensive variation in the effectiveness and even the vitality of many of the world's IOs.

Many scholars observe this pattern in the comparative study of economic organizations. Researchers laud economic integration agreements for their positive effects on not just trade promotion but also on democracy (Pevehouse 2002), foreign direct investment (Büthe and Milner 2008), human rights (Hafner-Burton 2005), and transparent elections (Donno 2010). Yet, when one closely looks at the record of individual agreements, the picture looks quite different. Africa hosts "a veritable organizational junkyard" of unimplemented and contradicting agreements (Herbst 2007, 129); East Asian economic agreements are described as "thin gruel" (Friedberg 1993, 22) whose strict-looking designs go unimplemented (Ravenhill 2008, 471–472); and Latin American integration is stymied by the "entrenched rejection of supranationalism" (Sanahuja 2012, 5). Many economic organizations comprise countries that have few complementary products to trade (Soderbaum and Sbragia 2010, 570).

These critiques underscore that IOs vary not just in effectiveness, but also in vitality. But most of these studies focus on a small number of organizations or on one particular region. They do not address the question of how many of the numerous IOs that make their way into researchers' datasets even still operate. Most large-N analyses of IOs tend to record the existence of an organization at formation or note when new members join. But they rarely discount organizations for ceasing to be active or for even falling off the books altogether.<sup>6</sup> For example, Pevehouse (2002) includes in an analysis of the effect of regional organizations on democracy the Organization of Central American States (ODECA), an organization that folded after 1973 during the war between El Salvador and Honduras. The organization then reemerged as the Central American Integration System (SICA), but not until 1993, and yet this IO appears in the dataset as a single organization in continuous existence from 1951 to 1992 (the upper limit of time in the dataset). Many other articles do not include a list of the agreements that they count in their estimates, but very different agreements—from the European Union to the Central Asian Economic Union—usually receive the same binary treatment, implying that they have the same levels of activity and performance over time.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup>I refer here not to preferential trade agreements (PTAs) that exist only as treaties but to organizations that have a physical secretariat and staff. Many of the world's four-hundred-odd PTAs are simply paper agreements, which also may become obsolete, but through different mechanisms than those advanced in this piece.

<sup>5</sup>Depending on the type of cooperation problem, many organizations can thrive and be effective with no bureaucratic structure whatsoever (Koremenos 2001, 293; Abbott and Snidal 1998, 4; Stein 1982, 301). A simple organization or a minimal level of organizational machinery may be sufficient to ensure cooperation on a particular issue, if the cooperation problem is simply one of coordination. But there are more complicated cooperative problems, and loftier ambitions, that lead states to form organizations with secretariats, permanent staff, and regular budgets. Because these cooperative problems are more difficult to solve by mutual organization alone, organizations would have difficulty meeting their goals. Acknowledging that some organizations die off or are zombies is less a criticism of those organizations and their capabilities, and more of a recognition of the difficulty of the cooperative problems that they were designed to address.

<sup>6</sup>But see Koremenos (2016, 396–97), which does acknowledge "failed" agreements with flawed design provisions, and Hooghe, Marks, Schakel, Osterkat, Niedzwiecki, and Shair-Rosenfield 2016 (see my question in the references regarding this source), which measures change in IO design over time.

<sup>7</sup>Much IR research makes theoretical claims about IOs generally, but their empirical tests contain a large number of regional organizations. The literature on comparative regionalism acknowledges variation in the performance of such organizations—see, for example, Acharya (2012) and Jentschke and Lenz (2013). However, this literature has not yet presented a unified theory to explain this variation (Baier, Bergstrand, Egger, and McLaughlin 2008, 462–63). Indeed, the literature on comparative regionalism probably pays the most concerted attention to instances of failed cooperation and variation in vitality among regional economic organizations (see Ravenhill 2008 on Asia; on Africa, see Bourenane 2002). However, the insights from this literature rarely make their way into the large-N IO literature (Sbragia 2008, 30). Studies in comparative regionalism tend to focus on only a few organizations at a time in comparative perspective, often with reference to the EU (Hetme 2005, 545).

## A Typology of International Organizations

I propose that researchers think about IOs in three categories of vitality.<sup>8</sup> The first category includes organizations that we can consider to be *alive*. To be classified as such, these organizations must hold at least one meeting a year at the internal level.<sup>9</sup> They also must make some kind of progress toward their stated mandate. There is, of course, wide variation in the effectiveness of IOs within this category. But the majority of the IR literature assumes that most IOs fall into this category, including studies of cooperation that purportedly address broad IO topics but actually focus on functional organizations such as NAFTA or the EU.

The second category of operation is the *zombie* category. Zombie organizations maintain a level of semi-regular operation, but output in terms of progress on their goals falls below expectation.<sup>10</sup> But, the organizations persist in some form rather than disband altogether.<sup>11</sup> Often they will rename themselves in an attempt to rejuvenate—the various Central American integration schemes took on three separate names<sup>12</sup> despite minimal changes in membership or mandate, and cooperation efforts in Central Asia saw five similar transformations over a twenty-year period.<sup>13</sup> But member-states in these organizations do not remove barriers to trade despite regular meetings.<sup>14</sup> IOs occasionally expand to different issue areas altogether.<sup>15</sup> They may be successful in those new areas, even if they have not made much headway in their area of founding. For example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), founded in 1975 to promote regional economic integration, never achieved much in the way of trade liberalization but shifted in 1990 to security issues, moving to intervene in

the first Liberian civil war (Haftel and Hofmann 2017, 499). After fifteen years of limited success in economic cooperation, it now has what is widely regarded as the most effective peacekeeping infrastructure in Africa (Adeleke 1995, 569). More generally, organizations may change their missions as previous ones become obsolete; the Bank for International Settlements is one prominent example (Bernholz, 2009), as is the evolution of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its mission over time. But zombie organizations will persist in similar forms—albeit with slightly different names—despite stagnation.

The final category is dead organizations, which have formal secretariats and bureaucracies but never meet and have no visible level of activity. Although organizations rarely disband altogether, IOs in the *dead* category often only exist in name alone. This often occurs because they cannot meet their stated ambitions and subsequently become starved of funding. Member-states stop paying their dues and send fewer delegates of lesser import to meetings. This can result in a complete inability of organizations to hire staff or hold meetings that attract member-state delegates of authority. But organizations that die off altogether are somewhat rare—just as member-states infrequently exit from IOs. Nonetheless, some percentage of organizations in the world do disappear altogether, as can sub-organizations within organizations.

### *Hypotheses on Organizational Vitality*

What factors are associated with organizations ending up in one place or another on this spectrum? Given an environment of competition among IOs, an organization must be able to attract and retain talented staff for it to stay alive. Bureaucracies have distinct organizational cultures, structures, and behaviors (March and Simon 1958) that can make an IO more or less successful.<sup>16</sup> In the developing world, brain drain erodes the potential workforce, as talented people leave their home countries in search of a better standard of living, as well as more competitive salaries, access to superior technology, and more stable political conditions.

The field of international-relations tends to overlook the importance of bureaucracies into the study of IOs. Some of the most extensive development of these theories occurs in the study of EU management reforms (Bauer 2008) or in particular sectors of cooperation, such as the environment (Biermann and Siebenhner 2009b). The broader IO literature only erratically acknowledges the crucial role of bureaucrats, who are often tasked with implementing or even initiating and designing policies. As Johnson (2013, 184–85) discusses, bureaucrats play an active role in the design of progeny IOs. Other scholars explore the role of IO bureaucracies in the implementation of policy (Haftel and Thompson 2013), including in the distribution of aid (Arel-Bundock, Atkinson, and Potter 2015).<sup>17</sup>

Understanding the vitality of any given IO hinges on two key components: the quality of the staff and the degree of bureaucratic autonomy. These two elements are distinct

<sup>8</sup>These categories refer primarily to organizations that at one point in their existence had a physical secretariat with a permanent administrative office, an annual budget, and permanent employees; different criteria would be necessary to evaluate the life cycles of international cooperation efforts that simply exist as treaties or agreements. Those may also fail to be effective, but their persistence would take a different form than the ones described below. Since treaties have no operational costs, their option value is different than agreements that require some financial and personnel input from member-states to keep them alive.

<sup>9</sup>Even NAFTA, which has a minimal secretariat structure compared with other economic organizations, holds an annual summit of member-state representatives.

<sup>10</sup>They may accomplish some of their goals—as Chayes and Chayes (1998, 9–14) note, compliance can be a matter of degree and can vary across issue area—but they largely fall short of their stated ambitions.

<sup>11</sup>Zombie organizations could in principle be set up simply to lie dormant until they are needed, but this occurs more frequently in security organizations than in ones aimed at economic cooperation. For example, the Regional Security System in the Caribbean, founded in 1982, has been relatively inactive since the invasion of Grenada in 1983, except for sending troops in the occasional military exercise.

<sup>12</sup>Chronologically, La Organizacin de Estados Centroamericanos (ODECA), from 1951 to 1973, the Central American Common Market (CACM) from 1960, and La Sistema de la Integracin Centroamericana (SICA) from 1993 to the present.

<sup>13</sup>These were the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) from 1991 to 1994, the Central Asian Economic Union (CAEU) from 1994 to 1998, Central Asian Economic Cooperation from 1998 to 2002, Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC) from 2001 to the present, and Eurasec from 2008 to the present.

<sup>14</sup>Occasionally, new and expanded organizations grow out of existing ones. For example, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) grew out of the PTA for Eastern and Southern Africa. Similarly, the West African Economic and Monetary Union formed from the West African Economic Community (CEAO), which itself grew out of the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC); the GATT evolved into the WTO, with new members and a higher degree of institutionalization, and the EEC gave way to the European Union.

<sup>15</sup>See Haas (1964) and Nye (1970), who discuss spillover dynamics between economic and social policy cooperation, with an emphasis on issue interdependence and the growth in regulatory complexity.

<sup>16</sup>Many studies of bureaucracies, including those in the constructivist tradition, observe that each agency possesses a unique culture that can permeate the agents' behavior and produce normative environments that lead to the championing of particular ideas. These cultures tend to vary across agencies more dramatically than they do within single agencies across time—but see, for example, Chwieroth (2009).

<sup>17</sup>Such studies, however, tend to examine single organizations, particularly the World Bank (Weaver 2008) or the IMF (Stone 2002). Biermann and Siebenhner (2009b) note that despite similar structures, aims, and finances, international bureaucracies on the environment have varying autonomous influence.



but complementary. Concerning bureaucratic autonomy, scholars across a variety of disciplines argue that a bureaucracy that is not captured by state interests can enact more effective policy.<sup>18</sup> IO scholars who use principal-agent frameworks discuss how member-states act as a collective principal that delegates to an IO bureaucracy, the agent (Pollack 1997).<sup>19</sup> The central dilemma resides in the trade-off between the benefits that principals receive—in terms of legitimacy and efficiency—through delegation, compared with the losses that they might experience from ceding control to an autonomous agent. If member-states agree to grant an agency with sufficient autonomy, they will be subject to less political influence in the implementation of their mandate. The implementation of international agreements can be subject to shifting political tides.<sup>20</sup> Free from political control, autonomous bureaucracies can more efficiently enact their mandates. This brings us to the second key component of IO vitality. A bureaucracy with autonomous design cannot work well without competent staff. When bureaucrats prefer IOs that are well-located and offer meaningful employment opportunities, those IOs are more likely to be vital, especially in the presence of multiple IOs from which to choose. Empowered and well-staffed bureaucracies can enact the goals set out by member-states on a day-to-day level (Elsig 2010, 348–49).

This theory of the combined effects of staffing and bureaucratic autonomy resonates with causal arguments about bureaucracies' ability to enact internal change. The realist perspective might suggest that states intentionally design ineffective organizations to avoid constraining powerful actors and that any change in competencies would come from the will of states and not from bureaucracies themselves. But bureaucratic autonomy can increase when staff establish reputations among diverse coalitions for the effective provision of services (Carpenter 2000). The administrative structures of bureaucracies can subsequently ensure their insulation from state interests (Bauer and Ege 2016).

Implementation of IO mandates can require oversight and outreach that would be difficult without a competent and empowered bureaucracy. For example, in Asia, firms utilize only 24 percent of the region's free-trade agreements (Katsuhide and Urata 2009). High-quality staff cannot force firms to export, but they can ensure political communication that will encourage member-state governments to fulfill their commitments to removing the political barriers to trade. Even if bureaucracies do not directly encourage firms to trade—although some actively do so, through business outreach and clarification of customs procedures—they can at least mitigate the barriers to cooperation through

<sup>18</sup> Many studies of bureaucratic politics stress the importance of bureaucratic autonomy to policymaking (Huber and Shipan 2002; Gailmard and Patty 2007). A key debate discusses the nature of organizational change and whether bureaucratic entrepreneurs can have autonomous power or if their behavior simply reflects power structures in elected office. For example, where Wilson (1989, 8–10) and Kernell and McDonald (1999, 793–97) argue that Congress played the pivotal role in the reform of the post office, Carpenter (2001, 192–95) argued that autonomous bureaucrats led the calls for reform. A substantial literature in American politics also discusses the relationship between bureaucracy and the effectiveness of policymaking. For example, Krause, Lewis, and Douglas (2006) examine the relationship between political appointments and policy effectiveness. Ting's bureaucratic redundancy theory (2002, 2–6), building off Landau (1969), argues that principals choose multiple agents in a bid to increase the effectiveness of an organization.

<sup>19</sup> But see Vaubel (2006), who casts the principal-agent problem as one between IO bureaucrats and voters in member-states, who are unaware of most of the IO's activities, and Graham (2014), who depicts IOs as constituting multiple, not singular, agents. Biermann and Siebenhuener (2009, 8) also note that most principal-agent frameworks assume variation in the principals, whereas in many IO bureaucracies, particularly multilateral ones, the principals are a constant.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Leeds, Mattes, and Vogel (2009).

holding meetings that encourage repeated interactions between state officials (Checkel 2005). Constructivists champion the role that bureaucracies can play in socialization and in the spreading of norms (Finnemore 1993). Bureaucrats can aid with the monitoring, assessment, and compilation of statistics that improve information among member-states as to whether other countries have adhered to their obligations.

Given an environment of competing IOs, if an organization cannot offer good working conditions for its staff—both in terms of the attractiveness of the locale and the ability of bureaucrats to fulfill their mandates—its prospects for success may be limited. The location of an organization's headquarters can serve as both a direct and indirect measure of the ability of an IO to attract good staff. If organizations compete not just for bureaucrats but also for key officials to coordinate with policies, the convenience of the locale can play a prominent role in IO functioning.

IO staff themselves echo this view. A recent report commissioned by CARICOM, a trade organization among Caribbean countries, highlights the state of crisis in the organization, attributing this in part to “a serious weakening in its structure and operation over a number of years” (Landell Mills 2012, 98). This report elaborates on the variation in the quality of staff:

The Secretariat has had difficulties attracting applicants to higher-level posts in recent years. It is understood that entry-level professional posts are filled, but that young staff at that level tend to stay only long enough to get an impressive entry on their CVs. We were told that the Secretariat used to attract the “cream of the crop,” but that this is no longer the case. As we have already noted, there is a core of highly committed but aging staff at the top of the Secretariat—many of whom are beyond retirement age—but only a limited pool of talent in the following generation to replace them.

The report attributes this in part to the secretariat's location in Georgetown, Guyana (Bishop, Girvan, Shaw, Mike, Kirton, Scobie, Mohammed, and Anatol 2011). At the time of CARICOM's founding, Guyana was relatively well-off as a nation; throughout the 1950s, its gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was among the top forty countries in the world, on par with other nations in the organization.<sup>21</sup> Member-states did not establish CARICOM with the intention of dooming it to failure by locating it in Georgetown. The secretariat was initially located in Guyana for political reasons, to acknowledge the contributions of Guyanese Prime Minister Forbes Burnham in the establishment of CARICOM. Indeed, the preceding paragraph highlights that the earlier staffers were quite dedicated. Today, however, Guyana stands as the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and Georgetown became a city with a high rate of violent crime as well as theft and armed robbery in business and residential districts. The violence associated with the drug trade is rampant, and the per capita murder rate in Guyana is three times higher than that of the United States (OSAC 2012). Over time, the undesirability of the location created staffing problems for CARICOM.

Furthermore, the degree to which any given IO competes with similar IOs in the region would condition vitality. Any organization that attempts to promote economic cooperation among a multitude of similar groups might have a

<sup>21</sup> In 1960, Guyana's GDP per capita was \$299.41, making it the forty-third-richest economy in the world. In comparison, Jamaica's GDP per capita that same year was \$429.14 (thirty-first), Trinidad's was \$635.43 (twenty-fifth), and Barbados's was \$378.84 (thirty-seventh).

harder time remaining vital. A proliferation of similar IOs in the same region would generate lessened vitality for all organizations, either because of greater competition among those IOs for talented staff and resources, or because the preponderance of similar IOs reflects a greater underlying difficulty of cooperation in that region in the first place. Given an environment of IO competition, the above propositions related to bureaucratic structure can be framed as testable hypotheses:

**H1:** *The ability of an organization to attract and retain talented staff is positively associated with the vitality of an organization.*

**H2:** *Organizations are more likely to be vital if their secretariats have the autonomy to enact policy.*

### *Competing Explanations*

Several alternate explanations should be considered. IO vitality might stem from characteristics of the member-states themselves. One might assume that vital agreements are more common in the West, and dead or zombie organizations proliferate in parts of the world with deeper economic and political problems. However, agreements go defunct in both the developed and the developing world, and similar groupings of countries can still produce organizations that vary greatly in vitality (the many organizations among similar clusters in Africa, for example).

Instances of violent conflict among members might decrease organizational vitality. Honduras left the Central American Common Market after its 1969 “soccer war” with El Salvador, and Georgia left the Commonwealth for Independent States in the wake of 2009 conflict with Russia. Overall levels of income could be associated with vitality; one might suppose that rich countries sustain the IOs of which they are members, while poor countries are less likely to do so.

Additional rival explanations might focus on the characteristics of the agreement. The degree of constraint or institutionalization in an agreement might determine cooperative outcomes. This point has more to do with agreement effectiveness and not vitality per se, since most of the rational design literature assumes that any agreement that lists toward inactivity would either be redesigned or disbanded.

However, further concerns might be raised about the potential for endogeneity in the relationships described above. If states design agreements with all the parameters relevant for cooperation, the degree of vitality would be built into the agreement. In conditions that are not fruitful for cooperation, states would simply design agreements to fail, and conversely IOs would be constructed to ensure success in circumstances where cooperation was desired. In short, founding member-states build obsolescence into some institutions (Solingen 2008). This echoes an argument made by Moe (1989) with respect to US public bureaucracy. If competing factions disagree over what an agency should do, and if each group lobbies for its own interests, an agency’s resulting design would be intentionally dysfunctional as a result of the compromises. To that end, when member-states have heterogeneous preferences, they may not agree on how to control IO bureaucrats (Martin 2006).

If countries know in advance that an IO will go nowhere, they might choose to bury it in an unattractive city or fail to empower it to make decisions through the granting of autonomy. This might mean that both design and location might be endogenous to agreement performance.

However, the logic of Moe’s argument may work better for domestic agencies than for international ones, since countries are under no obligation to create IOs. States would hardly take the trouble to establish an organization, rent out a building, and hire staff for an IO that they imagined would never succeed—particularly several times over, as states far more frequently form and join IOs than they disband or exit from them. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that even organizations that end up dying off usually start out with good intentions—the Mano River Union, which has barely been operational since the 1990s, was originally borne from a “deep friendship” between Liberian President William Tolbert and Sierra Leone’s President Siaka Stevens<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, countries may not be able to predict the trajectory of an IO headquarter city. In the CARICOM example above, Guyana had been a relatively prosperous country at the time of the organization’s founding, but over time conditions deteriorated in the capital, making the prospect of working there less attractive. Nonetheless, even if organizations start out with a foundation of optimism, this may erode over time, particularly if competing organizations exist in a region or if member-states lack political will (Barnett and Solingen 2007).

A further rival explanation for vitality is the evolution of the IO onto new substantive territory. Even if IOs fail to ensure cooperation in the substantive area that they were initially meant to cover, they might expand their missions to include areas that prove more fruitful ground for cooperation. Indeed, IOs can expand their missions as a function of increased demand for cooperation and regulations in linked areas (Haas 1964). An IO that looked to be in a zombie state could be productively pursuing cooperation in other issue areas. Specifically, an IO intended to promote economic cooperation might stall but then successfully shift its mandate to a different issue area, such as security (Haftel and Hofmann 2017, 486).

Finally, the value of IOs may rest not in overt actions to promote cooperation but rather in giving space for repeated interactions and the sharing of information that allows members to become socialized into like-minded and subsequently cooperative behaviors (Checkel 1997; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). Even if IOs did not seem to be producing cooperative gains among states, they might still remain vital through bringing together decision makers from member-states and giving them the opportunity to exchange information and participate in social learning. What may look like a zombie organization could still be serving a valuable purpose—as long as they hold regular meetings and summits for staff and member-state representatives.

These rival explanations will be accounted for in the subsequent empirical section.

### **Operationalizing Vitality for Economic Organizations**

This section groups international economic organizations—that is, IOs that promote economic integration, starting with a free-trade area, among their members—into three ordinal categories of vitality. Although the theories above generalize to most IOs regardless of issue area, I focus primarily on economic organizations for several reasons. First, comparing “like” organizations and their outputs requires a focus on organizations with similar intent. Agreements that tackle divergent issue areas are difficult to compare in terms of their output. Second, economic agreements stand among

<sup>22</sup>“Conflict and Collaboration: Sierra Leone and Her West African Neighbours, 1961–1980.” *Africa Spectrum*, February 15, 1980

the most prominent forms of international economic cooperation today. Countries at all levels of development and in all regions of the world have signed on to these agreements. As such, studying these IOs' vitality helps us understand whether international economic law promotes freer trade, a goal sought by nearly every country in the world. In addition, although in general IO outputs can be difficult to measure directly, most economic agreements have a clearly observable goal: increased trade among members. This makes it a useful starting point from which to examine variation in IO vitality.<sup>23</sup>

For the list of IOs, I build off [Pevehouse et al. \(2004\)](#), who define IOs as having more than two parties, regular meetings, and a secretariat or headquarters.<sup>24</sup> I then eliminate all organizations that do not attempt to promote a free-trade area among members, using [Mansfield and Milner's \(2012\)](#) dataset as a reference. I also reference these data off [Goertz and Powers's \(2012\)](#) dataset of thirty-eight regional economic organizations, although they conflate several organizations.<sup>25</sup> Including the variously named incarnations of similar organizations, this leaves a dataset of seventy IOs, listed in the appendix. The years run from 1948 to 2013, with an average organizational lifespan of nineteen years.<sup>26</sup> The appendix lists the IOs under study, along with their lifespans and their subsequent vitality coding.

The vitality of IOs should be judged along two dimensions: their level of activity and their output, with respect to the goals that they set out for themselves. Baseline levels of activity—that is, regular meetings—are a necessary but not sufficient condition for vitality. If IOs simply meet without producing any output relevant to their organization's mission, then they would be better classified as zombies than as alive, since they simply convene without producing any activity that relates to their reason for being. This leads to the issue of evaluating IO output. Because the world's IOs have many different aims, we must identify the output relevant to the purpose of the organization. The economic organizations under study here espouse free trade among members as a minimum commitment to economic cooperation. Looking at the trade generated among member-states does not, however, conflate effectiveness with output. States belong to many different agreements, including multilateral ones, which makes it difficult to know to which agreement an increase in trade should be attributed. Trade levels simply establish a conservative metric by which economic agreements can be evaluated.

For the economic activity among countries in an organization, I run a standard gravity model<sup>27</sup> to obtain predicted values for trade using dyadic measures of trade between countries from 1948 to the present. The gravity model

([Deardorff and Stern 1997](#)) uses countries' economic and geographic fundamentals, as well as commonality of language and colonial status, to predict volume of trade a particular pair of states ought to conduct.<sup>28</sup> I then calculate actual levels of trade among the relevant set of dyad-years, subtracting the predicted trade from the actual trade. Negative values indicate less trade than predicted by standard gravity models, and positive values indicate more trade than predicted.

Operationalizing the output of organizations based on gravity-model predictions represents a minimal threshold of activity for the organization in question. The gravity model estimates what countries should trade given their economic and geographic fundamentals, even in the absence of an international agreement.<sup>29</sup> Residuals of zero indicate that a group of states trade at exactly the level that their economic and geographic circumstances would predict, even in the absence of an international trade agreement. Any negative residuals mean that there exists some, potentially political, impediment to cooperation ([Rose 2002](#)). In order to produce as much or more trade as predicted by the gravity model—that is, residuals greater than 0 would involve countries removing political barriers to trade. Bureaucracies cannot force firms to trade, but they can help remove obstacles to enable firms to trade as much as their geographic circumstances would permit.

The measure of vitality benchmarks trade performance against the amount of activity in a given organization. An organization must be operational on a baseline level, regardless of whether it fulfills its stated purpose of (in this case, economic) cooperation. Without convening somewhat regularly, IOs could scarcely offer the socialization that constructivists champion. Therefore, the measure relies both on an agreement's economic output as well as its overall level of activity, assessed through data in the *Yearbook of International Organizations*. If the *Yearbook* does not list an IO at all, or if it classifies an IO as being inactive in a particular year, it counts as dead for that year regardless of the level of trade among the member-states. Dead organizations across time constitute about 10 percent of the dataset.

However, if an organization either appears in the *Yearbook* or has some nonzero number meetings of listed for a given year, but the difference between predicted and actual trade is less than zero, the organization falls into the zombie category. This indicates organizations where members trade less than predicted by standard gravity models, and yet those organizations continue to have some level of activity. That is, they persist despite a lack of progress toward their stated goals for cooperation.<sup>30</sup> Nearly 38 percent of the organizations appear to be zombies across various years, in-

<sup>23</sup> By definition, many of these economic agreements are also regional organizations, since plans for trade liberalization often occur initially among proximate countries ([Baldwin 2008](#), 13–15).

<sup>24</sup> This brings the total to 171. Note that PTAs usually meet none of these definitions.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the only two of their thirty-eight organizations that are listed as having died are the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO), which they note as having lived from 1994 to 2006. In fact, CACO was alive from 1991 to 1994, to be replaced by the Central Asian Economic Union (CAEU) until 1998, then replaced by the Central Asian Economic Cooperation (CAEC) until 2002, which turned into the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC).

<sup>26</sup> These organizations are also included in the [Volgy et al. \(2008\)](#) dataset, but those data—which do not focus solely on economic organizations—exclude several from the Goertz and Powers data.

<sup>27</sup> Some economists criticize the gravity model for not reflecting as much trade as it should because of its inability to capture certain unobserved variables ([Trefler 1995](#), 1029–30; [Anderson and van Wincoop 2003](#), 170–71). However, it remains the standard-bearer for estimating expected levels of trade.

<sup>28</sup> The model is the natural log of the GDP of the importing and exporting country; the natural log of the distance between capital cities; shared colonial heritage; whether the countries share a common language; and whether the countries share a contiguous border. Data come from the CEPII Gravity Dataset. I collapse dyadic data by sum for individual country pairs within an organization to come up with an overall score for the entire organization in a given year.

<sup>29</sup> The gravity model also controls for factors in a country that would affect all trading partners simultaneously, such as infrastructural conditions or factor endowments. Additionally, because agreements are not in the model, the predictions come from what would be the best-performing agreement in any group of states. This makes it lenient toward the expectation of the effectiveness of any one agreement, given the potential for overlapping agreements.

<sup>30</sup> This metric does not capture whether those organizations thrive in performing other activities outside of their initial mandate, either through an expansion or shifting of their mandate, or through performing more subtle functions such as the gathering and dissemination of information. In the sample, a few organizations could indeed fit these categories. This possibility will be operationalized and controlled for in the subsequent empirical analysis.



**Table 1.** Vitality in IOs

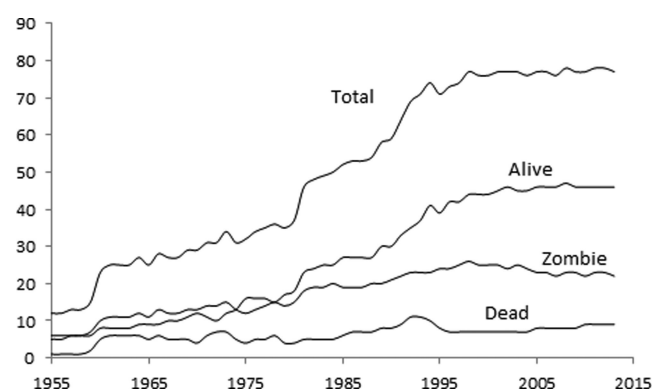
		Activity	
		$\geq 1$ meetings/year	$> 1$ /year
Trade	Low (residuals $-$ )	Death	Zombie
	High (residuals $0$ or $+$ )	Life	Life

cluding Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), and Georgia Ukraine Azerbaijan Moldova (GUAM).

An organization counts as alive if it appears in the Yearbook as having at least one meeting in a given year, and if predicted compared with actual trade is equal to or greater than zero. For robustness, I supplemented the coding in the Yearbook with yearly mentions in Keesing's World Affairs of whether an organization had met in a given year. This is a relatively forgiving coding; all that is required for an organization to be classified as alive is to meet expectations for trade and to have been recorded as having had at least one meeting in a given year. Since even secretariats with minimal levels of administration, such as NAFTA, convene meetings at least once a year, this is not a stringent requirement. Around 50 percent of the organizations across various years meet this classification. The category includes most of the better-known economic organizations, such as the EU, CEFTA, ASEAN, SADC, and Mercosur. Table 1 shows the methodology behind this classification in a  $2 \times 2$  table.

Vitality within organizations can also change over time. I code all of them as alive at the year of their formation. They move into zombie status with inactivity and underperformance given their trade potential. But they can move back into living status if their activity picks up or if trade residuals become nonzero. For example, the Arab Maghreb Union, a North African trade organization founded in 1986, had not met at the Heads of State level since 1994, due to conflict among members. But that organization had its first meeting in twenty years subsequent to the Arab Spring and is currently announcing further integration plans ("Arab Maghreb Union" 2017). Its coding went from zombie in 1994 to alive in 2013. Similarly, the Mano River Union, an organization among Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, never generated much trade but began meeting more frequently in 1992. As a function of increased meetings but persistently low trade for that year, its coding changed from dead to zombie.

Relying on trade and convocation alone may seem an overly blunt metric for examining IO vitality. However, this coding scheme is consistent with other metrics that scholars have developed related to IO performance. To check the reliability of these scores, I take advantage of other coding metrics of regional economic organizations. Some researchers have coded the treaty provisions of economic organizations (Baccini, Duer, and Elsig 2014; Hicks and Kim 2012), but as mentioned, the treaty language does not necessarily indicate an organization's vitality. Others have coded more performance-based metrics, but their coverage varies. Gray and Slapin (2012) use expert surveys to rank around fifty agreements on various dimensions, but those surveys do not have cross-time coverage. Feng and Genna (2005) calculate integration achievement scores for nineteen agreements going up to the year 2000. Haftel (2012) codes organizations on their level of overall implementation in five-year increments. Combining these three scores, the cross-validity between the vitality metrics and these other measures is very high (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.83). This indicates

**Figure 1.** The vitality of economic organizations over time

that the measure reported here is consistent with other researchers' assessments, giving confidence in its reliability.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of observations in each category across time. This graphic gives a remarkably different picture than many of the visuals associated with trade organizations, which usually note an increase in their sheer numbers over time without taking into account their actual level of activity. The sections below discuss explanatory factors for organizational vitality.

#### *Operationalization of Independent Variables*

The theory of IO vitality hinges on bureaucratic autonomy as well as bureaucratic quality. How do we measure the pull of any given organization to local bureaucrats? Some studies have looked at the qualifications of bureaucrats as a means of assessing their competence, but those studies usually focus on single agencies rather than offering comparative metrics.

Many have speculated that the location of a bureaucracy can impact its health. Significant work exists, for example, on the location of US state capitals as they affect outcomes (Engstrom, Hammond, and Scott 2013; Campante and Do 2014), and others have pointed to the physical relocation of bureaucracies as a way of improving their performance (Zagarri 1988; Ireland 2006). To operationalize the degree to which the secretariat can attract and retain talented staff, I collect data on the percent of hardship pay associated with taking a job in the city in which the secretariat is located, relative to other secretariat locations in the region (*Secretariat City*). I draw on the US State Department's listing of hardship pay for specific cities over time, compiled on an annual basis from 1997. This measure shows the desirability of the secretariat's location and serves as a proxy for the organization's quality of staff, which in the long term would be associated with the organization's lifespan. A higher premium required to compensate for difficult or undesirable living conditions would be negatively associated with an organization's vitality.

For example, the South African Development Community (SADC) has its headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana, which has no hardship premium associated with it and is in a relatively stable and prosperous African country. By contrast, for the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa's (COMESA) secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia, hardship pay ranged from 10 percent on top of existing salaries in 1997, to 15 percent in 2002, to 20 percent in 2007. Although Botswana does not belong to COMESA, both those organizations have largely the same member-state composition and would potentially be drawing from the same talent pool to

staff their organizations. All else equal, a qualified bureaucrat from any of the six countries that belong to both SADC and COMESA would prefer to work in a more desirable city and country. Hardship pay ranges from 0 percent for cities such as Brussels, which hosts many of the main administrative structures for the EU; to 25 percent for cities such as Jakarta, the location of the ASEAN secretariat; to 50 percent for Freetown, Sierra Leone, site of the Mano River Union headquarters. Hardship pay for Georgetown, Guyana—the site of the previously mentioned CARICOM headquarters—was 25 percent in 2007, one standard deviation above the mean values for all economic organizations.

The organizations themselves do not award their staff that hardship pay, and for the most part governments in the dataset do not compensate their internationally placed bureaucrats for hardship. Especially in the developing world, governments infrequently award substantial hardship pay to their staff abroad (Chew 1993, 28–29; Lienert 1998, 3). Rather, State Department hardship compensation simply proxies for the desirability of the location in question.<sup>31</sup>

Bureaucratic autonomy also influences IO vitality. To measure the autonomy of a given IO bureaucracy, I use Haftel's (2012) coding for the implemented bureaucratic autonomy in an organization (*Implemented Autonomy*). Haftel's coding captures not just the *de jure* levels of autonomy in an organization but whether the IO upholds those standards in practice. Many organizations make claims to supranational status but do not honor the levels of legalization in their own treaties (Baccini, Duer, and Elsig 2014). The variable takes the value of 0 if there are no supranational institutions; 1 if the organization establishes nominal institutions (as does ASEAN, CACM, and COMESA); 2 if those institutions have an information-gathering and advisory role (SICA, APEC, ECOWAS); 3 if the organization has the ability to amend proposals (as does the Andean Community after a set of bureaucratic reforms in 1993); and 4 if the organization has the ability to veto proposals (as in the EU). The category of 5 contains cases where supranational institutions operate as the primary decision node. Organizations can vary in their implemented autonomy over time; for example, the Andean Community enacted an effective institutional reform in 1993, bringing its score from a 2 to a 3. High values should be associated with living organizations; dead and zombie ones would rank at lower scores.

An organization's *implemented* autonomy differs from its *designed* autonomy. Simply using the design of an agreement might raise concerns about endogeneity; that is, one could speculate that states would design in minimum levels of implemented autonomy if they did not want an organization to thrive (although one might still question why states would take the trouble to build organizations that they did not wish to remain vital). However, an organization's implemented autonomy reflects the degree to which the design principles of independence are enacted in practice.

#### *Rival Explanations and Further Operationalizations*

The estimations also include variables that capture rival explanations for IO vitality, as well as other factors in modeling IO health overall. The first set of variables includes the economic and political conditions in member-states. The domestic attributes of states that sign an IO could potentially influence the health of an organization, and their in-

<sup>31</sup> Because the hardship pay variable is only available for later years, models in the appendix supplement with a variable for the flight connectivity of secretariat cities.

fluence must be taken into account against the bureaucratic hypotheses advanced above.

First, the natural log of the total GDP of member-states in an IO for each year of its existence (*GDP*) captures overall market size of member-states. Countries that constitute a larger market might be more likely to form IOs where they have the resources to meet their goals. As Gelbach (2008, 1191) notes, GDP also proxies for the potential size of the bureaucracies in a country, or the potential pool from which a given IO could feasibly draw. A greater selection of quality bureaucrats might also increase the likelihood of IO health. We would expect a positive relationship between member-state GDP and vitality.

As mentioned, countries in disagreement might know in advance that an IO will go nowhere, and anticipating this, choose to bury it in an unattractive city or fail to empower it to make decisions. This would mean that both design and location might be endogenous to agreement vitality. To control for this possibility, I operationalize *Similarity of Member-State Interests* through the closeness in UN voting from the time of the organization's existence (Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten 2015). Dissimilar countries would find it more difficult to reach compromise and would be more likely to design an IO to fail. Similar countries might be more likely to be associated with vital IOs.

Additionally, outbreaks of armed conflict could derail economic cooperation. I include a variable for the total number of *Militarized Interstate Disputes* among members of an organization in any given year; the expected relationship with IO vitality is negative.

I also create a variable that measures the *Agreement Age*. Older agreements have more time to go dormant or die. At the same time, the rate of IO failure might be higher in earlier years, but once IOs pass a certain age it might speak to the durability of their setup.

We would also want to capture the endogenously designed level of cooperation built into the IO. IOs should not be judged as dormant if they have low ambitions. To control for the level of *Proposed Integration* in the agreement, I include a coding for the depth of economic cooperation proposed in the agreement, where an agreement takes the value of 1 for free-trade area, 2 for a customs union, 3 for a common market, and 4 for monetary union. These measures do not necessarily represent the amount of achieved integration in a given agreement, but it illustrates the ambitions of a group of states. In a robustness check, I also include a measure for the level of *Legalization* in an agreement, from McCall Smith (2000). This variable captures the degree to which an IO possesses legal authority that supersedes the domestic laws of member-states.

I also include a variable for local competition among IOs. If multiple agreements with overlapping mandates exist in a given region, we might expect a higher number of dead or zombie organizations. This variable (*Number of Competing Agreements*) counts the number of regional economic organizations per region per year. This accounts for the number of other of IOs with which a given bureaucracy might be competing and the likelihood of survival.

## Models and Results

This section presents the empirical results of tests of the central hypotheses about the relationship between bureaucrat quality and IO vitality. To examine the determinants of an organization's vitality, particularly the role of bureaucratic elements, I run variations of the same basic model, organizing the data in several ways. Models with the binary



Table 2. Core models

	Vitality	Vitality	Vitality
<b>Death</b>			
Bureaucratic autonomy	-8.295** (2.69)		-7.380** (2.24)
IO competition	0.121 (0.18)	0.152 (0.15)	0.187 (0.18)
Member GDP	-0.169 (0.19)	0.134 (0.19)	-0.205 (0.26)
Level of proposed integration	0.158 (0.33)	-0.016 (0.28)	0.647* (0.28)
IO age	-0.016 (0.03)	-0.023 (0.05)	0.011 (0.04)
Member similarity	-1.870 (1.69)	-1.052 (1.97)	-4.377* (1.97)
Member conflict	-6.239*** (0.42)	-7.161*** (0.35)	-6.742*** (0.45)
Secretariat city hardship		1.699** (0.65)	1.570* (0.73)
Constant	6.255 (6.04)	-6.128 (5.82)	6.113 (8.44)
<b>Zombie</b>			
Bureaucratic autonomy	-3.081* (1.24)		-2.923* (1.49)
IO competition	0.074 (0.09)	0.016 (0.09)	0.015 (0.11)
Member GDP	-0.611*** (0.17)	-0.389* (0.17)	-0.538** (0.18)
Level of proposed integration	0.290 (0.26)	0.059 (0.20)	0.409 (0.25)
IO age	0.002 (0.02)	0.026 (0.03)	0.017 (0.03)
Member similarity	1.027 (2.06)	2.389 (2.43)	1.505 (2.51)
Member conflict	0.941*** (0.27)	0.419* (0.17)	0.373 (0.26)
Secretariat city hardship		1.846*** (0.54)	1.671** (0.64)
Constant	15.574** (5.38)	5.769 (5.06)	11.617* (5.43)
$\chi^2$	489.228	692.896	504.098
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.261	0.262	0.375
Log likelihood	-653.957	-475.567	-319.908
N	949	692	562

Notes: Statistical significance: \* $p < .10$ , \*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .01$

dependent variables provide a fuller picture of the impact of the independent variables on each individual stage of life, while a multinomial model shows the weight of each variable across stages of vitality. In most of the models, I include the variables for bureaucratic autonomy and secretariat city separately, to better get a sense of their independent effects on vitality (although the models in the robustness checks include all variables simultaneously).

Table 2 shows multinomial logit models where the dependent variable is a nominal variable with separate codings for live, dead, or zombie organizations. The constants show the predicted probability of each outcome setting all the independent variables equal to 0. The reference group is live organizations.

The bureaucratic hypotheses predict a positive relationship with vitality and implemented autonomy, and this bears out in the results; bureaucratic autonomy is positively associated with life and negatively associated with dead organizations and zombie organizations. Less attractive secre-

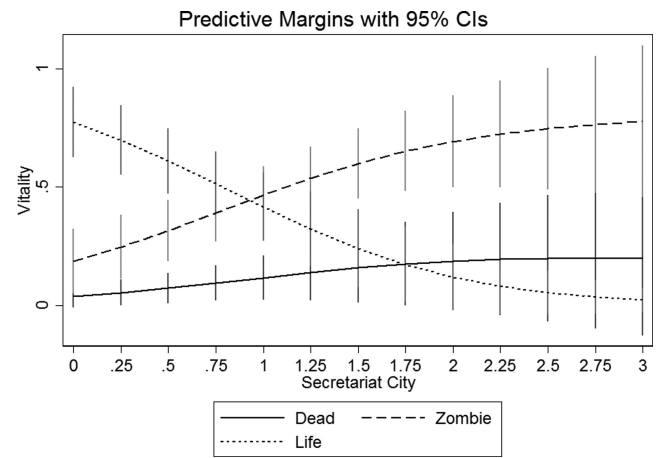


Figure 2. Predicted Probabilities

ariat cities (the more hardship compensation offsetting the locale) are associated with less vitality, and there is a positive association with death.

The other covariates have mixed results across models. In the third column, higher levels of proposed integration are associated with dead organizations, indicating that more ambitious agreements might be more likely to fail to meet their goals and then die off. Thus, an organization’s design is not the whole story: ambitious agreements can collapse if they set their sights too high. In the third model, states that shared common perspectives are less likely to build IOs that die; the relationship is statistically significant across models. Nonetheless, given the range of the variables, the substantive significance of the bureaucratic factors outweighs that of the similarity among IO members. Conflicts among member-states—representing dissimilarity and disagreement among members—are negatively associated with dead organizations but positively associated with zombie IOs. This might indicate that countries with conflictual relationships might form IOs in an attempt to head off fighting, but those agreements then fall into disuse—a finding that bears further exploration. Richer states are less likely to witness zombie or dead IOs.

Figure 2 shows the predicted probabilities for all three values of the dependent variable, whether an organization is alive (3), zombie (2), or dead (1), varying the degree of city attractiveness (through hardship pay for the secretariat’s home city) from minimum to maximum values and holding all other variables constant. CARICOM’s headquarters in Georgetown, Guyana, has, across years, an average relative hardship pay for the secretariat city at the point where the probabilities for zombie and live IOs cross (around one).

Table 3 shows logit estimations of binary variables for each form of vitality (life, death, or zombie). The coefficients for the variables operationalizing hypotheses should not have the same sign across all of these estimations. For example, a more autonomous bureaucracy would be associated with a higher probability of life but a lower probability of death or zombie status. Similarly, a less attractive location—as operationalized by hardship pay, where higher values indicate more hardship in a locale—should result in negative coefficients for life and positive ones for death or zombies.

Here, levels of wealth are positively associated with live organizations and negatively associated with dead ones, but the core independent variables go in the expected directions. The model does a better job of predicting live organizations than it does zombies (pseudo R<sup>2</sup> of 0.40 for the

Table 3. Binary DVs

	Life	Death	Zombie
Secretariat city hardship	-1.641** (0.61)	0.867 (0.52)	1.403* (0.55)
Bureaucratic autonomy	3.676* (1.43)	-6.084* (2.51)	-1.363 (1.54)
IO competition	-0.039 (0.10)	0.175 (0.16)	-0.034 (0.10)
Level of proposed integration	-0.466 (0.24)	0.339 (0.31)	0.245 (0.25)
Member GDP	0.475** (0.16)	0.105 (0.27)	-0.513** (0.17)
IO age	-0.014 (0.02)	0.015 (0.04)	0.018 (0.03)
Member similarity	0.077 (2.01)	-3.882 (2.07)	2.579 (2.70)
Member conflict	-0.267 (0.21)	0.000 (.)	0.622 (0.34)
Constant	-11.638* (4.92)	-2.950 (8.86)	9.816* (4.97)
$\chi^2$	32.142	14.955	27.950
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.396	0.285	0.325
Log likelihood	-234.852	-112.648	-254.666
N	562	543	562

Notes: (1) Logit of the lifespan of economic organizations (life, zombie, death), by organization/year. (2) Dependent variable is a multinomial variable for vitality. (3) Robust standard errors, clustered by organization, in parentheses. (4) Statistical significance: \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

model where life is the dependent variable). This tends to remain true across subsequent models as well: most models perform better when linking the factors associated with live or dead organizations than zombie organizations. This is not surprising, given that much of the IO literature focuses on explanations for live organizations and has overlooked the possible determinants of flagging ones. Further investigation should sort out the unique factors that might make organizations moribund.

The appendix also includes several additional robustness checks. These include using different measures for some of the key concepts. First I use an alternate measure for IO design, using a measure of the legalization of the agreement. Additional tests use a variable measuring IO bureaucratic transparency (Grigorescu 2010) measures that accounts for whether IOs might be engaging in other productive activities outside of their initial mission statements. A further set of models also operationalizes the attractiveness of the IO secretariat city through flight connectivity rather than hardship pay. I also include region fixed effects in a separate set of models, to ensure that certain parts of the world do not habitually produce IOs of the same level of vitality. A final set of models interacts the key independent variables with a variable for IO competition. Results remained largely unchanged throughout.

### Conclusion and Future Research

Although much research assumes that any IO that exists “on the books” maintains some basic level of functionality, the reality looks quite different. Once we take into account an organization’s economic output, along with its level of activity, we find that only about half of economic organizations are alive. About 10 percent are effectively dead. The remain-

der are zombies, with some minimal level of staffing and operation, but little actual output. The ability of the secretariat to attract and retain good staff—as proxied by the level of hardship pay allotted for the secretariat city—is associated with a given organization’s vitality. This theory could be applied to many types of organizations, and at many different layers of governance, outside of international-relations.

This article demonstrates that bureaucracies play a role in the functioning of IOs, with implications for resonant literature in both the rationalist and the constructivist camps. If, as Johnson (2013) observes, IOs create progeny in their image, such organizations might have a greater tendency to go dormant. Scholars that stress the role of bureaucratic discretion (Jabko 2006; Posner 2009; Newman 2008) should expect to see their arguments apply across other IOs as a function of those organizations’ vitality.

Future work should identify why some organizations die off and others persist in stripped-down form, holding fewer, increasingly lower-profile meetings and facing rising staff vacancies. Bernholz (2009, 364) argues that organizations that have failed to fulfill their original mandates might persist on account of the incentives of individual staff workers to retain their job or the political difficulty of dissolving an organization that countries have previously constructed. The factors that turn bureaucracies sclerotic (Barnett and Finnemore 1999) rather than vital require further exploration. The benefits of keeping the organization alive may exceed the cost of financing them. Additionally, these organizations may persist for reasons of regional identity (Anderson 1991; Duina 2008), prestige, and recognition (Chayes and Chayes 1998; Joliffe and Jupille 2011), or simply out of bureaucratic inertia (Olson 1984).

This article also presents relevant findings for policymaking. If secretariat cities can help determine the health of an organization, policymakers should consider the choice of IO headquarters. This finding could help explain the clustering of IOs in single cities, such as in Geneva, Switzerland, and Montevideo. IOs that end up in attractive cities may have a greater chance of survival because they attract quality bureaucrats, and the effect may be multiplied the more IOs that set up their headquarters in the same city. However, there may be an upper limit to this effect. An abundance of IOs may generate too much competition among organizations, making IO survival more difficult.

There are also implications for the quantitative literature on IOs. Organizations that persist through inertia alone would likely not have adequate governance capacities or oversight over member-states to enable cooperation. Including such organizations in an attempt to estimate the effect of IOs on cooperation would attenuate the actual impact of functional organizations. A more careful evaluation of the world’s hundreds of IOs, and a recoding that reflected their actual state of life, might likely reveal a similar pattern of underfunctioning institutions. Appropriate coding would then enable researchers to develop more realistic expectations of the anticipated effects of each type of organization. Studies of IO proliferation and diffusion might alternately reveal several zombie or dead organizations, which might undercut our initial impressions about the surge of IOs.

### Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at <http://sites.sas.upenn.edu/jcgray/publications/> and at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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