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Legitimacy and the Cognitive Sources of International Institutional Change: The Case of Regional Parliamentarization

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How and under what conditions does legitimacy affect processes of international institutional change? This article specifies and evaluates three causal mechanisms by which variation in legitimacy induces institutional change in international organizations (IOs) and argues that an important, yet hitherto neglected, source of legitimacy-based change is cognitive in nature. Using survival analysis, we evaluate these mechanisms with a novel dataset on the establishment of parliamentary institutions in thirty-six regional organizations between 1950 and 2010. We find that the empowerment of supranational secretariats, engagement with the European Union, and parliamentarization in an organization's neighborhood increase the likelihood of regional parliamentarization. This suggests that legitimacy judgments that draw on cognitive referents provide an important source of international institutional change. We illustrate the underlying cognitive emulation mechanism with a case study of parliamentarization in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

How and under what conditions does legitimacy affect processes of international institutional change? This article develops and evaluates three causal mechanisms by which variation in legitimacy induces institutional change in international organizations (IOs) and argues that an important, yet hitherto neglected, source of legitimacy-based change is cognitive in nature.

Current debates about the downsides of globalization, the increasing engagement and influence of rising powers in IOs, as well as the rise of populist challenges to internationalism reflect the view held by many stakeholders that global governance is facing a legitimacy crisis that can only be ameliorated through institutional change. The scholarly literature in international relations (IR), however, has not considered how actual or anticipated legitimacy loss can itself be a factor promoting institutional change. There is extensive literature documenting and explaining institutional changes that have led to increased IO authority—such as the emergence of stronger dispute-settlement institutions, more independent IO bureaucracies, or the growth of pooled decision-making competences (see, for example, [Haftel 2013](#); [Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019](#)). And recent literature theorizes and measures how those institutional changes have impacted perceptions of IO legitimacy, with some scholars arguing that the growing authority of IOs is leading to increased contestation over the terms of international cooperation ([Zürn, Binder, and Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012](#); [Morse and Keohane 2014](#)). If, however, as the literature has

shown, legitimacy is an important source of IO stability and authority, then we should expect variation in legitimacy itself to be a potential explanation of institutional change. But explanations of institutional change within IR scholarship have primarily focused on the role of power and interests as explanatory factors; the field lacks attention to legitimacy-based sources of international institutional change.

We argue that variation in legitimacy can help to explain when institutional change occurs and what kind of institutional change will be attempted. We explicate three mechanisms of legitimacy-driven institutional change that we derive from two distinct models of legitimacy. The first model, which reflects the dominant position in the literature, is what we call the *congruence model of legitimacy*. In the congruence model, legitimacy judgments are based on an evaluation of the congruence or match between an organization's features and the underlying norms of its stakeholders. This model assumes that actors are primarily concerned with the *internal consistency* of an institution (i.e., that legitimacy is essentially a self-referential assessment). It implies two distinct causal mechanisms by which legitimacy concerns can prompt institutional change. First, pressures for reform can be expected when changes to an organization's features render that IO no longer aligned with the norms of appropriate governance held by stakeholders—such as when an IO enhances its autonomy in the absence of accountability mechanisms. Second, pressures for reform can be expected when the underlying norms of stakeholders change against static institutional features—such as when member states begin to value democratic governance norms, including representation and deliberation, within traditionally top-down IOs.

The inward-looking congruence model neglects to consider that legitimacy judgments may depend on the degree of perceived consistency of an organization with other organizations in the organizational environment ([Kahneman](#)

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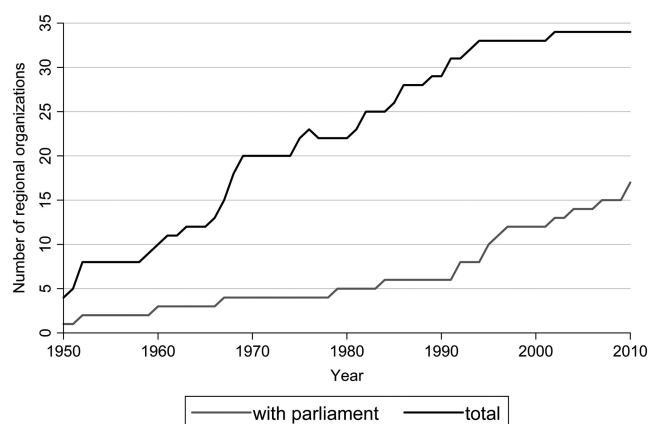


Figure 1. Cumulative number of parliamentary institutions in regional organizations, 1950–2010

2003; Fiske and Taylor 2013). This insight is captured in a second model that we call the *cognitive model of legitimacy* (Lenz and Viola 2017). The cognitive model emphasizes that, because information is incomplete and complex, available cognitive schemata should shape legitimacy judgments. This model thus implies a third mechanism, namely that unfavorable comparisons between an organization and the core features of exemplary reference organizations in the environment can create the perception of a legitimacy deficit that in turn prompts institutional change. In this case we would expect the type of change to be a move toward imitation or conformity with the formal structure of the referent organization (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

The purpose of this article is to theoretically specify the distinct mechanisms through which changes in legitimacy can drive institutional change and to establish the empirical plausibility and relative significance of these mechanisms. In order to empirically test the value of these legitimacy mechanisms as explanations for institutional change, we assess how legitimacy concerns shape a particular case of institutional change—the adoption of parliamentary institutions within regional organizations.¹ In contrast to other types of institutional changes, such as the creation of dispute-settlement mechanisms or the strengthening of international bureaucracies, the adoption of parliamentary institutions offers a promising case for testing arguments about the legitimacy-based sources of institutional change because their functional value, as conceived by standard delegation theories, is limited, as we detail below. We focus on regional organizations because that is where most parliamentary institutions have been created and where the trend is most significant.² Based on data from the Measurement of International Authority (MIA) dataset, which encompasses thirty-six regional organizations with “standing in international politics” (Hooghe, Marks, Lenz, et al. 2017, 16), Figure 1 shows the establishment of regional parliamentary institutions between 1950 and 2010 (see Online Appendix A for a complete list). Whereas only one regional organization featured a parliamentary institution in 1950, this number rose to six in 1990 and to seventeen in 2010. As the number of regional organizations also grew during this period, in relative

terms the increase is from 25 percent in 1950 to 56 percent in 2010. How can legitimacy concerns help to explain this evolution?

We posit that the widespread adoption of regional parliamentary institutions constitutes a legitimation strategy that governments use in response to a decline in an organization’s legitimacy, or legitimacy loss. We translate the three mechanisms outlined above into distinct hypotheses to explain the creation of regional parliamentary institutions and then subject them to a systematic empirical test by drawing on a novel dataset.³ The statistical results lead to two significant contributions. First, the results confirm that changes in organizational procedures produce pressures for institutional change when they render the IO no longer aligned with dominant standards of legitimacy. Second, the findings indicate that comparative judgments of legitimacy based on changes in available cognitive referents in the external environment—what we term the cognitive emulation mechanism—are at least as important for understanding variation in legitimacy and pressures for institutional change, if not more so, than are self-referential baselines that derive from change within the organization itself. Taken together, our statistical analysis suggests that the little-studied cognitive model deserves closer empirical scrutiny as an explanation of legitimacy-driven institutional change.

Accordingly, we study the cognitive legitimacy model through a single case study of regional parliamentarization in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In this case, a regional parliamentary institution emerged despite having a largely nondemocratic membership and limited supranational competence. The cognitive model helps to explain this counterintuitive outcome by showing how perceived deviations of ASEAN’s institutional status quo from external referents contributed to its loss of legitimacy with important elite audiences inside and outside of the organization, which member-state governments eventually sought to reverse by emulating specific institutional structures from other regional organizations that appeared more legitimate and successful.

We first develop the two models of legitimacy as an explanation of institutional change, we then derive from them several legitimacy-based hypotheses of regional parliamentarization, which we subsequently evaluate empirically in a statistical analysis followed by a case study. The conclusion summarizes the argument and outlines its wider theoretical implications.

Legitimacy as an Explanation for Institutional Change

The institutional literature within IR has come to recognize the significance of legitimacy for sustaining and stabilizing institutions (see, for example, Tallberg and Zürn 2018). Legitimacy refers to the recognition of an institution’s “right to rule” based on its normative appropriateness. Legitimacy contributes to organizational stability because it generates voluntary compliance based on a sense of appropriateness, rather than compliance based on coercion or self-interest (Hurd 1999; Buchanan and Keohane 2006, 408–10). Thus, legitimacy can be a powerful tool for inducing actor support for and compliance with an organization when coercion and self-interest are absent or weak (Hurd 1999).

¹ Such institutions have attracted surprisingly little attention in the literature. But see Costa, Dri, and Stavridis (2013) for a descriptive analysis and Rocabert, Schimmelfennig, Crasnic, et al. (2018) for a theoretical and systematically comparative analysis.

² Only very few global organizations have created parliamentary institutions; for example, the International Labor Organization.

³ Rocabert et al. (2018) also study the establishment of parliamentary institutions in international organizations through a mixed-methods research design and advance a legitimation argument. Their study is more narrowly interested in testing existing explanations for why international parliamentary institutions are established, rather than when and how legitimacy considerations affect international institutional change.

Given the relevance of legitimacy for organizational stability and functioning, we should expect institutions to be sensitive to changes in legitimacy. This requires thinking of legitimacy not just as variable across institutions but also as variable within institutions across time (Rixen and Viola 2016, 20). In other words, legitimacy is not an inherent or constant characteristic of institutions. Moreover, it opens the possibility of thinking about legitimacy not just as something to be explained, but as an independent variable in its own right. Most of the current literature is motivated by concerns about the legitimacy crisis of IOs, seeking to explain when and why actors perceive an IO to be more or less legitimate (Binder and Heupel 2015). But if variation in legitimacy—similar to changes in the distribution of power or changes in functional utility—can affect an institutional equilibrium, then we should be able to theorize when and under what circumstances changes in legitimacy are likely to lead to institutional change.⁴ Whereas power-based accounts view institutional change as a strategy employed by hegemonic actors to secure their dominant position, and interest-based accounts conceive of institutional change as a collective attempt to enhance the efficiency of cooperation, legitimacy-based explanations interpret institutional change as a collective attempt to enhance the normative appropriateness of an organization in the eyes of important inside and outside stakeholders. Institutional change can be a strategic response to a perceived legitimacy deficit premised on exploiting prevalent norms of appropriateness. Sociological theories of institutions have long emphasized the idea that “organizations often adopt a new institutional practice . . . because it enhances the social legitimacy of the organization or its participants” (Hall and Taylor 1996, 949). Most prominently, organizational theorists in sociology have argued that the ceremonial imitation of institutional features serves to legitimize an organization within a wider organizational field and improve an organization’s chances of survival, independently of their functional value (Meyer and Rowan 1977).

In order to theorize the effects of legitimacy on institutional change, it is necessary to specify the sources of variation in legitimacy. Existing literature suggests that legitimacy is based on congruence between an organization’s features and the standards of appropriateness held by relevant organizational stakeholders. Drawing on ideas from Max Weber and following Talcott Parsons, sociologists understand legitimacy as “congruence of an organization with social laws, norms, and values” (Deephouse and Suchman 2008, 50; see also Beetham 1991, 11). If an organization’s features—its rules and procedures—and the underlying norms held by important organizational stakeholders correspond, stable organizational legitimacy results; when correspondence weakens, organizational legitimacy becomes precarious. This implies two possible mechanisms through which a decline in legitimacy compared to the status quo ante will produce pressures for change. First, legitimacy loss can result from a change in organizational features against a fixed set of norms (institutional mechanism). Second, legitimacy loss can result from a change in the underlying standard of appropriateness against fixed organizational features (normative mechanism).

⁴Explanations of international institutional change typically draw on power and interests as key variables. Power-oriented accounts emphasize changes in the distribution of power inside and outside of IOs (see, for example, Gruber 2000), whereas interest-based explanations highlight changes that enhance the functional need for more authoritative IOs (for example, Jupille, Mattli, and Snidal 2013; Koremenos 2005).

These two mechanisms imply that actors are fully informed and that congruence can be readily and objectively ascertained by assessing the match between features and norms. As Suchman (1995, 574) recognizes, however, “[a]n organization may diverge dramatically from societal norms yet retain legitimacy because the divergence goes unnoticed.” This is because, as Lenz and Viola (2017, 947) note, “the evaluative assessment of congruence—that is, the meaning of congruence for legitimacy—is ultimately a perceptual judgment.” Research in cognitive psychology has studied the role that heuristics play in forming judgments in situations of uncertainty and incomplete information and offers insights into how legitimacy may be perceived. A core insight of this literature is that human judgment does not occur in a vacuum but actors interpret information by evaluating it in relation to reference points that are available in the environment, which take the form of representative prototypes or exemplars (Kahneman 2003, 703; see also Tversky and Kahneman 1974; Fiske and Taylor 2013). Thus, in addition to the self-referential mechanisms of the congruence model, the cognitive model yields a third possible mechanism whereby legitimacy judgments about one organization may depend on its degree of correspondence with exemplary reference organizations in the environment (see Goetze and Rittberger 2010, 40; see also Weyland 2008).

These three mechanisms are summarized in Figure 2.

Explaining Regional Parliamentarization: Legitimacy-Based Sources of Institutional Change

Parliamentary institutions are institutionalized fora for regular multilateral deliberation composed of elected representatives generally drawn from national parliaments.⁵ The competences of these institutions tend to revolve around debate and consultation rather than legislation.⁶ These institutions are typically entitled to discuss issues of common concern, to receive information about governmental decision-making in the regional organization, and to make recommendations to governments. They write their own rules of procedure and decide how to distribute their own budget. Regional parliamentarization is the process by which a parliamentary institution acquires formalized access to participate in the decision-making of a regional organization. What explains the decision to grant parliaments this access?

Conventional delegation theory has trouble identifying the conditions under which governments create regional parliamentary institutions because, compared to other institutions such as secretariats, expert advisory bodies, or courts, parliaments offer few efficiency-enhancing benefits while generating potentially significant sovereignty costs. Parliaments do not provide benefits such as facilitating the coordination of organizational activities, setting the agenda, providing policy relevant expertise, or monitoring and enforcing agreements—“gains from specialization” regularly attributed to such institutions by delegation theory (Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, et al. 2006, 13; Pollack 2003). Implementation knowledge and compliance information, two functions recently identified to explain the involvement of transnational actors in international cooperation

⁵Only four international parliaments are directly elected: the European Parliament, since 1979; the Central American Parliament, since 1992; the Andean Parliament, since 2008 (in three out of four member states); and the Mercosur Parliament, since 2016 (in two out of four member states).

⁶Only two regional parliaments have legislative competences: the European Parliament and the Legislative Assembly of the East African Community.

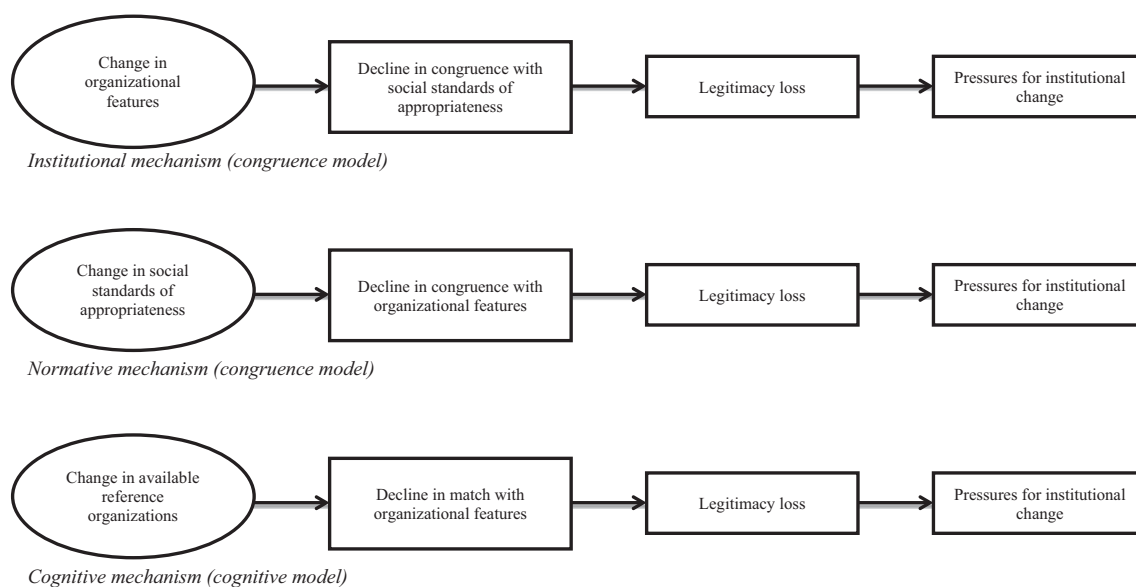


Figure 2. Three mechanisms of legitimacy-driven institutional change

(Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito, et al. 2014, 754), appear to be more applicable to “specialized” nongovernmental organizations or multinational corporations than to parliaments. In contrast to the involvement of transnational actors, the functional advantages of including parliaments “is more difficult to identify” (Tallberg et al. 2014, 754). Instead of enhancing the efficiency of international organizations, parliamentary involvement in decision-making increases the likelihood of complications and delays because the interests of another actor, often with preferences distinct from governments, must be taken into account. As one analyst notes, international parliamentary institutions “counteract or at least slow down a variety of forces pushing regional economic integration” (Slaughter 2004, 107).

At the same time, the potential sovereignty costs of regional parliamentarization tend to be high due to the distinct composition of parliamentary institutions. Even though governments empower international parliamentary institutions (and have the power to withdraw their competences), these institutions are not the agents of governments but of national parliaments and, ultimately, of the citizens of member states. Whereas governments generally control the selection of top personnel in secretariats and courts *ex ante*, and can remove staff *ex post*, such control mechanisms do not exist in international parliaments, which are generally appointed by national parliaments. Because governments lack the mechanisms that would allow them to align their preferences with those of international parliaments, their preferences are more likely to be misaligned. Self-reinforcing empowerment dynamics are more likely to occur as nonstate actors gain access to organizational decision-making—what Hawkins (2008, 374) terms “institutional permeability.” The European Parliament’s institutional trajectory from a consultative to a legislative organ is a prime example of the encroachment of parliamentary actors upon executive dominance in international cooperation, and this mechanism has also been documented elsewhere (Rittberger 2005; Hawkins 2008).

A dearth of efficiency-related benefits and a high degree of independence from governments imply that purely efficiency-based theories are insufficient to explain regional parliamentarization, as readily recognized by theorists working on the European Union (EU) (see, for example, Pollack

2003, 204). Instead, the establishment of international parliamentary institutions has an important legitimacy dimension. In fact, the main rationale of these institutions is to enhance popular participation in the process of regional cooperation. The Mercosur Parliament, for example, explicitly sees its purpose as contributing to “democracy, participation, representation, transparency, and social legitimacy in the process of regional integration” (Constitutive Protocol of the Mercosur Parliament, preamble our translation). Under which conditions do governments perceive a need to legitimize regional organizations by establishing parliamentary institutions?

Three Legitimacy-Based Explanations of Regional Parliamentarization

Applying the two models of legitimacy-driven institutional change outlined above, we can specify three testable hypotheses regarding how legitimacy concerns can drive the establishment of regional parliamentary institutions. These explanations share the assumption that a decline in organizational legitimacy is an important source of institutional change in regional organizations and interpret the establishment of parliamentary institutions as a legitimization strategy used by governments to counter a loss of organizational legitimacy. The three explanations differ, however, in the sources of legitimacy loss they posit and the ways in which these translate into institutional change.

SUPRANATIONALIZATION

Derived from the congruence model, the first explanation of regional parliamentarization emphasizes incongruence as the result of changes in core organizational procedures against a fixed set of underlying norms. In this sequence, relevant organizational stakeholders interpret organizational features (perhaps ones created on efficiency grounds) as violating underlying social norms and therefore question the organization’s legitimacy—legitimacy loss which governments seek to mitigate through additional institutional change.

With respect to regional organizations, this explanation starts from the assumption that the legitimacy of regional organizations hinges on the ability of societal actors to

hold organizations accountable (Grant and Keohane 2005). In “classical” regional organizations that operate as inter-governmental bargaining fora, every government holds a veto over collective decisions and, therefore, accountability can be fully secured through domestic channels. This logic breaks down, however, when regional organizations become supranational—that is, when they gain independence from direct government control. Such procedural change can occur in two ways. First, the loss of control is particularly acute when governments attempt to facilitate decision-making by ceding their veto over organizational decisions (i.e., when decision-making moves from consensual to majoritarian procedures) (Rixen and Zangl 2013, 368). Second, it can result from delegation to independent secretariats with agenda-setting competences that allow them to influence organizational decisions (see Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019, ch. 3). In both cases, as societal actors lose their ability to ensure organizational accountability through domestic channels, they increasingly place legitimacy demands on the organization (Zürn 2004), generating pressures for institutional change. Supranational organizations require additional institutional channels to allow societal actors to hold their governments accountable (Rittberger 2005; Rittberger and Schimmelfennig 2006, 1160; Slaughter 2004, 125–29; Zürn et al. 2012). Establishing a regional parliamentary institution is one plausible such channel. This discussion leads to two testable hypotheses:

H1a: *The likelihood of regional parliamentarization increases as regional organizations pool authority, ceteris paribus.*

H1b: *The likelihood of regional parliamentarization increases as regional organizations delegate authority to independent regional institutions, ceteris paribus.*

DEMOCRATIZATION

Also derived from the congruence model, the second explanation of regional parliamentarization highlights a change in the underlying standard of appropriateness against fixed organizational procedures. In this sequence, the standard of appropriateness by which organizational stakeholders evaluate the legitimacy of an organization shifts and no longer matches dominant organizational features, leading to pressures for institutional change to conform to the new standard. When member states democratize, for example, organizational stakeholders expect organizational procedures to change to conform to democratic standards. Grigorescu (2015) shows how the rise of democratic norms creates pressure for IO institutional change. Tallberg and colleagues demonstrate how IOs have opened up to civil society actors partly in response to stronger democratic participation norms (Tallberg et al. 2014; see also Tallberg, Sommerer, and Squatrito 2016).

With respect to regional organizations, this explanation starts from the assumption that the legitimacy of regional organizations depends on whether they align with the social norms embodied in domestic political regimes. Liberal theories of IR have long posited that states aim to “establish a basic compatibility between domestic and international policy objectives” (Katzenstein 1977, 588). As norms of appropriate behavior change within member states, organizational stakeholders apply these emerging norms to judge the legitimacy of regional organizations. When member states democratize, we can expect relevant stakeholders to demand a realignment of regional organizations with these norms. As Grigorescu (2015, 5) argues, domestic norms influence the design of IOs both through actors who have internalized those norms and actors who see strategic reasons

for adopting them.⁷ Given that “parliaments are the traditional locus for legitimation in modern democracies” (Kraft-Kasack 2008, 535), this logic predicts that domestic democratization makes efforts to create parliamentary institutions in regional organizations more likely. This leads to a second testable proposition:

H2: *The likelihood of regional parliamentarization increases as the membership of a regional organization becomes more democratic, ceteris paribus.*

COGNITIVE EMULATION

Derived from the cognitive model, the third explanation emphasizes incongruence that arises from changing cognitive referents against fixed organizational procedures and constant standards of appropriateness. In this sequence, dissimilarities between a regional organization and the available reference organizations on the part of relevant organizational stakeholders triggers a decline of perceived legitimacy in the regional organization, which governments seek to mitigate by emulating available institutional forms from the referent, while adapting them to suit local contexts (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Rūland 2014). Poole, for example, has shown how the creation of a human rights body in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was an attempt “to improve the legitimacy of ASEAN and its norms, as perceived by extraregional actors” (Poole 2015, 357).

This explanation starts from the assumption that an assessment of congruence between organizational features and underlying standards of appropriateness necessarily relies on some cognitive aid that gives meaning to information. Using environmentally available reference points provides actors with cues about how to judge legitimacy. As Khong (1992, 13) notes, “[m]atching each new instance with instances stored in memory is then a major way human beings comprehend the world.” To the extent that important organizational stakeholders observe institutional differences between their organization and the reference organization in the field, they perceive its legitimacy to be wanting and put pressure on the organization to align its design accordingly.

A referent is likely to be an *exemplar* within an organizational field—an organization that is particularly successful and prominent. We suggest that, in the realm of regional organizations, the European Union forms the major exemplar. It is the most successful regional organization in the world and is “often (if only implicitly) seen as the ‘gold standard’ of regional integration” (Sbragia 2008, 33). Thus, familiarity with the organizational procedures of the European Union affects perceptions of the legitimacy of other regional organizations (see Lenz 2018). A referent may also be an organizational form that is *familiar* in the environment. Familiarity influences how actors assess the normative desirability of an organizational form (Zajonc 1968; Aldrich and Fiol 1994). The more familiar stakeholders are with a specific institutional form—such as international parliamentary institutions—the more likely they will see the presence of such institutions as legitimate and their absence as problematic. This discussion leads to two further testable propositions:

⁷ Similarly, our explanation does not necessarily require an internalization of democratic norms by state representatives themselves. While norm internalization is one potential motivation, it is also compatible with our explanation that governments respond to demands for democratization by organizational audiences for strategic reasons.

H3a: *The likelihood of regional parliamentarization increases as actors in other organizations become familiar with parliamentarization in the European Union, ceteris paribus.*

H3b: *The likelihood of regional parliamentarization increases as the incidence of parliamentarization in an organization's external environment grows, ceteris paribus.*

Regional Parliamentarization: A Quantitative Test

To test these competing hypotheses, we use the MIA dataset that contains information on thirty-six regional organizations between 1950 or the year of their establishment and 2010. The MIA dataset defines a regional organization as a formal international organization composed of three or more geographically proximate states (Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke 2004; Haftel 2013, 394). Sampling is based on the Correlates of War dataset and focuses on organizations that “have standing in international politics.” While this may raise issues about representativeness and selection bias, this focus is justified by the practical need to focus on organizations that leave some footprint in the primary sources given the detailed information involved in the dataset and the plausible consideration that states are more likely to care about organizations that have some resources and status (Hooghe et al. 2017, 16). Moreover, the sample (listed in Online Appendix A) covers organizations on all continents and is more encompassing than most datasets previously used to evaluate hypotheses about regional organizations (e.g., Haftel 2013; Gray 2014).

In line with our theoretical approach, our empirical strategy is to measure the hypothesized sources of variation in the legitimacy of regional organizations rather than seeking to tap legitimacy or legitimacy loss directly in the quantitative analysis. The subsequent case study illustrates in detail how legitimacy loss leads to institutional change. In this section, we first describe how we operationalize the variables used in the analysis and then turn toward our estimation and results.

Operationalization of Variables

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

This study focuses on regional parliamentarization, defined as the process by which a parliamentary institution acquires formalized access to participate in the decision-making of a regional organization. This involves, at a minimum, a parliamentary institution having a formally codified right to issue recommendations to the core decision-making organs, for which an institutionalized channel of interaction exists. Thus, we conceive of the dependent variable—*regional parliamentarization*—as binary, giving it a value of 1 if such a regional parliamentary institution exists, and 0 otherwise.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

We operationalize each of the three mechanisms of regional parliamentarization in at least two different ways to enhance the confidence in our results. First, the *supranationalization* mechanism is composed of pooling and delegation, which are operationalized drawing on the MIA dataset. Pooling is an aggregate index that captures the extent to which collective decision-making bodies in regional organizations deviate from the consensus principle in six decision areas: membership accession, membership suspension, policy-making, budgetary allocation and noncompliance, and constitutional reform. The measure ranges from 0 to 1, though the actual maximum is 0.5, reached by the

African Union after 2005. Delegation is an aggregate index of the formal delegation of competences to the general secretariat, which is widely considered the main agent in regional decision-making (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Rittberger 2005). It gauges the extent to which secretariats can set the agenda in the six aforementioned decision areas, whether they dispose of executive powers, and whether they enjoy exclusive executive and agenda-setting competence in policy-making. This index ranges between 0 and 1, though the maximum is 0.72, reached by the Economic Community of Western African States after 2007 (for details, see Online Appendix B).

Second, the *democratization* mechanism captures the degree to which the membership of a regional organization is democratic. We use two standard measures to capture this feature, drawing on the conventionally used Polity IV dataset on regime type (Pevehouse 2005; Tallberg et al. 2016). The main operationalization is average democracy, which is the mean level of democracy in a regional organization. The measure ranges from 1 to 21, which is an additive scale of Polity IV's separate autocracy and democracy scores (range 0 to 10). An alternative operationalization is democratic density, which is the proportion of member states that are considered full democracies or democracies (democracy score higher than 6) according to Polity IV's regime typology. The advantage of this operationalization is that it gives a clearer picture of the democratic “quality” of a regional organization and the balance between democracies and non-democracies.

Third, the *cognitive emulation* mechanism captures the extent to which actors become familiar with parliamentarization in the European Union as the main exemplar among regional organizations (Hypothesis 3a) and the incidence of parliamentarization in an organization's geographic neighborhood (Hypothesis 3b). We operationalize EU emulation by capturing the extent of institutionalized engagement between the EU and other regional organizations. Drawing on data by Lenz and Burilkov (2017), we construct an index that measures two aspects of EU engagement: the EU's financial support of other regional organizations and the existence of institutionalized contacts between EU representatives and their counterparts. Combining these two components, the variable EU engagement is quantitative and ranges from 0 to 1, while the two components are normalized and weighted equally. The Cronbach's alpha is 0.7025, which indicates acceptable scalability, and we use the components separately in robustness checks. The variable *EU engagement* is detailed in Online Appendix B and captures the intuition that funding from the EU to support regional institution-building elsewhere and institutionalized contacts with EU representatives increase familiarity with the EU's institutional framework, including its parliament.⁸ The variable *regional emulation*, on the other hand, is the proportion of regional organizations in five geographical macroregions (Americas, Africa, Europe, Middle East, and Asia) that have already established parliamentary institutions.

CONTROL VARIABLES

We also include several controls. First, *post-1990* is a dichotomous variable that represents the exogenous shock of the end of the Cold War upon the assumption that this pivotal event may have changed the dynamics of regional

⁸ It is important to note that we have not found any evidence that EU funding is made conditional on institutional reform in the image of the EU. Alter (2012, 145) makes a similar observation with regard to the transfer of EU-style courts to Africa.

Table 1. Summary statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Creation of parliamentary body	0.278	0.448	0	1
Pooling	0.169	0.125	0	0.508
Delegation	0.216	0.163	0	0.787
Average democracy	12.22876	6.328	0.333	20.307
Democratic density	0.453	0.365	0	1
EU engagement	0.994	1.674	0	6
Regional emulation	0.251	0.251	0	0.8
Global emulation	0.251	0.114	0	0.5
Post-1990	0.505	0.500	0	1
GDP/capita	14911.49	17007.28	445.455	83915.59
Democratizing hegemon	0.072	0.266	0	2
Democratic hegemon	0.370	0.517	0	2
Age	26.347	20.982	1	122
Observations	1371			

parliamentarization. Second, *global emulation* is the proportion of the total number of regional organizations that have already established parliamentary institutions, which we use to control for the possibility that emulation is more encompassing than our theoretical focus on the European Union and the respective geographic regions. Third, *democratic hegemony* is a dichotomous variable that captures the possibility that parliamentarization is driven by democratic or democratizing hegemons rather than the democratic density or average level of democracy of an organization. (For details on variable construction, see Online Appendix B.) This hypothesis is based upon the realist premise that great powers may seek to externalize their domestic ideology and force their institutional preferences upon other members of an IO (see Moravcsik 2000). Finally, we control for *GDP per capita* in a regional organization to assess the possibility that richer organizations find it easier to create costly regional institutions; as the distribution of GDP per capita is considerably right-skewed, we use the log in the analysis. Summary statistics of all variables used in the analysis are provided in Table 1, and a correlation matrix is included in Online Appendix C.

Estimation and Results

Our analysis is conducted using survival methods. The unit of interest is parliamentarization in regional organizations; survival time is the time in years until a regional organization institutionalizes a parliament, which is the failure event. Our data begins in 1950, with four organizations, of which one had a parliament, and ends in 2010 with thirty-four organizations, of which seventeen had parliaments. Observations are left-censored if the regional organization existed in 1950 and already had a parliament, which is true in the case of the Council of Europe, and right-censored if by 2010 the regional organization did not adopt a parliament, such as in the cases of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the North American Free Trade Agreement, or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

For the main analysis, we select the semiparametric Cox proportional hazard model, recommended and applied in cases when there is no strong expectation of a particular distribution function for the hazard (Box-Steffenmeister and Jones 2004; Kokkonen and Sundell 2014); in our case, this means that we do not expect the age of the organization to have a strong impact on the likelihood of parliamentarization. As our unit of interest, which is parliamentarization of

an organization, may only occur once in any given regional organization, we do not adopt shared frailty models or models where each organization would have its own baseline hazard. However, we use robust standard errors in order to mitigate heteroskedasticity; these robust standard errors in the main analysis are highly similar to the “classical” standard errors produced if the analysis does not include robust standard errors, indicating that our models are not misspecified.

Table 2 shows our results on five models. Model (1) covers the supranationalization mechanism and tests pooling and delegation. Models (2) and (3) cover the democratization mechanism; we employ different models because democracy and democratic density are highly collinear ($r = 0.91$). Model (4) covers the cognitive emulation mechanism, with EU engagement and regional emulation. Finally, Model (5) incorporates all right-hand-side variables in a single model to test the robustness of individual models’ results. All models include the standard battery of controls, and they have been checked to fulfill the proportional-hazards assumption, and influential observations have been identified and removed. Finally, Table 2 shows hazard ratios, which indicate that, if any given variable is more than 1, it accelerates parliamentarization, and if it is less than 1, it slows it down.

As a baseline, the median survival time, meaning years until a regional organization adopts a parliament, is forty-one years, with a standard error of 4.2 years. Thus, parliamentarization is a process that evolves over significant stretches of time.

Our results lend strong support to the cognitive emulation mechanism, some support to the supranationalization mechanism, and little support to the democracy mechanism. Regarding cognitive emulation, we find consistently positive and strongly significant results for regional emulation and EU engagement, both in Model 4 that tests only the cognitive emulation mechanism and the fully specified Model 5. This result bolsters Hypotheses 3a and 3b, indicating that the more familiar actors become with the parliamentary form in either the EU, through EU-funded experts or contacts with EU officials, or in their geographic neighborhood, the more likely they are to create regional parliaments themselves. This result is consistent with the cognitive model of legitimacy-driven institutional change, which suggests that legitimacy loss may result from a decline in congruence between an IO’s institutional features and the institutions of important reference organizations rather than being a fully self-referential process of assessing whether an IO’s institutional features correspond to the

Table 2. Determinants of regional parliamentarization

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Pooling	0.007 (0.021)				
Delegation	1.145*** (0.035)				1.105*** (0.034)
Average democracy		1.148 (0.110)			0.935 (0.101)
Democratic density			5.939 (7.962)		
EU engagement				1.787*** (0.270)	1.677*** (0.283)
Regional emulation				1.062*** (0.021)	1.056* (0.032)
Global emulation	1.025 (0.043)	1.076* (0.042)	1.070* (0.042)	1.044 (0.046)	1.008 (0.061)
Post-1990	3.744 (3.224)	1.738 (1.826)	2.056 (2.097)	1.698 (1.869)	2.134 (2.439)
Democratizing hegemon	5.003*** (3.103)	2.583** (1.096)	2.883** (1.236)	2.312* (1.051)	4.251** (2.652)
Democratic hegemon	0.671 (0.536)	0.277* (0.200)	0.295* (0.208)	0.691 (0.437)	0.584 (0.564)
GDP/capita	1.070 (0.286)	0.686 (0.169)	0.733 (0.172)	0.725 (0.173)	1.254 (0.386)
N	619	619	619	619	619
Wald chi2	37.897	30.485	31.232	54.580	93.242
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note. (1) Survival analysis, Cox proportional hazard models; exponentiated coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. (2) Statistical significance levels: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

standards of appropriateness of key organizational stakeholders.

The supranationalization mechanism also receives some empirical support. Model 1 indicates that the move toward majoritarian decision-making (pooling) is not related to a higher likelihood of parliamentarization, which allows us to reject Hypothesis 1a, but that delegation is a strong and highly significant predictor of regional parliamentarization—a result confirmed in the fully specified Model 5. This result shows that organizations that empower a general secretariat to shape the process of regional cooperation are also faster in adopting a parliamentary institution, and it suggests that Rittberger’s (2005) argument about the sources of parliamentarization in the European Union may be applicable more generally. This finding also lends credence to the congruence model of legitimacy-driven institutional change, which posits that a change in institutional features—in this case, the empowerment of a regional secretariat—against constant standards of appropriateness may trigger legitimacy loss and drive governments to reestablish legitimacy by realigning the organization’s institutions with these standards.

Empirical support is weak for the second mechanism associated with the congruence model, a change in underlying standards of appropriateness—in our case, democratization of an IO’s membership—against constant organizational procedures. Indicated by Models 2, 3 and 5, democracy and democratic density are neither significant nor strong predictors, especially in Model 5, although hazard ratios are consistently larger than 1. Ultimately, even for organizations with a very high level of democracy—meaning that at least the majority of members must be full democracies—the likelihood of parliamentarization is only 15 percent higher than that of regional organizations at the mean, substantially less than the impact of delegation, EU engagement, or regional emulation, as we show below, and furthermore is not significant.

Results vary greatly with respect to our controls. Our dummy for the end of the Cold War is consistently positively signed, indicating that the decades following the end of bipolar superpower competition allowed regional parliaments to flourish, but it is not significant, indicating that there is no strong statistical relationship. Other controls are less consistent. The incidence of parliamentarization glob-

ally is far less salient than the incidence of parliamentarization within a geographic region and only reaches a 0.1 significance level in conjunction with democracy due to the spread of both post-1990, suggesting that familiarity with a specific institutional form is indeed the result of its ready availability in a particular region or through a particularly high-profile case of parliamentarization, rather than a function of the more general occurrence of parliamentarization. Prosperity, in the form of GDP per capita, has very little impact, does not reach any level of significance, and furthermore its ratios are inconsistent between models, indicating it has no measurable influence on parliamentarization. Finally, the presence of hegemon has a mixed result. Compared to our baseline category, which captures the existence of an autocratic hegemon and a balance between an autocratic and a democratic hegemon or the absence of a hegemon, democratic hegemon appear to reduce the likelihood of parliamentarization, though the results are not consistently significant. On the other hand, the presence of a democratizing hegemon appears to accelerate parliamentarization; in any case, the presence of such democratizing hegemon is strongly concentrated in Southeast Asia and Africa.

To explore the substantive effects of our independent variables, we examine their estimated survival functions, as shown in Figure 3. To show the marginal effects, we distinguish between “high” (above the mean) and “low” (below the mean). Our figures extend the possible age of the regional organization beyond the sixty years in our analysis, as some already existed in 1950, though we have only one case of left-censoring, as the Council of Europe’s parliamentary assembly was established in 1949. Furthermore, the effects we present are based on Model 5, which includes all right-hand-side variables, and we display the results as the proportion of all regional organizations that have adopted a parliament at any given regional organization age (the “failure” event), rather than the proportion that survived (i.e., did not parliamentarize).

As can be inferred from Figure 3, delegation is highly significant, and this is reflected in the especially rapid pace of parliamentarization in the first years of an organization’s existence, followed by a linear increase in the hazard until forty-five years of organizational existence for regional organizations with substantial levels of delegation. In general,

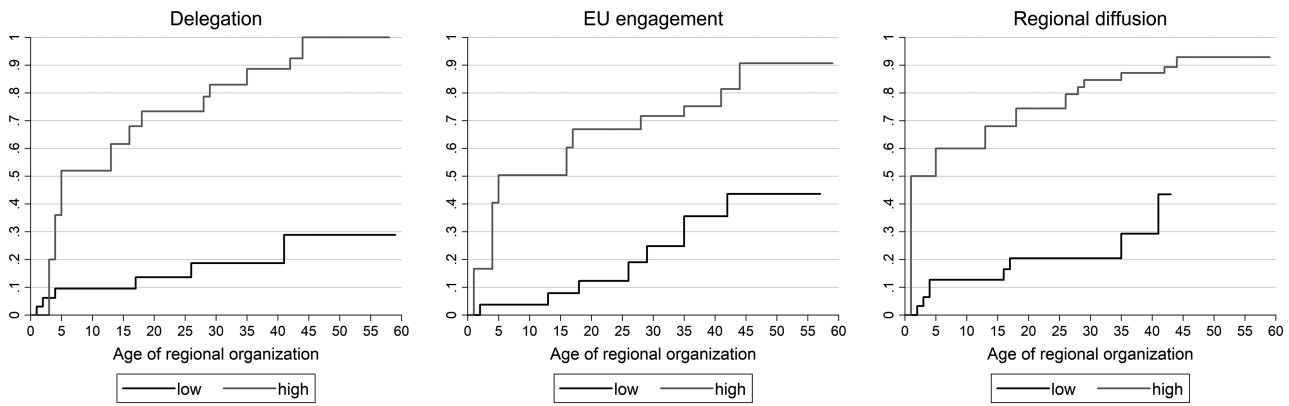


Figure 3. Estimated survival functions

such organizations adopt parliaments at a median age of five, much faster than the baseline of forty-one, and their chance of doing so is three times as high as regional organizations with low delegation, up to a likelihood of 95 percent for organizations near the maximum delegation. Most such regional organizations have adopted parliaments by 2010, with a few notable holdouts, including the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Organization of Arab-Petroleum Exporting States, and the Organization of American States; in the first two this is consistent with low levels of supranationalization in the Middle East. Conversely, out of all regional organizations with low delegation, none have adopted a parliament.

EU engagement also shows a very strong substantive effect. Within five years, fully half of regional organizations that have been in close contact with the EU will have adopted a parliament, and in general such regional organizations are up to 70 percent more likely to do so than organizations that engage with the EU only on a limited basis or not at all. The effect tapers off, though remains significant, in the longer term. This indicates that the influence of the EU is particularly pronounced in the critical first years of an organization's existence, where its institutions may be more easily shaped. By 2010, out of the regional organizations that have engaged closely with the EU, only the South Pacific Commission and the Pacific Islands Forum have not adopted parliaments. In contrast, parliamentarization in West African organizations has occurred without particularly strong engagement with the EU, even though policy-makers in Africa are generally quite familiar with EU institutions through the long-standing relationship between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific states, which our EU engagement variable does not capture.

Regional emulation is the final key driver of our results. It is particularly strong in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, and comparatively weak elsewhere. In general, it shortens parliamentarization to a median of twenty-seven years, similar to the effect of EU engagement, and highly dependent on the region, with the greatest impact in Africa and Latin America; a lesser but nonetheless strong impact in Europe, where median parliamentarization is accelerated by eighteen years; and almost no impact in Asia and the Middle East, where there are very few organizations that have parliaments. However, the effect weakens after thirty-five years, with the maximum hazard at fifteen. This is unlike delegation and EU engagement, whose effects only strengthen over time, eventually plateauing at around thirty-five to forty years, and the risk is less than in the case of either. Whereas

regional organizations with a very high level of delegation have likelihoods of adopting a parliament greater than 95 percent, for an organization located in a region with very strong parliamentarization, such as Africa (67 percent of regional organizations have parliaments in 2010) or Europe (80 percent of regional organizations have parliaments in 2010), its effect would only lead to a 90 percent likelihood over the course of four decades, holding delegation and EU engagement constant, and is thus similar to the impact of EU engagement.

Robustness Checks

To test the robustness of our results, we apply three sets of checks. First, we disaggregate our compound EU engagement variable into its constituent elements (EU funding and EU contacts) and run our analysis with the EU contacts component only. One may suspect that EU funding operates through incentives rather than through cognitive channels, so we exclude it in our robustness checks. We also use a stricter interpretation of EU contacts, which exclusively captures contacts and exchanges at the parliamentary level. This disaggregated analysis demonstrates that our results regarding EU engagement are not driven solely by EU funding, but also by the web of contacts and exchanges led by the EU. The results of the disaggregated analysis, shown in Online Appendix D.1, confirm the results of our main analysis and indicate that EU engagement in its various incarnations is a key driver for parliamentarization.

Our second set of robustness checks examines the influence of time to ensure that our results are not affected by modeling choices related to the passage of time. In the main analysis, we include substantive controls strongly correlated with time, namely global emulation and post-1990. But because one may suspect that organizational maturity may affect the result, we also stratify the sample by age. We further conduct a stricter analysis, stratifying by age and replacing the global emulation and the post-1990 controls with a year count. Tables D.2 and D.3 in the Online Appendix present the results. The results do not substantially vary from those of our main analysis, and the strong drivers we identified—delegation, EU engagement, and regional emulation—remain highly significant.

Finally, our third set of checks concerns our assumption that the distribution of the survival function is not a significant driver of our results. To this end, we conduct our analysis first using a Weibull distribution, then again using a Gompertz distribution. Our results, shown in Online Appendix D.4 and D.5, are in concordance with our main

Table 3. The “pathway case” logic: Configuration of variables

<i>Congruence Model</i>	<i>ASEAN</i>
Supranational authority	Limited
<i>Pooling</i>	No
<i>Delegation to secretariat</i>	Weak
Democratic organization	No
Predicted outcome	No parliamentary institution
<i>Cognitive Model</i>	
EU engagement	High
Regional emulation	Low (but growing)
Predicted outcome	Creation of parliamentary institution

analysis in [Table 2](#), indicating that our assumption regarding the Cox model and the survival distribution function was correct.

Case Study: Regional Parliamentarization in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

The most interesting result of the statistical analysis is the support we find for the hypothesis that environmental referents matter for the creation of regional parliaments. To study this hypothesis in more detail, we provide a case study of regional parliamentarization in ASEAN, a regional economic and security organization founded in 1967 by five Southeast Asian countries that granted the long-standing ASEAN Interparliamentary Assembly (AIPA) consultative competences in regional decision-making in 2010. The case study allows us to trace the causal mechanism that we posit, namely that legitimacy loss and resulting pressures for institutional change can derive from a mismatch between an organization and a cognitive exemplar against which it is assessed. ASEAN presents a useful case because its parliamentary institution emerged with a nondemocratic membership and with very limited supranational competence.

As summarized in [Table 3](#), ASEAN closely conforms to [Gerring’s \(2007, 238\)](#) “pathway case” logic in that “the causal effect of X_i on Y can be isolated from other potentially confounding factors.” Using original primary material, such as meeting documents, speeches and interviews, and a novel reading of secondary sources, we examine the sources of legitimacy loss in ASEAN, as perceived by relevant audiences, and governments’ strategic reaction to it. The case illustrates how perceived deviations of the organization’s institutional status quo from specific external referents contributed to its loss of legitimacy among important elite audiences inside and outside of the organization in the 1990s and early 2000s. Member-state governments sought to reverse this by strategically aligning the organization’s institutional framework with that of other regional organizations that appeared more legitimate and set the standard of normative appropriateness, leading to the creation of a parliamentary institution, namely AIPA.

Sources of Legitimacy Loss

The end of the Cold War marked an important turning point in the evolution of ASEAN’s legitimacy. While the organization was able to gradually enhance its legitimacy during its first twenty-five years—primarily by maintaining peace among postcolonial states with a history of nationalist conflict and by bolstering these states against internal challenges ([Acharya 2001](#))—the widespread recognition of its right to rule was increasingly questioned by important

organizational stakeholders from the mid-1990s onward. Criticism mainly targeted the state-centric nature of regional cooperation in ASEAN, thereby challenging a key practice of the organization (see [Ba 2013, 140](#)). What has become known as the “ASEAN way” denotes an informal and radically consensual style of decision-making that relies heavily on small-scale contacts among state leaders, generating a process of what [Acharya \(2003, 376\)](#) has termed “elite-centric regional socialization.” Even though the ASEAN way had arguably contributed to the organization’s initial success, a variety of actors inside and outside of the organization, including academics, civil society groups, and popular commentators, started advocating for more societal involvement (see, for example, [Caballero-Anthony 2004](#)). The 1997/1998 Asian financial crisis seemed to confirm these criticisms. The organization’s utter failure to manage a common reaction “shattered ASEAN’s credibility as a regional leader and an economic regime” ([Narine 2002, 139](#)). ASEAN governments found themselves confronted with unprecedented criticism from a variety of important stakeholders.

In the early 2000s, ASEAN’s legitimacy had reached its lowest point since the organization’s creation in 1967. What were the main sources of this unprecedented loss of legitimacy that paved the way for regional parliamentarization later on? We argue that it cannot be explained by incongruence between changing organizational features stemming from increasing supranationalism or changes in underlying social norms induced by the democratization of member states. Instead, the primary source of this legitimacy loss was changing perceptions of the organization among important external stakeholders, as strict adherence to the ASEAN way seemed increasingly at odds with the changing practices of important reference organizations.

The supranationalization argument has the weakest empirical support. The degree of supranationalism in ASEAN barely changed in the 1990s. Even today, the organization is widely characterized by actors inside and outside of ASEAN as “an intergovernmental organization where the power lies with the member states” ([Collins 2008, 319](#)). Under the Charter, all decisions continue to be taken by consensus (no pooling), and the delegation of competences to the ASEAN Secretariat remains circumscribed. In 1992, the Secretariat did gain some agenda-setting powers to “initiate, advise, coordinate, and implement ASEAN activities” (Manila Protocol 1992, Arts. 4a and b), but this change was modest. Nowhere in the ASEAN records, including in the records of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO), which are littered with references to, and justifications of, the idea of creating an ASEAN Parliament ([AIPO 2003; AIPA 2013](#)), or in the vast secondary literature could we find any passage that would suggest that legitimacy loss was a result of delegation (or pooling).

Although there is more empirical support for the democratization argument, it hardly constitutes the main source of ASEAN’s legitimacy loss prior to the early 2000s. Influential member states—notably, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and, to a more limited extent, Malaysia—embarked upon political liberalization, even democratization, in the 1990s, and various studies have shown convincingly that this has affected cooperation in ASEAN. For example, democratization facilitated the emergence of more independent nonstate actors that advanced “increasingly vociferous demands . . . to democratize regional governance by creating more participatory channels” ([Rüland 2014, 251](#)). However, these demands from relatively weak social actors occurred mainly throughout the first decade of the 2000s, so their

impact is difficult to identify as a *major* driver of legitimacy loss. Most experts agree that, especially in the early 2000s, the state-centric nature of regionalism in the region continued to enjoy widespread legitimacy among member governments. As Acharya notes, “[d]emocratic transitions in three out of the four cases in Southeast Asia (Philippines 1986, Thailand 1991–1992, Cambodia 1993, and Indonesia 1998) over the past [fifteen] years have not produced a regime [that] has willingly undermined its state-centric regionalism” (Acharya 2003, 380). Enlargement of ASEAN to a set of highly authoritarian states in the 1990s reinforced, rather than undermined, the idea of state-centrism in ASEAN (Ba 2013, 148–49). Democratization in this case cannot provide a strong explanation for legitimacy loss.

Our third hypothesis, the cognitive emulation argument, emphasizes changing perceptions due to growing inconsistency between an organization and available cognitive referents. A first indication of this argument is that the most severe criticism of ASEAN’s state-centric nature during the 1990s came from external actors, who assessed the organization by reference to other organizations that they are most familiar with. As two leading scholars conclude, the “most acutely felt legitimacy challenge for ASEAN has come from states and interstate groups outside ASEAN,” including international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union, and states such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (Ba 2013, 141; see also Rüländ 2014). As participation by non-state actors became increasingly seen as a prerequisite for transparency and accountability, many IOs institutionalized access in the 1980s and 1990s, thereby rendering them less state-centric (Reimann 2006). Among many international stakeholders, strong adherence to the ASEAN way appeared increasingly out of sync with these emerging institutional “best practices.” As one European Commission official remarked,

[w]e have long complained that ASEAN is overly dominated by member-state governments, even individual leaders. It lacks “societal” involvement. . . . The EU experience has shown how important societal representation is for the legitimacy of an integration process. . . . In the 1990s, many other [international] organizations opened up to nonstate actors. I think this was the time when it became clear also to others [other international actors] that ASEAN’s practices have to change.⁹

Relatedly, a good governance discourse that was advocated by many international actors at the time associated the idea of state-centrism not with ASEAN’s success but with intransparent and unaccountable practices. As an official from the Asian Development Bank explained,

[i]nternational financial institutions were particularly vocal in criticizing ASEAN in the wake of the [Asian] financial crisis. They wanted member states—but also the organization as a whole—to become more transparent and accountable. . . . This entailed pressure [on ASEAN] to become less state-centric. One important argument was . . . that accountability requires wider societal involvement. This was becoming an international best practice at the time. . . . These criticisms marked a real dent in ASEAN’s legitimacy.¹⁰

While both quotes already hint at the cognitive micro-dynamics of legitimacy judgments based on comparisons

with available referents, this idea may best be illustrated by the behavior and thinking of local parliamentarians from within the region, who have been among the most vocal advocates of regional parliamentarization. Since the 1980s, the creation of a regional parliament has been regularly discussed in AIPO. Studies commissioned by AIPO to assess the prospects of an ASEAN parliament regularly mention the European Parliament and other parliamentary bodies as important reference points for such ideas. For example, AIPO General Assembly Resolution No. 12GA/1991/Res/0–18 resolved “to recommend that the Thai National Group . . . conduct an in-depth study of the merits and demerits of an ASEAN Parliament, along the lines of the European Parliament or other regional parliaments” (AIPA 2013). Implicitly, this statement suggests that the creation of an ASEAN Parliament is worth considering because many other regional organizations have one.

Consider the activism of Jose de Venecia, former Speaker of the Philippine House of Representatives and former president of AIPO, one of the most ardent advocates of the creation of a parliamentary institution in ASEAN. In 2003, de Venecia codrafted a Philippine report that reinvigorated interest in the idea of establishing an ASEAN parliamentary institution (AIPA 2013). It came at a moment when his involvement in international parliamentary bodies (and that of many other parliamentarians from the region) was surging. In 1998, he was elected vice president of the Christian Democratic International, in 1999 he was inducted into the newly established Association of Asian Parliaments for Peace (AAPP), and in 2000 he cofounded the International Conference of Asian Political Parties. His biography is littered with descriptions of how this international involvement shaped his thinking on the requirements of cooperation in his own region (Decker 2008, for example, 325). In interviews, a Singaporean AIPO/AIPA delegate stated that advocates of an ASEAN parliamentary institution “saw the European Parliament, which is a supranational body powerful enough to legislate for the whole region, and that’s what they saw themselves doing.”¹¹ A government official similarly claimed that “they saw that the EU has a parliament, and thought: ‘Why not us?’”¹² Consider a speech delivered by de Venecia to the ASEAN Leaders’ Summit in January 2007 in order to make the case for regional parliamentarization:

To keep pace with ASEAN’s progress toward community, AIPO (now called AIPA) itself is moving toward an ASEAN Interparliamentary Assembly (AIPA)—on the model of continental legislatures: the European Parliament, born in 1962; the Latin-American Parliament, born in 1964; and the African Parliament, born in 2004, that are already well established.

Indeed, Asia—cradle of the great civilizations, cradle of the great religions, and cradle of the great cultures—lags far behind the other continents in this global movement toward the establishment of regional parliaments. . . .

Given these precedents, we expect that our ASEAN regional parliament would have a key role . . . in the historic process of Southeast Asian integration (de Venecia 2007, 5–6, our emphasis)

¹¹ Author interview, Singapore, September 2009.

¹² Author interview with Singaporean government official, Singapore, August 2009.

⁹ Author interview at the EU Delegation to ASEAN, Jakarta, August 31, 2009.

¹⁰ Author interview, Manila, September 28, 2009.

These diverse pieces of evidence not only suggest that comparisons with available reference organizations were a major impetus for parliamentary demands but also indicate that ASEAN was seen as inadequate, even illegitimate, *because* it displayed institutional discrepancies when compared to other important organizations. ASEAN leaders came to realize that, as Secretary-General Severino noted, they had to change ASEAN in a manner that responded “to the needs of ASEAN’s people today” (Severino 2006, 37).

Parliamentarization as a Legitimation Strategy

How did ASEAN governments react to this loss of their organization’s legitimacy? We suggest that regional parliamentarization was one result (among several) of member governments’ collective attempt to reestablish organizational legitimacy. The strategic response consisted of aligning the organization’s institutional framework with that of other organizations that appeared more legitimate and successful. Initially, policy-makers simply emulated the discourse that appeared increasingly widespread among IOs to silence growing criticisms of the organization’s state-centrism. The Vision 2020, adopted at the beginning of the financial crisis in 1997, endorsed the participatory discourse of many IOs by outlining the vision of an ASEAN community where “the civil society is empowered” and in which the member states are “governed with the consent and greater participation of the people” (Vision 2020).

Eventually, governments realized that actual institutional changes were warranted to silence external and internal criticisms and to reinstate organizational legitimacy. As Ali Alatas, Indonesia’s foreign minister at the time, notes, “ASEAN must strive for relevance. To succeed at this, ASEAN must be able to get the people of ASEAN to be more directly and deeply involved in its activities” (Alatas 2001, 7). The ASEAN Charter was the culmination of a series of institutional reforms that started with the idea to create an ASEAN Community in the Bali Concord II. These reforms aimed to secure “ASEAN’s future relevance, viability, and effectiveness as an association” (cited in Koh, Manalo, and Woon 2009, 2). As Rüländ (2014, 251) notes, “[a]ware of the growing pressures, ASEAN opted for . . . accommodating the normative challenge through partial procedural and institutional concessions” (similarly, Ba 2013, 147). The question was, what should these look like?

While the idea of creating a parliamentary body in ASEAN had hitherto “never received serious consideration” by governments despite long-standing demands (Rüländ and Bechle 2014, 73), this changed around 2005 when the organization embarked upon the Charter-making process. As noted, national parliamentarians from the region had long advocated for the idea of an ASEAN parliament that took inspiration from the European Parliament and other regional parliamentary institutions. These initiatives received a boost when several regional parliamentarians visited the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 2005, which “stiffened their resolve to ‘work toward the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,’” including carving out a stronger role for AIPO/AIPA (Decker 2008, 327).¹³ Similarly, the Eminent Persons Group, nominated by governments to make recommendations on the Charter, undertook a study visit to the European Union during their consultations, where their counterparts emphasized that granting parlia-

mentarians formalized access to regional decision-making was a crucial ingredient in rendering an organization more people-oriented.¹⁴ Subsequently, the group recommended “cultivat[ing] ASEAN as a people-centered organization and [strengthening] the sense of ownership and belonging among its people, including enhancing the participation of . . . AIPA” (Eminent Persons Group 2006, 6). This proposal was taken up by the High Level Task Force, which was created by governments to draft the final Charter. Negotiation documents and interviews suggest that the idea of more structured participation by parliamentarians was largely consensual among governments during the final Charter negotiations (see the accounts in Koh et al. 2009).

The Charter formally recognized AIPA for the first time as an associated entity of the organization, alongside other societal organizations. Even though this initially did not entail formal consultative competences, governments intended to render AIPA—as a Summit declaration notes—“the key partner in government” (ASEAN Summit 2007, emphasis added). Shortly after the Charter entered into force in December 2008, ASEAN leaders established regular informal meetings with AIPA representatives, and a formal participatory channel was established in 2010 in the form of a discussion forum that institutionalized regular coordination on AIPA resolutions prior to ASEAN summits (AIPA 2017, 90; see also Deinla 2013, 15). Defending the Charter, Secretary-General Ong Keng Yong underscored the achievement of “establish[ing] greater institutional accountability and compliance system”—also a reference to AIPA’s new role—in the interest of “reinforc[ing] the perception of ASEAN as a serious regional player in the future of the Asia Pacific region” (ASEAN Summit 2007). It was now easier for ASEAN officials to claim “new” legitimacy, because it could be presented as addressing concerns about overt state-centrism that had induced serious legitimacy loss in the early 2000s. Policy-makers that had previously strictly rejected any comparisons with the European Union suddenly endorsed them in public (see Yukawa 2018 for a detailed account). High-ranking diplomats noted at an expert roundtable in Berlin that European integration was “inspiring ASEAN” (BMBF 2012; similarly, see accounts in Koh et al. 2009). Similarly, government officials, such as Malaysian foreign minister Syed Hamid Albar, acknowledged that emulating institutional models from other regional organizations “gives ASEAN respectability” (Rüländ and Bechle 2014, 71). This statement captures the idea that aligning an organization’s institutional framework with that of other organizations perceived as more legitimate is a viable strategy for responding to legitimacy challenges.

Conclusion

Even though questions of institutional change are receiving increased attention in the literature, we know little, both theoretically and empirically, about legitimacy as a potential driver of change. Drawing on the case of parliamentarization in regional organizations, this article seeks to remedy this weakness by proposing that international institutional change occurs not only in response to changes in power and interests, but also because of the changing appropriateness of institutions. We identify three mechanisms by which legitimacy loss can lead to institutional change, emphasizing changes in organizational features, norms, and perceptions. In the empirical test, we find robust statistical support for

¹³ Author interview with Jose de Venecia, Manila, October 2015.

¹⁴ Author interview with Fidel Ramos, September 2009.

the idea that the empowerment of a regional secretariat, engagement with the European Union as a key exemplar, and parliamentarization in neighboring organizations enhance the probability of parliamentarization within a regional organization. The pooling of decision-making and the democratization of an organization's membership, in contrast, do not. These findings lend credence to the cognitive model of legitimacy-driven institutional change, which posits that changes in available reference organizations are a major source of variation in legitimacy and thus of pressures for institutional change. We also show, through a case study of regional parliamentarization in ASEAN, how organizational referents can shape key stakeholders' legitimacy judgments of an organization and the institutional remedies they adopt.

Taken together, the conceptual and empirical arguments advanced in this article suggest that institutional change in IOs occurs not only when powerful actors seek to secure their dominance or when member states seek to enhance organizational efficiency, but change can also result because policy-makers seek to counter a loss of organizational legitimacy.

A focus on legitimacy and international institutional change recovers a key element of constructivist theory that has been neglected in much recent theorizing, which tends to focus on concepts such as identity, norms, and ideas. Existing research tends to view legitimacy as a force for stability in international politics, stabilizing the status quo when the distribution of power and of interests shift. In this article, in contrast, we emphasize legitimacy (loss) as an important source of institutional change. In fact, the fundamental Weberian assumption that policy-makers are sensitive to changes in legitimacy implies that legitimacy loss is a powerful source of behavioral change, able to unsettle even deeply ingrained, seemingly stable patterns of behavior. We show that this long-standing logic applies also to international institutions and institutional change—a field of study that has thus far been dominated by a focus on power and interests.

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Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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