

# Domestic policy driven by intergovernmental bodies not citizens, research finds

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Citizens are increasingly being marginalized by intergovernmental organizations for the attention of national politicians and influence over domestic policies, according to new research from Binghamton University, State University of New York.

The study highlights the increasing influence of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as the European Union, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund and World Bank, on developing nations and powerful states alike.

"It is likely that states will continue to join international institutions and their influence will increase," said David Cingranelli, professor of political science at Binghamton University. "Thus, the undermining of domestic accountability is likely to continue."

The study, conducted by Cingranelli, Mikhail Filippov, associate professor of political science, and Rodwan Abouhardb, associate professor of international relations at University College London, shows that on average the greater the number of memberships to intergovernmental organizations, the lower the [quality of government](#). This is true regardless of whether the country is a member of globally influential organizations, such as WTO, IMF or World Bank; or international organizations, which are typically less powerful, such as the World Health Organization.

"All nations face a tradeoff between the advantages of international co-

operation for effectively addressing some global or regional problems and the inevitable reduction on domestic accountability inevitably created by international cooperation," said Filippov.

The study examined 129 countries and established the total number of memberships to international organizations in a given year. To measure quality of government, the researchers used five indicators including: the quality of government index, government effectiveness, control of corruption, political corruption and public sector corruption index.

Researchers found that when countries went from holding the average number of IGO memberships (approximately 50) to increasing their membership by around a third to 74, the decline in the quality of government is about equal to the effect that would be produced if the state went from being fully democratic, to something resembling only a partial democracy with political leaders having only limited accountability.

"To counterbalance this effect, international organizations should put more effort into making it more difficult for domestic politicians to shirk responsibilities to their own citizens," said Cingranelli.

In addition, the authors reveal that when the number of IGO memberships increase by about two thirds above the average, the decline in the quality of government is about equal to the effect that would be produced if the level of per capita income declined by \$7,500.

The authors call for international organizations to step up their efforts to promote transparency within member states and for national governments to disclose the demands of IGOs.

"Despite criticism that it's mainly a problem for a third world countries—with developing countries being pushed around by powerful

global institutions, our findings show that there are negative consequences of international cooperation for first world countries as well," said Abouharb. "Our research shows it is getting more difficult for individuals in countries to control the bureaucracy of IGOs as the number and complexity of them increases. The influence of IGOs in shaping domestic policy is now so extreme, the ability of citizens in many countries to influence some government policies at the ballot box, is virtually impossible."

"These findings provide some support for the Trump administration's argument that US citizens are better off when their government negotiates many bilateral trade agreements instead of participating in large-scale trade agreements like the Trans Pacific Partnership where US positions have to be compromised to reach a deal," said Cingranelli.

He also speculated that "Many citizens of the United Kingdom also resent the way membership in the European Union has made their national government less responsive to their own preferences concerning issues like immigration policy."

"More generally, international co-operation has been shown to positively affect the quality of domestic government, particularly when it comes to cross border issues such as climate change," said Abouharb. "However, as we have shown, increasing embeddedness in intergovernmental organizations also has a disruptive effect on domestic government."

The paper, "Too Many Cooks: Multiple International Principals Can Spoil the Quality of Governance," was published in *Social Sciences*.

**More information:** M. Rodwan Abouharb et al, Too Many Cooks: Multiple International Principals Can Spoil the Quality of Governance, *Social Sciences* (2019). [DOI: 10.3390/socsci8050139](https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8050139)

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