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### **ABSTRACT**

This introduction to the Special Issue reviews the existing literature on the domestic politics of international organizations (IOs), presenting them within a unified theoretical framework. We emphasize the central role of domestic forces in the study of IOs: how individual preferences are channeled through domestic political institutions, and ultimately inform a government's foreign policy decisions toward and within IOs. We show that these forces can be distilled into a game between citizens in which they select welfare weights to be assigned to citizens across the globe. We refer to this as the Citizens' IO Game. The contributions in this Special Issue and previous studies are discussed in the framework of the Citizens' IO Game, which offers fresh insights into the intersection of domestic constitutions, politics, resource distribution, and IO membership and policy. We construct a specific application to trade policy to further clarify the role of the framework. Using this example, we show that global externalities can never be fully internalized through IOs when sovereignty is prioritized. We conclude by suggesting directions for future research on the domestic politics of IOs.

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# 1 Introduction

International organizations (IOs) have increased in prominence over the past several decades. From universal bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), to regional bodies like the European Union (EU), IOs shape policies and outcomes across a wide range of issue areas. Yet the effectiveness and legitimacy of these organizations ultimately depends on the support of domestic political actors in member states. This special issue of the *Review of International Organizations* presents new perspectives on the complex interplay between domestic politics and IOs.

The significance of this topic is underscored by the mounting challenges faced by IOs in recent years. In 2016, the United States began obstructing appointments to the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism. In 2018, under a different administration, the US officially withdrew from UNESCO and then exited from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the US announced its intention to withdraw from the World Health Organization. While some of these policies were subsequently reversed, the US continues to paralyze the WTO, maintains high tariffs on Chinese goods, and pursues industrial policies that provide large subsidies to domestic industries. As of the writing of this article, neither political party in the United States supports trade agreements with market access provisions, and a majority of Americans (59%) believe that the US has lost more than it has gained from increased trade.<sup>1</sup>

The backlash to international organizations is not limited to the United States. Europe, Brazil, and India among others have pursued reforms in international organizations to reassert their autonomy. Under President Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil challenged the European Union on environmental issues and sought to reshape its role in the United Nations. In India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized the importance of respecting national sovereignty and territorial integrity, particularly in digital governance, a stance that contrasts with the approach of international organizations, which advocate for more borderless regulation. Threats to IOs have also emerged from non-populist sources. Japan withdrew from the International Whaling Commission in 2019, a decision made by a mainstream political party that reflected Japan's long-standing pro-whaling stance. Similarly, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) in 2020 was executed by a mainstream conservative party. Between 1945 and 2014, nearly 200 member states have voluntarily removed themselves from all contractual obligations and legally terminated their memberships in IOs (Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019, Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024b). This crisis of international organizations brings to light a long-standing fundamental tension between the push for greater global cooperation and the desire for nations to prioritize domestic

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<sup>1</sup>Pew Research Center. (2024, July 29). Majority of Americans take a dim view of increased trade with other countries. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/07/29/majority-of-americans-take-a-dim-view-of-increased-trade-with-other-countries>

interests and national sovereignty (e.g., Rodrik 2012, De Vries 2018, De Vries et al. 2021, Heinkelmann-Wild, Kruck, and Zangl Heinkelmann-Wild et al., Lake et al. 2021, Bowen and Broz 2022). To explain support and opposition for international organizations, we need a deeper understanding of the individual domestic political actors and the domestic institutions that constrain the choices of policy-makers in dealing with IOs.

In this introduction to the Special Issue, we present a stylized theoretical model to help organize the existing literature on international organizations, including contributions to this Special Issue. At its core, our model examines the dynamics of IOs through the lens of individuals within nations—individuals that often hold differing, and sometimes conflicting, preferences about the policies that IOs address. Differences arise not only from diverse priorities but also from unequal access to resources. Some individuals may rely solely on their votes, while others can wield greater influence through organized interest groups, campaign donations, or lobbying. Political institutions, which evolve over time, play a crucial role in channeling these preferences into policy outcomes. These institutions—ranging from laws governing lobbying and elections to voter access—are shaped by the deeper, more stable rules embedded in domestic constitutions. Constitutions, such as a country’s system of government, are persistent, vary across nations, and influence how citizen preferences are expressed and represented in IO decision-making.

We distill the interaction between citizens, governments, and other countries into the *Citizen’s IO game*. We show that the international IO policy choices of domestic coalitions are equivalent to an outcome in which each citizen selects welfare weights to assign to each citizen across the globe. Welfare weights are essentially a way to account for the varying interests of citizens across nations. An allocation of welfare weights to non-domestic citizens implies IO membership. Welfare weights are balanced across individuals in different countries to maximize personal welfare while minimizing negative international externalities. For an IO to exist and adopt a policy, there must be a system of welfare weights that supports that policy in equilibrium. To illustrate the main features of our model, we provide a simple example focused on trade policy. Using our framework, we show that the standard non-cooperative outcome of trade-policy settings implies an outcome with no IO members. We also show the impossibility of fully internalizing global externalities through IOs when sovereignty is respected and citizens are treated equally.

We are certainly not the first to theorize about the domestic politics of international cooperation and international organizations (for foundational works, see for example Viner 1950, Gourevitch 1978, Milner and Rosendorff 1997, Moravcsik 1998, Putnam 1988, Frieden 2002). However, we present a micro-level approach to complement the existing literature, which often employs a more ‘macro’ perspective. For instance, research on the geopolitics of international organizations frequently abstracts from individuals to nation-states, treating these as unitary actors that pursue a broadly defined ‘national interest’

(Martin 1992, Thacker 1999, Oatley and Yackee 2004, Barro and Lee 2005, Vreeland 2008, Lake 2009, Dreher et al. 2009, Schneider 2009, Copelovitch 2010, Davis 2023, Carnegie and Clark 2023). In contrast, our micro-level approach emphasizes that the foreign policy actions of sovereign governments—including their decisions to participate in and shape international organizations—are deeply rooted in the preferences and priorities of individuals, which are then aggregated through both domestic and international political institutions. By focusing on this individual-level foundation, our approach provides a more nuanced perspective that supplements existing theories. In particular, our approach enables a more detailed examination of the mechanisms by which individual preferences—shaped by factors such as economic interests, political ideology, and social identity—translate into national foreign policy and, ultimately, into international outcomes. Our model demonstrates that citizens are ultimately at the center of many of the questions that scholars of International Organizations have debated for decades. This approach not only helps organize the existing literature on international organizations but also opens up new avenues for research on the micro-foundations of global governance, the role of sovereignty in international cooperation, and the design of more effective international institutions.

## 2 A Theoretical Framework

We present a stylized theoretical model to assist in organizing the extant literature connecting IOs and domestic politics. The model highlights the role of citizens within each country in shaping their country’s support for, and participation in, IOs. The formation of policy in domestic and international institutions can be seen as the direct outcome of citizen preferences for policy. This echoes classic work in political economy using citizen-candidate models of domestic policy-making (e.g., Osborne and Slivinski 1996). Other scholars have explored the link between citizen preferences and IOs, oftentimes focusing on levels of aggregation of citizen actors—such as electorally relevant citizens, political parties, or interest groups—or different mechanisms through which citizen preferences aggregate to the IO level.<sup>2</sup> The model we present shows that the main forces connecting preferences to international policy simplifies to maximizing a weighted global welfare function in a manner similar to Lindbeck and Weibull (1987). In our model the choice of welfare weights are endogenous, but have a status quo bias. This reflects important features of domestic and international politics, and illuminates various links in the chain connecting citizens to IO policy.

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<sup>2</sup>See, among many others, Putnam (1988), Caldeira and Gibson (1995), Milner and Kubota (2005), Voeten (2005), Milner (2006), Broz and Hawes (2006), Broz (2008), Chapman (2009), Zürn et al. (2012), Chaudoin (2014), Dellmuth and Tallberg (2015), Schneider and Slantchev (2018), Walter et al. (2018), Anderson et al. (2019), Schneider (2019b), Schneider and Tobin (2020), De Vries et al. (2021), Tobin et al. (2022).

Domestic constitutions play a crucial role in constraining how citizen preferences are aggregated into both domestic and international policies. By setting the boundaries of governmental power and delineating the roles of legislative, executive, and judicial branches, constitutions create procedural constraints that influence whether and how citizen preferences shape foreign policy. For instance, some constitutions require legislative approval or public referenda for international agreements, thereby limiting executive autonomy and ensuring broader political alignment. At the same time, constitutional principles—such as federalism, sovereignty, or individual rights—limit the scope of permissible domestic policies, reinforcing citizens’ preferences around autonomy or social values. Constitutions thus serve as frameworks that mediate the influence of citizens on policy, channeling preferences through structured pathways and imposing constraints on government action. This also includes systems of government.<sup>3</sup> We provide a simple way to formulate constitutional constraints as the allowable set of welfare weights in the weighted global welfare maximization problem of each citizen. As domestic politics is an endogenous object, the formulation also allows us to capture the feedback loop from policy formed within IOs to the changes in domestic and international politics.<sup>4</sup>

The model begins intentionally general, and IOs serve the role of coordinating on policy to reduce a negative international externality. This allows us to capture much of the existing work. After laying out the general framework, we turn to a special case of multi-dimensional policies that take values that have real numbers—such as a tariff or defense spending—and well-behaved preferences, which reflects many settings of interest. This allows a general characterization of the citizens’ trade-offs, and highlights the balance between retaining domestic control over policy and working with other countries to reduce international externalities (Ikenberry 2000, Stone 2011, Ikenberry 2011, Rodrik 2012, Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019, Heinkelmann-Wild, Kruck, and Zangl Heinkelmann-Wild et al., Lake et al. 2021, Kreuder-Sonnen and Rittberger 2022). In Section 7, we apply the framework to the trade policy setting game in Bowen et al. (2025).

**The international community** The international community consists of a group of  $J$  countries  $j \in \mathcal{J} = \{1, \dots, J\}$ . Each Country  $j$  is simply a set of citizens  $\mathcal{I}_j$  who interact repeatedly over an infinite horizon  $t = 0 \dots \infty$ . The citizens of each country are guided by their domestic constitution to control domestic policy. Denote Country  $j$ ’s domestic policy in period  $t$  by  $p_{j,t} \in \mathbb{P}$ .

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<sup>3</sup>For example, previous work has demonstrated that different systems of government, such as regime type, impact various aspects of IOs (Mansfield et al. 2002, Pevehouse 2002, 2005, Mansfield and Pevehouse 2006, 2008, Donno 2013, Poast and Urpelainen 2015, Tallberg et al. 2016, Debre 2022, Cottiero and Haggard 2023, Winzen 2023, Meyerrose and Nooruddin 2023, Cottiero et al. 2024, Lipps and Jacob 2024, Hafner-Burton et al. 2024).

<sup>4</sup>Such feedback loops have been explored in work by Cortell and Davis (1996), Tallberg et al. (2018), De Vries (2018), Schneider (2020), Walter (2021), De Vries et al. (2021), Bowen and Broz (2022), Schneider and Thomson (2024), and others.

Domestic policy  $p_{j,t}$  can include, for example, subsidies (Bagwell and Staiger 2006, Rickard 2018), domestic transfers (Cameron 1978, Katzenstein 1985, Rickard 2012), monetary policy (Clarida et al. 2002, Eichengreen 2013, Bechtel et al. 2014, Broz 2015, Bordo 2021), tariffs (Grossman and Helpman 1995, Bagwell and Staiger 1999, Maggi and Rodríguez-Clare 2007), financial contributions to IOs (Broz and Hawes 2006, Broz 2008, Schneider and Urpelainen 2014, Schneider and Tobin 2016, Reinsberg 2023), democratization (Pevehouse 2002, 2005, Poast and Urpelainen 2015, Blair et al. 2023), autocratic stabilization (Debre 2022, Cottiero 2023, Cottiero et al. 2024), immigration policy (Betts 2011, Peters 2017, Johns et al. 2022, Alesina and Tabellini 2024), environmental policy (Bernauer 1995, McLean and Stone 2012, Genovese 2019, Tingley and Tomz 2022), fiscal capacity (Besley 2020), and other foreign policies (Voeten 2005, Chapman 2009). Note that we do not place any restriction on the policy space  $\mathbb{P}$  at this time, so,  $p_{j,t}$  can be multidimensional and include non-numeric variables. The vector of policies in all countries in period  $t$  is denoted  $p_t = (p_{1,t}, \dots, p_{J,t}) \in \mathbb{P}^J$ .

**Resources** Citizen  $i$  in Country  $j$  has resources  $k_{i,j,t} \in \mathbb{K}$  in period  $t$  from which they derive instantaneous utility  $u_{i,j}(k_{i,j,t})$ , where  $u_{i,j} : \mathbb{K} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ . Resources can include wealth, income, human capital, other forms of capital, etc. Writing the utility function in this way does not preclude a more micro-founded model with consumption and prices, as these micro-foundations typically rely on citizens making trade-offs to deploy resources.<sup>5</sup>

We assume resources of citizen  $i$  in country  $j$  are given by a function  $f_{i,j} : \Gamma \rightarrow \mathbb{K}$ , where  $\gamma_{j,t} \in \Gamma$  is a country-level parameter that can change over time, shifting the resource distribution in Country  $j$ . This parameter could include, for example, national debt, demographics, capital stock, labor supply, technology, or natural resources (Alesina and Drazen 1991). It can be, therefore, shaped by policy, subject to random shocks or related to past values of the parameter. Let  $\gamma_{j,t} = g(\gamma_{j,t-1}, p_t, \omega_t)$ , so the resource distribution parameter  $\gamma_{j,t}$  depends on the previous period's distribution through  $\gamma_{j,t-1}$ , the international vector of policies  $p_t$ , and a random shock  $\omega_t \in \Omega$ . The random shock can include, for example, natural disasters, technological innovations, or budget shocks.<sup>6</sup>

Note that the resource distribution in Country  $j$  can be affected by their own policies  $p_{j,t}$ , but also policies in other countries  $p_{-j,t}$ , i.e.,  $g : \Gamma \times \mathbb{P}^J \times \Omega \rightarrow \Gamma$ . For example, a tariff imposed by the United States affects producers of that good in countries across the world. Or a decrease in development assistance from the European Union can have implications for the poor in Guinea-Bissau. Countries can, therefore, impose externalities on each other through their domestic policies, which creates a role for IOs (Nordhaus

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<sup>5</sup>Meltzer and Richard (1981), Alesina and Tabellini (1990), Grossman and Helpman (1994, 1995), Krusell and Ríos-Rull (1999), Maggi and Rodríguez-Clare (2007), Battaglini and Coate (2008), Bowen et al. (2025) are some examples of special cases of our formulation of the economy.

<sup>6</sup>A vast literature in economics considers special cases of such a function (e.g., Caballero and Yared 2010).

1975, Sandler and Tschirrhart 1980, Nordhaus 1994, 2015, Ostrom 2015). To make this dependence more explicit, we focus on each agent’s expected indirect utility from their own domestic policy and the domestic policy of other countries, and denote this by

$$v_{i,j}(p_{j,t}, p_{-j,t}) = E[u(k_{i,j,t}); \gamma_{j,t-1}, p_t].$$

With indirect utilities written in this way, it is clear that policy-setting is, in fact, a game between citizens across all countries. Many papers studying international policy-making consider it as a game between *countries* behaving as unitary actors, as for example depicted in typical bargaining models of international cooperation (e.g., Fearon 1998). As stated earlier, one purpose of this model is to peel back the layer of “government,” and instead show how IOs and international policy are direct results of *citizen* preferences and choices. We describe domestic policy-making next, and then introduce its connection to IOs.

**Domestic policy-making** A substantial literature connects domestic politics, and elections in particular, to IOs (Dreher 2003, Dreher and Vaubel 2004, Caraway et al. 2012, Schneider 2013, Rickard and Caraway 2014, Chaudoin 2014, Schneider and Slantchev 2018, Schneider and Tobin 2020, Schneider 2019b, 2020). We borrow language from classical collective choice literature (e.g., Arrow 1950, 1963, Austen-Smith and Banks 1996) to formulate politics and policy-making as the outcome of actions by a domestic decisive coalition. We say that Country  $j$ ’s policies in period  $t$  are selected by a period  $t$  decisive coalition  $C_{j,t}$ . A decisive coalition  $C_{j,t}$  is a set of citizens who can influence policy. It can include the identity of specific policy makers, such as senators or congressmen, veto players, such as a president or executive, and non-veto players, such as a majority of citizens. The decisive coalition  $C_{j,t}$  might also include members based on resources  $k_{i,j,t}$ , such as firms that make campaign contributions, or lobby groups that support various policies. The key feature of a decisive coalition in Country  $j$  is that they are a collection of citizens from Country  $j$ , each with their own indirect utility from policy  $v_{i,j}(p_{j,t}, p_{-j,t})$ .

We assume the set of possible decisive coalitions in period  $t$  is determined by Country  $j$ ’s period  $t - 1$  policy choice  $p_{j,t-1}$ , i.e.,  $C_{j,t} \in \mathbf{C}_j(p_{j,t-1})$ . The choice of  $\mathbf{C}_j(p_{j,t-1})$  can include, for example, changes in campaign contribution limits that gives more or less power to the wealthy, laws related to lobbying, or voter registration policies (Milner and Rosendorff 1997, Broz and Hawes 2006, McLean 2015, Genovese 2019, Brutger 2024). Such policies allow different coalitions without identifying specific members. It can also include elections of public officials, if allowed by the constitution. Note that, since  $\mathbf{C}_j(p_{j,t-1})$  can specify if a citizen is in the coalition based on resources  $k_{i,j,t}$ , policies of all countries can affect the decisive coalition in Country  $j$  through their influence on Country  $j$ ’s resource distribution parameter  $\gamma_{j,t}$ . For example, OPEC members deciding how much

to produce may affect elections or changes of governing coalitions in Country  $j$ , through changes in the international price of oil (Arezki et al. 2022). Economic policy decisions in other countries can also directly affect electoral outcomes (Kayser 2007, 2009, Kayser and Peress 2012, Walter et al. 2018) or economic conditions (Forbes and Warnock 2012, Rey 2013, Bruno and Shin 2015, Miranda-Agrippino and Rey 2020) in other countries.

The allowable set of decisive coalitions is constrained by a country’s constitution. Country  $j$ ’s constitution is assumed to be fixed through time, and specifies the system of government, frequency of elections (if any), party formation, parliamentary versus majoritarian, if laws are governed by simple majority, super majority, or other. For example, a constitutional democracy cannot disenfranchise all citizens, whereas a monarchy or authoritarian regime can allow a single citizen to be the sole member of the decisive coalition. The constitution may not specify individual citizens who are enfranchised, but may describe features of an enfranchised citizen (such as gender or race). The specific individuals in the decisive coalition are constrained by those features. Thus, while the constitution is fixed through time, the members of the decisive coalition need not be. In practice, even in a dictatorship, there can be other informal influences on the policy choice such as advisors, public opinion, or international pressure (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, Weeks 2008, Magaloni 2008, Svulik 2012, Fang and Stone 2012, Boix and Svulik 2013, Weiss 2013, Hashimoto 2020). The scope of this influence can be captured by different features of a constitution. Formally, we denote Country  $j$ ’s constitution by  $\mathcal{D}_j$  and assume  $\mathbf{C}_j(p_{j,t-1}) \subseteq \mathcal{D}_j$ . We postpone the discussion of how decisive coalitions are formed to Section 6. We first describe how IOs are modeled and their relationship to decisive coalitions in each country.

**International Organizations** We assume an international organization serves the role of coordinating policies across countries to reduce transaction costs and manage international externalities (Nordhaus 1975, Keohane 1984, Nordhaus 1994, Kaul et al. 1999, Barrett 2003, Schneider and Slantchev 2013, Ostrom 2015, Nordhaus 2015).<sup>7</sup> As discussed above, international externalities are created when the policies of one or more countries have spillover effects on citizens in other countries (Sandler 2004). These spillovers can be unintended and are often negative. International externalities can arise in various contexts, such as civil and interstate conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, global health issues, financial instability, trade protection, migration crises, terrorism, organized crime, and cybersecurity. Externalities cross national borders and

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<sup>7</sup>Our assumption builds on well-established definitions of international cooperation as a process where governments “adjust their behavior to the actual or anticipated preferences of others, through a process of policy coordination” (Keohane 1984, 51). In addition to coordinating policies, international organizations reduce transaction cost externalities by standardizing rules and norms, provide mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement, share information, and offer mechanisms for dispute resolution, thereby mitigating the inherent inefficiencies and uncertainties of international cooperation.

require collective international efforts to manage.

We also model an IO as a collection of citizens who coordinate to make decisions about their own domestic policies that produce international externalities. We denote the set of individuals in the IO in period  $t$  by  $IO_t$ . Individuals in the IO are themselves members of a country in the international community, so we denote by  $IO_{j,t}$  the set of IO members from Country  $j$  in period  $t$ . In line with common definitions of IOs as formal entities that possess a permanent secretariat and have sovereign states as members (Singer and Wallace 1970, Abbott and Snidal 1998, Pevehouse et al. 2019), we assume that IO members from Country  $j$  must be members of the decisive coalition in Country  $j$ , and thus  $IO_{j,t} \subseteq C_{j,t}$ . Similar to domestic coalitions, we assume that the previous period's domestic policy in Country  $j$  determines the Country  $j$  members of the IO in period  $t$ , so we write this as  $IO_{j,t}(p_{j,t-1})$ . The collection of individuals who participate in the IO in period  $t$  are the individual members from each country in period  $t$ , so  $IO_t = \cup_{j \in \mathcal{J}} IO_{j,t}$ . Thus individuals in an IO may change as domestic coalitions and their designated IO representatives change.

**Timing** The timing of the policy-making game between citizens is as follows. At the beginning of period  $t$ , members of the domestic coalition and IOs are in place for each Country  $j$  (i.e.,  $C_{j,t}$  and  $IO_{j,t}$ ). The previous period's resources are also known and given by  $\gamma_{j,t-1}$ . Domestic policies  $p_{j,t}$  are selected by  $C_{j,t}$  and  $IO_{j,t}$  for all  $j$  through a process to be described in the next section. The random shock  $\omega_t$  is realized, and together with  $p_t$  and  $\gamma_{j,t-1}$ , determines the current period's resources for each agent in each country  $k_{i,j,t}$ . Citizens then derive utility  $u_{i,j}(k_{i,j,t})$  from resources. Finally, depending on policy choice  $p_{j,t}$  the next period's decisive coalitions  $\mathbf{C}_{j,t+1}(p_{j,t})$  and IO members  $IO_{j,t+1}(p_{j,t})$  are selected.<sup>8</sup>

**Observation 1.** *Policy  $p_t$  affects the following variables:*

1. *Period  $t$  resource distribution parameter in each country:  $\gamma_{j,t} = g(\gamma_{j,t-1}, p_t, \omega_t)$ ;*
2. *Period  $t + 1$  set of allowable decisive coalitions in each country,  $C_{j,t+1} \in \mathbf{C}_j(p_{j,t})$ ;*
3. *Period  $t + 1$  IO members from each country,  $IO_{j,t+1}(p_{j,t})$ .*

We can now describe decision-making within domestic decisive coalitions and IOs.

### 3 Policy choices of decisive coalitions and IOs

For each Country  $j$ , the resource distribution, possible decisive coalitions, and IO members ( $\gamma_{j,t-1}$ ,  $\mathbf{C}_{j,t}$ , and  $IO_{j,t}$ ) are inherited from the previous period, and thus describe

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<sup>8</sup>Similar dynamic processes in which today's "power" is a predictor of future power has been studied in the domestic context by previous authors, such as Acemoglu and Robinson (2001), Lagunoff (2009), Acemoglu et al. (2012).

the *state* of the country at the beginning of period  $t$ . Formally, the state of Country  $j$  in period  $t$  is  $s_{j,t} = (\gamma_{j,t-1}, \mathbf{C}_{j,t}, IO_{j,t})$ , and the state of the world is  $s_t = (s_{1,t}, \dots, s_{j,t})$ . We assume citizens discount the future by a factor  $\delta \in (0, 1)$ , and  $V_{i,j}(p_t; s_t)$  denotes Citizen  $i$ 's expected discounted infinite horizon payoff when policy vector  $p_t$  is chosen in state  $s_t$ . To ease notation, we will henceforth denote period  $t$  variables without  $t$  subscript, and period  $t + 1$  variables with a prime:

$$V_{i,j}(p; s) = v_{i,j}(p) + \delta V_{i,j}(p'; s'(p)).$$

In each period, given the state of the world  $s$ , each citizen in Country  $j$  seeks to maximize their expected discounted payoff  $V_{i,j}(p; s)$ .

We assume that coalition member  $i$  in Country  $j$  can only directly affect their domestic policy  $p_j$  whether or not they are a member of the IO. This assumption is in line with the fact that most IO policies have to be ratified and implemented by sovereign governments at the national level. For example, decisions in the WTO to reduce tariffs have to be translated into domestic policy, using the political decision-making processes as prescribed in national constitutions. Similarly, if NATO members collectively agree to increase collective security measures, individual member states have to get approval for greater defense spending from the appropriate national political bodies. Even decisions of international courts have to be translated into policy by national governments.<sup>9</sup> In the European Union, for example, [Franchino \(2004\)](#) finds that over 87% of legislative acts delegate implementation to national governments.<sup>10</sup>

Citizens maximize their individual expected discounted payoff through the choice of domestic policy  $p_j$ , according to their role in the domestic decisive coalition  $C_j$  and possibly their role in the international organization  $IO_j$ . These policy choices are made conditional on the policy choices of other countries  $p_{-j}$ . All citizens in a decisive coalition must account for the incentives of other citizens in the coalition when selecting policy  $p_j$ . Members of IOs are distinguished by the fact that they account for, not only their domestic coalition incentives, but also other IO member's payoffs when choosing domestic policy  $p_j$ . This allows for IO members to coordinate their domestic policy as part of the equilibrium of the game, including a system of punishments for off equilibrium path behavior. This is the standard view of policy cooperation in IOs via repeated games ([Snidal 1985](#), [Oye 1985](#), [Fearon 1998](#), [Martin and Simmons 1998](#), [Koremenos et al. 2001](#), [Rosendorff and Milner 2001](#), [Rosendorff 2005](#)). The difference in our approach is the players in the game are the individual citizens of each country, versus the country as a

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<sup>9</sup>The notable exception is the European Court of Justice; its rulings are directly applicable in the domestic legal systems of the European Union.

<sup>10</sup>In many cases where discretion is delegated to the European Commission, the Council limits the discretion of the Commission. For example, while the Commission can start negotiation with third countries on market access for credit institutions according to Directive 89/646, it needs authorization from the Council to do so.

whole. Moreover, since domestic coalitions include non-governmental members through, for example, special interest groups, it implies that non-governmental actors can be included in IOs. The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) Secretariat, for example, consists of members of each country, including governmental and non-governmental actors.

We incorporate these considerations by assuming that for Citizen  $i$  to agree to any set of policies, Citizen  $i$ 's expected dynamic payoff  $V_{i,j}(p; s)$  must exceed some individual threshold  $\bar{V}_{i,j}$ . This threshold can be determined by, for example, a status quo policy, the citizen's bargaining strength, wealth, citizen's "power," IO decisive rules, or other features. The threshold for each citizen  $\bar{V}_{i,j}$  plays an important role in the analysis, and we refer to them as *demands*. Various strands of the literature across economics, political science, and international relations have discussed factors that affect these demands, and we summarize these in Section 4. For coalition members not in an IO, the thresholds of other countries do not enter their maximization problem, but for IO members, the thresholds of other IO members do. We close this section with the theoretical formulation of the policy choice problem that accounts for these demands.

Consider the maximization problem of Citizen  $i$  in Country  $j$ , who is a member of the domestic coalition  $C_j$ , and also a member of  $IO_j$ . Assume (for now) that Citizen  $i$  is an agenda setter within the IO and the domestic coalition. Citizen  $i$  seeks to maximize her own payoff conditional on satisfying the other members of her domestic coalition and the members of the IO. Citizen  $i$ 's problem is thus

$$\max_{p_j \in \mathbb{P}} V_{i,j}(p_j, p_{-j}) \tag{1}$$

subject to:

$$V_{n,j}(p_j, p_{-j}) \geq \bar{V}_{n,j} \text{ for all } n \in C_j / \{i\}, \text{ and} \tag{C-D}$$

$$V_{m,k}(p_j, p_{-j}) \geq \bar{V}_{m,k} \text{ for all } m \in IO_k \text{ for all } k \neq j. \tag{C-IO}$$

The first set of constraints (C-D) includes one for each member of  $i$ 's domestic coalition, and the second set in (C-IO) includes one constraint for each member of the IO from each of the other countries. This problem captures the international and domestic pressures faced by any agenda-setter in an IO—they arise from the demands of each member of the IO and each member of the domestic coalition—highlighting the tension between satisfying domestic constituents while maintaining international commitments.

The maximization problem in (1) also captures the tension between maintaining sovereignty and solving international collective action problems. Consider a Citizen  $m$  in Country  $k$  who is a member of  $k$ 's domestic coalition but not a member of the IO. This citizen faces only her analogous constraints in (C-D). While this may seem advantageous

for  $m$  because there are fewer constraints, Citizen  $m$  loses the ability to coordinate with other countries on *their* domestic policies to improve aggregate payoffs in a way that most benefits  $m$ . Citizen  $m$  would not have a “seat at the table.” It is entirely possible to free-ride on the coordination of other citizens in Country  $k$ , but in some cases, coordination by other citizens can have a negative effect on  $m$ . This is exemplified by the well-documented [Autor et al. \(2013\)](#) “China shock” which caused higher unemployment, lower labor force participation, and reduced wages for individuals in local labor markets that housed import-competing manufacturing industries. Similarly, all citizens in Country  $k$  may free-ride on the policy coordination by citizens of other countries in the IO, but those other citizen choices can have a negative effect on citizens from Country  $k$ . Aggregating this to the country level gives us the familiar argument of countries outside an IO free-riding on the coordination of international policies by countries in the IO ([Gruber 2000](#), [Schneider and Slantchev 2013](#)).

We highlight that participation in the IO requires balancing the needs of domestic *and* international constituents, and hence giving up some sovereignty. These trade-offs are discussed in a large literature that looks at the use of majority decision-making rules in international organizations and the delegation of power to international IO bureaucrats ([Pollack 1997](#), [Barnett and Finnemore 1999](#), [Tallberg 2002](#), [Hug 2003](#), [Nielson and Tierney 2003](#), [Hawkins et al. 2006](#), [Vaubel 2006](#), [Voeten 2007](#), [Lake 2007](#), [Voeten 2008](#), [Haftel 2013](#), [Johnson 2013a,b](#), [Johnson and Urpelainen 2014](#), [Johnson 2017](#), [Honig 2019](#), [Clark and Zucker 2024](#)). Papers in this area have shown that international IO bureaucrats may have preferences that diverge from their member state and have the power to shift policies toward their own goals. Scholars have debated the extent to which bureaucrats have individual influence on policy outcomes, but there is a growing consensus that IO staff can influence IO policies in many areas. Our framework captures this influence, and the divergent interests of individual members of the IOs.

Before discussing the solution to the agenda setter’s maximization problem in (1), we discuss the literature that has addressed the sources of demands  $\bar{V}_{n,j}$  and  $\bar{V}_{m,k}$  by coalition and IO members.

## 4 Factors influencing domestic and IO member demands

The demands of domestic coalition members and IO participants play a crucial role in shaping a country’s engagement with IOs. In the model, Citizen  $i$  in Country  $j$  faces two sets of constraints when setting domestic policy to maximize their payoff: (i) domestic (C-D); and (ii) international (C-IO). These constraints are determined by the demands of domestic coalition members  $\bar{V}_{n,j}$ , and IO members from other countries

$\bar{V}_{m,k}$ . As mentioned above, a citizen’s demand can be determined by numerous factors including status quo policy, a citizen’s bargaining strength, wealth, citizen’s “power,” IO decision rules, systems of government, laws, etc. We now discuss the literature that has contributed to our understanding of the domestic and international sources of these demands.

## 4.1 Domestic factors

There are many domestic factors that influence demands, but we focus on three themes: *political institutions*, *resources*, and *public opinion*. Political institutions are the endogenous rules of domestic political systems that aggregate citizen preferences, and essentially endow coalition members with de jure power in the sense of [Acemoglu and Robinson \(2008\)](#). They structure policymaking and channel the preferences of citizens regarding IO participation. This includes factors such as electoral systems (as specified in the constitution), veto players, the distribution of power between branches of government, and laws that allocate, or delegate authority. Resources, as described in Section 2, can include wealth, income, human capital, other forms of capital, personal characteristics, the importance of economic sector to which the citizen belongs or participation in interest groups within a country that exert pressure on policy-makers to pursue specific policies within IOs. Public opinion reflects the preferences, and beliefs of the general public regarding international cooperation and specific IO policies. Public opinion can be shaped by factors such as culture, perceptions of international threats, economic conditions, politicization of IOs, elite messaging, or media portrayal of IOs. These features of domestic political institutions interact to determine the demands of domestic coalition members.

A substantial literature on domestic political economy emphasizes that the possibility of leader turnover in domestic political institutions significantly impacts the demands placed on decision-makers ([Alesina and Tabellini 1990](#), [Azzimonti 2011](#), [Acemoglu et al. 2011](#)). In democracies, electoral pressures and the need for public support constrain policy-makers’ actions. For example, during election periods, governments are more likely to push policies within IOs that align with domestic preferences, even if these may not be optimal from a global perspective ([Dreher 2003](#), [Dreher and Vaubel 2004](#), [Caraway et al. 2012](#), [Schneider 2013](#), [Conconi et al. 2014](#), [Rickard and Caraway 2014](#), [Chaudoin 2014](#), [Schneider and Slantchev 2018](#), [Schneider and Tobin 2020](#), [Schneider 2019b, 2020](#)). In the model, the demands of voters would be greater in an election year than in a non-election year. In a democracy, a winning majority of voters is necessarily part of the domestic coalition. Similarly, an autocrat threatened by civil unrest must account for the demands of the citizens leading the unrest as they conduct international negotiations ([Gandhi and Przeworski 2007](#), [Weeks 2008](#), [Magaloni 2008](#), [Svolik 2012](#), [Fang and Stone 2012](#), [Boix](#)

and Svulik 2013, Weiss 2013, Hashimoto 2020).

Previous work shows that veto players in the domestic political system play a significant role in IOs (Schelling 1960, Putnam 1988, Milner and Rosendorff 1997, Tarar 2001, König and Finke 2007, Mansfield et al. 2000, 2002, 2008, Milner and Mansfield 2012, McLean and Stone 2012). The demand of a citizen who is a veto player must be met for any domestic policy to be changed, and ultimately, for any international policy to be changed. A veto player could be a median voter in a democracy or the President. Countries with more veto players have greater domestic coalitions and must incorporate the demands of each veto player in international negotiations. This can lead to policy outcomes that are biased towards IO members facing more domestic veto players' constraints (Ali et al. 2023). The presence of veto players can thereby impact a country's ability to engage in international cooperation and the depth of integration pursued in those agreements (Downs and Rocke 1995, Fearon 1998, Mansfield et al. 2008, Mansfield and Milner 2012).

The nature of the electoral system can influence which citizens are prioritized. For example, Rogowski and Kayser (2002) build from a Stigler–Peltzman framework and find a bias that favors consumers in majoritarian systems and favors producers in proportional representation systems. This consumer bias in majoritarian systems could have implications for how countries engage with IOs. Countries with majoritarian systems might be more inclined to push for trade liberalization in WTO negotiations, as it aligns with consumer interests for lower prices. However, other scholars predict the opposite: Grossman and Helpman (2005) develop a model that envisages a protectionist bias in majoritarian systems.<sup>11</sup> Rickard (2022) also shows that countries with PR systems, party-centered electoral competition, and successful green parties tend to lead efforts to restrict environmentally damaging fishing subsidies, i.e., by increasing their demands for these policies. The demands imposed by domestic coalition members may depend on the extent to which adopted policies are binding domestically, and the extent to which they are monitored and enforced (Snidal 1985, Oye 1986, Martin and Simmons 1998, Maggi and Rodriguez-Clare 1998, Abbott and Snidal 2000, Donno 2010, Hafner-Burton et al. 2015, 2023, 2024).<sup>12</sup>

Domestic resource distribution also significantly shapes the preferences of and demands placed on policy-makers regarding IO participation (Osgood and Kim 2019, Lee and Osgood 2019, Osgood 2021, Van Patten and Méndez 2024). Firms and industry groups often lobby governments to pursue specific policies within IOs that benefit their

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<sup>11</sup>See also Rickard (2015).

<sup>12</sup>In a related study, Kim (2024) shows that career bureaucrats distributing Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) in the US are less likely to certify TAA petitions and are more likely to delay investigations during Republican presidencies relative to Democratic presidencies. This partisan behavior applies to bureaucrats who are not tenured and increases in magnitude during periods of high alignment between labor and the Democratic Party. Thus, the enforceability of IOs depends on the career incentives of domestic bureaucrats—an element that also shapes domestic coalition demands.

sectors (Pelc 2009, Dür et al. 2015, McLean 2015, Bechtel et al. 2019, Genovese 2019, Brutger 2024). The extent of this influence often hinges on the resources each group of citizens can use to lobby or persuade (Grossman and Helpman 1994, 1995). For example, different interest groups have shaped trade policy at various points in history. Policy-makers must often balance the interests of import-competing sectors, which may favor protectionist policies, against those of export-oriented industries that benefit from trade liberalization (Grossman and Helpman 1994, Beaulieu 2002, Hicks et al. 2014, Milner and Tingley 2015, Alt and Gilligan 1994, Bailey et al. 1997, Irwin 2017, Bowen et al. 2025). Existing research also shows that citizens organized through interest groups have a strong impact on cooperation within IOs and compliance with IO mandates (Milner 1988, Dai 2005, Simmons 2009, Chaudoin and Urpelainen 2015). The effect of citizens goes beyond substantive IO policies, but can also affect, for example, decisions of the IO to accept new member states (Schneider 2007, 2009, Schneider and Urpelainen 2012, Davis and Wilf 2017, Davis 2023).

Since coordination in the IO affects individuals' payoffs directly, it shapes and is shaped by public attitudes toward IOs (Bechtel and Tosun 2009, Bechtel et al. 2017, Walter et al. 2018, Zvobgo 2019, Dellmuth et al. 2019, Dellmuth and Tallberg 2021, De Vries et al. 2021, Madsen et al. 2022, Jurado et al. 2022, Tingley and Tomz 2022, Brutger and Clark 2023). As citizens form attitudes toward IOs based on their perceived performance and impact, these views reverberate through domestic political processes and affect the demands of domestic coalition and IO members (Risse-Kappen 1991). Voters consider IO performance when making electoral decisions, and governments respond by adjusting their policies toward IOs to align with voter preferences, especially during election periods (Dreher 2003, Dreher and Vaubel 2004, Schneider 2013, 2019a,b, 2020, Rickard and Caraway 2014, Chaudoin 2014, Caraway et al. 2012).<sup>13</sup>

Of course, public opinion is influenced by various factors beyond the actions of the IO, including nationalism, economic conditions, media portrayal of IOs, and the popularity of a government (Gabel and Palmer 1995, Gabel 1998, Hobolt and Vries 2016). Nationalist sentiments can lead to skepticism or opposition toward IOs perceived as infringing on national sovereignty (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019). Economic conditions, such as unemployment or income inequality, may shape public attitudes on trade agreements or financial assistance programs administered by IOs (Mansfield and Mutz 2009, Bechtel et al. 2014, Walter 2021).<sup>14</sup> Media coverage also plays a role in framing IO activities and shaping public perceptions (Baum and Potter 2019, Jurado et al. 2022, Brutger and

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<sup>13</sup>In addition, they use their behavior and success in the IO to claim credit for political gain (Cruz and Schneider 2017, Hunter 2024), particularly when negotiations are public (Stasavage 2004).

<sup>14</sup>While poor economic conditions are oftentimes seen as generating backlash against IOs, some scholars find that economic crises can increase incentives of governments to cooperate within IOs to address the causes of the crisis more effectively (Haftel and Nadel 2024). The framework we present can guide scholars in comparing these trade-offs through examining how they influence IO member demands in different contexts.

Clark 2023). During periods of nationalist fervor, media narratives can activate national stereotypes and influence how the public processes information about IOs and foreign affairs (De Vries et al. 2021). The impact of public opinion is particularly evident in democracies, where electoral pressure and the need for public support constrain policy-makers' actions regarding IO participation. For example, situations in which a United States president enjoys high approval ratings and security at home, or one whose party controls both the House and the Senate, contribute to a higher demand from their IO representatives (Lohmann and O'Halloran 1994, Milner and Rosendorff 1997, Karol 2000).

Two studies in this Special Issue relate to the impact of public opinion on coalition and IO member demands. Hunter and Walter (2025) introduce a new dataset containing over 600,000 statements about international organizations (IOs) from six national parliaments between 1990 and 2018 to show that members of national parliaments speak more negatively about international organization when IOs are perceived to have too much authority or a democratic deficit. In another contribution to this Special Issue, Schlipphak et al. (2024) use a survey experiment conducted in six countries to show that these effects are mitigated by individual identity. In particular, citizens' cosmopolitan identity interacts with the authority of international organizations (IOs) to shape their domestic support for international organizations. Citizens with higher cosmopolitan identity are more likely to support IOs that hold greater authority, while those with lower cosmopolitan identity become more skeptical of IOs with increasing authority.

The interplay of domestic political institutions, resources, and public opinion on IOs is explored in a contribution to this Special Issue by Lee and Lee (2024). Lee and Lee (2024) demonstrate the significant role of domestic concerns, such as voter preferences and partisan priorities, in influencing governments' responsiveness to international disputes. The study explores how the partisan orientation of governments in democratic countries influences their decisions to settle investor-state disputes (ISDS) arising from regulatory changes. Using both quantitative analysis of 335 ISDS cases (1994–2020) and qualitative case studies, it demonstrates that right-leaning governments are more likely to settle disputes informally, prioritizing economic growth and foreign investment, while left-leaning governments prefer arbitration to protect domestic social welfare and regulatory autonomy. These preferences are further shaped by domestic political constraints, with legislative power amplifying the partisan differences in settlement behavior.

Interactions such as these determine the domestic constraints and opportunities faced by policy-makers when engaging with IOs, and influence the extent and nature of a country's participation in global governance.

## 4.2 International factors

Citizens who are members of international organizations face a complex array of factors imposed by the IO that influence their demands. These include the formal design of international organizations—variations in veto rules, consensus, majority voting—the informal limitations on individual members’ ability to shape policy, membership in other IOs or international coalitions, personal career concerns, and even personal financial or political benefit.

Scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of the preferences and priorities of IO member states, the design of international organizations and how they influence decision-making outcomes at the international and national level (Gray 2009, 2013, Hafner-Burton and Schneider 2019, Ferry et al. 2020, Debre 2022, Cottiero and Haggard 2023, Cottiero et al. 2024, Koremenos et al. 2001, Dür and Mateo 2010, Hooghe and Marks 2015). A significant constraint in this regard comes from how voting power is formally distributed among members. Some IOs—such as the UN General Assembly or the World Trade Organization—give every member country one vote; other IOs—such as the UN Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, or the Council of the European Union—use weighted voting schemes where some member states receive more votes than other countries, based on some predefined formula (oftentimes related to the relative size of the member’s contributions, its GDP, or population). These formal rules allow individuals in IOs more or less voting weight—formal rules that give an individual more voting weight increases their demand and less voting weight decreases it. The correlation between structural economic or military power and vote shares in many IOs has led to a veritable cottage industry of scholarly work demonstrating that structurally more powerful states have a significantly greater ability to shape IO policies according to their interests (Thacker 1999, Abbott and Snidal 2000, Stone 2002, 2008, 2011, Vreeland 2003, Broz and Hawes 2006, Tallberg 2008, Arregui and Thomson 2009, Dreher et al. 2009, Aksoy 2010, Copelovitch 2010, Morse and Coggins 2024). The sovereignty costs of member states increase when IOs have greater enforcement capacity (Hafner-Burton et al. 2015, 2023). This will raise the demands of IO members.

Beyond formal voting power, informal power dynamics also play a crucial role.<sup>15</sup> More powerful states often wield influence through informal channels, inducing other states to align their votes accordingly (Dreher and Jensen 2007, Dreher et al. 2009, Vreeland and Dreher 2014, Carter and Stone 2015). For example, the US enjoys significant voting power in the IMF, correlating with its economic clout, leading to policies that often reflect US preferences beyond what one would expect on the basis of the formal voting rules. Studies have shown how such power asymmetries can influence IO effectiveness (Stone 2008, Lipsky and Lee 2019). Informal power can also be exercised more indirectly,

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<sup>15</sup>This includes considerations of personal power (Anesi and Bowen 2021).

for example when the IO staff is composed mainly of nationals of a particular member state (Voeten 2008, Thomson and Dumont 2022, Lang et al. 2024).

Holding leadership positions within international organizations—such as chairing intergovernmental bodies or rotating into decision-making bodies—can provide members with agenda-setting power, further influencing outcomes (Baron and Ferejohn 1989, Tallberg 2006, Ali et al. 2023); and some states have increased their influence as they rotate into important decision-making bodies within the institution (Dreher et al. 2014, 2016, Vreeland and Dreher 2014). Another major influence is the decision-making rules within these organizations. These rules vary widely, from unanimity or consensus-based decision-making to majority voting systems (Blake and Payton 2015, Hooghe and Marks 2015, Hooghe et al. 2016). Members are less constrained under unanimity rules, as they can block decisions that are not in their favor. Conversely, majority voting systems can impose constraints on individual members, as decisions may be made despite their opposition (Schneider 2011, Steinberg 2002, Schneider and Urpelainen 2012, Lewis 2003, Haftel and Thompson 2006, Achen 2006, Thomson et al. 2006).<sup>16</sup>

Of course, voting power and decision-making rules can interact with each other, and other important factors further influence international constraints. For example, decision-making becomes more difficult as member states preferences diverge (Kahler 1992, Alesina and Spolaore 1997, Alesina et al. 2001, Gilligan 2004, Schneider and Urpelainen 2014, Schneider and Tobin 2016), and this effect is exacerbated when decisions are made by unanimity rule. The constraints induced by preference heterogeneity has become especially salient in recent years when illiberal regimes in democracies and autocracies have increasingly acceded and participated in international organizations (Brazys and Dukalskis 2017). To the extent that these regimes have different priorities and preferences than their liberal counterparts, it has had significant effects on member constraints overall (Cottiero et al. 2024, Meyerrose and Nooruddin 2023, Winzen 2023). While vote shares of individual members matter, the ability of less powerful states to form voting coalitions (Lyne et al. 2009, Schneider and Tobin 2013, Rickard 2022), use veto power opportunities (Schneider 2011), or link issues (McKibben and Western 2014) can affect individual members' demands significantly.

Finally, the increasing complexity of the IO landscape constitutes another constraint. In many policy areas, there exist numerous IOs dealing with similar or overlapping goals. Whereas the jury is still out on whether the existence of alternative IOs can create positive synergy effects or lead to competitive pressures, there is increasing evidence that the existence of competing IOs can shift pressures and priorities, thereby affecting IO member demands (Busch 2007, Lipsy 2015, Pratt 2018, Kinne and Kang 2023, Qian et al. 2023).

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<sup>16</sup>However, scholars also find that decisions oftentimes reflect the structural power and the salience of individual member states even if made by consensus (Golub 1999, Thomson et al. 2006, Steinberg 2002).

## 5 IO Policy Choice and Weighted Global Welfare

We will show that the solution to Citizen  $i$ 's maximization problem in (1) is equivalent to the solution of the dual problem of maximizing some weighted global welfare function. The approach used is similar to Lindbeck and Weibull (1987) and others who applied this to domestic policy-making. We demonstrate the importance of this formulation for coalition and IO member choice, and highlight the trade-offs involved with inclusion of various coalition and IO members.

To keep the mathematics straightforward while maintaining the intuition, we assume policy may be multidimensional, but must take numeric values. Specifically, we now assume  $\mathbb{P}_j = \mathbb{R}^n$ . A typical example is a single-dimensional policy such as a tariff or subsidy. We further assume that each citizen's dynamic payoff  $V_{i,j}(p_j, p_{-j})$  is differentiable and strictly concave in  $p_j$  for all  $j \in \mathcal{J}$ . We present the discussion with a single-dimensional policy to keep notation light, but the extension to multiple dimensions is immediate.

Let  $W_j(p_j, p_{-j}; \lambda^j)$  be a weighted welfare function for Country  $j$  with welfare weight for coalition member  $n$  in Country  $k$  given by  $\lambda_{n,k}^j$ . Then

$$W_j(p_j, p_{-j}; \lambda^j) = \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J}} \sum_{n \in C_k} \lambda_{n,k}^j V_{n,k}(p_j, p_{-j}) \quad \text{with} \quad \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J}} \sum_{n \in C_k} \lambda_{n,k}^j = 1. \quad (2)$$

We can similarly construct weighted welfare functions  $W_k(p_k, p_{-k}; \lambda^k)$  with associated welfare weights  $\lambda^k$ , for each country  $k \in \mathcal{J}$ . Each country's welfare function puts weight (potentially zero) on coalition members from each of the other countries in the IO. The equivalence theorem below connects this weighted welfare function with the maximization problem in (1).

**Theorem** (IO and Weighted Global Welfare Equivalence). *For each country  $j \in \mathcal{J}$ , if a decisive coalition  $C_j$  chooses domestic policy  $p_j^*$ , then there exists a set of welfare weights  $\lambda^{j*}$  such that*

$$p_j^* = \arg \max_{p_j \in \mathbb{P}_j} W_j(p_j, p_{-j}; \lambda^{j*}).$$

The proof is simple yet illustrative, so we discuss it here. First note that the maximizer of  $W_j(p_j, p_{-j}; \lambda^{j*})$  is unique.<sup>17</sup> Now let  $i$  be the agenda setter for Country  $j$  and a member of  $IO_j$ . Then  $i$  chooses Country  $j$  domestic policy  $p_j$  to solve the maximization problem in (1). By standard arguments, Citizen  $i$ 's optimal solution satisfies the first order necessary

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<sup>17</sup> $W_j$  is the sum of strictly concave functions, so is strictly concave.  $\mathbb{P}_j = \mathbb{R}^n$ , so  $\mathbb{P}_j$  is convex. Maximizing a strictly concave function over a convex set gives a unique maximizer.

condition of the Lagrangian

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{L}_{i,j} = V_{i,j}(p_j, p_{-j}) &+ \sum_{n \in C_j / \{i\}} \tilde{\lambda}_{n,j}^i [V_{n,j}(p_j, p_{-j}) - \bar{V}_{n,j}] \\ &+ \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J} / \{j\}} \sum_{m \in IO_k} \tilde{\lambda}_{m,k}^i [V_{m,k}(p_j, p_{-j}) - \bar{V}_{m,k}]. \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

For some agent  $i \in \mathcal{I}_j$  from some country  $j \in \mathcal{J}$ , the solution to this problem is the IO policy choice  $p^*$ . The Lagrange multipliers for coalition member  $n \neq i$  in Country  $j$ , and IO member  $m$  from country  $k \neq j$  are given by  $\tilde{\lambda}_{n,j}^i$  and  $\tilde{\lambda}_{m,k}^i$  respectively. Note that members of  $IO_j$  are already included in  $C_j$ . There is, thus, a Lagrange multiplier for each member of  $j$ 's domestic coalition and a Lagrange multiplier for each member of the IO from each of the other countries. The following remark highlights the first insight from our micro-founded approach.

**Remark 1.** *The Lagrange multiplier  $\tilde{\lambda}_{n,j}^i$  can be thought of as Citizen  $i$ 's shadow price of Citizen  $n$  being in the decisive coalition  $C_j$ , and the Lagrange multiplier  $\tilde{\lambda}_{m,k}^i$  is Citizen  $i$ 's shadow price of Citizen  $m$  from Country  $k$  being in the IO.*

Remark 1 provides us with a way of conceptualizing (and ultimately quantifying) the cost to agenda setter  $i$  of the domestic coalition and IO members' demands  $\bar{V}_{n,j}$  and  $\bar{V}_{m,k}$ . If the coalition or IO member has a low demand, then that member's shadow cost to  $i$  will be low, and if the demand is high, then the coalition member is more expensive to  $i$ . As discussed in Section 4, demands can arise from the IO structure, domestic pressures, individual power, among other factors. For example, if the IO member's country is very powerful, it can be very costly to satisfy them, as they can sway policy far from what maximizes  $i$ 's payoff. If a coalition member has a particularly onerous domestic political constraint, such as a powerful lobby group or an upcoming election, then the demand is high, and the shadow price is high. All the factors discussed in Section 4 contribute to these shadow prices being greater or lower. Section 8 suggests future research to capture these demands and shadow prices.

Denote the full set of Citizen  $i$ 's Lagrange multipliers by  $\tilde{\lambda}^i$ . Each country's agenda setter, for example Citizen  $m$ , will solve a problem similar to (1). They will each have a corresponding Lagrangian  $\mathcal{L}_{m,k}$  and Lagrange multipliers  $\tilde{\lambda}^{m,k}$ . Country  $k$ 's agenda setter will thus account for demands of all IO members from each country (including  $j$ ) when setting policy  $p_k$ . In this way, all IO members from each country internalize the externality of other IO members when setting domestic policy, consequently reducing the global externality. This leads to our second insight from our micro-level approach.

**Remark 2.** *The benefit of the IO is that each country in the IO internalizes the impact of their policy choices on the payoffs of other IO members through the constraints analogous to (C-IO). This consequently reduces the global externality.*

While many papers have considered IOs as reducing negative international externalities, we show that these externalities can be directly incorporated into each citizen's payoffs through the impact of foreign country policies, i.e., through  $V_{i,j}(p_j, p_{-j})$ . When agenda setter  $i$  from Country  $j$  accounts for IO member  $m$ 's payoff in setting domestic policy  $p_j$ , the result is reducing the negative externality caused by  $p_j$  on IO member  $m$ 's payoff from Country  $k$ . When IO member  $m$  additionally accounts for  $i$ 's payoff in the same manner, the consequence is improving the aggregate outcome.

This disaggregated approach shows how improvements in welfare can be uneven across citizens. This depends on the factors that influence the demands of coalition and IO members as discussed in Section 4. Moreover, the policies set within the IO are heavily dependent on the individual preferences of citizens who are members of the IO. These demands and preferences translate into the shadow prices of each IO member, leading to different welfare outcomes.

By the Khun-Tucker Theorem, Citizen  $i$ 's optimal policy  $p_j^*$  and the Lagrange multipliers for Citizen  $i$ 's problem (which are possibly zero) satisfy the following first order condition

$$\frac{\partial V_{i,j}}{\partial p_j} + \sum_{n \in C_j / \{i\}} \tilde{\lambda}_{n,j}^i \frac{\partial V_{n,j}}{\partial p_j} + \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J} / \{j\}} \sum_{m \in IO_k} \tilde{\lambda}_{m,k}^i \frac{\partial V_{m,k}}{\partial p_j} = 0. \quad (4)$$

A given set of coalition members  $C_j$  and IO members from each country give rise to a different vector of Lagrange multipliers  $\tilde{\lambda}^i$ , which are a direct result of the demands of each of these citizens.

We now return to the weighted welfare function  $W_j$ . The maximizer  $p_j^*$  of  $W_j$  satisfies the first order necessary and sufficient condition

$$\frac{\partial W_j}{\partial p_j} = \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J}} \sum_{n \in C_k} \lambda_{n,k}^{j*} \frac{\partial V_{n,k}}{\partial p_j} = 0. \quad (5)$$

We construct welfare weights  $\lambda^{j*}$  as follows

$$\lambda_{nk}^{j*} = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } n \notin IO_k \text{ for all } k \neq j \\ \frac{\tilde{\lambda}_{nk}^i}{1 + \sum_{m \in C_j / \{i\}} \tilde{\lambda}_{mj}^i + \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J} / \{j\}} \sum_{m \in IO_k} \tilde{\lambda}_{m,k}^i} & \text{if } n \in C_j \cup IO / \{i\} \\ \frac{1}{1 + \sum_{m \in C_j / \{i\}} \tilde{\lambda}_{mj}^i + \sum_{k \in \mathcal{J} / \{j\}} \sum_{m \in IO_k} \tilde{\lambda}_{m,k}^i} & \text{if } n = i. \end{cases} \quad (6)$$

With welfare weights given by  $\lambda^{j*}$ , the policy  $p_j^*$  that satisfies the first order condition for the weighted welfare function  $W_j(p_j, p_{-j}; \lambda^{j*})$  in (5), is the same as the solution to the first order condition to the Lagrangian in (4). This is because  $\lambda^{j*}$  is simply a renormalization of  $\tilde{\lambda}^i$ . The policy choice of a decisive coalition  $C_j$  must satisfy the agenda setter's optimization problem for some  $i \in C_j$ , and thus the policy choice of coalition  $C_j$

is the same policy choice as a social planner maximizing the weighted welfare function  $W_j$ , with welfare weights given by  $\lambda^{j*}$ . This completes the proof.

The Theorem tells us that a set of welfare weights  $\lambda^{j*}$ , can be rationalized by some decisive coalition  $C_j \in \mathbf{C}_j$  and some IO members with appropriate demands  $\bar{V}_{n,j}$  and  $\bar{V}_{m,k}$ . This leads to our next major insight from this micro-founded approach.

**Remark 3.** *A vector of welfare weights for each country  $\lambda = (\lambda^1, \dots, \lambda^J)$  determines the optimal policy vector  $p^*$ . This policy satisfies demands of some domestic coalition and some IO members. Moreover, a set of welfare weights for each country determines payoffs for citizens across each country, and these payoffs are unique.*

## 6 The Citizens' IO Game

Given the equivalence between the IO member problem and the weighted welfare problem, we recast the policy choice of coalition members and IO members (and their associated demands), as a choice of assigning welfare weights. By choosing a given set of welfare weights, it implies a particular set of optimal policies and payoffs. They can be rationalized by a particular set of domestic and IO coalition members, and their respective influence on policy through formal and informal sources. We can thus rewrite Citizen  $i$ 's expected dynamic payoff in period  $t$  as a function of  $\lambda$ , i.e.,

$$V_{i,j}(\lambda; s) = v_{i,j}(\lambda; s) + \delta V_{i,j}(\lambda'; s'(\lambda)),$$

where  $v_{i,j}(\lambda) = E[u(k_{i,j}); \lambda, s]$ . We therefore state Citizen  $(i, j)$ 's policy choice as a selection of welfare weights  $\lambda^{(i,j)}$  that maximizes  $V_{i,j}(\lambda; s)$ . The policy choice game between citizens across all countries is then a choice of welfare weights for each citizen in each country.

The state  $s$  is now the parameter  $\gamma_j$  from the previous period that determines expected resources  $k_j$ , and the previous period's (endogenous) welfare weights  $\lambda$ , which capture the existing domestic coalitions and IO. The period's resource parameter  $\gamma_j$  factors into Citizen  $i$ 's decision about the welfare weights for the current period (and hence the coalition, IO members, and policy). If no new weights are agreed to, the default is to revert to the previous period's weights. This is consistent with the fact that domestic laws are enforceable by courts and remain intact unless changed deliberately (or expire based on how they are written). This built-in status quo bias is related to a rich literature studying legislative bargaining with an endogenous status quo (Bowen et al. 2014, Anesi and Seidmann 2015, Dziuda and Loeper 2016, Ali et al. 2023). This is how current domestic coalitions and IOs affect future domestic coalitions and IO choices (and policies). Previous welfare weights capture the current "demands."

As discussed in Section 4, demands are shaped by domestic and international forces. In the Citizens’ IO game these are now captured in part by *exogenous* factors—the constitution  $\mathcal{D}$  and shocks to resource  $\omega_j$ —and in part by *endogenous* factors, through the welfare weights that are now part of the state variable  $s$ . They determine future IO policies and payoffs. Other existing work provides evidence that aligns with these dynamics. In a contribution to this Special Issue, [Tobin \(2025\)](#) demonstrates how International Investment Agreements (IIAs) can influence individual actors’ perceptions and behaviors, illustrating the feedback between domestic politics, international organizations, and individual citizens (in this case, foreign investors) in member countries. [Levelu et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrate this in a setting related to immigration. They find that visa provisions in regional trade agreements increase the bilateral stock of immigrants between the two countries. Moreover, the effectiveness of these provisions is reduced by anti-immigration sentiment of voters in the destination. This shows the impact of IO policy on public opinion.

The endogenous component of the state provides a framework to understand backlash against IOs ([Lake et al. 2021](#), [Gray 2024](#)). Backlash may manifest as government resistance or withdrawal due to diverging preferences between the domestic demands and the IO policy ([Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019](#), [Broz et al. 2021](#)). In those situations, member governments have incentives to try and affect the decision-making process to avoid unpopular outcomes ([Winzen 2023](#), [Meyerrose and Nooruddin 2023](#), [Lipps and Jacob 2024](#)).<sup>18</sup> To the extent that this is not possible—such as in areas where they have given up significant sovereignty—the inability to satisfy the member constraints can potentially lead to the weakening or death of IOs ([Gray 2018](#), [Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024b](#)).

Note that a domestic coalition member is now any citizen with a non-zero welfare weight under the status quo. Formally

$$C_j = \{i \in \mathcal{I}_j : \lambda_{i,j} > 0\}.$$

We can now define the remaining elements of the citizens’ IO game more precisely.

**Constitutions** The welfare weights of Citizen  $i$  in Country  $j$  must respect Country  $j$ ’s constitution  $\mathcal{D}_j$ . In the citizens’ IO game we formalize the constitution as a restriction on the allowable set of welfare weights. For example, a democracy would not allow  $\lambda^{i,j}$  that places full weight on Citizen  $i$ . Welfare weights with this feature would be excluded from  $\mathcal{D}_j$ . A monarchy or autocracy might allow for such vectors. Let  $\Delta^\infty$  denote the infinite dimensional simplex that captures all possible combinations of welfare weights.

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<sup>18</sup>IO members may also try to keep their cooperation private so as to reduce concerns about public backlash ([Carnegie et al. 2024](#)). Our model does not account for private information, suggesting many areas for future research in adding a role for it in IO member demands, or IO policy.

Then it must be the case that welfare weights chosen by Citizen  $i$  in Country  $j$  satisfies  $\lambda^{i,j} \in \mathcal{D}_j \subseteq \Delta^\infty$ .

**Equilibrium** Let  $\sigma^{(i,j)} \in \mathcal{D}_j$  be a strategy for Citizen  $i$  in Country  $j$  that assigns a welfare weight to each citizen of each country, given the state of the world  $s$ . In equilibrium these must be a best response to the welfare weights chosen by Citizen  $m$  in Country  $k$ . Let  $\sigma = (\sigma^{(i,j)}, \sigma^{-(i,j)})$  be the profile of strategies for each citizen in each country. We write Citizen  $i$ 's expected dynamic payoff when the state is  $s$  and given strategy profile  $\sigma$  as  $V_{i,j}(\sigma^{(i,j)}, \sigma^{-(i,j)}; s)$ . We can now define an equilibrium of the citizens' IO game.

**Definition 1.** *An equilibrium of the citizen's IO game is a strategy profile  $\sigma^* \in \times_{j \in \mathcal{J}} \mathcal{D}_j$  such that*

$$V(\sigma^{(i,j)*}, \sigma^{-(i,j)*}; s) \geq V(\sigma^{(i,j)}, \sigma^{-(i,j)*}; s)$$

for all  $i \in \mathcal{I}_j$ ,  $j \in \mathcal{J}$ ,  $\gamma \in \Gamma$  and  $s$ .

The condition in Definition 1 is the standard best response condition. The equilibrium  $\sigma^*$  thus determines the equilibrium policy in Country  $j$  and IO membership. We assumed that if citizens of Country  $j$  cannot agree to a new domestic coalition, then the status quo coalition prevails. This ensures the existence of an equilibrium.

**Proposition 1.** *The equilibrium policy  $p^*$  solves the following system of equations for all  $j \in \mathcal{J}$  and  $i \in \mathcal{I}_j$*

$$p_j^* = \arg \max_{p_j \in \mathbb{R}} W_j(p_j; \sigma^{(i,j)*}).$$

Proposition 1 characterizes the equilibrium policy as the result of the equilibrium welfare weights selected by each country. This will be a system of simultaneous equations, one for each country. Together they determine all policies across countries. Necessarily, the choice of domestic policies must be consistent across all citizens in that country. While domestic welfare weights must be consistent, across countries welfare weights can vary. This is because the welfare weight of Country  $j$ 's citizens only matter for Country  $j$ 's domestic policy.

**Proposition 2.** *In equilibrium, Citizen  $i$  from Country  $j$  is a member of an IO if  $\sigma_{m,k}^{(i,j)*} > 0$  for some  $k \neq j$ .*

In equilibrium, any citizen placing positive welfare weight on citizens from other countries in policy selection, is effectively a member of the IO. For example an authoritarian regime needs to give up some domestic policy making authority when they join IOs. They do this by placing positive welfare on citizens from other countries. Note, all citizens in Country  $j$  must agree for this to be an equilibrium.

## 7 Application to trade policy

Consider two countries  $j = 1, 2$ . Country 1 has an economy as in [Bowen et al. \(2025\)](#) (henceforth BBR) with two citizens  $i = 1, 2$  and two non-numeraire goods  $z = 1, 2$ . Citizen 1 in Country 1 has current period resources  $k_{1,1} = f_1(1; \gamma_1) = (\gamma_1, 0)$  with the first element denoting endowment of good 1, and the second indicates good 2 endowment. Citizen 2 has resources  $k_{2,1} = f_1(2; \gamma_1) = (0, 1 - \gamma_1)$ . Assume  $\gamma_1 > 1/2$  so that Citizen 1 is the exporter in Country 1. Country 2 has a single citizen  $i = 1$ , who has resources  $k_{1,2} = f_2(2; \gamma_2) = (1 - \gamma_2, \gamma_2)$  which are his endowments of goods 1 and 2 respectively. The economy in Country 2 is therefore as in [Maggi and Rodríguez-Clare \(2007\)](#). To keep matters simple, in this example we assume  $\gamma_j$  is fixed for all  $j$ , so that  $g(\gamma_j, p, \omega) = \gamma_j$  for all  $j$ .

**Domestic policies** Let policy  $p_j \in \mathbb{R}$  be Country  $j$ 's tariff (or subsidy if negative) on good  $-j$ . So the global policy is the two-dimensional vector  $p = (p_1, p_2)$ . The global optimal tariff for a utilitarian planner would be zero, but due to terms-of-trade effects, citizens in each country have positive ideal tariffs. As in BBR, tariffs result in indirect utility  $v_{i,j}(p)$ . These payoffs are single peaked in  $p_j$  for citizens of Country  $j$ , and strictly decreasing in  $p_{-j}$ . They satisfy the assumptions in Section 5. Denote the ideal tariff for Citizens 1 and 2 in Country 1 as  $p_{1,1}$  and  $p_{1,2}$ . We know from BBR that  $0 \leq p_{1,1} < p_{1,2}$  and these are independent of  $p_2$  but depend on  $\gamma_1$  and  $\gamma_2$ . Citizen 1 in Country 2 has ideal tariff  $p_{2,1}$  which is the standard optimal tariff in [Maggi and Rodríguez-Clare \(2007\)](#). We know from BBR that  $0 \leq p_{1,1} < p_{2,1} < p_{1,2}$ .

**Constitutions** A set of welfare weights for all citizens in all countries is  $\lambda = (\lambda_{1,1}, \lambda_{1,2}, 1 - \lambda_{1,1} - \lambda_{1,2})$ . The constitution of each country  $\mathcal{D}_j$  determines the set of allowable welfare weights. One could image that the notion of ‘‘sovereignty’’ prescribes that each country’s citizens will carry a weight no less than citizens from other countries, and the total weight should also not be less than the total weight assigned to other countries. Let us denote this special class of constitutions as  $\mathcal{D}_j^S$  and define it formally as

$$\mathcal{D}_j^S \equiv \left\{ \lambda \in \Delta^2 \quad : \quad \lambda_{i,j} > \lambda_{m,k} \text{ for all } i \in \mathcal{I}_j \text{ and } m \in \mathcal{I}_k, \text{ and} \right. \\ \left. \sum_{i \in \mathcal{I}_j} \lambda_{i,j} > \sum_{m \in \mathcal{I}_k} \lambda_{m,k} \text{ for any } k \neq j \right\}.$$

We assume  $\mathcal{D}_j \subseteq \mathcal{D}_j^S$  for all  $j$ . Country 2 is a dictatorship, and Citizen 1 can choose any allocation allowed that respects sovereignty, and thus  $\mathcal{D}_2 = \mathcal{D}_2^S$ . We assume Country

1 is a democracy, and thus some weight must be allocated to each citizen. The details of the constitution will determine if some citizens are systematically disadvantaged. For example, in Malaysia, the constitution provides special rights and privileges to ethnic Malays and other indigenous peoples but not to other citizens. In Israel, the Basic Laws (considered constitutional laws) distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens, particularly concerning rights to immigration under the Law of Return. For simplicity, we assume no such distinction, so the constitution of Country 2 treats citizens equally. However, equal treatment in the constitution does not guarantee equal treatment in practice. That is, equilibrium coalitions can have uneven weights. To capture this, if Country  $j$  is a democracy assume this implies an equal *minimum* weight to each of its citizens  $\bar{\lambda}_j < 1/|\mathcal{I}_j|$ .<sup>19</sup> Thus we define the class of democratic constitutions  $\mathcal{D}_j^D$  as

$$\mathcal{D}_j^D \equiv \{\lambda \in \mathcal{D}_j^S : \lambda_{i,j} \geq \bar{\lambda}_j \text{ for all } i \in \mathcal{I}_j\}.$$

We assume Country 1 is a democracy, i.e.,  $\mathcal{D}_1 = \mathcal{D}_1^D$ . A strategy  $\sigma^{(i,j)} \in \mathcal{D}_j$  for Citizen  $i$  from Country  $j$  is a choice of welfare weights that satisfies the democracy and sovereignty constraints. Each citizen's strategy specifies welfare weights for each citizen in each country, i.e.,  $\sigma^{(i,j)} = (\sigma_{1,1}^{(i,j)}, \sigma_{2,1}^{(i,j)}, \sigma_{1,2}^{(i,j)})$ .

**Uncooperative Equilibrium** Without cooperation, as a dictator, citizen (1,2) places full weight on his own welfare and thus  $\sigma^{(1,2)*} = (0, 0, 1)$ . Citizen (1,2) is the only domestic coalition member and is not a member of the IO because there are no citizens from other countries to whom he allocates welfare weights. By Proposition 1, the equilibrium domestic policy in Country 2 would be citizen (1,2)'s ideal,  $p_{2,1}$ . Without cooperation, each citizen  $i \in \{1, 2\}$  in Country 1 would assign some weight greater than  $\bar{\lambda}_j$  to each other and none to Country 2 in equilibrium. That is  $\sigma^{(i,1)*} = (\sigma_{1,1}^{(i,1)*}, 1 - \sigma_{1,1}^{(i,1)*}, 0)$ , with  $\sigma_{1,1}^{(i,1)*} \in [\bar{\lambda}_1, 1 - \bar{\lambda}_1]$  to respect the democracy constraint. This would result in an equilibrium policy between the two citizens' ideal  $p_1^* \in [p_{1,1}, p_{1,2}]$  as in BBR.<sup>20</sup> We summarize this below as a Corollary to Propositions 1 and 2.

**Corollary 1.** *The uncooperative equilibrium in the two country game is*

$$\begin{aligned} \sigma^{(1,2)*} &= (0, 0, 1) \\ \sigma^{(i,1)*} &= (\sigma_{1,1}^{(i,1)*}, 1 - \sigma_{1,1}^{(i,1)*}, 0) \text{ for } i \in \{1, 2\} \end{aligned}$$

<sup>19</sup>It is also reasonable to assume  $\bar{\lambda}_j \leq 1/|\mathcal{I}_j|$ , but we exclude perfect equality as this would be more akin to communism. Note that democracies that guarantee greater minimum rights to citizens, i.e., higher  $\bar{\lambda}_j$ , are closer to a socialist democracy.

<sup>20</sup>The specific policy will depend on the status quo welfare weights, so it will change from period to period.

with  $\sigma_{1,1}^{(i,1)*} \in [\bar{\lambda}_1, 1 - \bar{\lambda}_1]$ . This results in equilibrium policies

$$\begin{aligned} p_1^* &\in [p_{1,1}, p_{1,2}] \\ p_2^* &= p_{2,1} \end{aligned}$$

and there are no IO members.

**Cooperative Equilibrium** As is standard, we assume that by repeated game logic, citizens can sustain outcomes that improve on the non-cooperative outcome. IOs serve to coordinate this equilibrium. They facilitate communication, coordination, information gathering and dissemination, and monitoring and sanctioning, as is common in discussions of the theory of IOs (Fearon 1998, Koremenos 2001, Abbott and Snidal 1998, Martin and Simmons 1998, Oye 1985, Snidal 1985, Rosendorff 2005, Fang 2008). For example, in a contribution to this Special Issue, Mangini (2024) studies the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which offers tariff-free access to US markets for developing countries conditional on their compliance with labor and intellectual property rights. The study shows that sanctioning threats are effective in motivating states to comply with the GSP’s conditions, even when they have not been directly confronted, as states adjust their policies preemptively to avoid losing market access. IO rulings, even when non-binding can exert at least a short-term effect on domestic policy. This is also demonstrated by Schoner (2024) in another contribution to this Special Issue. The study focuses on “violation decisions” issued by UN treaty bodies, particularly the Human Rights Committee, which oversees the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These decisions, while not binding, are found to exert short-term improvements in physical integrity rights (e.g., protection from torture and extrajudicial killings), especially when civil society organizations (CSOs) are involved in publicizing the outcomes.

Stationary grim trigger strategies can sustain cooperation, but a vast IO literature also shows that strategies can account for a changing state of the world as captured by  $\gamma_j$  and  $\lambda$ .<sup>21</sup> Among other things, this work shows that on the equilibrium path, an IO can allow periodic “escape” from commitments. Our framework helps to flesh out how these nuances are influenced by citizens, constitutions, and random shocks to resources. This can result in the IO collapsing on the equilibrium path, or never quite getting off the ground. The next result highlights such an instance.

In this simple economy the world welfare maximizing tariff is zero and would result from welfare weights  $(1/4, 1/4, 1/2)$ . The question is if these weights are compatible with domestic institutions and domestic bargaining power of citizens. Sovereignty implies they

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<sup>21</sup>For example, Rosendorff and Milner (2001), Pelc (2009), Kucik (2012), Baccini et al. (2015), Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2016), Holzinger (2001), Leuffen et al. (2013), Schneider (2009, 2007), Downs and Rocke (1995), Kucik and Reinhardt (2008).

are not because it violates the condition  $\sum_{i \in \mathcal{I}_j} \lambda_{i,j} > \sum_{m \in \mathcal{I}_k} \lambda_{m,k}$ .

**Proposition 3.** *Sovereignty implies that free trade with welfare weights  $(1/4, 1/4, 1/2)$ , is not an equilibrium outcome in the Citizens' IO Game.*

Proposition 3 extends readily beyond this simple example. If countries insist on sovereignty (i.e., prioritizing national interests and citizens) and treat all citizens equally, then pure free trade is not possible.<sup>22</sup> More generally, global externalities cannot be fully internalized if countries abide by sovereignty and treat all citizens equally. The degree of cooperation will be limited by the constitution and the status quo. This echoes Rodrik's Trilemma of global integration (Rodrik 2012) and work by scholars who attribute instances of democratic erosion to the delegation of policy autonomy to international organizations (Meyerrose 2020, 2024). The result also extends to other topics including the environment, financial risk mitigation, security arrangements, labor, etc. In light of Proposition 3, it should come as no surprise that countries routinely miss climate goals set by UNFCCC (as an example).

We have presented an impossibility result, but it is more useful to determine what *can* happen in a cooperative equilibrium. This goes beyond the scope of this introduction, but is a great topic for future study.

## 8 Discussion and Directions for Future Research

We presented a theoretical framework that illuminates the complex interplay between domestic politics and international organizations. The discussion highlights the trade-offs involved in pursuing optimal policy outcomes through IOs. There is a balance between the individual benefits of internalizing a global externality, satisfying the demands of domestic and international coalitions embedded in the status quo, and respecting domestic constitutions.

The paper by Bondi et al. (2025) in this Special Issue exemplifies the connections between individual citizen preferences and IO performance that the model highlights, particularly regarding how domestic actors shape international cooperation through IOs. Specifically, Bondi et al. (2025) demonstrates how firms involved in global value chains (GVCs) push for deeper preferential trade agreements (PTAs), which aligns with the Citizens' IO Game model where individual preferences influence policy outcomes in international organizations. The findings illustrate how the welfare weights assigned to different actors in the theoretical model can be influenced by economic interests, such as those of firms engaged in GVC activities, leading to specific policy choices in international trade agreements. Our model thereby also sheds light on the legitimacy gap between elites and citizens (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2023, Dellmuth et al. 2022a, Dellmuth and Tallberg

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<sup>22</sup>It is an open question if welfare weights that treat citizens unequally can sustain free trade.

2015, Dellmuth et al. 2022b) as elites are more likely to belong to the coalition that is more able to shape IO policy outcomes and should therefore be more likely to benefit from IO policies.

Our framework provides several insights for future research. One fruitful avenue to explore empirically and theoretically, is how the domestic and international forces identified in Section 4 influence citizens' demands in a more consistent framework. This would allow the influences to be more easily compared, and develop new insights on IO outcomes and sustainability. For instance, future studies could examine how IO institutional design features might reduce member constraints while accommodating varying domestic and individual considerations. Researchers might also investigate how adjustments in IO decision-making timelines could mitigate the impact of domestic political pressures, such as election cycles, on international negotiations and policy outcomes. Analyzing how different domestic political systems shape countries' engagement with IOs and their policy preferences within these organizations would deepen our understanding of IO dynamics. One immediate theoretical question arising from Proposition 3 is whether welfare weights that treat citizens unequally can sustain optimal welfare outcomes while respecting sovereignty. More generally, what are the classes of welfare weights that can support optimal outcomes accounting for the endogenous nature of these weights? The answers could shed light on the policies that can be feasibly implemented through IOs. As also mentioned, there is contradicting evidence on the impact of more majoritarian systems and the incentives for trade liberalization in WTO negotiations. One could use our framework for easier empirical comparison.

Another important theme to explore is the effect of sometimes opposing forces generated by exogenous economic conditions on IO member demands. Conventional wisdom suggests that poor economic conditions can generate backlash against IOs, whereas some scholars find that economic crises can increase incentives of governments to cooperate within IOs to address economic crises more effectively (Haftel and Nadel 2024). Our model can guide scholars in comparing these trade-offs through examining how they influence IO member demands in different contexts.

The tension between sovereignty and global cooperation, as identified in our findings, also merits further exploration, especially in the context of increasing government emphasis on these issues. Future research could focus on innovative IO designs that better balance national sovereignty with the need to address global challenges. Studies could analyze how varying conceptualizations of sovereignty across countries affect their willingness to engage in deep cooperation through IOs. Investigating the long-term implications of the difficulty in fully internalizing global externalities while respecting national sovereignty would also be a valuable area of inquiry. Furthermore, analyzing the welfare implications of IO policies at the individual citizen level, rather than solely at the country level, could yield valuable insights.

The feedback loop of IOs to citizen preferences and political institutions is captured by the endogeneity of the status quo welfare weights in our model. Existing work can further explore this feedback at a disaggregated level. Work by [Choi et al. \(2024\)](#) is a groundbreaking example of such an endeavor in the context of trade policy. They robustly demonstrate that US counties whose 1990 employment depended on industries vulnerable to NAFTA suffered large and persistent employment losses after its implementation. Moreover, voters in these counties turned away from the party of President Clinton, who promoted the agreement. Further studies can apply similar techniques in other country and policy contexts, to make the links between status quo coalition members, IO formation and policy (as captured by status welfare weights), and consequent voter attitudes, with consequences for resulting new coalitions and policy (as captured by new welfare weights).

Finally a key aspect missing from the current model is the role of private information and communication. A substantial literature has looked at public backlash, driven by populist parties or media portrayal of IOs, where individuals come to believe that the benefits of the coordinated IO policy do not outweigh the costs of losing national autonomy over the policy-making process ([Dahl 1999](#), [Schmidt 2006](#), [Hix et al. 2007](#), [Hix 2008](#), [Keohane et al. 2009](#), [Hobolt and Tilley 2014](#), [De Vries 2018](#), [Walter 2021](#), [Schlipphak et al. 2022](#), [Chaudoin 2023](#)). There are now many examples where domestic political actors politicize international cooperation as detrimental to national sovereignty and individual welfare ([De Vries et al. 2021](#), [Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2024a](#)). These influences would arise where citizens have private information about IO policies, resources, constitutional constraints or take private actions that influence demands. Future research can theoretically and empirically incorporate these aspects into the model and apply them to particular IOs or countries.

These open questions pave the way for future research and our analysis demonstrates that the structure of domestic coalitions and the allocation of welfare weights are central to understanding how international organizations function and evolve. Ultimately, our analysis reveals that citizen-driven demands shape global governance as much as institutional constraints. By bridging micro-level preferences with macro-level outcomes, this framework not only clarifies existing debates, but also paves the way for future research on the evolving role of sovereignty, representation, and legitimacy in international cooperation.

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