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Lisa Dellmuth, Jan Aart Scholte, Jonas Tallberg and Soetkin Verhaegen. 2022. *Citizens, Elites, and the Legitimacy of Global Governance*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

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Why, and to what extent, do citizens and elites around the world regard global governance to be legitimate? How much do citizens and elites differ in how they believe in the legitimacy of global governance, and what explains any such elite–citizen gaps? These are the main research questions of *Citizens, Elites, and the Legitimacy of Global Governance*, co-authored by Lisa Dellmuth, Jan Aart Scholte, Jonas Tallberg, and Soetkin Verhaegen. It is the first in a series of three monographs that present the main findings of the six-year-long research program Legitimacy in Global Governance (LegGov), which recently came to a close at universities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Lund, Sweden (Sommerer et al., 2022; Bexell et al., 2022).

The book provides a major contribution to the growing scholarship studying attitudes toward global governance in general and legitimacy beliefs in international organizations (IOs) more specifically. It focuses on patterns and sources of legitimacy beliefs in six global international organizations: the International Criminal Court (ICC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The text systematically explores a wealth of new data generated by a set of coordinated surveys in Brazil, Germany, the Philippines, Russia, and the United States (US). For each country, two parallel surveys were conducted, one aiming at a representative picture of the general population and one focused on a sample of positional elites – that is, those people holding major positions in key organizations that strive to be politically influential in the respective society.

In line with most research in this field, the authors chose a Weberian perspective on legitimacy focused on how citizens hold “a belief that a governing institution has the right to rule and exercises this right appropriately” (p.11). They assume social

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legitimacy as a core condition for the proper functioning of global governance in general, and IOs as its institutional backbone more specifically. While the authors acknowledge that things are not necessarily so straightforward (p. 7), legitimacy is assumed to help an IO “to attract members, obtain funds, produce policies, achieve compliance with its rules,” while legitimacy shortfalls can “discourage participation, restrict funding, limit decision-making, hamper policy implementation, lead people to rival venues such as multi-stakeholder organizations, and possibly even close down the IO itself” (p.6). The overall research problem is motivated by recent waves of public “politicization” and “backlash” against IOs, often articulated by its proponents with a populist narrative of “the elite” being somehow detached from what “ordinary people” think or want. In the face of such populism, the authors define the possibility of an “elite-citizen gap” in legitimacy beliefs as a major research problem to be addressed.

Possible sources of legitimacy beliefs (as well as possible gaps between elites and other citizens) are theorized along the lines of four main “lines of explanation” at the individual level. The first centers on socioeconomic status and expects (egocentric) utilitarian calculations to play a major role in how legitimacy beliefs are formed – the more endowed with resources, the more people are expected to accord legitimacy to IOs (p. 119–122). While discussing sociotropic calculations, the analysis mainly focuses on egocentric considerations, operationalized by individuals’ level of education and satisfaction with their own financial situation. A second explanation takes on ideological orientations, employing the classical notion of “Left” and “Right” and—in line with other, more recent research in this area—a second axis of political belief-systems juxtaposing green-alternative-liberal orientations (“GAL”) and traditional-authoritarian-national (“TAN”) orientations (p. 123–125). Here, the authors expect left- and/or GAL-leaning people to hold stronger legitimacy beliefs in IOs on average. A third line of explanation focuses on geographical identification, expecting IO legitimacy to reflect variation in how much people feel attached to national communities or to a cosmopolitan idea of global community (p. 125–128). A fourth and final line of explanation expects IO legitimacy to empirically relate to trust in domestic political institutions. Here, the authors discuss three possible mechanisms that could explain such a relationship, two of which are systematically investigated. First, people may extrapolate trust in governments toward more distant and less familiar institutions such as IOs. Second, social trust may be a common antecedent factor of confidence in all kinds of institutions, including governments and IOs.

The text emphasizes accessibility, leading readers in exemplary fashion through the many facets of its investigation. *Part one* of the book introduces the reader to the main questions, concepts and findings (Chap. 1), before turning to reflect on its important methodological choices (Chap. 2). *Part two* is devoted to the description of social legitimacy by mapping the level of observed confidence toward the selected IOs and across countries with regard to citizens, elites, and observed “gaps” between these two strata of societies (Chap. 5). *Part three* begins with synthesizing the four lines of explanations outlined above and translating these into testable hypotheses (Chap. 6). Expectations are empirically tested in the three subsequent chapters with a focus on citizens (Chap. 7), elites (Chap. 8), and observed differences between

the two (Chap. 9). In each chapter, the discussion starts with results of “pooling” data across countries and an index that aggregates observed confidence for all six IOs as the main dependent variable, while later unpacking results for individual countries and IOs. Regarding “gaps” between elites and citizens, the authors apply a “dyadic modeling strategy,” which takes all dyads between individual citizens and elites per country sample as the basic unit of analysis. Across chapters the analysis mainly relies on multivariate regression to evaluate theoretical expectation based on the observed significance of estimates.

The authors add the many pieces of evidence to a number of remarkable findings, which a concluding chapter (Chap. 10) uses to lay out broader implications. The first set of important findings is descriptive: On average, the authors observe a consistent but moderate level of confidence among citizens across IOs and country samples. Elites’ confidence in IOs tends to remain at a moderate level across the board, but higher in most countries – with the notable exception of the Philippines, where the elite tend to have less confidence than citizens. Regarding differences between countries, Filipinos show consistently more confidence in IOs across specific institutions than people in other countries, while Russians tend to be the most skeptical. Regarding differences between IOs, the WHO is trusted the most across countries, and the IMF the least. By and large, selected “human security” IOs (UN, ICC, WHO) fare better than the Bretton-Woods institutions (World Bank, WTO, IMF). While evidence supports the expectation of a general elite-citizen gap in social legitimacy, the authors also find a similar gap in average confidence vis-à-vis national governments.

The last point hints at another set of important findings, namely those regarding the power of alternative explanation. While there is ample evidence in support for all four lines of explanation, the one that focusses on trust in domestic political institutions consistently accounts best for the observed variation in individual confidence in IOs on both levels as well as the respective gap between how elites and citizens evaluate IOs in a country. The explanatory power of socioeconomic status, political values and geographical identification is remarkably high for US citizens, too, but varies quite a bit across the other countries and—although to a lesser degree—across IOs. The authors themselves take this as an indication that the “four individual-level drivers are complementary rather than competing in accounting for IO legitimacy beliefs, but also that organizational- and societal-level factors affect their applicability” (p. 221). The latter conclusion might be one of the most valuable contributions to the field—the more the authors unpack the data to zoom-in on how people in specific countries view specific IOs, the more interesting variation they find, which vehemently calls for the inclusion of contextual factors in future research.

No doubt, there are many reasons for why *Citizens, Elites, and the Legitimacy of Global Governance* deserves widespread recognition as a most canonical contribution to the growing scholarship on the social legitimacy of global governance. These include the comprehensive as well as systematic discussion of existing research along the lines of “four lines of explanations” (which is in itself a valuable contribution) and the empirical analysis of a breathtaking wealth of new data that provides important insights into the current level and sources of social legitimacy across major IOs, countries and social strata. These achievements will make the book a must-read for any scholar interested in the global legitimacy problematique

and a first point of reference on the topic for years to come. The authors deserve special praise for carefully noting the remarkable variation across cases, countries and strata, thus making a strong case for future studies that start where this formidable project took us with its focus on a limited set of important “individual-level factors,” which nevertheless entirely leave out sociopolitical conditions under which these might be put to work. In similar ways, a couple of other limitations of the book will hopefully inspire future research efforts.

A first limitation is the book’s focus on confidence to operationalize legitimacy beliefs. Plausible justifications include a high conceptual fit to what the authors call an “approval approach” to legitimacy (p. 26–29), but also reflect a pragmatic decision not to conflate one’s own measurement of legitimacy with evaluations of IOs’ appropriateness along normative standards of governance, or to include measures that tap into the consequences of legitimacy, e.g., a willingness to accept a decision even if it means going against one’s own interests. While a well-justified choice in this study, future research should find ways to use such correlates to validate confidence as a measure of legitimacy beliefs—especially if comparing across countries, and, by implication, language communities. Moreover, levels of confidence also do not tell much about how people might envision more legitimate global governance to look like. In this way, some of the conclusions drawn by the authors seem problematic. Observing moderate levels of confidence on average, the authors infer that these “neither suggest a crisis for global governance nor a readiness for expansion” (p. 229), because “popular support for such an expansion is currently lacking” (p. 230). But confidence is not an evaluation of specific institutional features, nor of possible reforms for “stronger and more intrusive global institutions” (p. 230) the authors have in mind if speaking of “expansion.” Tellingly, other comparative research indeed shows that people tend to prefer a more authoritative and representative UN over the status quo if given a choice between alternative institutional designs (Ghassim et al., 2022, 8). This fits the book’s descriptive result (that people show only moderate confidence in major IOs such as the UN) but also suggests that its conclusion regarding (the lack of) public support for an expansion of global governance might be premature.

Another limitation that arguably calls for more research is evidence of people’s awareness of IOs. A general understanding of “a governance institution’s existence is required in order for individuals to form legitimacy beliefs toward it” (p. 30), as the authors note at the beginning. With some plausibility, their study focuses on the more salient global IOs (p. 30), while acknowledging that this to some extent limits generalizability of results with regard to global governance institutions (p. 29). The authors deserve praise for gathering some new data on factual knowledge of IOs and also discussing item non-response as a proxy for (lacking) awareness in the book (p. 41f, 56). However, it would be productive to see people’s awareness of global governance take center stage in future discussions of legitimacy beliefs toward IOs. Do people perceive and evaluate specific IOs as single objects or as exemplars of a broader cognitive scheme—maybe “global cooperation,” “international politics” or “(liberal) international order”? Results presented in this book show that levels of confidence significantly vary across IOs, as do estimated coefficients in the explanatory analyses. However, this variation seems surprisingly limited, keeping in mind

how different institutions such as the ICC and the IMF in fact operate. Thus, future research should also investigate the dimensionality of attitudes toward IOs and theorize as well as further empirically test their structural properties. And to take the issue of cognition one step further: How much do people perceive what IOs are and do? How do such perceptions moderate the applicability of alternative explanations of how legitimacy beliefs are formed and changed? For example, how much “utilitarian calculations” (p. 119) do we find at work if not generally asking for financial satisfaction or educational achievements—as rather distant proxies of what we theorize—but directly tap into perceived costs and benefits of global governance? Relatedly, do people perceive IOs as ideological actors that promote certain principles and values more than others—such as economic freedom, human rights, or sustainability? Do such perceptions help people to effectively use their own ideological orientations to judge the degree to which IOs seem more or less legitimate (p. 123)? Reaching beyond the scope of this book, future investigations might greatly add to our understanding of social legitimacy if they further unpack the cognitive priors that inform people’s judgement of IO legitimacy.

A final limitation of this study is the restraint with which the authors theorize the elite-citizen gap. The gap itself is derived from observed differences in confidence in IOs expressed by citizens and elites; hypotheses on its causal drivers are also formulated as direct derivatives of individual-level explanations of legitimacy beliefs. For example, the authors expect citizens and elites with higher levels of trust in domestic institutions to equally accord more legitimacy to global governance. By implication, we might then also expect that “an elite individual who has higher levels of trust in domestic political institutions than an individual citizen will regard global governance as more legitimate than this citizen” (p. 131). But, arguably, the “gap” as a structural phenomenon deserves additional reflection in the field, in order to achieve more a life of its own. The authors briefly refer to “prior processes of selection and socialization” (p. 189) and that “elites and citizens at large experience a variety of different life situations” (p. 212) as possible explanations for why there are differences, again pointing to sociopolitical conditions this book unfortunately leaves aside. Relatedly, while the “dyadic modeling strategy” is an elegant way to operationalize an elite-citizen gap, it somehow assumes a domestic network among elites and citizens with full equality of ties. Future work might take on the task to theorize and systematically measure the strength and qualities of such ties—as private or professional, online or offline, national or transnational—in order to explain how attitudes of citizens and elites empirically influence each other.

Citizens, Elites, and the Legitimacy of Global Governance sets a new landmark in the fertile research area that focuses on the shape and sources of legitimacy beliefs in global governance in general, and IOs more specifically. It is a testament of its timeliness and relevance that this book’s remarkable results as well as limitations will remain a most fruitful inspiration for future efforts in this area for years if not longer.

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