

Perils of Legitimacy: How Hegemonic Legitimation Strategies Sow the Seeds of Order Failure*

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Abstract

Great powers seek hegemony because it secures their position atop an international hierarchy in which they can dominate challengers and set favorable rules of international conduct. The material reasons why other states accept such hierarchy are well understood but the role of hegemonic legitimation strategies in inducing compliance is under-studied. Using a Weberian framework, I explain how hegemons select among various candidate legitimacy principles and the downstream effects of this strategic choice. Legitimation strategies affect the hegemonic order's ability to expand without coercion, drive which issues are most likely to generate dissent within the order, and help determine how long hegemonic orders will last. Legitimation makes hegemonic rule efficient but it sows the seeds for future dissent and order failure. The results of this combined historical and large-N statistical investigation will inform our understanding of the success and failure of great empires and provide a cautionary note as the United States seeks to fend off challenges to the current order.

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Introduction

There is near universal consensus that the international order is being challenged, producing scholarly and policy debates about the nature of the current order and how to preserve or change it.¹ Scholars differ on the effect that rising tensions between the United States and China will have on the international order. Some argue it will result in a replay of historical patterns of major war between declining and rising hegemonic powers Allison (2017). Others remain optimistic that international institutions will limit the effects of U.S. hegemonic decline Ikenberry (2001, 2019).² Finally, some argue that the increase in China's strength and the decline in other states' willingness to accept America's liberal ordering project will diminish the American position, likely ending its status as hegemon Cooley and Nexon (2020*a*). Notably, each of these understandings of the current moment relies on a theory of international hierarchy(-ies) that is at odds with the Waltzian view of states under anarchy. Because states under anarchy are theorized to be asocial and undifferentiated,³ scholars have had a difficult time explaining why states fail to engage in robust balancing behavior, sometimes attributing this apparent failure to respond to international incentives in terms of domestic politics Schweller (2008). I explain that states are indeed responding to international incentives when they decide whether to support or oppose the behavior of powerful states. Consistent with the long-standing Weberian understanding that leadership is enabled by both coercion and legitimacy, I seek to explain the causes and consequences of hierarchical legitimation strategies.

¹These include arguments over whether the "liberal international order" was a myth (see: Allison (2018); Ferguson (2018); Porter (2020) and, for a response, Lissner and Rapp-Hooper (2018)) as well as arguments for how to approach the international order differently (for example: Ikenberry (2018); Lind and Wohlforth (2012); Wright (2018)).

²This is similar to the logic in Keohane (1984).

³Wendt (1999) is an obvious exception.

The recent hierarchy turn in IR is lifting the field's gaze from a theory of anarchic balancing that was rooted in a very narrow historical experience⁴ and is providing the tools for scholars to understand international hierarchies, including examples of hegemony. Waltz's framework retains considerable utility for understanding how states interact when they find themselves in undifferentiated positions under anarchy. However, recognition that such situations are historically-contingent creates incentives to understand how states behave when those conditions don't obtain. Indeed, states often seek out or accept positions of super/sub-ordination, as is true today. A theory based on the assumption that state behavior follows universal patterns of balancing under anarchy cannot explain how these hierarchies function (or diagnose dysfunction in them) because it assumes them away. Fortunately, scholars of hierarchy are doing a great deal to theorize types of hierarchies, how they form and function, and the impact they have on patterns of peace and conflict.⁵ Recognizing hierarchies in international life not only avoids over-generalizing from temporally and regionally limited cases, it also erodes the distinction between domestic and international politics, allowing IR scholars to leverage insights from domestic and comparative politics.⁶ Scholars of international hierarchy generally accept that both halves of the Weberian equation - coercion and legitimacy - matter for the functioning of hierarchies, but legitimation practices are under-studied for two reasons. First, scholars frequently acknowledge the importance of legitimacy theoretically but neglect it empirically because it is difficult to measure. Second, where scholars have empirically studied legitimacy, they often infer legitimacy based on support for an order. As I explain in more depth later, legitimacy is only one reason that a subordinate state might support a hierarchy. Legitimacy per se is also

⁴On the non-universal nature of balance of power systems, see: Buzan and Little (1996); Donnelly (2006); Haggard and Kang (2020).

⁵For a thorough and wide-ranging overview, see Lake and Liu (2020).

⁶Interestingly, it is precisely the similarity between how legitimacy operates in the domestic and international spaces that leads Milner (1991) to question the sharp distinction commonly made between these two domains of politics.

not a quantity that a hierarch can manipulate. It can, however, choose its approach to *legitimation*, i.e., how it tries to build legitimacy.

This study addresses hegemonic legitimation strategies, asking how hierarchs (hegemons and empires) select those strategies and how those choices affect the size of hierarchical orders, their susceptibility to crisis, and their longevity. Although coercion is always present in the fore- or background, international life is almost always less violent than it could be. Rather than relying solely on threats and violence to induce compliance, powerful states seek to portray their dominance as an exercise of authority that is normatively desirable, rather than pure imposition by right of might. Put simply, hierarchs seek to legitimate their rule. The hierarchy literature generally accepts the importance of legitimacy but tends to infer it backward based on outcomes.⁷ Orders that enjoy consent are treated as legitimate while those that provoke backlash are seen as having lost legitimacy. This raises considerable methodological issues, including selection on the dependent variable and the risk that legitimacy arguments will become tautological. It also leads to the frequent relegation of legitimacy to the role of addressing residual variation that materialist explanations cannot explain.⁸ This leaves scholars unable to determine why leading states attempted to build legitimacy the way they did, and what effect their legitimation efforts had on international behavior. This study takes a different approach that resolves these methodological issues and examines these neglected questions. My two-stage argument focuses on the legitimation strategies of states at the head of international hierarchies to explain (1)

⁷Agreement on the importance of legitimacy extends well beyond the hierarchy literature. For example, (Gaddis, 2005, 6) notes that legitimacy acts as a lubricant, mitigating friction in relations between states. See chapter 2 for more examples of scholars from diverse traditions who cite the importance of legitimacy while spending very little analytical effort on it.

⁸Hobson and Sharman (2005) is one example of a study that starts with a materialist explanation, finds outcomes that don't conform to it, and infers that a non-material explanation, specifically about logics of appropriateness, must be necessary.

why they choose the legitimation strategies they do (from a theoretical menu of legitimation options), and (2) what downstream effects those choices have on the form such international hierarchies take, their vulnerabilities, and their longevity.

The stakes could hardly be higher. After an optimistic historical hiatus at the end of the Cold War, scholars are recognizing that wars among great powers are not only a thing of the past; they may also be our future Fazal and Poast (2020). The period of expanding global cooperation is slowing as the United States and China pursue different visions of international governance and compete for influence.⁹ This is generating a robust debate about how the United States should respond and what the United States should prioritize in its relations with East Asia and the world.¹⁰ As this competition for leadership of international hierarchies plays out, findings from Braumoeller (2019) are a reminder that this competition has a very real possibility of escalating to major conflict. The emerging consensus that the international order is being challenged - and an understanding that failure may include catastrophic war - place a high premium on understanding how international orders function and what leads to their failure.

One point of clarification is in order with regard to current U.S. - China relations. This project addresses how great powers use legitimation arguments to build support among subordinate states. It is not about how great powers build acceptable rules of the road with peers. Kissinger (2014), for example, described how powerful states need a consensus on acceptable behavior in order to limit major conflict. Similarly, *détente* was an effort to self-consciously reduce tensions between the superpowers. Amid rising tensions with China and discussions of “great power competition” or a “new cold war,”

⁹On China’s ambitions under Xi Jinping, see: Holbig et al. (2017); Tobin (2020). For a clear statement of a U.S. shift to a competitive posture toward China, see: Trump (2017).

¹⁰For examples, see: Beckley (2011); Brands and Cooper (2019); Brooks and Wohlforth (2016*a*); Fravel et al. (2019); Lind and Wohlforth (2019); Mastanduno (2020); Mearsheimer and Walt (2016); Posen (2015); Swaine (2011).

Larison (2021) argues for a less competitive approach that focuses on policy areas where the two great powers can agree: “the U.S. and China should pursue détente first and work together on shared interests.” How the United States should respond to a more powerful China that chafes at the U.S. role in the world - and perhaps promotes its own vision of international order - is an important discussion but it is not the focus here. This project asks how great powers manage relations within the hierarchies they lead. The insights here will apply then, not to bilateral relations with China, but to U.S. efforts to galvanize and hold together a coalition of states responding to China’s more aggressive foreign policy. In many cases, the kinds of policies that are necessary to galvanize a coalition against China - emphasizing ideological promotion, differences of identity, or the superior ability of the U.S. led order to solve international problems - are likely to erode U.S. - China consensus on the way forward, not shore it up.

In addition to the importance of this work for understanding current policy challenges, our understanding of historical empires is at stake as well. Historians have written extensively about the functioning of empires, including how they sought to build legitimacy for their rule. Political scientists, however, have not generally situated this knowledge of specific empires into a broader pattern of the causes and effects of legitimation practices. This project takes individual cases of empire seriously and uses case studies of four empires that cross two and a half millennia and multiple regions for theory development. This heuristic case study approach allows me to identify common threads in the construction of imperial legitimation strategies and the effects of these strategies on the functioning and longevity of empire, which I test using an original data set and state-of-the-art statistical techniques. The results should be of interest to political scientists, historians, and policy-makers.

Plan of the Paper

The plan for the rest of this paper is as follows. Chapter 1 situates my argument within the existing literature on hegemony, international order, and the recent hierarchy turn in IR. Chapter 2 explains how existing scholarship has treated legitimacy and the challenge that poses for scholars attempting to determine the effects of legitimation strategies. Chapters 3 - 6 use diverse case studies to inductively theorize about particular approaches to legitimation, and Chapter 7 describes my approach to large-N data collection, my hypotheses, and the statistical modeling techniques I use to test them. Chapter 8 presents results and implications. A final chapter concludes by reiterating key points and articulating prospectus for future research.

Chapter 1: Order: Hegemonies, Institutions, and Hierarchy

International Order

Arguments about patterns of international behavior - whether they describe balances of power forming among self-interested states, the establishment of cooperation through international organizations, or the creation of hegemony and other forms of hierarchy - are all versions of arguments about international order. The security studies literature does not often use this framing, perhaps because of the connotation that “international order” refers to dynamics that are less conflictual than realists expect international relations to be. That is unfortunate because even highly conflictual patterns of relations, to the extent that they are not random, form a type of order. Young (1982) provides a useful taxonomy of orders, categorizing them as negotiated, spontaneous, or imposed. This brings theories of hegemony, balancing, and institutional cooperation under a shared umbrella of techniques for organizing international political life. I use the literature on international order to situate my argument and preview some of the mechanisms associated with the hierarchical orders that are the focus here.

Imposing Order through Hegemony Theories of hegemony provide a realist explanation of how cooperation is possible in spite of anarchy. A hegemon enjoys a concentration of power that situates it at the top of an international hierarchy and allows it to impose its own rules. These rules benefit members of the hegemonic order because they allow states to escape the cooperation failures that are common under anarchy, but they benefit the hegemon most.¹¹ This gives each state in the system a desire to become the hegemon Mearsheimer (2001). Standard accounts of hegemonic

¹¹On the debate over whether hegemons gain more than other states from hegemony, and how much, see: Drezner (2013); Norrlof and Wohlforth (2019).

order refer to legitimacy but the concept has little analytic content because of its near perfect correlation with material power. Gilpin argued that it rests almost entirely on “victory in the last hegemonic war and (the great power’s) demonstrated ability to enforce its will on other states.” This approach equates the concepts of power and legitimacy (by arguing that legitimate hegemons are those with the power to make and enforce rules) and it violates a social scientific understanding dating to Weber’s 1922 *Economy and Society* that powerful actors rely on a mix of coercion and legitimacy to gain the compliance of subordinates.¹² Although rulers may come to power by virtue of their material strength, they seek to legitimate their rule because coercion is costly. Gilpin himself recognized the value of non-coercive inducements for the maintenance of social order - but only domestic social order. He wrote that the provision of public goods and the promotion of “ideological, religious, or other values” can produce political legitimacy, but he concluded that these sources of legitimacy are only relevant to the governments of states. International orders rest solely on power and the reputation for power (Gilpin, 1981, 30-31, 34).

One result of Gilpin’s sharp theoretical distinction between domestic and international orders (and his ontological commitment that only coercive power matters in international politics) is that it is irrelevant to the functioning of a hegemonic order whether a hegemon produces club goods or articulates a particular vision of economic, social, and political organization. Acquiescence and dissent are theorized to arise solely as a result of material conditions, specifically the ability of the hegemon to coerce others. Differential growth rates lead to a mismatch between the (increasing) power of a rising state and the hegemon’s (static or more slowly increasing) power. A systemic

¹²Glaser (2019) also expresses skepticism that legitimacy can provide explanatory power in excess of that provided by a focus on power. If he is correct, legitimation strategies will have a null effect in my statistical models, which control for relative power.

war occurs between the declining state and its rising challenger and, if the rising state prevails, it establishes itself as the new hegemon, creating rules of international order that suit its preferences. Gilpin's theory of hegemony was useful as an early articulation of how an international order with differentiation among the units can emerge from an anarchic environment. It was also an early treatment of hierarchy in international relations. Subsequent work has refined Gilpin's approach by taking the governance substance of international order seriously, incorporating insights from domestic politics, and situating hegemony as one form of international order.

Liberal Hegemony Ikenberry (2001) provides an important adaptation of hegemonic theory. He notes that a state that prevails in a major conflict may dominate the system, abandon it, or transform it into a constitutional order. Victorious states choose a constitutional strategy of liberal hegemony in order to provide protection to smaller states who, because they fear exploitation, might otherwise choose to balance against this powerful state. Liberal hegemons forgo the gains of exploitation today in order to avoid the costs of facing balancing coalitions in the future. Importantly, agreement on principles and rules makes Ikenberry's constitutional orders legitimate. Unlike its realist counter-part which assumes that legitimacy follows un-problematically from power, this approach to hegemony emphasizes the importance of the substance of hegemonic orders. Dissent is central to Ikenberry's story but he is explaining how a liberal structure *avoids* dissent. Liberal hegemons agree to forgo a maximization of their gains in exchange for compliance by member states. Ikenberry's work was path-breaking because it focused explicitly on the choices hegemons make about the design of their order. This clarified (a) that there are different forms of hierarchical orders available to dominant states and (b) the dominant state's *choices* (and not just material changes in the system) affect the durability of hegemony. *After Victory* does

not address the possibility that the order's legitimacy principle might create long-term dysfunction and dissent, but more recent work from Ikenberry raises doubts that the liberal international order can maintain its claim to universalism in the face of rising authoritarianism (Ikenberry, 2018, 10-11).

Balancing as an Emergent Order Theories of hegemony have competition from theories of balancing to explain the sources of order in international life. Neorealists, most notably Waltz (1979), argue that states fear concentrations of power and respond with competitive arms racing and alliances. States are forced by the structure of the international system to engage in self-help behavior that is inefficient but, at its best, prevents concentrations of sufficient power to threaten the survival of member states. To the extent that order exists, it is understood as a pattern of regularity (i.e., states regularly balance against concentrations of power) rather than a political program in which a shared sense of legitimacy enables cooperation toward common goals. An ordered outcome is an unintended by-product of state actions taken, not with an eye toward ordering, but for other purposes. The neorealist takeaway is a pessimistic one: states have little ability to escape a self-help environment and to engage in positive-sum cooperation.

Negotiating Orders through Institutions Against this backdrop of neorealist pessimism, liberal institutionalists counter with a variety of organizational technologies designed to enable cooperation under anarchy, often without hegemonic leadership. International organizations (IOs) are said to enable cooperation and increase the efficiency of international exchange Abbott and Snidal (1998), align the foreign policy behavior of states in ways not possible without the guiding hand of IOs Martin and Simmons (1998), and preserve favorable patterns of cooperation, even as the distribution of power in the system changes Keohane (1984). The institutionalist literature is

large and diverse, but the key takeaway is that states can take concrete steps to create the international order that they want; international life is not uniformly tragic. The literature generally assumes that states share a conception of the “problems” to be solved and that what’s missing is a technocratic solution to enable cooperation toward those ends. This lends the impression that the liberal institutionalist literature does not rely on legitimacy principles in order to ensure the functioning of the order. This is false. International institutions that aim toward a technocratic ideal rely on an implicit claim to performance legitimacy; they are legitimate because they work. It is perhaps only in an ideal typical spontaneous order that legitimacy plays no role.

Another variation on the theme of how states can construct less conflictual patterns of relations comes from Wallensteen (1984) who argued that geopolitical history can be divided up into “universalist” and “particularist” periods. Universalist periods exist when states agree to limit their competitive behavior and respect the interests of other states. By contrast, in particularist periods states pursue their goals without regard for the interests of other states and this increases rates of conflict. The key take-away from Wallensteen is that conflict is lower when states engage in less self-regarding security behavior. Unfortunately, it is not clear from Wallensteen’s work whether order causes states to live peacefully in spite of competing interests or if his universalist periods result from the convergence of state interests.

To position the argument within the framework I’ve developed here, Wallensteen puts forth an argument about how achieving a shared conception of legitimate international order is a more effective strategy for producing peace than each state pursuing its own goals without regard for the interests of others (perhaps through balancing). Unfortunately, Wallensteen assumes away a key challenge of international life: how to achieve this consensus and cooperation. He notes that peaceful periods of “univer-

salist” order are characterized by mutually observed rules governing the behavior of states, but he does not address variation in the form that such universalist periods take or explain how these common rules are established. Although Wallensteen concludes that universalist norms generally have a positive effect on peace, he provides little in the way of guidance for what sort of universalist arrangements would be most successful. This is a central problematic in my project: how states select the legitimation strategies that enable them to cooperate in the pursuit of a shared vision of international life.

Travlos (2016) picks up Wallensteen’s work and pushes it further by developing the concept of “managerial coordination.” Characterized by a combination of consultation, multilateralism, and the dismantling of adversarial alliances, this is a practice states observe during universalist periods that helps to limit the international use of force. Effectively, Travlos adds detail to Wallensteen’s argument that states limit conflict among them by cooperating to find a shared vision of international life. However, it’s unclear how states decide what constitutes appropriate shared goals or who would be acceptable partners in pursuing such goals. Indeed, Travlos concedes that “major powers engage in managerial cooperation when they are already primed for peace” (Travlos, 2016, 39) but it is unclear what achieves this priming. Like Wallensteen, Travlos is providing a description of a kind of cooperative order but doesn’t account for its origin. It is instructive that Travlos cites the Concert of Europe as an example of an order in which members were able to practice managerial coordination. I argue that legitimacy principles enable interstate cooperation and that the particular forms of dysfunction and dissolution that orders experience follows partially from the legitimacy principles they select. In the case of the Concert of Europe, it is clear that a legitimacy principle based on preserving monarchical governance enabled the coopera-

tion of great powers who had previously been at war with one another. The viability of that legitimacy principle - and with it the prospects for cooperation - broke down with the liberal revolutions of 1848.¹³ Because the literature does not sufficiently address the importance of legitimacy principles in achieving cooperation, it misses legitimation failures as a key source of order breakdown.

Hierarchy The recent turn in IR scholarship toward hierarchy recognizes that, although balancing among undifferentiated international actors does sometimes occur, is not a universal phenomenon. Empirically, international hierarchies frequently form and scholars are likely to misunderstand key dynamics of international politics if they do not theorize them explicitly and study them empirically. Buzan and Little (1996); Donnelly (2006); Haggard and Kang (2020), for example, have demonstrated many historical cases of hierarchical international orders that have been either ignored by Eurocentric scholarship or brought awkwardly under a “balancing under anarchy” framework. Traditional IR work on hegemony comes the closest to explicitly theorizing international hierarchy but, as Lake and Liu (2020) point out, that work has analyzed unequal relations while generally ignoring authority relationships in which both coercion *and* legitimacy produce relationships of super- and subordination. As mentioned previously, Gilpin (1981) provided a thoughtful articulation of how legitimacy contributes to domestic social order but his theoretical commitments prevented him from applying that insight to international politics.

Lake (1996) provided an early contribution to IR work on hierarchy in which he conceptualized a continuum of inter-state relations from anarchy to hierarchy characterized by authority relations. In this and subsequent works, Lake developed a theory

¹³For a brief overview of the period and of disagreements in the literature about when the Concert system began breaking down, see: Lascurettes (2017).

of international hierarchy based on rational contracting. He also expanded the aperture to include other forms of social organization traditionally neglected by international relations work. For example, Jung and Lake (2011) take a bottom up approach, arguing that the choices states make produce macro social structures that are organized as markets, hierarchies, or networks. Mattern and Zarakol (2016*a*) build on Lake's work and that of others to articulate three logics of hierarchy: that of trade-offs (contracting); of positionality (driven by social roles) and productivity. The literature on international hierarchies is rich and growing¹⁴ and, although it is providing important insights about the diversity of interstate relations, hierarchical legitimation strategies remain understudied. As mentioned previously, a wide range of scholars assume that legitimacy matters - and some try to measure it directly - but existing approaches suffer from important methodological and theoretical shortfalls. I attempt to remedy those shortfalls, explaining why hierarchs select the legitimation strategies they do and what effect those strategies have on international outcomes, net of the things that produced them in the first place. In the next chapter, I explain what exactly is meant by legitimacy and legitimation and how this study grapples with the challenges associated with the empirical study of this important social quantity.

¹⁴For an excellent snapshot of key works, see: Lake and Liu (2020).

Chapter 2: Legitimacy and Legitimation Strategies

Defining Legitimacy Legitimacy is an attribute of a rule or ruler that produces a sense of “oughtness,” on the part of subordinates. Subordinate actors are obliged to comply, irrespective of their preferences or the presence of coercion. It is a community standard that Alagappa describes as “the conviction of the governed that their government (whether democratic, monarchic, communist, theocratic, or authoritarian) is morally right and they are duty-bound to obey it. In the absence of such conviction there can only be relations of power, not of authority...” (Alagappa, 1995, 2). Similarly, (Theories of Legitimacy, 2001, 47) describes legitimacy as “the operational criterion that something is believed in by those who would gain from something else.” This describes conceptually what legitimacy is but not its content, i.e., what counts as legitimate. Scholars approach the content of legitimacy in two ways. The first is normative, in which scholars argue that one form of behavior is legitimate (and others not) on the basis of external normative principles. Put differently, arguments in this tradition are about whether one *should* view something as legitimate, not about whether others *do* view something as legitimate.

The second approach is empirical and is focused on what actors believe is legitimate and the behaviors produced by this belief.¹⁵ Scholars in this tradition emphasize what others believe about legitimacy and how that shapes their behavior. Unfortunately, however, it is exceedingly difficult to observe legitimacy directly. Scholars may ask people whether they view a government as legitimate,¹⁶ or they may measure whether they comply with government demands, but both approaches present

¹⁵On the distinction between normative and empirical approaches to legitimacy, see also Barker (2001) and Clark (2009). Scholars sometimes refer to the empirical study of legitimacy as sociological as well. For example, see: Tallberg and Zürn (2019).

¹⁶See Tallberg and Zürn (2019) for an example of scholarship that uses polling to determine legitimacy beliefs.

difficulties. Accurately gauging public opinion among those subject to international order is frequently not feasible, particularly in repressive societies. With regard to the legitimacy of contemporary international order, it is also logistically challenging to achieve a representative sample of public opinion, given the diversity of communities subject to international order. Naturally, most historical cases will lack the polling data necessary to make comparisons so a different measurement approach is clearly needed. Other scholars use measures of compliance as evidence for the legitimacy of a rule. This approach suffers from multiple problems as well. First, compliance may result from legitimacy, coercion, or harmony of interests, so it is not possible to infer legitimacy directly from compliance.¹⁷ Second, research that attempts to discern legitimacy based on compliance shrinks the space for political contestation within the context of an order that members view as legitimate. This is clearly a weakness as even legitimate political systems, and especially democratic ones, should expect contestation over the substance of particular policies Hurd (2019). Indeed, Parsons argued that legitimacy is built through a process of legitimation in which particular behaviors are framed in terms of shared values, norms, and beliefs (*Theories of Legitimacy*, 2001, 49-50). Legitimation is an action - a strategy - to frame a powerful actor's behavior as something that others *should* support. As I explain, powerful actors have multiple options for legitimating their rule and each available option is likely to have proponents and detractors, making contestation a normal part of legitimation.

Legitimation Strategies Because it is not generally possible to measure legitimacy directly, studying legitimation strategies presents an attractive alternative. By asking how states try to build legitimacy for their rule, we remain empirically rooted and avoid the complications of measuring an outcome that may result from multiple causes, only

¹⁷(Tallberg and Zürn, 2019, 587) and (Ikenberry and Kupchan, 1990, 286) make similar points.

one of which is legitimacy. Focusing on legitimation strategies also brings us closer to what motivates most problem solving theory in the first place: what states can *do*. Rather than attempt to measure legitimacy and then search for solutions when it is found lacking, this approach asks what states do to build legitimacy in the first place and ties these efforts to a variety of positive and negative outcomes.¹⁸ This approach is also consistent with existing scholarship on hegemony. For example, (Ikenberry and Kupchan, 1990, 289) argue that the ability to generate shared beliefs is an important source of hegemonic power. In fact, a surprisingly wide range of IR literature agrees that legitimacy is an important factor in producing international outcomes. The next section surveys how the international relations literature has addressed legitimacy and the shortfalls in these existing approaches.

Legitimacy and the IR Literature Theorists dating to Weber have noted that legitimacy is essential to sustaining order without constant resort to material coercion. Constructivist scholars argue that international orders rely on a shared sense of legitimacy to motivate member states to make voluntary contributions that sustain a stable social order. Breakdown is catalyzed in part through an erosion of the consensus values that sustain these institutions. The implication is that the order can be restored only through re-establishing a “shared vision of the good” or by falling back on material coercion Reus-Smit (2007); Phillips (2011). Principles of legitimacy can also guide state behavior by specifying who counts as a member of the international system Wight (1972). Legitimacy constitutes who belongs in the international system, what roles they play, and the consequences when a state’s behavior is misaligned with its role. For example, when a hegemon violates its prescribed place in the order, it undermines the foundation of legitimacy and erodes its own position Cronin (2001).

¹⁸On the utility of focusing on legitimation strategies, see Barker (2001).

It is perhaps not surprising that constructivist scholars emphasize legitimacy, given the importance they place on the role of shared understandings in enabling the terms of social life. The concern with legitimacy is much broader, however. Rationalist scholars have noted that the existence of hierarchical relationships in the international system is a puzzle, given the dominant view that states balance under anarchy. The presence of international hierarchies that are not sustained by force has led scholars to treat them as authority relationships in which weaker states accept the legitimacy of a stronger state exercising decision making power. For example, (Lake, 2009, 331) explains that “dominant states legitimately rule over...policy in subordinate states” in a negotiated bargain that relies on relations of legitimate authority. Here legitimacy comes from a contracted bargain. Lake’s work is notable as a rationalist approach that relies, not just on material incentives to explain hierarchy, but on the role that legitimacy plays in establishing and sustaining these relations.

Furthermore, many realists have invoked the importance of legitimacy in understanding international behavior. Kissinger (2014) argues that regional and world orders are sustained by both balances of power and a consensus on legitimacy. The latter delineates what behavior is acceptable and limits the extent of competition. Kissinger’s work emphasizes a role for accommodation among great powers, but even realists who defend unilateralism, such as Brooks and Wohlforth (2005), accept that hegemons seek to establish norms of legitimacy that support their power. My argument is in line with that of Morgenthau who argued that “(l)egitimate power, which can invoke a moral or legal justification for its exercise, is likely to be more effective than equivalent illegitimate power, which cannot be so justified” (Morgenthau, 1948, 30).

When scholars focus on particular historical instances of international orders, the discussion is similar. Kang (2010) describes how the Sino-centric tributary system

was historically sustained by a consensus about the legitimacy of Confucianism as a foundation for social order. In his framing, a common culture produced a shared world view that helped sustain a system of legitimate hierarchy. This emphasis on legitimacy as a foundation for hierarchical order is not unique to East Asia. Indeed, (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999, 192) write about the liberal order, arguing that an “overwhelming consensus in favour of political democracy, market economics, ethnic toleration, and personal freedom” provide a shared identity and legitimacy that sustain the order. Even scholars who are critical of how the liberal order operates recognize the role played by liberal norms in legitimizing the system. Political legitimacy is a key element of power because it allows a political actor to gain compliance with less material coercion. Bukovansky (2007, 2009).

The importance that legitimacy plays in explaining the behavior of states is widely accepted theoretically, but scholarship on legitimacy often struggles with inferential challenges. For example, scholars often infer the legitimacy of an order based on outcomes. Because we expect legitimate settlements to be durable, we infer legitimacy based on the durability of the system. This approach threatens tautology. Indeed, (Clark, 2003, 83) makes a similar point when he criticizes Kissinger’s much quoted passage that “An order whose structure is accepted by all major powers is legitimate”¹⁹.

An additional problem is the assumption that legitimacy principles follow naturally from the attributes of states. This treats legitimation strategies as a natural outgrowth of essential attributes of state actors rather than as a strategic choice. Kang (2010) does not say this explicitly but there is an implied inevitability about the form that Chinese legitimation strategies would take, based on shared East Asian cultural commitments. Kupchan similarly describes how dominant states impose their norms

¹⁹This passage is from (Kissinger, 1964, 145), cited by (Clark, 2003, 83).

in a fairly automatic, top-down fashion. Despite his understanding of the source of legitimacy, his analysis of its effects is consistent with my argument here. Kupchan explains that norms “...affect the character, stability, and durability of hegemonic orders, and may well shape the nature of the transition that ensues when one order gives way to another” (Kupchan, 2014, 20-21). It is not wrong to argue that common cultural understandings can facilitate common understandings of legitimacy. However, an emphasis on common culture as a source of legitimacy risks essentializing actors and imagining that actual patterns of cooperation and conflict were inevitable.

The scholarly work that comes closest to my research question is that of Phillips (2011) and MacKay (2019). Phillips argues that orders are upheld both by force and by a consensus on shared values. These “social imaginaries” provide legitimacy that sustains cooperation within the order. Orders fail as a result of legitimacy crises in which the collapse of social imaginaries undermines the normative basis of order and new military technologies undermine the order’s material basis. This underscores the roles that both coercion and legitimacy play in sustaining social order. MacKay’s work is similar to mine in that he takes seriously the link between legitimation strategies and subsequent dissent. His work also provides a useful list of historical hierarchies and arguments about the effects of their legitimation strategies. However, it has several limitations. First, it does not explain the source of legitimation strategies. Second, it uses a taxonomy of legitimation strategies that is quite different than the way most of the literature distinguishes principles of legitimacy, making it somewhat difficult to put these literatures into conversation with one another.²⁰ Third, although MacKay provides illustrative historical examples for his argument, he does not test his argument.

²⁰He distinguishes universalist versus competitive, and internally innovated versus externally innovated legitimacy principles. This makes sense in the context of inter-hierarchy relations but less so for a study of relations between superordinate and subordinate states.

Finally, Stacie Goddard and Ron Krebs have done important work on theorizing the role legitimation plays and when it is most likely to matter Goddard and Krebs (2015). They also point out the odd gap in the international relations literature among scholars who acknowledge that legitimacy is important but pay little attention to legitimation efforts. Calling this the field’s “legitimation blind spot,” they write that “to overlook legitimation is to overlook much of global politics” (Goddard and Krebs, 2018, 68). I pick up Goddard and Krebs’s exhortation to focus explicitly on the process of legitimation here.

Legitimation as a Strategic Choice Legitimation is “how political actors publicly justify their policy stances before concrete audiences” (Goddard and Krebs, 2018, 69). These political actors have choices in how they frame the legitimacy of their behavior, making legitimation a strategic choice to appeal to a particular audience. For leaders of hierarchical orders, we can ask what choices leaders make, why they make them, and what downstream effects they have on the functioning and eventual dysfunction of the order. They can make claims based on **performance** (that this particular type of order is better at achieving a particular goal), on a salient **identity** (e.g., the glory of the nation or the promotion of a racial in-group), or on an **ideology** of how society should be organized (e.g., monarchical or democratic principles). The choice leaders make about how to legitimize an international order is influenced by both domestic and international factors. The argument here is not that leaders have unconstrained agency in choosing any legitimacy principle they wish. For example, if a state leader wishes to emphasize a particular identity as a legitimacy principle, the state must actually have that identity. Similarly, a state that promotes a legitimacy principle abroad that is at odds with its domestic legitimacy principle is likely to face costs for the discrepancy. The set of options is constrained but there is nevertheless a decision space for the leader

and I show the conditions that make some choices more likely than others.

Performance Legitimacy and Economies of Scale Like states, which achieve economies of scale by centralizing policy making, international orders can solve collective action problems and achieve greater efficiency by centralizing certain functions and taking steps to align the domestic political organization of their members. For example, hegemons may provide an international reserve currency, and international organizations can help ensure monetary stability. Both solve international collective action problems that would go unsolved without some technology of international governance. International orders can also make international life more efficient by reducing the transaction costs incurred when exchange crosses national boundaries. For example, common standards for product design make trade more efficient, and similarity among legal systems facilitates inter-state contracts.

This efficiency comes at a cost, however, because it may impose homogeneous policies on populations with diverse preferences. This generates resistance to the homogenizing effects of political order that manifests itself in various types of dissent. In the context of states, centralization can lead to secessionist movements, as argued by Alesina and Spolaore (2005). I hypothesize a similar mechanism is at work in centralized international orders.

Legitimizing Order through Identity Social Identity Theory research has shown that making particular identities salient can galvanize cooperation, even when the identities themselves are trivial or contrived (Brewer (1979); Tajfel and Turner (1986)). Furthermore, Harari (2015) and Ahmad (2019) provide examples of how shared religious identity can enable cooperation among individuals in anarchic environments. I hypothesize that hierarchs emphasize a particular identity in order to build a sense of

legitimacy for the order and galvanize cooperation. This is similar to the idea of states as held together by an imagined sense of similarity Anderson (2006).

Like in the domestic space, identity-based cooperation (e.g., ethno-nationalism) relies on elevating some identities over other, creating political fault lines in the process. Where hierarchs rely on such identities to galvanize cooperation, I expect this legitimacy principle to create a built-in limiting principle on the order's ability to expand without coercion.

Legitimizing Order through Ideology Hierarchs may also rely on a particular ideological vision to galvanize support for their order. These international legitimation efforts are often a reflection of the dominant state's domestic political values, but the process of translating principles from one sphere to another is not automatic and may be manipulated by leaders. For example, Oren details how the United States treated Soviet ideology as a threat after World War II, even though it had not viewed it as a threat before the war. Indeed, Americans were often admiring of Soviet ideology before the war (Oren, 2013, ch. 3). It makes sense from a realist perspective that the United States would transition from an ally of the Soviet Union during the Second World War to an adversary in the post-war period. The two powers would be expected to set aside disagreements during the war in order to achieve the more important shared goal of defeating Nazi Germany and its allies. Once Germany had been defeated, the imperfect alignment of US and Soviet preferences would become clearer and the relationship would shift from cooperation to conflict. What does not make sense from a realist perspective is that the United States would be comfortable (even admiring) of Soviet ideology *before* the war when there was no shared threat to cause Americans to “look the other way,” and then treat that same ideology as an existential threat after the war. What changed were the international circumstances facing the two countries,

not their ideologies. The United States identified Soviet *ideology* as a threat because it saw the *Soviet Union* as a threat, not the other way around. This rhetorical move allowed the United States to communicate what the emerging Cold War was about and motivate both its domestic audience and the core members of the western bloc to make the sacrifices necessary to confront the Soviets. In other words, emphasizing an ideological commitment enabled the United States to legitimate and galvanize support for its order.

Similarly, Beinart (2021) has argued that the shift on human rights policy from the Trump to Biden administrations has been more rhetorical than substantive. “(H)uman rights do not drive American foreign policy. They justify American foreign policy.” He describes continuity in a competitive U.S. geopolitical posture vis-à-vis China that has gone through a change in legitimation strategy. The Biden team is using an ideologically-based rhetorical strategy whereas the Trump team (though Beinart does not say this) frequently used identity-based appeals, referring to COVID-19 as “kung flu” for example BBC (2021).

An emphasis on ideological difference may have significant downstream disadvantages. As Hundley (2020) shows, ideological cleavages significantly increase the probability of conflict. This is consistent with a concern that emphasizing ideological differences (rather than looking more narrowly at areas of converging and diverging interests) threatens to turn the U.S. - China relationship into an “existential cage match, heightening (the rivalry’s) intensity” Colby and Kaplan (2020).

These distinctions are not merely hypothetical. History records considerable variation in the legitimacy principles of international orders and the reasons the orders ultimately failed. It is clear that international orders vary considerably in the legiti-

minating frameworks they choose and provide sufficient historical variation to determine whether the kinds of dissent an order ultimately faces is partially a result of its choice of legitimation strategy. It is not clear, however, why orders choose the approach they do. This project aims to explain the choice that leading states make about how to legitimate their order, and evaluate the effects this choice has on the functioning of orders. Specifically, it asks whether certain types of legitimation strategies enable more growth in the order than others, whether legitimacy principles sow the seeds of vulnerability to specific types of disruption, and the effect of legitimation strategies on overall order durability.

Distinguishing Legitimation Strategies

Two potential objections to this taxonomy of legitimation strategies are worth addressing at the outset. The first is the observation that hierarchs often make multiple legitimation claims, for example emphasizing both ideology and performance. The second is that these strategies may themselves be analytically inseparable. It is true that states often make multiple legitimation arguments, but one strategy is generally dominant at any given time. Dominant legitimation strategies change over time in response to a hierarch's changing circumstances and this variation from year to year helps me to explain the determinants of legitimation strategies and their effects. Chapter 7 addresses this point in more detail, and includes an explanation of the structural topic modeling techniques I use to code a state's legitimation strategy in each time period. The second objection is about the analytical distinctiveness of the three categories of legitimation strategies. For example, a hierarch might advocate for its ideological vision by arguing that it is more effective at solving problems (e.g., the argument that a liberal market-based economy is legitimate because it produces more aggregate wealth). To distinguish whether an actor was making a performance based claim or an ideological

one, one should ask whether they were making an argument about consequences or appropriateness. Performance legitimacy is focused on demonstrating that an actor is able to make (desirable) thing X happen. That thing could be ideologically inspired (e.g., promoting human rights) but the legitimacy of an actor relying on performance legitimacy would rest on how well the task was carried out. An ideological legitimacy claim, by contrast, relies on the importance the shared project and a shared sense of what's appropriate, rather than the actor's success to date in achieving that thing. An actor that has not had success at promoting a particular ideological vision but emphasizes its commitment to that set of ideological principles to explain why it is legitimate is using an ideological legitimation strategy. It relies on a logic of appropriateness ("We share the right ideology.") rather than a logic of appropriateness ("I will achieve what others cannot.) in building support.

Domestic Determinants of Legitimacy Principles Domestic politics very likely play a role in a leader's selection of legitimacy principles for international order because it is generally difficult for a government to be so radically multivocal that it uses one legitimacy principle domestically and an entirely incompatible one internationally.²¹ In other words, powerful states will likely choose a principle to legitimate their international influence that is consistent with the identities and values that lend legitimacy to their domestic governance. Accordingly I treat salient aspects of a state's identity and domestic ideology as candidate legitimacy principles for a leader to promote internationally. Shared identities and domestic ideologies make it easier for a powerful state to bring others into its order and states will often attempt to emphasize such commonalities to gain support from other states.²² My approach here is similar to that of

²¹However, see Goddard (2018) on how multivocality helps rising states manage domestic and international constituencies with competing preferences.

²²For example, see Stein (1993) and (Walt, 1987, 37-40) on the importance of domestic political institutions to a state's ability to align with other states.

Swidler (1986) who describes how culture provides a set of resources upon which actors draw. The extent to which these cultural resources influence behavior is greatest in “unsettled” periods, of which the initial formation of new international orders is surely an example.

International Determinants of Legitimacy Principles The international circumstances facing a leading state may also influence its choice of legitimacy principle. For example, whether the ordering state faces a rival order with which it competes for members may affect the sorts of principles it adopts. If a competitor has a universalist ideology (e.g., Marxism-Leninism), a state may make a legitimacy claim based on a similarly universalist ideology (e.g., economic, social, and political liberalism) in order to appeal to the same “audience.” Conversely, if a competitor order has a legitimacy principle based in an exclusionary identity (e.g., nationalism or race), a state may make a similar claim for its own particularist identity, in effect challenging the legitimacy of the competing order by disproving its legitimacy claim. Other principles are possible as well. For example, if a state is in a structural position to provide public goods, the state can rely on performance legitimacy, justifying its rule in terms of its ability to produce public goods, rather than in terms of its embodiment of some identity or the pursuit of some set of desirable ideological goals.

Implications for Function and Dysfunction One virtue of treating the selection of legitimacy principles as a strategic choice is that it allows us to consider the strengths and weaknesses of various candidate legitimacy principles. For example, the principle of performance legitimacy should be well-suited to achieving cooperation among diverse members. If members have a shared interest in the production of certain goods, this imperative may allow order members to overcome differences of identity and ideology. Such an order is likely be thinner and aimed at cooperation toward minimal goals rather

than toward the promotion of a more demanding conception of justice.²³ One drawback of this type of order is that it may be less resilient to shocks. If members support an order because it provides tangible goods, and if the addition of each additional member improves this system (i.e., by making the provision of goods more economical), even a temporary downturn in the order's ability to provide those goods may lead to a loss of membership. Such a loss can feed on itself as each member that removes its support from the order diminishes the utility the order provides to those left behind, perhaps inducing additional members to exit the order.²⁴ An order facing a loss of its performance-based legitimacy principle may fall back on identity or ideological claims as an alternative form of legitimacy.

By contrast, a legitimacy principle based on identity or shared ideology should enhance the cohesion of the order because it provides something enduring around which states can rally. Such orders validate members' identities or their vision of progress and this marks them as a cohesive unit, set apart from others. When such orders face performance difficulty, they should be able to draw on this source of cohesion to prevent erosion of the order. Unfortunately, increased internal cohesion highlights differences vis-à-vis out-groups. Relying on such principles may limit an order's ability to conceive of sharing social purpose with external orders. Where more than one order builds cohesion based on particularist identities or ideologies, voluntary cooperation between orders may become nearly impossible. Instead of the voluntary cooperation that comes from shared legitimacy, the Weberian logic is reversed. The lack of shared legitimacy forces orders to rely on coercion when they interact with one another. And

²³For a discussion of orders as practical societies, see Brown (2001).

²⁴This is related to the logic in Granovetter (1978) in which the decision of each agent depends on the state of the environment and each agent's decision affects the state of that environment for other agents. Contagion, in which one agent's action leads others to take the same action, is a possible result.

when one order expands (either to include new members or additional issue areas), having a strong legitimacy principle increases the likelihood that members of the order will disagree on fundamental and potentially irreconcilable issues.

The Gap and Relevance Despite the importance of legitimacy to international orders, we know too little about how orders choose legitimacy principles, whether some legitimacy principles are more prone to collapse than others, and whether the challenges orders face are truly exogenous or if they are partly a function of the order's legitimacy principles. For example, some legitimacy principles may polarize the international system more than others, exacerbating the salience of in and out groups and contributing to conflicts that produce the military innovation cited by Phillips.

Understanding the impact of design choices on international order is important for three reasons. First, our understandings of vast swaths of history are incomplete because we lack an understanding of the conditions that have led ordering states to pursue specific forms of order. Although historians and political scientists know a great deal about individual periods of order, we have serious gaps in our general knowledge of how international orders enable cooperation and experience dissent and decline.

Second, the erosion of the current international order threatens to scuttle the gains in cooperation made by recent decades of international governance. There is an understandable desire to “turn back the clock” to a golden era when the order was taken for granted. This generally leads to an effort to double down on the promotion of liberal principles in both international and domestic governance. However, if current dissent against the order is responding to the order's promotion of a liberal economic, social and political ideology, such a strategy will be counter-productive. The erosion of norms within the liberal international order is a subset of a broader phenomenon, however.

Orders can decline for different reasons and it's important to understand why they're declining because different causes of decline will incentivize different policy prescriptions.

Finally, dissent against the current order appears to come from sources that existing theories do not expect, suggesting a real gap in our collective understanding of how orders function and whose interests they serve. Materialist explanations for the rise and decline of order predict that other great powers would chafe at a U.S. dominated international order. But it is striking that smaller western powers - both recently admitted and historically core members - are contesting the principles of the order and seeking to limit its influence. This suggests that backlash is a result of a breakdown of legitimacy and not just a function of powerful states seeking parochial changes.

Chapter 7: Research Design

This project uses a two stage modeling approach to explain the determinants of state legitimation strategies, and the effect those legitimation strategies have on the size of orders, their durability, and the causes of their failure. As mentioned previously, some leading states will build support for international order on the basis of performance (also known as “output”) legitimacy, while others will rely on a particular identity or ideology to convince other states to support it (input legitimacy).²⁵ This choice of legitimizing framework has implications for the optimal size of their order, the sources and kinds of dissent the order encounters, and the order’s longevity. For example, an order that stakes its claim to legitimacy on its ability to efficiently provide public goods is more likely to face dissatisfaction if it fails to produce those goods than it is to face dissent along identity lines. An order legitimized by association with a particular identity group (e.g., a racial or religious group) is more likely to be judged by whether its actions benefit that group. And an order legitimized by a particular ideology of universal progress may face dissent from adherents (who doubt the hierarch’s commitment) and those targeted for conversion (who have not joined the ranks of adherents).

Research Approach

I explain the sources and effects of legitimation strategies in two stages. In the first, I predict the kind of legitimation strategy a hierarch will employ, based on its international position, its domestic circumstances, and its size. In the second, I show the way that various legitimation strategies sow the seeds of dissent within the order and affect the order’s longevity. Importantly, I highlight how each strategy presents unique strengths and vulnerabilities. Methodologically, I combine heuristic case studies

²⁵see: Scharpf (1999).

with state-of-the-art statistical techniques, using a unique data set.

In chapters 3-6, I develop four case studies: the Persian Achaemenid Empire; the Ming Dynasty; the Ottoman Empire; and the U.S. led order from 1945 to the present. I chose these cases as part of a “least similar” research design that allows me to inductively build my theory before testing it statistically on a broader universe of cases. I use structural topic modeling (STM) techniques to process a corpus of official statements and code the legitimation strategies that each used. This allows me to focus on what the leaders of hierarchical states said to justify their foreign policy behaviors. Automating the process of evaluating these documents allows me to apply a consistent lens to a large number of official statements. It also allows me to discern what the dominant legitimation argument was when multiple arguments were present. Statistically, I use nested logit models to predict the hierarch’s choice of legitimation strategy, ordinary least squares to model the determinants of an empire’s size, multinomial logit models to predict the types of dissent that each legitimacy principle will provoke, and conditional frailty models to predict order duration. The latter adapts survival modeling techniques for non-clinical settings in which the researcher cannot achieve *ceteris paribus* conditions.

Large-N Data

I build on the existing data set of international orders published in Braumoeller (2019) and expand it to capture a rough description of as many international hierarchies as possible. I exclude minor orders because, in any given period, there may have been states that sat atop minor hierarchies but failed to impose a general order in their region. I exclude these cases because my analysis is interested in those states that were able to create orders, not each state that aspired to do so. Having thus defined

the universe of cases, I collect data on the legitimacy principles that each hierarchy used to justify their orders. I code yearly observations for each hierarchy, using public statements from leaders to determine the hierarchy's legitimation strategy. For years in which no major public legitimation statements are present, I use the most recent legitimation argument as a proxy. This is appropriate because, were there to be a change in legitimation framework, it would need to be publicly articulated. In cases where I have reason to believe that there are missing documents, I consult subject matter experts. Finally, I collect information on the international conditions facing the order (e.g., the presence of a peer rival, the legitimizing principle of the rival, and the relative power of the two states, as measured by relative GDP, as well as CINC scores where available),²⁶ how long the order lasted, and the sources of order failure.

²⁶For an "other" to be a rival, it must be a sizable order in its own right, which means that it already enters the data set through my other inclusion criteria. To capture the influence of rivalry, I code three additional variables: presence of rival; legitimacy principle of the rival; and GDP ratio (state of interest: its rival).

Variable list This yields the following variables (observed yearly unless otherwise noted):

- year of hierarchy founding
- year of hierarchy dissolution
- duration of hierarchy (number of years)
- legitimacy principle of hierarchy
- domestic regime type (Using VDEM where available, self-coding otherwise)
- presence of peer rival (0/1)
- legitimacy principle of the rival
- power of hierarch (historical GDP data from the University of Groningen)
- power relative to rival (GDP:GDP)
- composite power of hierarch (CINC scores when available)
- capability ratios (CINC:CINC when available)
- size of the order (distance of the furthest territorial capital from the imperial capital, measured at the peak of the order)
- cause of order failure

Hypotheses about Selecting Legitimacy Principles

- H_{L1} : The choice of a performance based legitimation strategy will be positively correlated with the size of the hierarchy, as measured by GDP. ²⁷

²⁷The logic here is that large states will be in a structural position to provide club goods, making this legitimation strategy attractive.

- H_{L2} : Hierarchs will tend to mirror the legitimacy principles of rivals (e.g., responding to a rival's performance based claims with performance based claims, or responding to a rival's identity-based claims by emphasizing the hierarch's own identity).
- H_{L3} : All else equal, a hierarch will be more likely to use legitimacy principles internationally that match its domestic principles.

Hypotheses about Size

- H_{S1} : If an order emphasizes *performance legitimacy*, it will be, on average, more able to grow (to incorporate new members) than orders that rely on other legitimacy principles, after controlling for GDP and relative power.
- H_{S2} : If an order derives legitimacy based on a *identity*, the order will be, on average, smaller than orders relying on either performance legitimacy or universalist ideologies, after controlling for GDP and relative power.

Hypotheses about Causes of Failure

- H_{F1} : If an order emphasizes *performance legitimacy*, the failure of the order will be associated with failure to provide those goods (i.e., members defect to a different hierarchy who is more successful at providing goods).
- H_{F2} : If an order derives legitimacy based on a *ideology*, failure will be associated with opposition to the imposition of that ideology on diverse communities. (i.e., members defect to a different hierarchy who espouses a competing ideology).

Hypotheses about Duration

- H_{D1} : If an order emphasizes *performance legitimacy* it will last, all else equal, for a shorter period of time than differently legitimated orders. ²⁸
- H_{D2} : If an order derives legitimacy based on a *universalist ideology*, it will last, all else equal, for longer than performance-based orders, but for a shorter period of time than particularist orders. ²⁹
- H_{D3} : If an order derives legitimacy based on a *particularist ideology*, it should last longer than orders relying on universalistic or performance based legitimacy principles, after controlling for relative size, because they enjoy the cohesion that comes from ideological organization but are less likely to have incorporated

²⁸The logic here is that all orders face disruptions (e.g., from economic downturns or leadership changes) and, because performance based orders rely primarily on success to maintain the support of subordinates, they should be especially vulnerable to such disruptions.

²⁹The logic here is that ideological orders in general have a purpose to which they can rally their members during times of disruption. This should make ideological orders more durable than performance based orders (after controlling for relative size). Universalist orders should be more fragile than particularist orders because they should be more prone to the incorporation of diverse communities who do not share the ideology, thus sowing a “seed of disruption.”

diverse populations.³⁰³¹

Statistical Modeling

Stage 1 My argument has two stages. In the first, I predict the legitimation strategy that a hierarchy will use, based on predictors that include regime type, size of the state (GDP), presence of a peer rival, the legitimacy principle of the rival, and the relative power of the rival. For this stage, I use a nested logit model to account for correlations among the choices.

Stage 2 The second stage of my argument predicts the size, causes of failure, and durability of the order, based on the legitimacy strategies employed. I predict the size of the order (measured as the distance of the furthest territorial capital from the imperial capital) with an ordinary least squares model to test my hypothesis that orders using performance-based legitimation strategies will tend to grow larger to take advantage of economies of scale in the provision of club goods. Second, I use a multinomial logit model to estimate what predicts a range of different types of failures for orders. Finally, I predict the duration of the order using a conditional frailty model. This is an adaptation of well-known survival models, which estimate patient survival time (or the analogous “time to failure” of an object or social structure). Unlike clinical studies,

³⁰The logic here is that a more homogeneous community that can draw on a shared identity should be more able to marshal internal support to weather crises. I also expect these orders to be smaller so I only hypothesize that particularist ideologies will prolong the duration of orders after controlling for relative size.

³¹Of course, it is possible that the impact of universalist and particularist ideologies will be the opposite. I’ve assumed that orders based on particularist ideologies will be smaller because their legitimacy principles will be appealing to a smaller community of people than universalist principles. But it is also possible that what drives the size of the order is the order’s power, and therefore the level of diversity within the order is a function of power and not of legitimacy principle. Because the level of diversity in such an order is fixed (rather than a function of a legitimacy principle attracting a certain number of supporters based on the breadth of its appeal), a legitimacy principle based on a universalistic ideology should promote a longer duration because it can plausibly appeal to more people than a particularistic principle could.

I cannot manipulate or otherwise account for all of the “treatments” an international order received. This means unmeasured variables likely contributed to the duration of each order. Conditional frailty models adapt traditional survival modeling techniques to account for these unmeasured and unmeasurable variables (Box-Steffensmeier and De Boef 2006).

Conclusion

International relations scholars have devoted considerable effort to understanding how states can create international order under anarchy. We now understand how hegemony and international organizations can promulgate rules that help states solve collective action problems and improve the efficiency of exchanges across state borders. Scholars acknowledge that such governance is sustained through both coercion and legitimacy but the determinants of legitimation strategies are under-studied, as are their downstream effects. Ordering states have multiple options for legitimizing their orders and this project helps explain their choices and the effects those choices have on the functioning and durability of their orders.

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