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Trends in Theorizing Democratic Legitimacy

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Abstract:

The current literature on democratic legitimacy is vital to addressing why assaults on democracy are effective. The theoretical frameworks of the construction of legitimacy by international organizations (IOs) help us comprehend how and why IOs seek support and when the results of these quests effectively curb democratic backsliding in their member states. Furthermore, the explanatory models of domestic democratic legitimacy allow us to understand how anti-democratic actors claim the right to rule and what makes their claims successful. They also explain what makes militant democracies fail. The theories differentiate between socially attributed legitimacy and the acquisition of social legitimacy through claims to the right to rule. Their conceptualizations differ depending on the audiences, claimants, and consequences of legitimacy.

Keywords: democratic legitimacy theories, elite legitimacy beliefs, self-legitimation, militant democracy and constitutional legitimacy, legitimacy in deliberative democracy

Introduction

The great economic crisis of 2007–2009, the refugee crisis, and the pandemic-induced crisis, have revealed how vulnerable contemporary regimes are to anti-democratic threats. Populist actors have managed to gain strong electoral support. In exchange for the promise of a return to a pre-crisis lifestyle, restoration of national social structures, and broadly understood protections, some polities have voluntarily given up political rights. At the same time, international organizations have proven less effective in preventing such democratic backsliding. Democracy is under attack worldwide. And yet, why these assaults are so effective remains puzzling.

The current literature on democratic legitimacy is vital to addressing this puzzle. It contributes to our understanding of the ongoing erosion of democracy in multiple ways. First, the theoretical frameworks of the construction of legitimacy by international organizations (IOs) help us understand how and why IOs seek support and when the results of these quests are

effective in curbing democratic backsliding in their member states. Second, the explanatory models of domestic democratic legitimacy allow us to comprehend how anti-democratic actors claim the right to rule and what makes their claims successful. They also explain what makes self-defending democracies fail. Both bodies of works differentiate between socially attributed legitimacy and the acquisition of social legitimacy through claims to the right to rule. However, their conceptualizations differ depending on the audiences, claimants, and consequences of legitimacy.

Engaging with recent developments, the article aims to discuss trends and challenges in theorizing democratic legitimacy. It draws on a selection of articles published internationally in political science journals between 2019–2022. The remainder of the article consists of six parts. Embedded in debates about global governance, the first three parts revolve around raising and conferring legitimacy to IOs. The first delves into the sources, processes, consequences, and limits of legitimacy in global governance institutions. Then, the discussion moves on to the importance of elite legitimacy beliefs for global governance. The following part reveals the most recent academic trends and achievements in studying domestic legitimacy in relation to two major types of democracy. The fourth part tackles the challenges to constitutional legitimacy and the fifth addresses democratic legitimacy in deliberative democracy. The discussion concludes with a brief comment on the plurality of approaches and subjects within current studies on democratic legitimacy. The conclusion also suggests avenues for future research.

Democratic Legitimacy in Global Governance

Legitimacy in global governance has attracted research attention due to its importance in understanding the changing international order (Hausteiner, 2020; Verhaegen, Scholte, & Tallberg, 2021). IOs wield growing authority since increased transnational policy challenges interact with problems surrounding global regulation. The latter includes standards of accountability, participation, and human rights (Scherz, 2021). Nevertheless, whether IOs successfully perform their tasks relies on their perception as legitimate actors, i.e., having the right to rule and exercising it properly. If they are considered legitimate, they may act and influence global affairs. They may efficiently maintain their role in competition with other actors by acquiring resources, increasing participation, making binding decisions, guaranteeing compliance, and offering solutions to global problems (Verhaegen, Scholte, & Tallberg, 2021).

Based on Zürn's "A Theory of Global Governance," Fioretos and Tallberg initiated a book symposium, "Authority, Legitimacy, and Contestation in Global Governance" to critically discuss the global governance theory treating democratic legitimacy as a major explanatory factor and explore advancements in this area. Global governance, they argue, is "the exercise of authority across national borders as well as consented norms and rules beyond the nation state" (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021, p. 100). In turn, legitimacy relates to the perception that authority is appropriately exercised (Maffettone & Ulas, 2019). As such, legitimacy is a relational feature established by how audiences perceive the exercise of power. According to Fioretos and Tallberg's diagnosis, relations between states, IOs, and global civil society are institutionalized more densely than ever before. The diagnosis empowers the thesis that global governance institutions are path-dependent and constitute a global governance system. The latter is relatively

stable but still facing backlash and threatened with disintegration due to governments' and political movements' attempts to challenge the legitimacy of its institutions (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021). With the series of election successes by authoritarian populists, the waves of contestation are becoming even more numerous and stronger than ever before (Keohane, 2021).

These observations have triggered discussion and motivated scholars of international relations to develop knowledge of the sources, processes, consequences, and limits of legitimacy in global governance institutions (Leander, 2021). These studies have produced two paths of middle-range theorizing. First, researchers account for the legitimacy of global governance institutions through public and elite opinion. Second, theorists have drawn scholarly attention to the processes of legitimation and delegitimation through practices aimed at shaping those institutions' legitimacy. These latter practices often take the form of narratives used to justify the authority of global governance institutions (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021) and are referred to either as claims to the right to rule or as legitimacy claims (Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2021).

On the one hand, Barnett has reflected on whose legitimacy beliefs matter. He challenges current studies by arguing that concentrating on states (especially "large powers") and societal actors (e.g., human rights organizations) in the Western powers leads to an overly narrow perspective. Barnett proposes instead to rethink the category of relevant audiences and to consider the legitimacy of global governance from the viewpoint of the excluded and the marginalized within these institutions (e.g., nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations) (Barnett, 2021). This suggestion fits in with the general call for greater distancing from state-centrism (Scholte, 2021; Minatti & Duyvesteyn, 2020).

On the other hand, theorists of international relations have made a convincing case for explaining the legitimacy of global governance from a state-oriented perspective. Drawing on empirical examples rather than research, Faude and Grosse-Kreul (2020) argue that regime complexes expand the normative legitimacy of global governance by enhancing the ability of affected actors to challenge the negative spillovers that IOs produce in governance realms beyond their own. These interfaces facilitate inter-institutional and more encompassing means of justification in comparison to individual IOs. However, this theoretical claim requires verification through an in-depth comparative analysis of the mutual features of various regime complexes.

Going into details of relevant audiences and legitimacy challengers, Kelley and Simmons (2021) begin by pointing to rising powers that look for a greater voice and different objectives from those promoted in the Liberal World Order (LWO) and developing countries opposed to the LWO. Secondly, there are actors whose populist internationalism influences legitimation and delegitimation. As other researchers point out, the influence of this factor is more substantial the higher the level of nationalism in world politics and the narrative of its constructors (Karkour, 2021; Keohane, 2021; Peetz, 2020). In addition, Kelley and Simmons (2021) seek the sources of the legitimacy crisis in Western disruption in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the USA's reluctance to support multilateralism, and mounting civil society skepticism.

Another theoretical limitation exposed by the symposium participants lies in the assumption that procedure and performance are complementary institutional sources of legitimacy and underlie legitimation narratives in global governance (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021). In line with Barnett's criticism, the approach overstates legitimation through procedural qualities, such as expertise, legality, and impartiality. In contrast, the perception and justification of global governance institutions may rest on performance qualities, such as responsiveness and effectiveness (Barnett, 2021).

Furthermore, Scholte (2021) argues against liberal institutionalism that the sources of legitimacy for global governance institutions cannot be explained merely through their institutional properties. Recommendations include integrating institutional, structural, and individual conditions and configurations of those factors to account for the multiple sources of legitimacy. Exemplary structural features are hegemonic relationships, capitalist ideas, and discursive structures, while individual conditions entail interests, identities, and personal predispositions. Nonetheless, Westerwinter (2021) also recommends a careful rethinking and unpacking of institutional factors with a focus on the distinctions in the institutional design of new forms of global law-making as the sources of legitimacy.

Notably, these studies provide empirical evidence to support theories that are not contradictory but complementary. They delve into different aspects of building democratic legitimacy, including relevant audiences (Barnett, 2021), legitimacy challengers (Kelley & Simmons, 2021), sources (Westerwinter, 2021), processes (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021), consequences (Leander, 2021), and limits of legitimacy (Scholte, 2021). It demonstrates the need to integrate the current research results to put forward a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms of legitimacy in global governance.

Elite Legitimacy Beliefs and Global Governance

Global institutions have a limited repertoire of technocratic and legal narratives that can be used to justify their authority. Due to the lack of traditional authority, they have insufficient resources to use a "fairness narrative of redistribution" (Keohane, 2021). Instead, they draw upon references of expertise and impartiality. Simultaneously, they fail to deliver a plausible justification of the extensive authority of global governance institutions. This translates into legitimation problems and legitimacy deficits (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021).

A recently growing body of scholarship points to the underexplored issue in studies of global governance and democratic legitimacy of elites' attitudes towards IOs. Although elites are crucial in creating, operating, defending, and contesting IOs, we lack knowledge of their legitimacy beliefs. Two research teams have taken up the challenge of theorizing based on extensive systematic and comparative research. The first one, Verhaegen, Scholte, and Tallberg (2021) contribute theoretically and empirically to the field by revealing the importance of institutional satisfaction as an explanation of attitudes toward IOs and delivering empirical evidence to support the argument. The second team, led by Dellmuth et al. (2022), contributes to identifying and explaining elite–citizen gaps in IO legitimacy beliefs.

Verhaegen, Scholte, and Tallberg (2021) draw on a multi-country and multi-sector survey of 860 elites undertaken in 2017–2019 to determine essential features of elite legitimacy beliefs towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). They integrate public opinion studies and international relations theory to advance an explanation of elites' legitimacy beliefs as the consequence of their satisfaction with the institutional qualities of IOs. At the same time, they test and challenge competing explanations, which respectively assign explanatory power to utilitarian calculations, global orientations, and domestic cues. As the study uncovers, these three general approaches underestimate the elite-centered explanation, when, in fact, they are complementary. It points out that when elites are more satisfied with democracy, effectiveness, and fairness in IOs as their institutional features, they perceive these IOs as more legitimate. Furthermore, opponents of IOs can attract elites to their side by referring to alleged institutional failings in democracy, effectiveness, and fairness (Verhaegen, Scholte, and Tallberg, 2021).

Dellmuth et al. (2022) offer a study that answers the Verhaegen team's call for further comparative research on the differences and similarities between elite and mass opinion toward IOs. It explains whether a gap in the perceived legitimacy of IOs between elites and citizens exists and, if so, why citizens are more skeptical toward IOs than elites (Verhaegen, Scholte, and Tallberg, 2021). Building on original survey evidence from Brazil, Germany, the Philippines, Russia, and the United States, Dellmuth et al. (2022) investigate legitimacy beliefs toward six IOs: the International Criminal Court (ICC), IMF, United Nations (UN), World Bank (WB), World Health Organization (WHO), and World Trade Organization (WTO). The comparative analysis of elite and citizen's views of global governance focused on the perceptions of IO legitimacy allows them to evaluate to what extent elites and citizens perceive an IO's authority to be appropriate.

The Dellmuth (2022) research team's contribution to the study of democratic legitimacy is threefold, i.e., methodological, theoretical, and empirical. Firstly, the team formulates an individual-level approach to scrutinizing the elite–citizen gaps considering individuals as the unit of analysis. This analytical tool explores how distinctions between elites and ordinary people in individual-level features affect these two groups to have different views of IO's legitimacy. While organizational- and societal-level explanations consider the characteristics of governing institutions and social order, respectively, the sources of legitimacy, the explaining features in the individual-level approach include socioeconomic status, political values, geographical identification, and domestic institutional trust (Dellmuth et al., 2022).

Secondly, the Dellmuth (2022) team theorizes empirical observations and contributes theoretically to our knowledge of the legitimacy gap, which have been challenged and undertheorized (Coicaud, 2019a). It confirms the existence of the elite–citizen gap by showing that elites are more likely to perceive IOs as more legitimate than ordinary people. On the one hand, it allows for formulating a more optimistic diagnosis than the one prevailing in the literature about the deepening crisis of legitimation (García Iommi, 2021; Ibsen, 2019). As Dellmuth et al. (2022) argue, global governance can solve problems of democratic accountability

due to elites conducting global governance because they consistently accord legitimacy to IOs. On the other hand, the study provides further empirical evidence supporting the claim that greater skepticism by IOs' general audience poses a severe challenge to contemporary international cooperation, whose efficiency depends on its legitimacy (Dellmuth et al., 2022). Additionally, it explains the efficiency of populists' anti-globalist messages based on criticism of IOs (Ibsen, 2019).

Thirdly, Dellmuth et al. (2022) discover that the legitimacy gap results from systematic differences between elites and ordinary people regarding the explanatory features in the individual-level approach. It exposes the role of organizational and societal contexts in formulating the frameworks of sources of legitimacy (cf. Maffettone & Ulas, 2019). Differences in domestic institutional trust explain legitimacy gaps in almost all settings. For example, socioeconomic status and political values determine the legitimacy of economic IOs in the USA.

On the other hand, geographical identification is a significant factor accounting for the legitimacy gap in Russia. As a result, the study highlights the need for comparative approaches in explaining the sources of legitimacy and combining existing explanatory models rather than treating them as competing proposals (Dellmuth et al., 2022).

Concentrating on the consequences of elite communication for citizen perceptions of IO's legitimacy, Dellmuth and Tallberg (2021) emphasize the role of elites in shaping the popular legitimacy of IOs. Legitimacy in society is vital to understanding the sources of global governance' efficiency since it can impact whether IOs remain meaningful focal arenas for states' attempts to handle problems and engagement with IOs. Moreover, popular legitimacy facilitates securing state support for IOs' ambitious projects and impacts IOs' ability to ensure compliance with international rules. Finally, it determines fundamental normative concerns. Accordingly, a drop in IO legitimacy leads to a mounting democratic deficit in global governance.

Driven by further explanatory goals, Dellmuth and Tallberg (2021) advance original hypotheses on the consequences of elite communication under the following conditions of global governance: the communicating elites (national governments, civil society organizations, or IOs themselves), the communication objects (IOs' procedures or performances), and the valence of messages (positive or negative). To test them, the researchers conducted a population-based survey experiment among almost 10,000 residents of Germany, the UK, and the USA concerning the European Union (EU), IMF, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The experimental research design allowed Dellmuth and Tallberg (2021) to overcome the problem of isolating the effects of elite communication. The findings reveal that communication by national governments and civil society organizations substantially impacts legitimacy perceptions more than IOs themselves. Furthermore, elite communication influences legitimacy perceptions regardless of whether it refers to IOs' procedure or performance to criticize or endorse them. Negative messaging is more efficient than positive communication in garnering popular legitimacy. Hence, delegitimation efforts substantially impact legitimacy perceptions more than legitimation efforts. Finally, elite

communication is more often efficient regarding the IMF, NAFTA, and WTO, than the EU and UN, which is the result of variation in the familiarity and contestation of IOs.

In sum, the recent comparative studies enrich our understanding of the role of elites in generating legitimacy. They also confirm the existence of an elite-citizen gap, which allows for more comprehensive explanations of changes in global governance.

Self-legitimation by IOs

Legitimacy is not just a product of relevant audiences' perceptions of claims on the right to rule. Instead, it is formed in the interplay between audiences, performers, and the force of discourse (Peetz, 2020). Despite a clear focus on external audiences and elite legitimacy beliefs in IOs (Coicaud, 2019b), researchers attach increased importance to self-legitimation, where an IO attempts to gain internal legitimation. The latter is a crucial component of building an IO's identity. Billerbeck (2020) makes a plausible argument that IO identities are often more multiple and conflicting than uniform. Thus, not only static interpretations but also those focused on identifying one coherent self-legitimacy image are burdened with an inability to recognize identity (in)coherence (Billerbeck, 2020; cf. Elliott, 2020). It is worth striving to identify and explain the configuration and reconfiguration of the images during these attempts at discursive construction.

Addressing this problem, Billerbeck (2020) probes deeply into self-legitimation in the UN, NATO, and WB to offer a novel theory of IO self-legitimation that accounts for why, when, and how self-legitimation emerges in IOs. It suggests that the necessity for self-legitimation arises from the IO's degree of identity cohesion and identity hierarchy. Self-legitimation may have a negative impact when it makes IOs lose external legitimacy and elevate resistance to reform, resulting in organizational dysfunction and inefficiency. Simultaneously, self-legitimation of IO activities may have a positive impact when rendering IOs more eager to tackle challenging tasks. Self-legitimation is constitutive for IOs and other collective professional subjects with multifaceted identities. Besides, subjects with incoherent and weakly hierarchized identities are more likely to use self-legitimizing practices. The practices differ in content and across a type of organization (Billerbeck, 2020).

Although studies on self-legitimation are not mainstream in explaining the dynamics of global governance and its role in democratic backsliding, their importance is growing. They complement research on elite legitimacy by demonstrating the complexity of IOs' identity creation resulting from self-legitimacy.

Constitutional and Democratic Legitimacy

The second body of scholarship deals with domestic legitimacy. Drifts of democracy towards autocracy after and over the three great crises inspired a revival of studies on militant democracy and constitutional legitimacy (Murdoch et al., 2021). The essence of militant democracy is to protect democracy from its enemies by limiting the constitutional rights and freedoms of those enemies. Schmitt's theory of constitutional legitimacy is employed to address the power relationships in such structures. It is considered the primary source of contemporary appeals to

strong popular sovereignty and constituent power. At the same time, as Duke argues, this theory is more useful for normative interpretations than for its explanatory value (Duke, 2020).

Duke (2020) delves into the arguments introduced by critics of endeavors to ground constitutional legitimacy in the constituent power of a strong popular sovereign. In recent years, such studies have concentrated on the tension between strong popular sovereignty and liberal constitutionalism. The latter included a necessity to resolve a disagreement over the issues of common concern and the value of the rule of law. Duke criticizes the argument on the grounds that its proponents presuppose the existence of a pervasive liberal mindset. In other words, they assume a commitment to liberal principles and values that the supporters of strong popular sovereignty may not share. Duke dismisses the idea that the recourse to liberal tenets holds explanatory power and argues that they are unnecessary to expose the inability of a theory of strong popular sovereignty to account for constitutional legitimacy. Duke (2020) contributes to the theoretical debate with the argument that theories of constitutional legitimacy based on strong popular sovereignty and constituent power suffer from the lack of resources for a theory of constitutional legitimacy. It results from their failure to lay normative grounds for evaluating whether a specific constitution is legitimate or illegitimate (Duke, 2020).

Another important theoretical contribution to the field is an autonomy-based conception of legitimacy, which rests on the justification of political power defined as the level of competencies. It applies to analyzing domestic and international legitimacy. An institution is legitimate if it provides content-independent reasons to comply, and not to conflict, with the institution (Scherz, 2021). According to Scherz, political power as rule-setting constitutes a normative menace to the individual and political autonomy of involved actors. It translates into the following relationship: the more political power a state or international institution deploys, the stricter its legitimacy standards must be to remain legitimate. Scherz lists scope, domain sensitivity, applicability, and impact as the dimensions of political power. When they upshift, the legitimacy strain for the institution also increases. Moreover, Scherz introduces graded legitimacy standards sensitive to differences in institutions' political power. Unlike minimal (output, human rights, transparency) or democratic legitimacy standards, the various standards of accountability, participation, and human rights must be reached in line with the institution's level of competencies (Scherz, 2021).

In sum, the theorizing of constitutional democracy and its legitimation brings us closer to understanding the causes and consequences of negotiating new spheres of political power in the post-crisis states.

Democratic Legitimacy in Deliberative Democracy

Based on impossibility theorems of social choice theory, researchers have criticized aggregative forms of democracy as inefficient sources of democratic legitimacy (Chung & Duggan, 2020). This argument underlies an analytical turn to deliberative democracy, considering deliberation a proper source of democratic legitimacy (Trojan, 2021). Accordingly, outcomes are democratically legitimate, provided that they are the object of reasoned agreement by free equals (Chung & Duggan, 2020). Despite an argument-rich academic discussion, there has been a lack

of a formal theory of democratic deliberation that would explain the essence of generating democratic legitimacy. Chung and Duggan (2020) fill this gap by advancing a formal theory of three different modes of democratic deliberation: myopic discussion ("positions on an issue are compared and subject to argument in a relatively free-flowing manner"), constructive discussion ("deliberation follows an argument-climbing dynamic"), and debate ("between opposing parties, each of whom seeks to employ rhetorical tactics to reach her favored position"). The difference between them lies in how much they lend democratic legitimacy to their final outcomes or lack thereof. Indeterminacy of long-run outcomes is peculiar to the myopic discussion, whereas conclusiveness defines constructive discussion and debate. Additionally, in contrast to the other types of deliberation and regardless of the initial status quo, debate leads to a compromise position, is path independent, and confers more effective legitimacy on its resulting outcomes (Chung & Duggan, 2020). Notably, Chung and Duggan's formal theory empowers rather than replaces normative philosophical theorizing (cf. Rossi & Argenton, 2021).

At the same time, some students of deliberative democracies depart from the ideal of deliberation and its institutionalization in given sites and forums (Trojan, 2021; Hoyeck, 2021; Chung & Duggan, 2020) towards a systemic approach (Milstein, 2021). The supporters of the systemic turn theorize deliberative democracy at a mass scale across multiple actors, institutions, and stages. They see deliberative democracy as a system of interacting parts whose dynamics allow for breakdowns, contradictions, and tendencies toward crisis (Milstein, 2021).

As in studies on global governance, the legitimation crisis raises theoretical concerns of growing importance to democratic theorists (Corbett, 2020). Drawing upon Rainer Forst's theory of justification in the context of the Brexit vote and Trump's election, Brian Milstein asserts that the legitimation crisis results from incongruities between the components of the deliberative system. A justification crisis emerges when a citizenry cannot make a justificatory sense of its allegedly democratic decisions due to the breakdown of at least one of its component parts. Milstein encourages conceptualizing deliberative system components as orders of justification with concurrent justificatory narratives available for meta-deliberative analysis. This approach is designed to enable researchers to explore legitimation with deliberation-theoretic categories and offers a theoretical framework sensitive to differentiate between various legitimation challenges in the deliberative system and their potential consequences. Reinforcing the tools of deliberative theory, this approach further enables researchers to explain legitimation crises and crisis tendencies that may affect democratic regimes. As Milstein highlights, investigating the tendencies that come from decreasing legitimation in the deliberative system reveals how system components work together and what is threatened if they stop. It gives an insight into the criteria for deliberative regimes that ensure processes and decisions citizens can consider in justifying manifestations of a collective will (Milstein, 2021).

Finally, a systematic approach to deliberative democracy casts new light on the special role political parties play in legitimation crises. As Biale and Ottonelli (2019) note, intra-party deliberation is a requirement of legitimacy for a deliberative system. It is necessary to guarantee that parties meet their epistemic, motivational, and justificatory functions to enable citizens to exercise reflexive control in democratic decision-making.

Reflection on deliberative democracy is complementary to studies of constitutional democracy to capture the transformations in generating legitimacy. New theoretical models and methodological approaches to domestic legitimacy, including domestic institutions' legitimacy, have initiated a critical stage in the field's development.

Conclusions

What democratic theorists may expect from theories of legitimacy has become a matter of mounting concern (Fossen, 2019). Building upon a critical discussion with critics of democratic legitimacy theories, Fossen finds that theorizing ought to go beyond articulating criteria or standards of legitimacy. In doing so, emerging theories should account for how legitimacy manifests itself and contribute to comprehending the types of political activity that jeopardize the criteria (Fossen, 2019).

This article demonstrates that democratic theorists are taking up this challenge successfully. Recent reviews and research articles devoted to democratic legitimacy boost the discussion on how to explore its novel and evolutive aspects depending on whose legitimacy beliefs matter, whose actions, and by whom they are justified. Due to their considerable explanatory power, democratic legitimacy theories also underlie a quest to explain labile legitimacy and its role in democratic backsliding.

Delving into how international and domestic audiences perceive the exercise of power, the theories unpack sources, processes, consequences, and limits of legitimacy in global governance institutions (Leander, 2021; Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021). They expose the importance of institutional satisfaction to explain attitudes toward IOs (Verhaegen, Scholte, & Tallberg, 2021) and discover elite–citizen gaps in IO legitimacy beliefs (Dellmuth et al., 2022). These theories underlie middle-range theorizing of how the legitimacy of global governance institutions is built through public and elite opinion and what makes legitimacy claims effective. The latter body of works draws on narratives deployed to justify the authority of global governance institutions (Fioretos & Tallberg, 2021; Crilley & Chatterje-Doody, 2021). The state-oriented research suggests that regime complexes expand the normative legitimacy of global governance by developing the capability of affected actors to challenge the negative spillovers that IOs produce in governance realms beyond their own (Faude & Grosse-Kreul, 2020). These studies extend our knowledge of the conditions under which IOs are effective in curbing democratic backsliding in their member states. Simultaneously, a systematic approach to deliberative democracy contributes to our understanding of why militant democracy has become vulnerable to anti-democratic threats (Murdoch et al., 2021; Chung & Duggan, 2020), how anti-democratic actors claim the right to rule (Duke, 2020; Milstein, 2021), and why they are successful in undermining democracy (Scherz, 2021; Biale & Ottonelli, 2019).

Although the literature offers plausible examples to illustrate theoretical arguments (Faude & Grosse-Kreul, 2020), it still needs comparative studies to provide systematic and compelling evidence. Furthermore, whereas a state-centric perspective prevails (Scholte, 2021; Minatti & Duyvesteyn, 2020), the understanding of contemporary global governance requires taking into account the opinions of other relevant audiences, such as the excluded and the

marginalized within the institutions, especially civil society organizations (Barnett, 2021). Finally, the article reveals the need to integrate the scattered research results on domestic legitimacy, the legitimacy of global governance institutions, and self-legitimation practices of IOs activities (Billerbeck, 2020) to comprehensively explain the mechanisms of global governance, the changing international order, and the authoritarian turn.

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