Publics in Global Politics

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Edited by Janne Mende and Thomas Müller

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Editorial

Publics in Global Politics: A Framing Paper

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Abstract

In IR and beyond, there is considerable debate about the ways global governance, the transnationalisation of publics, and changes in communication technologies have affected the interplay between publics and global politics. This debate is characterised by disagreements about how to conceptualise publics in the global realm—and whether or not they exist in the first place. We seek to contribute to this debate by disentangling the various meanings associated with publics in order to get a better grasp of how publics shape and are shaped by global politics. We do so in two steps. First, we distinguish four different manifestations of publics: audiences, spheres, institutions, and public interests. Second, we identify four key dynamics that affect the evolution and interplay of these manifestations in global politics: the distinction between public and private, changes in communications technologies, the politics of transparency, and the need to legitimise global governance. These interrelated dynamics reshape the publicness of global politics while sustaining the plurality of the publics that partake in it.

Keywords

common goods; communication technologies; global governance; global politics; institutions; public-private divide; publics; transparency

Issue

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1. Introduction

Publics are key to our understanding of politics. In fact, the two are closely interrelated, as the common understanding of politics as the organisation and regulation of public affairs demonstrates (e.g., Leftwich, 2004). In this thematic issue, we focus on how publics shape and are shaped by global politics, understood here as political interactions among various kinds of actors across national borders.

Both global politics and the publics that partake in it have changed considerably in the past decades. Today, global governance is characterised by a complex and constantly evolving constellation of actors—among them states, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and firms—that perform governance tasks and assume governance authority (Avant et al.,

2010; Stone, 2020; Zürn, 2018). Simultaneously, publics have also become more transnational, though national or sub-national publics have not disappeared. This transnationalisation is part of broader processes of change—including digitalisation and the establishment of a global communicative space with the internet—that have profoundly transformed the characteristics of publics in the global realm (Baum & Potter, 2019; Fraser, 2007; Nash, 2014; Seeliger & Sevignani, 2021; Volkmer, 2014).

The rich literature on publics in global politics, by and large, agrees that global governance and the transformation of publics have altered the relationship between publics and global politics, but differs on *how much* and *in what ways* they have altered it. One crucial reason for this disagreement is the absence of a consensual definition of publics in the global realm. Instead, the

debate is characterised by a variety of conceptualisations of publics.

Against this background, rather than asking whether a global public exists (Ruggie, 2004), potentially exists (Zürn, 2021), or does not exist (Eriksen & Sending, 2013), this thematic issue studies what forms of publics exist in the global realm and how they overlap and interact. We do not focus solely on global publics—in the sense of worldwide publics—but more broadly investigate the various manifestations of publics that exist in and co-evolve with global politics.

In this Editorial, we develop a conceptual framework for this endeavour and discuss how the 11 articles in the thematic issue use it to study the interplay between publics and global politics. First, we distinguish four manifestations of publics, each based on a different notion of publicness. Second, we identify four key dynamics that affect and partly stem from the interplay between these publics and global politics. Third, we reflect on how these dynamics (re)shape the interplay of publics and global politics.

2. Four Manifestations

IR scholars tend to focus on political publics (Eriksen & Sending, 2013; Mitzen, 2005; Sending, 2016; Steffek, 2015; Stone, 2020). They are interested in publics that are involved in the governance of issues deemed to be the common affair of a group of actors and dealt with, directly or indirectly, through collective arrangements. But not all publics are political (e.g., Huber & Osterhammel, 2020, pp. 15–16). To disentangle the relationship between publics and politics, we distinguish four manifestations of publics: audiences, spheres, institutions, and interests. Empirically, these manifestations may overlap and co-constitute each other, but analytically differentiating them provides a clearer grasp of the plurality of forms of publics in global politics. We contend that in and through their interaction, these four manifestations impart global politics with publicness. However, not all of them need to play a part in the production of publicness in global politics.

The first manifestation of publics is *audiences*. These are groups of actors that share a common focus (Huber & Osterhammel, 2020, pp. 16–17; Warner, 2002, pp. 60–61). An audience in a theatre is one example, but the group of actors does not have to be in one place. The key characteristic is not co-presence but co-orientation. Actors form part of publics as audiences when they pay attention to the same phenomenon, be it certain events (e.g., a G20 summit or a war) or certain issues (e.g., climate change). The focus of attention can be political—that is, a matter regarded by the group, or parts of it, as in need of collective organisation and regulation—or non-political. Thus, the relationship between publics as audiences and global politics is a variable one: Some audiences focus on aspects of global politics while others do not. Moreover, audiences are often composed of diverse actors. In their contribution, Aue and Börzel (2023) discuss how the varied membership of digital publics can be mapped, using the UN's Twittersphere as an example.

The second manifestation refers to *public spheres*. In this manifestation, publics are considered groups of actors that form communicative spaces by engaging in debates over events and issues. A public is then a "social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse" (Warner, 2002, p. 62). Put differently: what ties the group of actors together is that its members react and refer to each other's arguments about an issue, thus creating and sustaining a joint discourse. Such a public is a "space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (Warner, 2002, p. 50). It does not necessarily coalesce around pre-existing issues, as these issues may also be the product of the discourse within the group of actors. Just like publics as audiences, public spheres can have weaker or stronger connections to politics. For example, sectoral publics, such as the academic public or the arts public, may be part of and differentiated from political publics (Zürn, 2021, p. 162). Political publics are discursive spheres in which the governance of common affairs is debated and the related decisions are legitimised and contested. In his contribution, Herborth (2023) elucidates the political character of public spheres by depicting them as sites of social struggles. Part of these struggles is the regulation of the discourse, as Schlag's (2023) analysis of the EU's politics of regulating a public sphere in the digital realm demonstrates.

The third manifestation of publics are *institutions*. Institutions are regarded as public when they are set up by a group of actors to coordinate and regulate common affairs and/or to produce common goods. These institutions are authorised by the group of actors to act in their name. The publicness of the institutions is thus based on claims of representation. Their key characteristic is neither co-orientation nor a joint discourse, but rather a joint institutional framework. The concept of publics as institutions emphasises the organisational arrangement(s) through which groups of actors develop and perform collective agency. From this perspective, a public is a "*collective entity of self-determination* and decision-making" (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 219; italics as in the original). This understanding informs discussions of global publics that emphasise the accountability of governors to the public affected by their decisions and the capacity of the governors to effectively implement these decisions (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, pp. 219–220; see also Fraser, 2007, pp. 20–23). The manifestation of publics as institutions is—in contrast to the first and second manifestations—inextricably interlinked with politics as it relates to how a group of actors constructs, organises, and regulates its common affairs. This is not to say that all public institutions are always perceived to be political. Public institutions such as broadcasting or health services may well be regarded as non-political as long as there are no controversies over their governance.

In his contribution, Vinken (2023) highlights the pivotal role of international law in the institutionalisation of publics in the realm of climate governance.

Finally, the fourth manifestation revolves around *public interests* (in the normative and dynamic sense of the term). In this broader sense, it is also labelled—often synonymously—as general interests, public good, common good, or general welfare. Actors postulate public interests when they denote common aims that a group of actors (supposedly) share. They thus do not only construct a group of actors—even if this group is only imagined—but also make the interest or well-being of said group a normative reference point for politics. This makes definitions of public interests a genuinely political matter. Empirically, public interests often play a key part in the production of publicness in global politics, particularly in the legitimation of publics as institutions. Koppell (2010, p. 52), for instance, suggests "see[ing] 'publicness' as a measure of the extent to which an organization draws on, invokes, or affects the common interests of all members of a society." Still, definitions of public interests are highly diverse, ranging from additive definitions as mere aggregates of individual interests to normatively laden definitions emphasising superior moral reasoning, complemented by deliberative concepts that interweave public with individual interests via free and equal discourse in a public sphere of deliberation (Mansbridge, 1990). Mende (2023b) unpacks these different meanings to study public interests as a legitimation tool for global governors.

Table 1 summarises these four manifestations of publics, their key characteristics, and their different relation with politics. Differentiating the four manifestations opens up two analytical avenues: firstly, a more fine-grained discussion of which manifestations of publics exist in global politics, or distinct policy fields within it, and, secondly, the study of when and how some, or all, of these manifestations co-exist and interact. To give two examples: public spheres are usually understood as intermediates between societies and political systems or as checks on what public institutions—whether national or international—do (Eriksen & Sending, 2013; Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1992; Zürn, 2021). Governors, in turn,

mobilise arguments about public interests within public spheres to legitimise their activities vis-à-vis audiences. Hence, all four manifestations of publics may become relevant, as McLarren (2023) shows in her study of religious publics in the context of the Ukraine war.

3. Four Dynamics

Global politics is shaped and reshaped by various dynamics. Four of them are particularly relevant for how the four manifestations impart global politics with publicness. These are dynamics relating to the distinction between public and private, changes in communication technologies, questions of transparency, and the legitimation of global governors. In this section, we briefly discuss each of these four dynamics, which are inherently political as they affect not only the presence, evolution, and interplay of the four manifestations of publics, but through them also shape how global politics is organised and practised. That said, the very definition of what is— or is not—part of global politics is decided within global politics itself. The effects of the dynamics are not predetermined and subject to change, which gives rise to variations in the forms of publics and publicness that shape global politics (cf. Figure 1).

The first dynamic stems from the fact that all manifestations of publics are defined by their distinction from what is regarded as private. This profoundly affects what counts as "political" in global politics. Notions of "the private" usually refer to what is excluded from publicness, thereby also defining what is included. However, the distinction between public and private is not as dichotomous as it sometimes appears. Rather, while distinctive, the two mutually co-constitute and entail each other (Müller, 2020). The famous feminist slogan that the private is political illuminates how the public sphere as a place of politics is enabled by reproductive work in the private sphere (traditionally assumed by women), and how (vice-versa) public regulation—e.g., via domestic laws on child care, divorce, and women's rights— constitutes and shapes family life, gender relations, and power inequalities at the very heart of what is understood as the private sphere (Mende, 2023a). The mutual

Table 1. Four manifestations of publics.

|	Manifestation of publics	Key characteristic: a group of actors that:	Intertwinement with politics
1	Audiences	Share a common attention focus	Varying: Focus may or may not be on political issues/events
2	Spheres	Engage in a joint discourse about an issue/event	Varying: Discourse may or may not be about political issues/events
3	Institutions	Have a joint institutional framework	Strongly intertwined: Framework geared towards governance of common affairs
4	Interests	(Supposedly) share common aims	Strongly intertwined: Aims serve as legitimation and guide for governance and politics
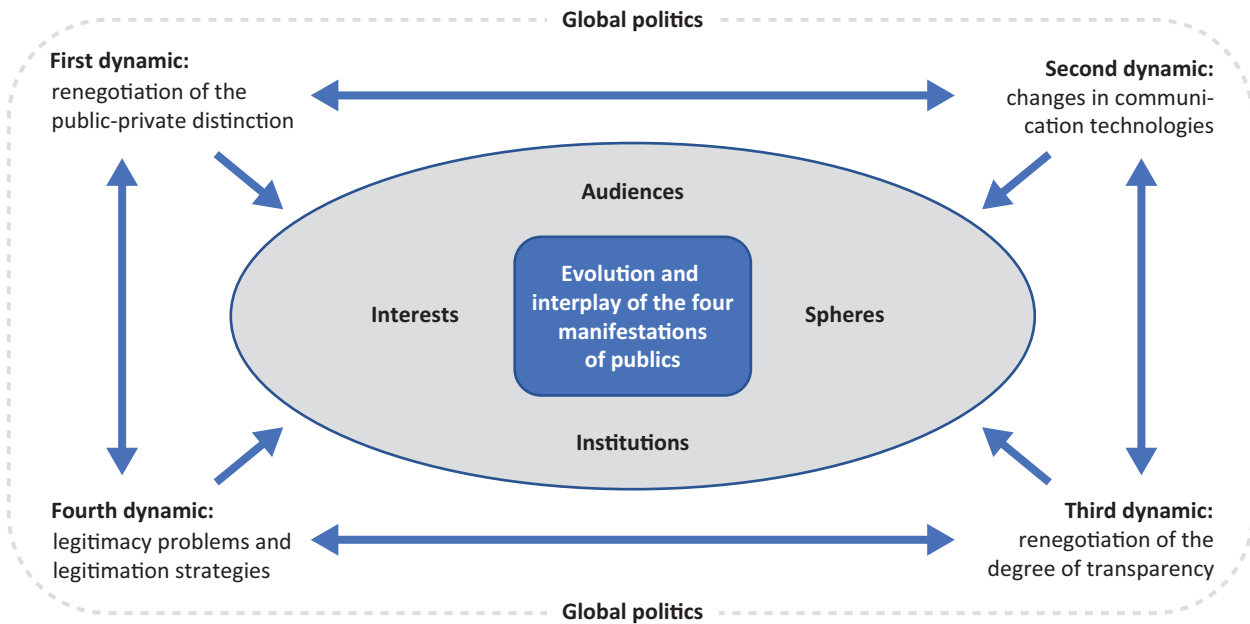
Figure 1. The dynamics shaping the evolution and interplay of the four manifestations of publics.

constitution of public and private is also visible in the strong interconnections between public interests and private interests. "[P]ublic and private interests cannot be fully understood if they are conceived as separate" (Mahoney et al., 2009, p. 1034), because the definition of each affects its counterpart. Public interests in global politics are thus also informed by the ways they regard or disregard private interests and whether they take the mutual constitution of the public and private into account, which is a precondition for addressing issues of power and inequalities in what is considered to be the private sphere. Focusing on cybersecurity, Liebetrau and Monsees (2023) analyse how private companies, by positioning themselves as managers of public interests, construct issue-specific publics and thereby also enhance their own authority.

The second dynamic stems from changes in communication technologies, as all four manifestations of publics are enabled and shaped by such technologies. Publics usually are dispersed rather than co-present at the same location. Such dispersed publics can only engage in a common debate when they have the technologies to communicate with each other. Publics—to put it differently—depend on communication technologies and the communicative spaces that these technologies create and sustain (Huber & Osterhammel, 2020, pp. 30–38). This is why changes in communication technologies have a profound potential to transform the publics. The telegraph, for instance, enabled new forms of more global publics in the late 19th century (Wenzlhuemer, 2013). The rise of the internet and social media today underpin and, to a considerable degree, drive current transformations of publics (Baum & Potter, 2019; Schneiker, 2021). That said, the digital revolution seems to matter in different ways for differ-

ent forms of publics. The internet, for instance, fosters global audiences but not necessarily global public institutions. Moreover, while current communication technologies potentially facilitate a global public sphere engaging in a shared debate, the global level is still marked by a plurality of languages and stark inequalities in access to communication. The technological changes make not only possible new modes of more personalised communication for international organisations, as Ecker-Ehrhardt (2023) shows in his contribution, but they also give rise to new governance issues, such as cybersecurity (see Liebetrau & Monsees, 2023).

The third dynamic relates to the level of transparency, that is, the availability of information about the issues around which publics are organised. Transparency—so the classic argument goes—fosters accountability (McCarthy & Fluck, 2017, pp. 421–422). Constituents can only hold those governing them accountable when they know what the governors are doing. Transparency is thus a crucial component of the third manifestation of publics outlined above (i.e., groups of actors that share a joint institutional framework for governing common affairs), although it matters for the other manifestations as well. As critical transparency studies emphasise, transparency "is no simple matter of opening up and sharing information, but rather a matter of managing visibilities" (Flyverbom, 2019, p. 3). The politics of transparency unfold through battles over which issues—and which aspects of them—are publicly visible and which are not. These battles can take place between states and their citizens—e.g., the right to privacy—but also among states. For instance, the degree of transparency is a key point of contention in the field of armaments and disarmament (Müller, 2021). The digital transformation is adding new dynamics to the politics of

transparency. It raises novel questions about data sharing and protection, but it also provides actors that seek to make certain activities or issues more visible with new tools (Zegart, 2022, pp. 225–250). In his contribution, Müller (2023) zooms in on one such tool, namely commercial satellite imagery, and discusses how it changes the power dynamics between state and non-state actors in the politics of transparency. Global performance indicators are another prominent tool (Kelley & Simmons, 2019). Ringel (2023) teases out the Janus face of the publicity of these indicators which put public pressure not only on the actors that they evaluate but also on those who produce them.

The fourth dynamic captures the legitimising function of publics for global politics. Notably, although Eriksen and Sending (2013, p. 230) deny the existence of a global public (in the sense of our third manifestation), they concede its salience as a construct, because "policies are justified with reference to the idea of such a public." This is visible in two trends, relating to global governance institutions and private governance actors respectively. As they face increasing contestation (Kelley & Simmons, 2021; Zürn, 2018), global governance institutions are in growing need of legitimisation. Claims to promote public interests or to address the demands of the global publics play a crucial role in their legitimisation strategies (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019). Private governance actors too increasingly refer to public interests to legitimise their governance power. While this does not make them public actors, it clearly transcends the boundaries of their private roles in global governance (Mende, 2023a). That said, public and private actors also interact. In her contribution, Bajenova (2023) highlights how think tanks form part of and contribute to the legitimation strategy of the EU. In all these cases, publicness becomes central to the politics of legitimation, affecting how global politics unfolds, and, at the same time, contributing to the constitution of audiences, spheres, institutions, and/or interests as public(s).

4. Conclusion

To sum up, we propose differentiating between four manifestations of publics—audiences, spheres, institutions, and interests—to study how publics shape and are shaped by global politics. This typology helps to untangle the relationship between publics and politics. It highlights that this relation is variable with regard to the first two manifestations (audiences and spheres), while the other two manifestations (institutions and interests) are inherently political in that they stand for, respectively, the capacity of groups of actors to organise themselves and the supposedly common aims that guide their governance. By asking which manifestations of publics exist in global politics, we thus open up analytical space for studying how audiences and spheres become politicised—that is, turn from non-political into political publics—and how claims of representation and

appeals to public interests enable and constrain the work of global governors (Mende, 2023b) as well as actors producing public knowledge (Ringel, 2023). In addition, the contributions to this thematic issue underscore the interplay between publics and global politics, highlighting that they co-construct each other and the crucial role of politics in defining what is or should be public (Müller, 2023) or what should or should not happen in publics (Schlag, 2023).

Furthermore, the contributions shed light on how different dynamics in global politics affect the evolution of publics and their relation to global politics. They show that the dynamics do not give rise to one global public but rather sustain a plurality of publics. Media systems remain fragmented, pushing governance institutions to rely on other strategies to foster public spheres and legitimise themselves (Bajenova, 2023). Social media has enabled diverse actors to interact with international organisations (Aue & Börgel, 2023), and the latter to interact more directly with their constituencies (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2023). But social media publics are nonetheless only one part of the public spheres that observe, debate, and contest global governance. Publics continue to coalesce around claims and activities relating to the governance of specific issues (Liebetrau & Monsees, 2023; Vinken, 2023) or—as in the case of religious publics—around specific world views (McLarren, 2023). In order to diffuse public pressures, states continue to fragment public debates (Müller, 2023). Last but not least, public spheres are both sites of deliberation and struggle and, as such, involve the formation of counterpublics that challenge the discourses in established publics (Herborth, 2023). A plurality of publics is thus likely to remain, but the dynamics, nonetheless, make these publics more and more integral parts of global politics.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Subaltern Counterpublics in Global Politics

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Abstract
Publics have traditionally been conceived as sites of social integration. While discord, controversy, and contestation may be acknowledged, theorising publics and especially public spheres are characteristically geared toward the production of consensus and/or the conditions of the possibility of unified decision-making. On this view, publics beyond the nation-state are reduced to conceptual extensions of the nation-state—The move to a higher level of aggregation, imagined as global or international, seems to make no conceptual difference. Against this, I propose to conceptualize publics as sites of the constitution of social struggles. To this end, I introduce Nancy Fraser's concept of "subaltern counterpublics," previously applied exclusively to national contexts, to the study of global politics. With a view to future empirical application, I discuss three promising sites for the further study of subaltern counterpublics in global politics: colonial public spheres, transnational social activism, and the circulation of extreme right-wing conspiracy tropes. Taken together, I conclude, these three sites of inquiry provide an important corrective to a statist concept of the public in which the place, purpose, and direction of publics are always already taken for granted.

Keywords
counterpublics; global governance; global publics; legitimacy; political authority; public sphere

1. Introduction

Publics have traditionally been conceived as sites of social integration. While discord, controversy, and contestation may be acknowledged, theorising publics and especially public spheres is characteristically geared toward the production of consensus and/or the conditions of the possibility of unified decision-making (Castells, 2008). On this view, publics beyond the nation-state are reduced to conceptual extensions of the nation-state—The move to a higher level of aggregation, imagined as global or international, seems to make no conceptual difference. Against this, I propose to conceptualise publics as sites of the constitution of social struggles. Doing so, I contend, enables both an understanding of politics that avoids the narrow prescriptions of a pre-stabilised concept of political order (thus tying publics conceptually to the nation-state) and a reconceptualisation of social struggles and social forces which does not presuppose a fixed arrangement of actors, structures, and processes among which then only limited confrontation on ready-made stages can be imagined. With Dewey (1927/2004), I suggest that publics can be understood in terms of the performative constitution of politics by means of reflexive self-intervention. Beyond Dewey and building on Fraser's (1990) concept of subaltern counterpublics, I suggest that the struggle over the terms of such performative constitution prefigures what is possible in terms of discord, controversy, and contestation. Going beyond Fraser, who develops and applies the idea of subaltern counterpublics with reference to a "Westphalian frame" of nationally and territorially bounded communities (see the self-critical discussion in Fraser, 2007, pp. 12–13), I introduce the concept of subaltern counterpublics into the study of global politics.

The argument proceeds in three steps. In a first step, I demonstrate how the concept of the public is used,

predominantly in the literature on global governance, to restore and reproduce a vision of order characteristic of the modern nation-state. In this view, politicisation, questions of legitimacy, and public contestation figure as a corrective to emerging forms of political authority beyond the nation-state. Mobilising questions of legitimacy and public contestation as a corrective afterthought, however, reduces publicness to an optional (if desirable) feature of political authority. In a second step, I provide an alternative view which considers publics as constitutive of political authority in the first place. Analytics of subaltern counterpublics, I suggest, allows us to think of publics in more explicitly political terms, in particular with a view to the vertical distribution of positions of power. In a third step, I discuss three promising sites for the further study of subaltern counterpublics in global politics: colonial public spheres, transnational social activism, and the circulation of extreme right-wing conspiracy tropes. Taken together, I conclude, these three sites of inquiry provide an important corrective to a statist concept of the public in which the place, purpose, and direction of publics are always already taken for granted.

2. Global Governance and the Restorative View of the Public

In this section, I discuss the classical, statist conception of the public to which the idea of subaltern counterpublics seeks to provide an alternative. In a critical discussion of the literature on global governance, I demonstrate that many of the attempts to make use of the concept of the public for the study of global politics simply extrapolate this statist conception onto the global scale in an effort to restore a vision of political order characteristic of an idealised account of the modern nation-state (for an example of a non-statist use of the global governance literature, see Mende, 2023). This, I suggest, is a problematic move because it presupposes that non-public forms of political authority have emerged at a global scale thus foregoing the potential of the concept of the public to critically interrogate the very constitution of political authority. On this restored statist view, the concept of the public can then only be mobilised in order to address problems of legitimacy—or rather the lack thereof—in what is already constituted as a global context of political authority. Bringing in the publics to the rescue after the fact, however, tends to problematically downplay their power dimension.

In order to understand the statist concept of the public it is important to remember that, while often universal in aspiration, it emerges at a particular time and in a particular place. It is a European concept articulated in response to the emerging differentiation between state and society and in relation to a new type of autonomy claim which pits free citizens against what is now framed as the old aristocratic order. Hence the subtitle of Habermas' (1962/1990) *Structural Transformation of the*

Public Sphere announces "an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society" (cf. Fraser, 1990, p. 58). From this vantage point, it may seem plausible to think of *the* public in the singular and in relation to a pre-existing type of political authority; and as the language of the public is mobilised against an old order with the promise of conferring legitimacy upon a new one its normative grammar becomes inherently *progressive*. This particular constellation leaves us with a concept of the public that is firmly settled in terms of place, purpose, and direction.

While such an account is historically contested for its neglect of simultaneous patterns of exclusion in terms of gender, class, and race (Black Public Sphere Collective, 1995; Eley, 1991; Landes, 1988; Ryan, 1990), it remains at the centre of the self-description of the modern nation-state. Peters (2007) demonstrates in a careful reconstruction of the broader semantic field of the public that variations on the theme of publicness—including the public sphere, public opinion, and different possible antonyms such as privacy and secrecy—are:

> Core concepts which are embedded in conceptions of social and political order. These are in part theoretically systematized, in part articulated implicitly in constitutional documents, laws and court rulings, and influential political statements. (Peters, 2007, p. 55, translation by the author)

While the ensuing variety of interpretations by a variety of social actors makes for a "dynamic semantic field," Peters (2007, p. 55; see also Herborth & Kessler, 2010; Liebetrau & Monsees, 2023; Strydom, 1999) highlights that all of these are informed by general conceptual structures which "have emerged since the 18th century in the political culture of Western societies and in essence have remained stable until today."

The concept of the public is thus marked by a dual constellation: A particular historical context of origin contrasts with a long and powerful legacy of stabilisation and routinisation in which the former is easily forgotten. Consider the following definition of the public sphere, taken from Fraser's (1990, p. 57) discussion of Habermas:

> The idea of the "public sphere"…designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of the discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory.

From this vantage point, presupposing a theatre within which public political action can take place, it is not surprising to see any consideration of global publics—or publics beyond the nation-state—is confronted with prima facie scepticism. Absent the communicative infrastructure and the lived experience of critical engagement enabled by a combination of mass media, linguistic transparency, and narrative constructions of shared fate, attempts to simply transpose the concept of the public beyond its particular European (and bourgeois) context of origin would seem highly questionable (see the critical discussion in Zürn, 2021). This constellation leads to an unfortunate theoretical impasse where publics can only be conceived in binary terms—as either present or absent. However, as the introduction to this thematic issue aptly demonstrates, the binary presence/absence works effectively as a conceptual blinder; it obfuscates a wider and diverse array of manifestations and dynamics of global publics and their political effects (Mende & Müller, 2023).

The literature on global governance stands in an ambivalent relation to this observation. Against the conceptual (and at times political) conservatism of the defenders of the nation-state as the static container of all things politically well-ordered, the global governance literature has pointed to a variety of forms of global publicness (Best & Gheciu, 2014a). At the core of the argument stands a reading of global governance as an emerging political system (e.g., Zürn, 2018). The existence of an emerging polity then figures as the functional equivalent of the territorial state in classical conceptions of the publics sphere (Zürn, 2021, p. 161). Absent a "normatively sophisticated" public to mediate conflict and contestation, however, global governance faces a legitimation crisis. Zürn's (2021) argument is both an empirical-sociological and a normative-political one. Sociologically, he observes the absence of a global public that could effectively mediate "between world society and the authoritative instances of global governance." Normatively, he underlines that a global political system calls for a "normatively sophisticated" public capable of such mediation. And combining sociological and normative perspectives he insists that the emergence of such a public is, in principle, a counterfactual possibility the actualisation of which is hindered not by a nationally minded citizenry but rather by the "specific institutional structure of the global political system" (Zürn, 2021, p. 164). Driven by a concern with the de-democratising and legitimacy-crisis-inducing effects of global governance, Zürn (2021) thus explores the possibility of restoring at the global level a series of mechanisms for the control and contestation of political authority that are tried and tested in national contexts.

The underlying turn to "politicisation" in global governance research thus reacts powerfully to its initial depoliticising tendencies. Conceptually, however, questions of legitimacy and public contestation are introduced as an afterthought. First, there is a structure of

political authority beyond the nation-state. Then, we need to ask questions of legitimacy which are necessarily inflected through some form of publicness (e.g., public contestation, public justification). Zürn et al. (2012, p. 71) thus "define politicization of international institutions operationally as growing public awareness of international institutions and increased public mobilization of competing political preferences regarding institutions' policies or procedures," i.e., as a reaction to the emergence of new forms of political authority. Hence, they contend that the "politicization of international institutions is a consequence of their new authority. The more political authority international institutions exercise or are expected to exercise, the more they attract public attention and demands. In this way, they become publicly contested" (Zürn et al., 2012, p. 71). As politicisation and public contestation are introduced as being merely reactive to new forms of political authority they cannot be thought of as constitutive elements bringing about political authority in the first place.

What is more, the attempt to conceptually restore the congruence of a politicised public with the scope of administrative decision-making forces us to think of publics in the singular, i.e., to reproduce the characteristic constellation of the modern nation-state at the international and global level. The transposition of singular publics from the national to the global level, however, runs into a conceptual problem. As Eriksen and Sending (2013) have argued, the concept of the public becomes politically meaningful in domestic settings mainly through its distinction from the private. While the private represents the particular, the public represents the universal (at least in the form of a claim to universality). At the international level, however, states represent the particular interests of their domestic constituencies. Designating the state as belonging by default to the public rests on the presumption that moving from the domestic to an international or global setting makes no conceptual difference. This creates a problem for a restorative view of the global publics. For, if the argument by Eriksen and Sending holds, mechanisms of holding political authority accountable which are tried and tested at the nation-state level cannot simply be scaled up precisely because the scaling up involves a shift in political semantics rather than empirical aggregation. Moving beyond the binary of (desirable) presence and (undesirable) absence, this invites consideration of how global publics are qualitatively different. In doing so, Eriksen and Sending point to the paradoxical effects of performing publicness beyond the state:

> Because of the lack of a global public actor and the exclusive and particularistic character of the global public sphere, existing forms of global governance may in fact contribute to making institutions *less public*, even if the policies and justifications of these institutions' practices may be based on moral values about autonomy and freedom as in the case of human

rights. Therefore, paradoxically, the emergence of a global public sphere, which would appear to improve the possibility of global accountability may have the opposite effect….It serves to legitimize particularistic policies and practices by presenting them as universal. (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, pp. 232–233)

In a similar vein, Bartelson (2006) has discussed the concept of global civil society as travelling uneasily from the domestic to the global level. While Eriksen and Sending make a systematic argument about the qualitative difference between publics in domestic and international settings, Bartelson makes a historical argument about the function of civil society as a category of legitimation. Hence, he notes that:

Despite the otherwise sharp discontinuities between the domestic and global forms of civil society, the basic function of the concept of civil society has remained largely the same across those contexts. It has been and still is a matter of defining the scope of the governable by distinguishing it from governmental authority proper, as well as from the uncivil outside beyond its limits. (Bartelson, 2006, p. 390)

In other words, what is being constituted through the normative grammar of accountability, control, and contestation is not a counterpoint to a pre-existing site of political authority but rather the possibility of political authority itself. This is not to say that the normative language of accountability and control must inevitably work as a legitimatory fig leave. It is to say, however, that without consideration of how the normative grammar of the public is imbricated in the production of the sites of authority to which it counterposes itself, we limit our understanding of the political effects of global publics.

To Keating (2009, p. 310), this is precisely the category mistake of posing normative questions of legitimacy and public contestation as an afterthought, something that could potentially be added on after the fact that new forms of political authority have emerged:

The governance debate…raises normative questions rather quickly (partly by exposing implicit normative assumptions that were not questioned in the world of government bounded by the nation-state) but, treating the concept as a neutral or positivist one, its advocates lack the concepts and vocabulary to address them. The suggestion that the next stage is to complete the concept by expanding it and then endowing it with a theory of legitimacy involves an inversion of theory (coining a concept and then trying to define it afterwards); normativity is something that is inherent in the design of concepts, not added on as afterthought.

I have argued in this section that, somewhat paradoxically, common uses of the public in the literature on global governance remain tied so closely to the conceptual presuppositions of the modern nation-state that the *global* in global publics makes no difference. It thus commits methodological nationalism not in the simple sense of privileging the nation-state as a site of empirical attention but in a more subtle, conceptual sense (e.g., Chernilo, 2011). Methodological nationalism is not a problem of an allegedly obsolete level of empirical aggregation. It is a problem of political semantics. This is to say, that methodological nationalism is not so much a question of where we look for political order, it is a question of how we look for it—And doing so in a way that remains faithful to the political vocabulary of the modern state imposes serious limitations on the possibility of "looking beyond."

The next section will thus introduce an alternative conceptualisation of global publics which reads publics less in terms of normative integration (ideal typically embodied by the nation-state, to be restored in global governance) but rather as sites of the production of social struggle and as such constitutive of political authority in the first place.

3. Global Publics and Their Politics: From Normative Integration to Subaltern Counterpublics

The very idea of normative integration presupposes a space that is to be integrated. That space must be always already there. It can be located in the past, not necessarily a historical past but an idealised notion of enlightened ambition that we may still aspire to. It may also be relegated into the future in such a manner that normative integration is the task of a public-to-come. On this view, publics exist notoriously in the modalities of "no longer" or "not yet." Hence, we can either discuss their eclipse and decline (e.g., Habermas, 1962/1990), or we can pose the question of publics in global politics as one of "return" (e.g., Best & Gheciu, 2014b). In any of these scenarios, however, we will be inclined to view the public in the singular and that singular vision of the public will be modelled on what I have discussed above as a statist conception. In this section, I discuss two powerful resources to challenge this statist conception. From Dewey (1927/2004) I take the idea that publics are constitutive of rather than reactive to political authority (see also the discussion of Arendt in Forough, 2015, Chapter 6.2). From Fraser (1990) I take the idea that the complexity of social struggles can be grasped more effectively if we consider publics in the plural and as expressions of social struggles rather than in the singular and as expressions of normative integration. At the same time, Dewey lacks explicit analytics of power, and Fraser remains thoroughly statist in her theorisation of subaltern counterpublics.

Dewey's (1927/2004) *The Public and Its Problems* can be read as a direct critique of attempts to singularise publics with reference to either an idealised past or a utopian future. Rather than stipulating a particular

macro-historical trajectory of decay or future emergence, Dewey outlines a performative view of political community formation that remains sensitive to historical reconfiguration. Dewey suggests conceiving the public (and the state) as a continuous experimental practice. He presents this as an explicit critique of literature that seeks causal origins in terms of individual motivations (Dewey, 1927/2004, p. 36; see also Abraham & Abramson, 2017; Cochran, 2002a, 2002b). Dewey (1927/2004, p. 12) thus proposes to replace the quest for causal origins with a focus on practical consequences.

> We take then our point of departure from the objective fact that human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others.

To the extent that such consequences remain confined to those immediately involved, they can be dealt with in private, i.e., among the participants of a particular situation. However, to the extent that others are affected, dealing with consequences becomes a problem of the public, and the public, in turn, constitutes itself precisely by addressing these problems. Hence, the "quality presented is not authorship but authority, the authority of recognized consequences to control the behaviour which generates and averts extensive and enduring results of weal and woe" (Dewey, 1927/2004, p. 19). Importantly, the pragmatist focus on practical consequences must not be misunderstood as a mere affirmation of a given status quo. From a pragmatist point of view, the success of any particular transaction hinges not on its conformity with externally given expectations but simply on what follows successively (!) after the fact. What is "objective" in Dewey's account is thus the mere fact that some kind of consequence can be observed. He starts, in a nutshell, from the social-theoretical premise that one thing we can assert about the formation of modern and complex societies is that they bring about things we may not have wanted and may not have seen coming. It is in confronting these problems that the public, and thus political authority, constitutes itself. It follows from this focus on the self-constitution of publics that the "recognition" of particular consequences—as well as the neglect of others—remains subject to the subsequent process of communication. All we can say about the public act of self-intervention is that based on the recognition of particular, possibly unintended, and unanticipated consequences of action, those who are affected constitute themselves as a public which manifests itself in the institutionalisation of contextually specific forms of addressing these problems. The specific kind of public that we refer to as the state:

> Is the organization of the public effected through officials for the protection of the interests shared by its members. But what the public may be, what the officials are, how adequately they perform their function, are things we have to go to history to discover….And since conditions of action and of inquiry and knowledge are always changing, the experiment must always be retried; the state must always be rediscovered. (Dewey, 1927/2004, pp. 33–34)

Dewey thus understands public spheres in terms of their performative constitution, as an ongoing, experimental, and open-ended process of self-intervention, self-regulation, and self-transformation (see also Honneth, 1999; Schmalz-Bruns, 1995). Despite its success in displacing an "absolutistic logic" which treats the state as unproblematically given, Dewey's reformulation reacts specifically to the rise of technocratic and "expertocratic" forms of domination epitomised in Walter Lippmann's dismissal of the public sphere (see the discussion of its impact on international relations in Holsti, 1992). In doing so, Dewey builds on a characteristic premise of left-Hegelian thought, namely that disagreement, with oneself and others, is constitutive of rather than antithetical to political order (see Fetscher, 1997). Dewey thus emphasises that the public does not stand outside of relations of political authority as an afterthought or as a corrective. It stands, rather, at the centre of the production of political authority itself. The terms in which this is done—and the inclusions and exclusions implicit in setting those terms—are open to political struggle and contestation. The public as such, therefore, has no normative quality outside of the political struggles by which it is produced.

However, Dewey, too, conceives publics in the singular. His concern is with *the public* and its *problems*, i.e., the confrontation of a single public with multiple problems. With Dewey, we can therefore adopt the performative view of the publics as constitutive of rather than reactive to political authority. For the purpose of thinking publics globally, however, we must go beyond Dewey and think publics in the plural. It is precisely in this context that Fraser's (1990) critical interrogation of the import of the idea of the public for a "critique of actually existing democracy" has not lost its bite. It provides an outline for a more historical and a more sociological understanding of publics which can help us to better understand how publics within and beyond the nation-state are imbricated in structures of power and domination, and it is this particular quality which makes Fraser's earlier discussion of subaltern counterpublics, even more so than her later work on transnationalising the public sphere (Fraser, 2007), relevant to our discussion of publics in global politics.

Specifically, Fraser introduces the idea of "subaltern counterpublics" in an effort to foreground the critical element of political struggle, an element she argues is overlooked in conventional "bourgeois" notions of the publics sphere. Taking for granted bourgeois society as an arena within which public spheres may emerge, Fraser

contends, comes with a series of problematic assumptions which figure as the tacit social theory underwriting conventional theories of the public sphere. First, she contends that thinking of the public as a singular sphere within a bourgeois society transforming itself into a nation-state invites us to "bracket status differentials and to deliberate 'as if' [interlocutors] were social equals" (Fraser, 1990, p. 62). On this view, "societal equality is not a necessary condition for political democracy" (Fraser, 1990, p. 62). Fraser thus highlights the socio-economic conditions of the possibility of political participation and public deliberation. It follows that there can be no political theory of possible inclusion without a social theory of practical exclusion. In other words, normative claims cannot be abstracted from their socio-political context.

Second, Fraser (1990, p. 62) challenges "the assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics." Here, Fraser introduces the idea of *subaltern counterpublics*. The idea of counterpublics allows us to think of multiple publics standing in opposition to one another. The idea of the subaltern, taken from Gramsci's analysis of the subaltern classes and later at the centre of postcolonial theory (Shilliam, 2015; Spivak, 1988), crucially adds an analytics of social exclusion which highlights both vertical and horizontal forms of exercising power. The subaltern is both vertically "below" and horizontally outside the centre as the "other" thus doubly excluded from the centre of political power. Fraser's (1990) key example of a subaltern counterpublic is the women's movement in the US which succeeded in carving out a political space separate from the official public sphere in order to be able to express and articulate concerns otherwise rendered notoriously invisible. Fraser allows for the possibility of subaltern counterpublics feeding such concerns (e.g., the language of sexual harassment) into the official public sphere and thereby contributing to its transformation. Subaltern counterpublics may however also engage in a strategy of delinking in order to create political space for the articulation of experiences otherwise excluded. Even in this case, though, they are not entirely decoupled from the official public sphere; they are not filter bubbles or echo chambers but rather "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67).

Third, Fraser (1990, p. 62) challenges the "assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of 'private interests' and 'private issues' is always undesirable." Fraser thus takes issue with the liberal separation of spheres which are presupposed as fixed and unproblematic. As Abrahamsen and Williams (2014) note, however, the distinction between the public and the private, constitutive of standard views of international politics much like the distinction between the domestic and the international itself, has increasingly been problematised. Rather than presupposing a fixed separation of separate spheres, subaltern counterpublics can thus observe and challenge the performative effects of drawing categorical distinctions such as the one between public and private.

Lastly, Fraser (1990, p. 63) questions whether "a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state." Instead, the idea of subaltern counterpublics invites us to think of civil society, with Gramsci, as a site of the formation of social struggles which are constitutive of social relations of hegemony. Going beyond Gramsci, Fraser introduces the distinction between *strong publics* which can produce decisions (e.g., parliament) and *weak publics* which cannot. Whether or not subaltern counterpublics affect social transformation at the level of strong publics must remain open; it is a political question. If they do, however, they act not merely as a corrective to political authority, they partake in reconstituting it.

In developing the idea of subaltern counterpublics, Fraser combines insights from social and political theory to counter what McNay (2014) would later aptly criticise as "socially weightless" accounts of critique. Fraser situates conventional concepts of the public in a series of problematic social-theoretical assumptions and sketches possible alternatives. For the purpose of this article, this allows us to trace a history of contestation, inclusion/exclusion along each of these problematic assumptions in a way that remains sensitive to the "remarkable irony" that "a discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction" (Fraser, 1990, p. 60). Subaltern counterpublics thus do more than act as a placeholder for opposition and dissent. They insert a sharp element of power analysis into Dewey's vision of the performative constitution of political authority; they allow us to trace the inclusions and exclusions (of subjects, voices, perspectives, possibilities) co-performed in the performative self-constitution of publics, global and otherwise (see also Schlag, 2023).

At the same time, Fraser's discussion of subaltern counterpublics remains firmly statist. As she would later concede, her "critique presupposed the national-territorial understanding of publicity. Far from challenging the Westphalian frame, it aimed to enhance the legitimacy of public opinion within it" (Fraser, 2007, p. 13). Perhaps more fundamentally, Alexander (2006) has argued that Fraser's account of subaltern counterpublics pits them too schematically against a homogenised centre of a hegemonic public sphere thus viewed effectively as:

A kind of empty arena, as a fenced-off space that has the capacity to pacify and contain social conflicts

whose goals and ambitions remain fundamentally orthogonal to one another and to the culture and institutions of the wider social world. (Alexander, 2006, p. 277; for an instructive discussion of the Deweyan tendencies of Alexander's later work see Emirbayer & Noble, 2013)

However, applications of Alexander's own sophisticated effort to bridge the artificial divide between the normative and sociological concepts of the public retain a statist focus as well as they focus on civil spheres within countries rather than giving independent weight to an international, transnational, or global perspective (Alexander et al., 2019; Alexander & Tognato, 2018). Similarly, detailed applications of the concept of counterpublics tend to focus on one specific locale rather than exploring the global multiplicity of publics and counterpublics (e.g., Reinisch & Kane, 2023). Suspending with the premise of a homogenised centre, however, is precisely the challenge of translating the concept of subaltern counterpublics onto the stage of global politics.

4. Subaltern Counterpublics in Global Politics

How, then, can the concept of subaltern counterpublic contribute to our understanding of publics in global politics? It follows from the above that it is decidedly not conducive to producing a single, unified narrative shedding light on a singular and coherent pattern. Subaltern counterpublics are political. They break through the established order of things, and they do so in ways that exhibit irreducible moments of agency, contingency, and unpredictability. In doing so, however, they effectively disrupt the teleological idea of a singular public as a site of normative integration. In what follows, I will therefore highlight—in a necessarily brief fashion—three avenues for the further exploration of subaltern counterpublics in global politics. These are sites of conceptual engagement as much as they are sites of potential empirical application. For the purpose of the present article, they serve as vignettes of what specifically the concept of subaltern counterpublics can contribute to the study of publics in global politics.

4.1. Colonial Publics: How Subaltern Counterpublics Enable a Shift of Focus

If read (with Habermas, 1962/1990) as a category of bourgeois society, the public sphere is rooted firmly in a particular time and place. It is a modern idea, and it is a European idea. Analytics of subaltern counterpublics, while sensitive to the situatedness of publics, allows for a critical decentring of our understanding of publics in global politics. It suspends with the premise, shared by both the statist and the restorative view, that place and space can unproblematically be taken for granted—metaphorically speaking, that the theatre within which public contestation may ensue is always already there.

Indeed, in a discussion of recent historiography on colonial publics, Warner (2002) suggests that his own discussion of *Publics and Counterpublics* was crucially motivated by a critical engagement with Eurocentric conceptions of the public sphere. Conceptually, Warner suggests, the very idea of counterpublics serves to decentre our vision of order and political authority. It is precisely through this move that the binary focus on the presence/absence of the publics in global politics can be overcome in favour of questions such as: "How do these spaces form? What are the rhetorics and cultural forms that we have to have on hand in order to speak of a public or multiple publics or counterpublics?" (James et al., 2020, p. 243). Recent historical research zooming in on colonial publics provides a case in point as it suspends taken-for-granted notions of how publics are socio-culturally and politically embedded in real-existing (Western) democracies (Hunter & James, 2020). As Shilliam (2015, p. 7) has recently pointed out, even critical work on the history of colonialism may reproduce the "fatal impact thesis," the idea that the encounter between the West and the rest was one of such insurmountable asymmetry that non-Western agency becomes virtually unfathomable. Against this, the study of colonial publics, e.g., through the independent rise and circulation of print media (see Hunter & James, 2020) can serve as a reminder of the potential of subaltern counterpublics to both conceptually and empirically shift our focus away from the paradigmatic case of the Western, European, bourgeois public sphere (see also Getachew, 2019; Herborth & Nitzschner, 2021). Rather than dismissing the concept of the public altogether as inextricably expressive of a colonial matrix of power.

4.2. Transnational Social Activism: How Subaltern Counterpublics Constitute a Fundamentally Different Type of Political Engagement

A burgeoning literature on transnational advocacy networks has inquired into the causal efficacy of transnational protest (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). It thus typically focuses on the question of whether, how, and to what extent transnational social activism can achieve particular goals or change the terms of political engagement. Approaching it through the notion of subaltern counterpublics allows us instead to focus on how (transnational) activism engages in a type of politics geared towards the articulation of fundamental dissent with rather than the progressive transformation of a particular political order which can serve to correct the top-down view characteristic of governance perspectives with a bottom-up perspective building on insights from social movement studies (Della Porta, 2022; see also the discussion of the World Social Forum in Forough, 2015, pp. 244–251; Herborth, 2007). As Sassen (2011, p. 574) notes: "Powerlessness is not simply an absolute condition that can be flattened into the absence

of power. Under certain conditions, powerlessness can become complex…it contains the possibility of making the political, or making the civic, or making history." Movements such as Occupy or Fridays for Future thus engage in the forward-looking imagination of radically different politics. Such transformative ambition contrasts sharply with mass-mediatised narratives enframing protest movements established and routinised forms of political conduct. The politics of transformative types of transnational activism, however, is to disrupt those. As Weber (2013, p. 126) notes:

> Counter-public formations thus emerge, as it were, "aside" from the officialized codes of political communication in the public sphere, and develop a register of social and political experience which expresses "what is going on" differently to the established modes of self-observation ritualized in the "official" public sphere….Rather than seeking to expand the public sphere, they are seeking to change it, its justificatory discursive means, and its constitutive dogmas through a persistent demand for a perspective shift. The *dramatis personae* of this would say things like: "The world you are describing is not the world we are living in; the account you give of the problem is skewed, distorted and engenders solutions we do not recognize.''

The politics of subaltern counterpublics is therefore not reducible to acts of opposition within a given context of political authority. On the contrary, subaltern counterpublics challenge extant modes of authorisation and seek to radically transform them; they struggle to performatively constitute a different political space rather than voicing opposition to particular policies within existing ones.

4.3. Right-Wing Conspiracy Tropes: How the Notion of Subaltern Counterpublics Remains Radically Open

Much of the outline of the idea of subaltern counterpublics as discussed above is directed against a grand liberal narrative of naturally progressive inclusion. Still, the language of subaltern counterpublics—counterpower against hegemony—almost implicitly comes with a normative presupposition. Resistance against hegemony, at least its very possibility, is a good thing. It thus may serve as a reminder of the non-linearity of political struggle that extreme right-wing conspiracy tropes have been circulating in remarkably effective ways, and they do exhibit key characteristics of counterpublics, such as the explicit confrontation with and opposition to an alleged centre of power and authority (Drolet & Williams, 2022; Kaiser & Rauchfleisch, 2019; Steffek, 2015). What stands out here, in particular, is the reverse intersectionality trope apparent in a variety of extreme right-wing shooter manifestoes (e.g., Utøya, Christchurch, Halle; see Millar & Costa Lopez, 2021). The reverse intersectionality trope

makes for a folk social theory to support the conspiracy narrative of a "great replacement" of a white majority by predominantly Muslim immigrants. Curiously, it connects various markers of social exclusion and dispossession and reverts them into a conspiracy narrative. At the centre of this narrative stands the crude antisemitic cliché of a Jewish ruling class (Subotic, 2022). In an effort to undermine white supremacy, the Jewish ruling class allegedly "invented" feminism in order to lower birth rates and make space for large-scale Muslim immigration aka the "great replacement." What follows from this for the notion of subaltern counterpublics? I have argued above that subaltern counterpublics are inherently political, i.e., radically open-ended. The possibility of co-optation of the critical language of subaltern counterpublics by the extreme right then serves to underscore that subaltern counterpublics cannot be readily inscribed into a Manichaean scheme where subaltern counterpublics are by default morally valorised on account of their opposition to a hegemonic centre. In terms of future research avenues, it allows for the reconstruction of the ways in which counter-discourses to liberal democracy emerge within liberal-democratic contexts and by liberal-democratic means.

5. Conclusion

Taking the concept of subaltern counterpublics out of its statist context and considering its implications for the study of publics in global politics I have not only sought to challenge statist and restorative views but also to demonstrate how the global and the international make a difference in our understanding of the public itself (see also Herborth, 2022). Colonial publics, counter-politics in transnational social activism, and the circulation of extreme right-wing conspiracy tropes have served as examples showcasing the conceptual and empirical potential of thinking publics in global politics in a way that foregrounds their multiplicity, their constitution through conflict and social struggle, and their open-endedness.

Taken together these three vignettes demonstrate how the notion of subaltern counterpublics can be made productive for the study of global politics: by shifting the focus away from binaries such as the presence/absence of a global public or unity/fragmentation and toward the situated production of global public space; by highlighting a different mode of politics engaged in the struggle for the creation of new and different kinds of political space; by confronting the difficulties of treating the politics of subaltern counterpublics as radically open and contingent, as opposed to embedded in the narrative of progress always already settled a priori. As such, they unsettle three constitutive fixities in the statist and restorative view. They do so by unpacking the where, the how, and the whereto of the publics in global politics. On the statist and restorative view, the publics matter only within pre-constituted arenas, they matter only with a view to influencing policy, and their influence

is primarily directed towards a pre-conceived notion of progress. The concept of subaltern counterpublics, on the contrary, allows us to problematise place and space (see also Forough, 2015, Chapters 1.6, 7) by zooming in on both the globally unequal distribution of voice and opportunity and the entangled histories of their production (e.g., Jahn, 2000). It allows us to move beyond a narrow focus on influencing policy by foregrounding the possibility of a different mode of politics where alternative political vocabularies can be developed in order to reconfigure the terrain of political possibility. Finally, it allows us to break with implicitly linear and teleological views of history where "more (counter)public" always signals normative progress by foregrounding the open-ended, indeterminate, and potentially "regressive" nature of the social and political struggle.

Subaltern counterpublics thus cut across the different manifestations of global publicness helpfully outlined in the introduction to this thematic issue (Mende & Müller, 2023). *Audiences* and *interests* are not simply there (or not); they are performatively constituted in and through social struggles. Giving voice to audiences and articulating interests may trigger processes of institutionalisation and the creation of a public sphere where more conventional forms of politicisation come into view. Whether or not this happens, and whether or not subaltern counterpublics seek to do so, however, remains a question of open-ended political struggle.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

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Article

Public Interests and the Legitimation of Global Governance Actors

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Abstract
Notions of public interests or common goods present a major reference point for the legitimation of global governance and global governors, yet they are rarely subject to closer analysis. After highlighting how a connection to public interests plays a shared pivotal role in legitimating public and private global governance actors alike, this article suggests an expanded understanding of public interests as consisting of a substantive element, an individual interest-based element, and a procedural element. This allows us to study how public interests are framed, affected, disputed, and shaped in global governance, and how global governors are (de)legitimized with certain notions of public interests. It sheds light on how individual interests form public interests (without reducing the former to the latter or vice versa), how apparently neutral, technocratic, or expert-driven ideas of public interests are a matter of (global) politics, and how all the elements of public interests are imbued with power inequalities. The expanded concept of public interests is based on an integration of the governance literature on input, throughput, and output legitimacy with moralist, empiricist, and procedural models from political philosophy. Ultimately, in explicating the often implicit yet formative notion of public interests in global governance, this article argues that the legitimation of global governors does not only depend on whether or not they cater to public interests. Rather, the question is how they frame and affect the substantive, individual interest-based, and procedural elements of public interests, thereby constructing publics in global politics.

Issue
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1. Introduction

Notions of public interests present a major reference point for the legitimation of global governance and global governance actors. After all, global governance—in spite of its different manifestations and approaches—is supposed to be "solving specific denationalized problems or providing transnational common goods" (Zürn, 2013, p. 408). Even if that purpose is not fulfilled, it is the justification for governance that transcends government by including a variety of actors, forms, and levels. In short, public interests legitimize global governance and act as a widely shared reference point for studies of global governors' normative and empirical legitimacy as performers of global politics.

Despite this prominence, the notion of public interests is rarely a matter of closer analysis in global gover-

nance studies. There are good reasons for this gap, some of which spring from the elusiveness of a concept whose "content is fluid" (Steffek, 2015, p. 274). However, this engenders a vague usage of the notion of public interests, making it either meaningless as an empty signifier or normatively predetermining its meanings. This, as Hurd (2019, p. 718) argues, prevents international relations scholars from questioning "the political content of legitimacy" and the substantive effects of global governance, as it suggests global governance is either apolitical or "inherently desirable" (Hurd, 2019, p. 727).

Against this background, this conceptual article focuses on notions of public interests as the pursuit of (supposedly) shared aims by a group of actors as one of the ways in which publics are constructed and contested in global politics (Mende & Müller, 2023), which is the focus of this thematic issue. The article proposes

an expanded concept of public interests consisting of three elements: substantive, individual interest-based, and procedural. This allows us to study how public interests (or synonyms) are framed, affected, disputed, and shaped in global governance, and how global governors are (de)legitimized with which notions of public interests. It sheds light on how individual interests form public interests (without reducing the former to the latter or vice versa), how apparently neutral, technocratic, or expert-driven ideas of public interests are a matter of (global) politics, and how all the elements of public interests are imbued with power inequalities. In sum, the article provides a better grasp of the notion of public interests without simply normatively prescribing one particular understanding. This does not preclude normative discussions but opens them up for reflection (cf. Mende, 2021). Neither does this article make any arguments regarding the success or failure of references to public interests. Instead, it proposes a conceptual frame that invites further empirical research and normative reflections on the meanings and functions of public interests for the construction and contestation of publics in global politics.

The article proceeds with a short overview of how public interests are defined in the literature (Section 2) and then highlights the role of public interests in the legitimation of global governors (Section 3). Next, it introduces the two strands of literature that form the foundation for the expanded concept of public interests: the triad of input, throughput, and output legitimacy from governance studies (Section 4); and moralist, empiricist, and procedural models of public interests from political philosophy (Section 5). Combining both strands, the article conceptualizes public interests as consisting of a substantive, an individual interest-based, and a procedural element, and discusses these with examples from the Covid-19 pandemic (Section 6). The concluding section outlines more general applications of the expanded notion of public interests for studying the legitimacy and the contestation of global governors.

2. The Notion of Public Interests

The notion of public interests appears in the form of different terms such as common interest, commonweal, the good of society, the greater good, common goods, or public goods. These terms sometimes overlap, sometimes indicate different nuances, or are used synonymously. Irrespective of what the concept is called, it engages scholars of international relations, law, economics (and other disciplines) alike. In economics, the term "common good" denotes goods that are non-rival in consumption and non-excludable. Understandings of global public goods or global commons are based on (while extending) that definition (Kaul, 2016). In other disciplines, the term is detached from its narrow economic definition. Classical legal scholars see law "as intrinsically reasoned and also purposive, ordered to

the common good of the whole polity and that of mankind" (Vermeule, 2022, p. 3). Jurists hope to "know the public interest 'when they see it'" but nevertheless "project their cultural roots, ideological convictions, and political circumstances into its meaning" (Bezemek & Dumbrovský, 2021, pp. 3, 11). International relations scholars describe public interests as pivotal for the legitimacy of government and governance. Sometimes it is connected to fundamental norms such as peace, freedom, and human rights, or sectors such as health and security; at other times, it is used as an undefined normative point of reference. Generally, the notion's "vagueness, combined with its extensive range, explains the concept's success just as it is responsible for its failings" (Bezemek & Dumbrovský, 2021, p. 3).

This article uses "public interests" as an umbrella term and in the plural to underline the heterogeneous nature of public interests and goods. Its main focus does not lie on a narrow notion of interests. Rather, it uses "interests" interchangeably with "goods" (in the non-economic sense) and thereby frees interests from their rationalist and pre-given usage, emphasizing their normative, dynamic, and contested meanings instead (cf. Kratochwil, 1982). Public interests present a pivotal point of reference used to (de)legitimize global governors. Accordingly, its definition and framing are highly contested. Contestations involve competing definitions of public interests which legitimize some things as being in the public interest and delegitimize others as purely in the individual interest. This article suggests acknowledging the relevance of both public and individual interests to gain an expanded understanding of public interests and adds a procedural element that interconnects the two.

3. Public Interests in Legitimizing Global Governance

In global governance, the notion of public interests has two functions. First, it lies at the very heart of defining global governance. Global governance is commonly understood as the regulation of a "public problem….A problem is public when the participating actors need to claim to act in the name of a collective interest or the common good" (Zürn et al., 2010, p. 2). The publicness of the problem to be regulated distinguishes global governance from the regulation of purely private matters. Not every regulation is, therefore, a part of global governance. Rather, we only speak of global governance when an element of publicness is involved. Given the pivotal role of non-state governance actors and private forms of governance, that element of publicness is not tied to the status of governance actors but rather to the goods or interests affected (Mende, 2022). However, what comes to be defined as public or private is dynamic, context-dependent, and a matter of political decisions and contestation.

A second and closely related point is that the reference to public interests is supposed to legitimize governance and governors beyond the democratic context

of states. In the latter, democratic mechanisms are supposed to ensure that states act in the interest of their constituency—that is, in the public interest. This is the very core of states' political authority as *public* actors. Private actors in global governance lack such mechanisms. For this reason, they rely on other forms of legitimation. The governance literature notes various sources of legitimation, including expertise, morals, accountability, efficiency, resources, or social behavior (Joachim, 2007; Keohane, 2006; Voss, 2013). This article argues that different governance actors, with their different sources of legitimation, share a common characteristic that makes them governance actors in the first place: a connection to public interests. This article defines "connection" both as a discursive reference to public interests for the purpose of legitimation and as the effects of an actor's behavior on public interests beyond mere discursive claims (cf. Mende, 2022).

Private businesses, for example, even if they do not claim to, perform public roles with far-reaching effects on public interests, such as providing public infrastructure or shaping norms and values (Hofferberth & Lambach, 2022). On the other hand, civil society actors are perceived as legitimate and indispensable global governors because they are supposed to "represent the 'public interest' or the 'common good' rather than private interests" (Risse, 2013, p. 434). In spite of the heterogeneous intentions of NGOs and their effects on public interests (Steffek & Hahn, 2010), they are seen as "private in form, public in purpose" (Reinalda, 2001). Similarly, public-private partnerships are defined by their pursuing "public policy objectives (as opposed to public bads or exclusively private goods)" (Pattberg et al., 2012, p. 3).

International organizations, too, are supposed "to fulfil tasks in the global public interest [which] can roughly be described as not in the private, personal, or profit interest" (Golia & Peters, 2022, p. 28). The United Nations was established to safeguard "the common interest" (UN Charter, 1945, Preamble). Non-majoritarian organs, technocrats, and experts are also perceived to serve the "public interests of a transnational community" (Steffek, 2021, p. 13). Remarkably, an orientation towards public interests also forms a defining criterion for international organizations that have been privatized (Golia & Peters, 2022, p. 28). Generally, the legitimacy of international institutions is commonly based on the assumption that they are acting "in the public interest" (Delbrück, 1997).

In sum, these different governance actors' power to regulate and perform governance functions is or strives to be legitimate via how they refer to or affect public interests. Similar to how the domestic political authority of states is tied to public interests, the private authority of non-state actors (Cutler et al., 1999) and the international political authority of international organizations (Hooghe et al., 2017) are connected to public interests. This distinguishes their governance authority to regulate issues referring to or affecting public interests from purely private forms of regulation, power, or force

(Mende, 2022). This does not mean, however, that they necessarily fulfill public interests. It also does not mean that no other interests are legitimately involved, "as governance means policy-making between actors representing different public and non-public interests" (Benz & Papadopoulos, 2006, p. 290). It does mean that the notion of public interests plays a pivotal role in defining and legitimating global governors.

4. Input, Output, and Throughput Legitimacy

This section elaborates on the first of the two strands that form the basis for the expanded concept of public interests, namely the triad of input, output, and throughput legitimacy (cf. Table 1). The governance literature broadly conceptualizes the legitimacy of global governors to regulate governance issues and solve problems with Scharpf's (2000) "almost canonical view" (Steffek, 2015, p. 266) of input and output legitimacy. This section expands this conceptualization with Schmidt's category of throughput legitimacy (Schmidt, 2020) and integrates Steffek's (2015) emphasis on the normative meaning of output legitimacy.

Scharpf's (2000, p. 103) starting point for the discussion of input and output legitimacy in the EU is the democratic legitimacy of governments to govern: their "governing authority." By now, the concepts of input, output, and throughput legitimacy have grown to refer to governance actors more generally, thereby mirroring, complementing, or substituting democratic mechanisms in global politics (Brühl & Rittberger, 2001). This is because the concept of a state's *governing authority* is translated to the *governance authority* of governors other than states.

Input legitimacy captures Abraham Lincoln's bon mot of "'government by the people' [which] implies that collectively binding decisions should originate from…the constituency in question" (Scharpf, 2000, p. 103). Input legitimacy thus ensures that constituencies (however indirectly or representatively) govern themselves. It provides the basis for a governance actor to assert authority over a constituency and to expect compliance based on some kind of consent by that constituency. Input legitimacy is derived from mechanisms that trace the will of constituencies. These are often connected to majoritarian institutions (Hix, 2008) or interest-group presentations (Kohler-Koch, 2010; Schmidt, 2013, p. 7). In global governance, input legitimacy usually denotes "participation and consent" (Brühl & Rittberger, 2001, p. 22). Discussing the problems of consensual and majority mechanisms, Scharpf (2000, p. 104) indicates the challenge of finding the will of constituencies that reconciles their "divergent preferences and interests."

Throughput legitimacy, as Schmidt (2013, p. 3) refers to Lincoln's notion, denotes government "*with* the people," focusing "on what goes on inside the 'black box' of…governance, in the space between the political input and the policy output….Throughput is process-oriented, and based on the interactions—

institutional and constructive—of all actors engaged in…governance." Thus, throughput legitimacy entails what others sometimes subsume under the input dimension but more clearly distinguishes procedures from the input by constituencies.

Notably, a predecessor of such a mid-notion already looms in Scharpf's discussion. When he is concerned that a simple majority-based input hurts the quality of the output (e.g., the protection of minorities), he asserts that the Habermasian "ideal of 'deliberative democracy' may also be understood as a concept that forms a *bridge between* input- and output-oriented legitimating arguments by insisting on specific input procedures that will favor qualitatively acceptable outputs" (Scharpf, 2000, p. 104, emphasis added). Against this background, throughput legitimacy is not only an empirical category capturing the procedures within a governance institution but also safeguards their normative quality, usually measured against deliberative values, including "accountability, transparency, inclusiveness and openness" (Schmidt, 2013, p. 6; Schmidt & Wood, 2019).

Output legitimacy denotes "'government for the people' [which] implies that collectively binding decisions should serve the common interest of the constituency" (Scharpf, 2000, p. 103). The emphasis on problem-solving capacities, Steffek (2015, p. 267) argues, has dominantly framed the output legitimacy of governance actors, thereby establishing an empirical rather than normative notion of output legitimacy. He argues in favor of re-integrating a normative public interest element in order to discuss the "quality of the output" (Steffek, 2015, p. 267). Hence, the question is not only whether problems are being solved efficiently and effectively. Rather, such assessments always entail a normative point of reference: concerning what or for whom which problems are solved efficiently.

This normative element of public interests is visible in studies of EU institutions (in which the concepts of input, output, and throughput legitimacy matured) that link EU output legitimacy to non-majoritarian institutions, which are supposed to guard the public interest (Majone, 1998), but also to some kind of common values (Schmidt, 2013, p. 6; Steffek, 2015, p. 271). What these approaches have in common is that they distinguish individual interests, even in their majority, from something else, something like a common or public interest, in order to safeguard a qualitative output.

To sum up, output legitimacy is supposed to cater to some kind of values or interests above the individual level, input legitimacy is concerned with the individuals who are supposed to be the subject of such public interests, and throughput legitimacy is concerned with how to translate that input into a certain output.

5. The Common Good Versus Individual Interests

The previous section illustrates that in input, output, and throughput legitimacy, notions of public interests play a prominent role but remain elusive. This section, therefore, introduces political and philosophical models of public interests. These provide the second strand that the expanded concept of public interests draws on (cf. Table 1).

The notion of public interests dates back thousands of years to Ancient Greek philosophy and has stayed alive in political philosophy ever since, touching as it does on a question that lies at the heart of politics: How can a political order (or an actor upholding such an order) be legitimized vis-à-vis its constituencies, even though—and because—it may also restrict its constituencies? In other words, how can individual and public interests be reconciled? This section introduces these debates in the form of three ideal-typical models. For moralistic models, individual interests only play a subordinate role, if any. On the opposite side are empiricist models that deny the existence of any greater good beyond individual interests. In between moralistic and empiricist models, a plurality of models interconnects normative (common) and empirical (individual) elements in differing constellations (cf. Bitonti, 2019; Held, 1970; Mansbridge, 2013). Most prominent among them are deliberative models focused on procedures (cf. Mattli & Woods, 2009, pp. 13–14).

Moralistic models pursue a strong and normatively laden idea of public interests, claiming to represent a common good that is supposed to be right and good for all. This article, therefore, reserves the term common good for moralistic models (while "public interests" serves as an umbrella term for all the different notions). Notions of a common good are prominent in the early writings of political philosophy, most notably in Aristotle and Plato, but they also recur in more recent approaches. Despite their differences, they share the assumption that something that is good for everyone can be identified and justified. While moralistic models do not necessarily or intentionally disregard individual interests, they presume that, as the common good is supposed to be good for all, it cannot conflict with true individual interests. Therefore, individual interests conflicting with or deviating from the common good are either rejected as wrong or disregarded. This is justified in two closely related ways. First, moralistic models suggest that a certain actor (e.g., a government, a class of philosophers, the Crown, or the church) has the authority "to define the particular content of that good and also to educate the citizenry as to its meaning" (Douglass, 1980, p. 105). This is based on the assumption that said actor knows better what is in the common interest, i.e., what is good for all. Second, that actor knows what is good for all not because of its own arbitrary and individual interests but based on a "greater wisdom" (Douglass, 1980, p. 106), which is validated by a universal moral system (Held, 1970, p. 45). The idea(l) is that this moral system prevents misuse and despotism. Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle base their approaches on the assumption that all humans seek good. Accordingly, even the rulers have to abstain from their own individual interests. This, however, actually

contributes to their true individual interests because, as Held (1970, pp. 140–141) analyses, Plato holds that "men do seek the good, and...it is in their true interests to do so," just as Aristotle (in a more open version) assumes that "all men do all their acts with a view to achieving something which is, in their view, a good."

Empiricist models take issue with the strong normative assumptions of moralistic models. In response, they over-emphasize the empirical counterpart formed by individual interests. In order to identify individual interests in a broader context, empiricist approaches—in their different versions—suggest aggregating individual interests, counting them and composing majorities, following the most powerful voices, or applying some form of calculation. Some of these approaches deny any possibility of a greater good or a superior public interest (cf. Bitonti, 2019, p. 4). Bentham's utilitarianism is representative of empiricist models (Mansbridge, 2013, p. 7): "The interest of the community then is, what?—The sum of the interests of the several members who compose it" (Bentham, 1780/2009, p. 3), or at least of its majority. So is Hobbes' dictum that a government should solely serve individual interests and private property (Douglass, 1980, p. 107), and his assumption that these align with the interest of a public order which guarantees the preservation of individual interests and private property. Empiricist models reappear, e.g., in accounts of democratic pluralism (Stout, 1943) or in the focus on consumers rather than citizens and the assumption "that the accumulation of the narrowly defined self-interest of many individuals can adequately approximate the public interest" (DeLeon & Denhardt, 2000, p. 89).

Deliberative models focus on the processes and procedures via which a public interest comes to be defined. They pay different attention to normative notions or individual interests, respectively. Those emphasizing the former argue that even in free deliberations, the participants need to have an idea of the public interest that the deliberation is supposed to arrive at, i.e., an idea that is independent of such deliberation (O'Flynn, 2011). The latter criticize deliberative models for repudiating individual interests; they demand that not only public but also individual interests (however contained by fairness) be taken more seriously in deliberative models (Mansbridge et al., 2010). In addition, the different models share the normative yardsticks for deliberation coined by Habermas (1992), most notably free and equal conditions, fairness, and transparency of public debate. Hence deliberative models integrate notions from moralist and empiricist models (with different weights) since they describe normative conditions for discourse. Its results, however, are not moralistically predefined but open to what empirical deliberation brings about.

6. The Expanded Concept of Public Interests in Global Governance

In order to make the implicit assumptions in global governance approaches explicit and to interconnect the three separate models of the relation between individual and public interests instead of juxtaposing them, this section links the two strands of literature, i.e., the moralistic, empiricist, and deliberative models with input, output, and throughput legitimacy. On this basis, it expands understandings of public interests as consisting of three elements: a substantive, an individual interest-based, and a procedural element (cf. Table 1).

6.1. The Substantive Element

The substantive element of public interests is analytically the most demanding, as it goes beyond a purely empirical description (as in "current global norms entail...") or a mere normative demand (as in "global norms should entail..."). Mirroring the normative reference points for output legitimacy, it resembles notions of the common good from moralistic models. Such underlying normative assumptions have not simply disappeared from global governance studies. Most visibly, they appear in concepts of good governance (e.g., Dingwerth et al., 2020; Pantzerhielm et al., 2020), in discourse about the protection of climate and environment (Lane, 2012), and in theories on fundamental norms that perceive norms such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and fundamental freedom as globally valid (Wiener, 2008, pp. 66–67). Even though the organization and application of fundamental norms are framed as a matter of contestation, the core of fundamental norms constitutes a normative yardstick that is not simply subjugated to diverging individual interests. Rather, it represents an idea of something that is supposed to be good for all—just as moralist models assume and output legitimacy strives for.

Furthermore, normative assumptions also appear in empirical notions of output legitimacy, as in rational bureaucracy and technocracy (Steffek, 2021) or in studies of the empirical legitimacy of global governance institutions (cf. Hurd, 2019, p. 718). The major difference to straightforward normative approaches is that these perspectives appear or claim to be neutral. There are good reasons for this claim, most importantly the danger

Table 1. The three elements of public interests in global governance.

Global governance studies	Political philosophy	Public interests in global governance
Output legitimacy	Moralist models	Substantive element
Input legitimacy	Empiricist models	Individual interests-based element
Throughput legitimacy	Deliberative models	Procedural element

of paternalism or moral rigidity from moralist models. However, apparently neutral perspectives may carry normative assumptions implicitly. For instance, they determine in relation to whom and to which yardstick an output is regarded as effective, they presuppose that the legitimacy of global governance institutions is "inherently desirable" (Hurd, 2019, p. 727), and expert-driven institutions are perceived to be "driven by a concern for the general welfare (rather than special interests)" (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002, p. 9; see also Steffek, 2021, p. 3), as "advanced by technical experts acting on their sense of the public interest, not by interest groups or elected officials" (Birkland, 1998, p. 67)—very much akin to the expertise of the Crown or philosophers in earlier moralist models.

Remarkably, given their appearance of neutrality, non-majoritarian and expert-driven institutions are even perceived as policies without publics (May, 1991) or as apolitical. In contrast, the expanded concept of public interests highlights that the substantive element does represent a public element as a matter of politics (and thus as a matter of power and contestation). It does so by highlighting the plurality and contestedness of substantive elements and how they relate to individual interests and the procedural element.

In sum, the substantive element of public interests helps disclose the normative assumptions underlying global governance approaches, including apparently neutral perspectives, as it makes implicit normative assumptions explicit. At the same time, the element of individual interests underlines the limits of a singularized substantive element. This highlights how concepts of a superior perspective on what is good give rise to arbitrariness, paternalism, and moral rigidity, "not least of all because historically it has seemed so open to manipulation by unscrupulous elites" (O'Flynn, 2011, p. 259). A moralist view of the common good makes it too easy to override individual interests and needs and demand individual sacrifices for the greater good. At the same time, there are good reasons for sticking to norms such as human rights, fundamental freedoms, or the protection of vulnerable groups against majority decisions. These reasons include the history of these norms' violations and the exclusion of certain groups of people from enjoying them (Mende, 2021). Reasons are also based on the normative (or moral or substantive) assumption that freedom is somehow better than the lack of freedom, however differently it may be interpreted and embedded (Adorno, 2006).

Hence the substantive element of public interests illustrates the normative dimensions of global governance, most particularly in its output, and how it can neither be reduced nor disregard individual interests.

6.2. The Element of Individual Interests

The element of individual interests most clearly relates to the concept of input legitimacy. It takes into account the empirical will of the constituency of governance authority. In classic constellations, it is determined by aggregation, i.e., by voting and counting, thereby accumulating the myriad of single individual interests as a basis for political decisions.

In global politics, however, the challenge arises that the constituencies of governance authorities are not necessarily identical to those affected (Eriksen & Sending, 2013; Keohane, 2006). This challenge has given rise to discussions about transforming democratic mechanisms globally, which tackle the difficulty of representing the will(s) of those affected by global politics (Anderson, 2002). From this perspective, the plurality and even discrepancy of different interests is not a concern. Instead, "democracy holds an absence of unity at its heart" (Näsström, 2010, p. 213). This makes taking individual interests into account an indispensable element of identifying public interests in global governance. This holds on both the domestic and the global level, only that for the latter the question prevails whom to count, how, and in which forum, whether, e.g., in a global parliament or the classic model of states representing their publics in international organizations.

In addition, the element of individual interests may also designate non-aggregated individual interests. This takes into account that global governance is:

> A relation of power...within the context of social contestation over who wins and who loses. It is neither apolitical nor neutral among outcomes nor an inherently progressive contribution to social order. Global governance, just like governance in any context, entails a world of nuance, trade-offs, distributional fights, and tragic choices. (Hurd, 2019, p. 728)

Given inequalities in power, resources, and access, or simply mechanisms other than the counting of majorities, individual interests may be formed by other, more singularized individual interests—what global governance studies refer to as private interests or particular interests.

Eriksen and Sending (2013), however, detach such individual interests from public interests. They argue that "all actors in global governance networks are particularistic" (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 230) due to their lack of accountability to those affected by their actions. For them, public interests can only result from deliberation in the public sphere. As this is lacking on the global level, they argue, references to global public interests, while claiming to present "something universally good" are really exclusive and unrepresentative, serving to "legitimize particularistic forms of global governance rather than representing a move towards greater universalization" (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 232). This resembles the empiricist model's assumption that there are no public interests but only aggregated individual interests. In contrast, the expanded concept of public interest acknowledges that "public and private interests cannot

be fully understood if they are conceived as separate" (Mahoney et al., 2009, p. 1034). It does not reduce public interests to individual interests nor the procedural element, as Eriksen and Sending demand. Rather, it perceives individual interests as one of three elements that, taken together, constitute public interests.

The individual interests-based element thereby provides an indispensable counterweight to purely procedural models as well as to moralistic views that singularize the substantive element. At the same time, the substantive and the procedural element illuminate the limits of singularizing individual interests or input legitimacy, in turn. This is important because, as the discussion of empiricist models illustrates, they distill public interests purely from existing, empirically given interests of individual actors. One of their major shortcomings is that here "the public interest may never be with the losing side" (Held, 1970, p. 43; see also Mansbridge, 2013, p. 10). Rather, they give an advantage to individual interests from dominant groups (in terms of resources, votes, or power). This leads to a neglect of the (individual) interests of those who are disadvantaged, underprivileged, excluded, or enslaved, as well as of a (normative) interest in a more just society, i.e., the substantive element of public interests.

In sum, the element of individual interests takes the concrete wills of individuals (involved actors, constituencies, and the affected) into account. In addition, discerning aggregate and non-aggregate utterances of individual interests apprehend the various manifestations of power and inequalities in global governance, both between global governors and in relation to the governed.

6.3. The Procedural Element

The procedural element of public interests mirrors the throughput legitimacy in global governance, thereby shedding light on the black box between the input and output of global politics. It denotes the translation between individual interests and the results of political decision-making that are supposed to be in the public interest. However, it does not imply a causal relationship. Rather, in addition to forming a bridge between them, the procedural element also affects the other two elements of public interests. Most visibly, concerning the element of individual interests, the questions of whom to count, how, and whom to include in the "common" instigate discussions about a public sphere of deliberation. While the procedural element cannot substitute the element of individual interests, it multiplies the possibilities of identifying these interests. Moreover, the procedural element is interlinked with the substantive element, as the deliberative demands for fairness, transparency, etc., establish normative (i.e., substantive) yardsticks. Integrating both empirical and normative elements, the procedural element of public interests thereby reconciles the limits of singularizing each, while contributing to their strengths. This again emphasizes the interconnectedness between all three elements as well as the equal importance of each, even though their concrete forms and content may vary.

6.4. Public Interests in Regulating the Pandemic

While this conceptual article does not have the space to engage in extensive empirical investigation, it illustrates its argument with examples from the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic's regulative measures included prevention, containment, and control aimed at safeguarding vulnerable individuals and the population against the virus—partly against their individual wishes. This is the logic of the common good, also inherent in many other laws and governance measures, where the public interest may outweigh individual interests. At the same time, this tension between public and (certain) individual interests is highly contested, including protests against Covid-19 measures and court decisions retrospectively declaring some of those measures unconstitutional.

Thus speaking about a public raises the question of who defines which interests or goods as public. Who is included—and who is excluded—in defining public interests and in building the targeted public? During the pandemic, public interests were framed in different, sometimes competing ways, as in public health, freedom of movement, the maintenance of public infrastructure, or decent working and living conditions, to name just a few. While these may have been framed as common goods, it is not sufficient to discuss their governance solely in terms of output or the substantive element of public interests—neither for global governors aiming to cater to public interests nor for studies of these governors' (lack of) legitimacy.

In addition, the individual interests-based element sheds light on, e.g., the governed who felt their individual wishes and preferences were being restricted as they did not share or understand (or perhaps even believe in) a common good. This may have been the case because they valued their own interests above anybody else's because neoliberal ideas have overemphasized individual over common interests for decades, because they suspected public interests of actually representing others' individual interests, or because they were so deprived that they did not (perceive to) benefit from a common good (I set aside conspiracist and extremist motivations, which are in need of further explanation).

Besides the individual interests of the governed, the expanded notion of public interests allows us to study individual interests on the side of governors as well. This highlights how governors strive to frame notions of public interests by implementing their own interests, for instance, in restricting access to vaccination via patenting but still arguing with reference to the greater good. It highlights the power inequalities in the ways different actors succeed or fail to imbue the notion of public interests with their own interests. It also demonstrates that the individual interests of global governors, while

sometimes damaging, can, at other times, benefit the substantive element of public interests, e.g., when a company aims to profit from a new vaccine, thereby helping to contain the pandemic. Public interests, then, are imbued with individual interests but cannot simply be reduced to them. They constitute something else, either substantive or imagined, consensual or contested, but in any case, a certain manifestation of publics that guide (global) politics.

For all these reasons, defining and protecting the substantive element of public interests, and reconciling it with individual interests, must be a matter of broad deliberation that includes a plurality of individual interests and voices. The procedural element of public interests illustrates how pandemic regulations could have considered this necessity. This includes transparency regarding the development of Covid-19 measures and decisions, and communicating the trial and error associated with new challenges, thereby not only communicating the substantive element of public interests but also opening it up for deliberation (even in time-sensitive matters that do not allow for extensive processes of collecting input). It includes local dialogue processes, inclusion, and cooperation with the potential to strengthen responsibility and solidarity among individuals (including for other parts of society and public interests). Measures of international and global cooperation (Ioannidis, 2020) and their deliberation could even set an example for the solidarity and responsibility that individuals are asked to exhibit on a local level, which illustrates how the procedural element can shape the element of individual interests, thus affecting the substantive element.

In sum, the pandemic amplified the continuous tension between public and individual interests. This tension cannot simply be dissolved in favor of one of the two sides but needs to be upheld in order to balance and reconcile the two. In that regard, the pandemic is neither exceptional nor different from other issue areas of global governance (or government). Rather, this tension is inherent to all democracies as well as other political regimes and forms of regulation that rely on some kind of legitimacy and recognition (as opposed to pure force).

7. Conclusion

This conceptual article investigates the elements of public interests in global governance. It underlines the strong connection of public *and* private global governors to public interests, and it suggests understanding public interests as comprising of a substantive, individual interest-based, and procedural element. This grounds public interests (in the plural) not solely on notions of *a* common good (however defined); it also integrates individual interests (of governors and governed) as well as procedural mechanisms into an expanded concept of public interests. This forms a basis for further research. Specifically, it can contribute to tackling current challenges in global governance studies in five regards.

First, the concept allows us to trace the relation between public and individual interests that global governors may pursue concomitantly. Accordingly, instead of ascribing, e.g., the pursuit of only public interests to civil society actors, or the pursuit of only private interests to business actors, the expanded concept illustrates how governance actors pursue and affect different interests at the same time. It helps investigate the relative emphasis of each element, the subjects of individual interests, and the (power) inequalities between different individual and public interests in global governance relations.

Second, the concept also allows us to study how the meanings of public interests are affected by the ways that global governors refer to them. This underlines the fact that the content and definition of public interests are not pre-given and thus not just a matter of tailored tools for identifying them in a positivist manner. Rather, the ways that global governors make use of understandings of public interests touch the essence of what constitutes public interests in the first place, even before assessing how public interests might be weakened or strengthened by certain global politics (which surely is another important area of research).

Third, the concept provides further differentiation for empirical studies on the legitimacy beliefs of various publics (including the governed), shedding light on which element of public interests is given which weight and associated with which content. Studying the ways in which specific global governors are perceived or expected to deliver which element of public interests provides a basis for better understanding their legitimacy (or the lack thereof) in the eyes of the governed. It also allows further insight into which type of actor is seen to provide which element of public interests in particular and how this element is connected to the other two.

Fourth, the concept allows us to identify the specific element(s) that contestations of global governors address. This may even enable the development of tailored responses to crises of global governance institutions. Responses can then focus on substantive, procedural, or individual interests-based elements, respectively, while at the same time taking repercussions on the other elements (due to their interconnection) into account.

Finally, the expanded concept helps identify the merits and challenges of transferring democratic mechanisms onto a global level. On a normative reading, the concept highlights the need to preserve the three elements that mark democracy on a domestic level: a common good that goes beyond individual or majority wills, the importance of counting individual voices, and the procedural design of decision- and policy-making processes. This also illuminates the challenges of delineating public interests in global politics and the extent to which each of its elements can or cannot be fulfilled.

In sum, the legitimacy of global governors does not only depend on whether they cater to public interests but rather how they frame and affect the substantive, individual interest-based, and procedural elements

of public interests. Ultimately, in explicating the often implicit yet formative notion of public interests in global governance, this article addresses the question of how and with what effects global governance relates to and affects public interests. It thus provides a basis for studying the (in)ability of global governance actors to contribute to public interests in a truly global manner.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

From "Bangtan Boys" to "International Relations Professor": Mapping Self-Identifications in the UN's Twitter Public

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Abstract

Digitalization and social media established world-encompassing publics that engage with international organizations. While scholarship has analyzed how international organizations communicate with such digital publics, this article determines who participates in these publics. We created a novel dataset to map the UN's digital public on Twitter and analyzed the bios of 243,168 accounts that have interacted with the UN. Members of this public provide self-identifications (such as researcher, consultant, or scientist) that indicate a professional interest in the UN. We analyzed clusters of users that self-identify with similar words. We find high heterogeneity in the UN's digital public: Clusters of professional, academic, and organizational users suggest that the technocratic history of international organizations reflects in the members of its digital public. At the same time, the digital public of the UN extends to very different groups (human rights activists and K-Pop fans feature in the UN's public on Twitter). We demonstrate for future research how multiple correspondence analysis can reveal clusters in unstructured biographical data. The article contributes the first analysis of self-identifications in digital publics of global politics.

Keywords

big data; international organizations; publics; Twitter; UN

Issue

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1. Introduction

Social media promises to extend further the publics of international organizations (IOs). In the early 20th century, IOs communicated with elite segments of the broader public to keep control of global political dynamics (Seidenfaden, 2022). After World War II, IOs' communication efforts increased to gain broad public support (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018a). Since the 1990s, the opening up of IOs has accelerated, partly responding to the democratic standards of member states (Tallberg et al., 2013). Extending the reach of IOs even further, social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok have enabled IOs to reach a potentially global communication space. Should IOs manage to reach out to these

broader publics, IOs' self-legitimation, and accountability could improve (cf. Mende & Müller, 2023). In response, research has started to analyze IOs' publics on social media (Bexell, Ghassim, et al., 2022). We contribute to such scholarship by asking: What groups participate in the digital public of IOs?

Established research maps publics of IOs with methods that depend on an ex-ante classification of identities and social groups. Researchers utilize surveys, survey experiments, and coding with preconceived items to map the participation of publics in global politics (Bexell, Ghassim, et al., 2022; Bexell, Jönsson, et al., 2022, pp. 12–15; see also Dellmuth et al., 2022; Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012). Social media has established a new infrastructure for publics in global politics and provides us with valuable

data for analyzing publics. On social media, most users publish information to describe themselves. In accordance, Bexell, Ghassim, et al. (2022) have established a high share of citizens in IOs' digital publics just as a high share of elites, coding biographical information of Twitter users.

In contrast, we map the public of global politics more inductively without preconceiving characteristics of specific groups in a coding scheme. Our article contributes a different approach—a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA)—to identifying groups in unstructured biographical data, such as biographical information on social media. Such an approach makes it possible to empirically determine the self-identifications that distinguish groups on social media instead of presuming relevant self-identifications with a coding scheme. Researchers in medicine, health sciences, and finance utilize MCAs to find patterns in unstructured data sets. In the social sciences, sociologists of fields developed encompassing tool kits and sociological interpretations of MCAs (Bourdieu, 1984; Le Roux & Rouanet, 2004). We demonstrate how an MCA can detect different groups of users that self-identify with specific words.

We focus on the digital public of the UN on Twitter, the IO at the core of the current international liberal order (Lake et al., 2021). Moreover, the UN also represents the largest digital public of any IO on Twitter. Hence, our analysis focuses on the public of the UN on Twitter as a highly salient digital public of supranational politics. We reconstruct the UN's digital public delimiting different groups of users that interact with the UN on Twitter. We base our analysis on a rich but unstructured data set that includes biographical self-descriptions of 243,168 Twitter users who have retweeted a tweet from the UN Twitter account (https://twitter.com/UN) from January 1, 2021, to November 15, 2022. We conduct an MCA on the biographical self-descriptions of these users.

We find high heterogeneity of groups in the UN's digital public. We empirically identify distinct groups in the UN's Twitter public, such as K-pop fans and human rights activists. As we will argue in the discussion, this heterogeneity has the potential to support accountability and (self-)legitimation of IOs. Heterogeneity ensures that IOs can be held accountable by various subsections of society, and IOs' stances can be deliberated from multiple angles. At the same time, heterogeneity risks the integration of this public as one communicative space.

In the remainder, we discuss existing work on digital publics of global politics and introduce key concepts that underlie our article. Section 3 narrows in on the public we analyzed and presents our data set on the UN's public on Twitter. In Section 4, we discuss statistics on the demographic, professional, and political self-identifications of members of the analyzed public. Section 5 introduces our methods. We introduce the different clusters found in the UN's public. In the conclusion, we discuss the heterogeneity of the UN's digital public established in this article.

2. Digital Publics of Global Politics

The rise of social media changed the publics of international politics. IOs can communicate directly with a transnational and multifaceted public that can witness the same events worldwide (Mende & Müller, 2023). While scholars have started to analyze IOs' activity on social media, research has only started to detect and delimit the groups that constitute the digital public of international politics. We know about IOs' communication efforts (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018a, 2018b; Uhlin & Verhaegen, 2022), we know how representatives of IOs communicate on social media, we know about the content that IOs publish (Hofferberth, 2020; Özdemir & Rauh, 2022), and about the political effects of personalization on IO's social media accounts (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2023). Still, the characteristics of users that constitute such digital publics remain largely in the shadows.

The groups that constitute IOs' publics have the potential to hold IOs accountable. When IOs communicate transparently with the public, power holders and constituents affected by IOs' actions can assess whether IOs' practices meet shared standards (Mende & Müller, 2023). In democracies, constituents can consider changing voting patterns for sanctioning IOs (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006, pp. 415–416). When such formalized mechanisms of accountability are unavailable, publics can establish "public reputational accountability" (Grant & Keohane, 2005, p. 37). IOs are sanctioned by reputational loss when violating shared standards of practice. Such relationships of accountability depend on constituents accessing information about IOs. We delimit the groups of constituents that can hold IOs accountable; they engage with information about IOs as part of IOs' digital publics.

In addition, the groups that constitute publics matter for legitimizing IOs. On the one hand, IOs can self-legitimize by reasonably justifying and communicating their practices. Publics can manifest as public spheres where such communicative action occurs (Mende & Müller, 2023). For self-legitimation, the "logic of the big audience" (Steffek, 2003, p. 265) implies that a high diversity within these publics improves the self-legitimation of IOs. When challenged by various viewpoints and arguments, IOs can more successfully self-legitimize as they can convince a broader discourse about their practices. On the other hand, IOs' legitimation builds on the broader public's shared belief in the IO's legitimacy (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019). For such relationships of legitimation, the citizenry must know about IOs and their practices to establish beliefs about their legitimacy. Hence, the legitimation of IOs depends on citizens being part of the IOs' publics. We empirically detect the groups that can hold legitimate beliefs about IOs as they are part of IOs' publics.

Research on non-digital publics relies primarily on surveys to gain information about the groups that constitute publics of global politics (Bearce & Jolliff Scott, 2019;

Dellmuth et al., 2022; Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012; Guisinger & Saunders, 2017). Survey designs have the disadvantage that preconceived items in the survey strongly guide respondents' self-identification. In contrast, social media makes it possible to assess self-identification in publics directly—without inferring identities from survey items. On Twitter, users offer self-identifications in their "bios" where they describe themselves. We regard these Twitter bios as "bundles of self-identification." Our focus on self-identification takes into account that identities are not stable pre-given entities. Individuals produce self-identifications affected by and for a social setting (Bucher & Jasper, 2017). Social media is one such social setting—highly salient for current global politics. This article proposes methods to find patterns in such bundles of self-identification produced for social media.

Bexell, Ghassim, et al. (2022) are closest to our approach in examining self-appointed Twitter audiences for IOs, including the Twitter public of the UN. They apply a coding scheme to distinguish profiles into different groups, differentiating between activists, civil society organizations, academic accounts, artists, media accounts, bloggers, business users, global governance institutions, representatives of governments, politicians, and citizens (defined as the residual category for users that do not fall into other categories; Bexell, Ghassim, et al., 2022, p. 204). They establish highly relevant insights on the UN's public as they find that "elites are indeed disproportionately represented" in digital publics (Bexell, Ghassim, et al., 2022, p. 188). While Bexell, Ghassim, et al. (2022) distinguish between groups in a coding scheme, we regard it as the goal of our article to empirically distinguish between groups with shared self-identification in the UN's Twitter public. We will assess to what extent our statistical method supports Bexell, Ghassim et al. (2022) identification of groups in IOs' publics.

We regard Twitter as establishing a digital public for the UN, defining and operationalizing "digital public" along the parameters provided by the editorial of this thematic issue. Mende and Müller (2023) distinguish between manifestations of publics as "audiences" that assemble "groups of actors that share a common attention focus." In addition, publics can manifest as public spheres that are "groups of actors that form communicative spaces" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 92). We locate digital publics—thus, in our case, publics mediated via social media—in between these two manifestations. On the one hand, digital publics can manifest as audiences when specific groups follow, listen, or read up on a shared item. We analyze users who retweeted content from the UN's Twitter account. Hence, these users share the same attention focus and constitute the public as an audience. On the other hand, digital publics can manifest as public spheres. Retweeting can constitute a communicative act as it invites other users to react to the retweet.

The technology of social media allows publics to easily shift from passive audiences to deliberating public spheres (Hofferberth, 2020). We regard the oscillation between the audience and the public sphere as the specific characteristic of a digital public. Our focus on users who "retweeted" content from the UN allows us to capture this specificity of digital publics. Such a conceptualization implies that the boundaries of digital publics are fluid and can quickly include or exclude groups of users. Digital publics can easily disintegrate internally when communication concentrates or breaks up within or between specific groups.

3. The UN on Twitter

The UN's official Twitter account gets introduced as: "Official account of the United Nations. For peace, dignity & equality on a healthy planet." According to Nancy Groves (2018), head of the UN's social media team, social media was initially not regarded as a serious enough platform to distribute UN statements. In 2010, the UN's social media team was established and professionalized the UN's messaging on social media. The social media team shares content on Twitter previously approved by the UN and tries to maintain neutrality when member states differ in opinion (Groves, 2018; Vale, 2020). Social media has become an official communication channel for IOs, comparable to conventional means of communication such as reports, speeches, or statistics. The analyzed account has around 16,087,000 followers and was created in 2008. As analyzed by Hofferberth (2020), the UN uses this and similar organizational accounts mostly for information dissemination on security issues.

We analyzed the account from January 1, 2021, to November 15, 2022, resulting in 5,774 tweets, corresponding to roughly nine tweets daily. As such, the account is highly active and has the highest number of followers of all organizational UN accounts, followed by the World Health Organization, with around 11,900,000 followers (see the Supplementary File for a list of UN Twitter accounts). We analyzed all accounts that had retweeted one tweet of the UN in the analyzed period. With one tweet, we set the hurdle for inclusion into the data set as low as allowed by our conceptualization. We do so as some of the theorized political effects of publics—such as reputational losses—do not depend on the strong engagement of publics with IOs. Hence, our analysis includes loosely connected users. To analyze self-identifications in this public, we downloaded all tweets and stored all accounts of the users that retweeted these tweets, resulting in 1,568,874 users. After removing duplicate entries, our data set includes 243,168 accounts.

Twitter provides a unique possibility for mapping the self-identification of users. Users can publish a short self-description for their account, the so-called "Twitter bio." We downloaded all Twitter bios for the analyzed 243,168 users. We translated all entries into English with Google Translate and excluded stop words in accordance with convention in quantitative text analysis (de Vries et al., 2018; see the Supplementary File for a list of

the excluded words.) In our sample, 24% of users did not publish a Twitter bio. Twitter bios provide relatively uncensored self-descriptions. Besides a limit of 160 characters, Twitter does not demand specific content or provide templates for self-descriptions. On the help page, Twitter introduces the "bio" as follows:

> Introduce yourself to the world with a bio. Use your bio to tell us a bit about you and what you love. Feeling stuck? This is your space. If you have writer's block, try looking at bios on your favorite accounts for some inspiration. The possibilities are endless. From your hobbies to a quote to your job—it's up to you. (Twitter, 2022)

Accordingly, we can assume some degree of homogeneity as Twitter users might get inspiration from other profiles. Furthermore, we can expect a focus on jobs and hobbies. At the same time, the bio hardly constrains the users on what self-identification they publish. Therefore, the bios should provide relatively unbiased bundles of users' self-identifications.

This advantage comes with methodological challenges. As we analyze self-identifications, users neither have to be truthful nor do we have comparable information over all accounts. Regarding demographic data, this means we only have data on how many users self-identify as "she/her." Furthermore, the data is highly unstructured. One account has the bio "Human," "she/her," and "Planet Earth Shalom—Shalom. Never Forget." Another user has the bio "Former Secretary-General of the United Nations. Am a South Korean politician and diplomat who served as the eighth secretary-general of the United Nations." Our article contributes a method for finding patterns in such unstructured biographical data. First, we

will describe the analyzed public regarding the 200 most utilized words in users' self-identification. Second, we will introduce and utilize MCA to map and cluster members of the public according to their Twitter bio.

4. Most Common Self-Identifications of the UN's Public

In the analyzed sample, we counted all words and compiled a list of the 200 most frequently utilized words in Twitter bios. As Figure 1 demonstrates, these words are highly diverse. 4.55% of all bios use "love" in their self-description. Here, users might be responding to the framing offered by Twitter to write about what they "love" (see, in the previous section, how Twitter introduces its bios). Other words are nominal self-identifications such as "student" (1.64%). Users self-identify with their interests ("music": 1.59%; "development": 1.59%; "health": 2.33%).

We identified the most commonly utilized words that provide information on demographic, professional, and political self-identification. First, 1.67% of users identify as "she/her" (Table 1). In contrast, 0.59% self-identify as "he/him." Arguably, these numbers provide information on the amount of female and male users who intend to normalize queer self-descriptions rather than information on gender distribution. Furthermore, profiles often reference family status, with 1.81% of users identifying as "mother" or "mom."

Second, profiles provide information on professional self-identification (Table 2). Most users identify as "student" (1.64%), followed by 3,036 profiles identifying as "writer." The list centers on academic occupations and on professions that conduct international politics. The high percentage of ambassadors (0.59%) reflects that ambassadors populate many sites of international policy-making
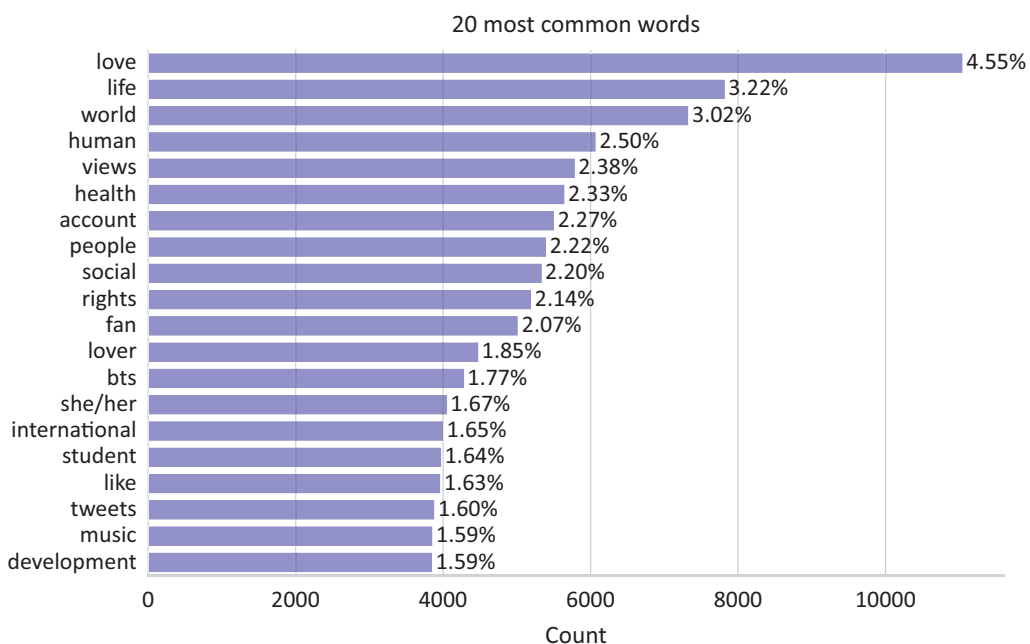

Figure 1. 20 most common words.

Table 1. Demographic self-identifications.

Word	Frequency	% of profiles
She/her	4,065	1.67
Mother	2,217	0.91
Mom	2,186	0.9
Father	1,606	0.66
Wife	1,479	0.61
He/him	1,439	0.59
Husband	1,229	0.51

(Neumann, 2008; Pouliot, 2016). We find reference to being a "consultant" among the most common self-descriptions as IOs outsource managerial decision-making and office work to consultants (Seabrooke & Sending, 2020). In addition, a high share of users works in academia, with 0.75% identifying as researchers, 0.66% as professors, and 0.57% as scientists.

Third, we find on the list of the 200 most utilized words of political self-identification (Table 3) that of these individuals, 0.59% identify themselves as human-itarians. Self-description as "feminist" and "activist" are among the most common political self-identifications in the UN's public.

The reader might regard such percentage points as relatively low. Still, we did not code these self-identifications. These are self-identifications that users produce when asked to "introduce yourself to the world." Hence, a high variance of words is not surprising. At the same time, we can assume that such self-identifications—when delivered truthfully—are

Table 2. Professional self-identifications.

Word	Frequency	% of profiles
Student	3,984	1.64
Writer	3,036	1.25
Director	3,000	1.23
Teacher	2,795	1.15
Engineer	2,383	0.98
Journalist	2,251	0.93
Founder	1,932	0.8
Artist	1,879	0.77
Consultant	1,860	0.77
Researcher	1,827	0.75
Author	1,784	0.73
Professional	1,652	0.68
Manager	1,624	0.67
President	1,604	0.66
Professor	1,602	0.66
Lawyer	1,523	0.63
Ambassador	1,442	0.59
Specialist	1,432	0.59
Entrepreneur	1,394	0.57
Scientist	1,388	0.57
Retired	1,287	0.53
Expert	1,188	0.49
Editor	1,113	0.46

Table 3. Political self-identifications.

Word	Frequency	% of Profiles
Activist	2,852	1.17
Advocate	2,841	1.17
Citizen	1,604	0.66
Humanitarian	1,437	0.59
Feminist	1,363	0.56

important for users' identity constructions, as they are produced relatively uncensored and independent from external influences.

## 5. Mapping the UN's Digital Public on Twitter

5.1. Multiple Correspondence Analysis

The previous section introduced selected demographic, professional, and political self-identifications of the UN's digital public on Twitter. Our data consists of 200 binary variables on self-identifications for each user. These variables cover whether one of the most utilized 200 words

in the entire sample features in a user's Twitter bio (cf. Table 4). In the following section, we search for patterns in this data: Are there different groups of users that use a specific bundle of words for self-identification?

We conducted an MCA to detect patterns in the data. MCA is a dimension-reduction technique that can be applied to explore and visualize large datasets. MCA represents the output subspace that best represents the data by maximizing the variance within the data. In that sense, MCA represents an objective method that allows the data to speak for themselves and does not need any a priori assumptions. MCAs have been applied across a range of fields, such as social sciences, marketing,

Table 4. Snapshot of the indicator matrix, showing the structure of the analyzed data set. Note: Each column represents one of the 200 most frequently used words and displays whether the individual Twitter user used this word in their description.

	Love	Life	World	Human	Views	Followers_Count	Following_Count	Tweet_Cound	Location	
20	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	views	1028	575	4489	New York, NY	EN
21	not.love	not.life	world	human	not.views	2799	413	48790	San Salvador, El Salvador	ES
22	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	1042	4992	5519	Washington, DC, missing London	EN
23	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	views	6708	7897	22796	Istanbul, Türkiye	EN
24	not.love	not.life	not.world	human	not.views	243	1660	18026	Blue Earth Oxygen St	EN
25	not.love	not.life	world	not.human	not.views	561192	1446	34069	New York, NY	EN
26	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	24631	21335	802496	Ilfeld und ganz Europa	DE
27	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	423	4958	58732	United States	EN
28	not.love	not.life	world	not.human	not.views	1273	4982	22244	🇳🇱 Amsterdam, Netherlands	EN
29	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	89	1302	41755	Vidisha, India	EN
30	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	18	4	626		EN
31	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	50	182	13620		TR
32	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	279	5000	133418	Newham Manor Park E12, London	EN
33	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	1036	2727	22253	Taksim - Beyoğlu - İstanbul	TR
34	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	151	248	3300	Islamabad	EN
35	not.love	not.life	not.world	human	not.views	34	342	417	Jakarta Selatan, DKI Jakarta	EN
36	not.love	not.life	world	not.human	not.views	5023	4299	45557	Geneve	SV
37	love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	716	500	70245	Los Angeles, CA	EN
38	not.love	not.life	not.world	not.human	not.views	3521	1431	195208	London, England	EN
39	not.love	not.life	world	not.human	not.views	391	167	1542	Portugal	EN

health, psychology, educational research, political science, and genetics. (Fithian & Josse, 2017). In the social sciences, MCA is most closely connected with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), who considered MCAs the appropriate statistical method to map social fields (Le Roux & Rouanet, 2004). In this article, we use MCA to find similarities between rows (Twitter user IDs) and columns (description of the individual Twitter user ID). The graphical visualization shows structural organization in the data and allows us to find patterns and associations between the investigated parameters (columns). The indicator matrix is constructed based on the categorical variables that represent the 200 most frequently used words in bio sketches of Twitter users that interact with the UN on Twitter.

More formally, MCA is an extension of correspondence analysis, which allows one to analyze the pattern of relationships between several categorical variables (Abdi & Valentin, 2007). MCA is obtained using a standard correspondence analysis on an indicator matrix X of type $I \times J$ with I as observations and J as categorical variables (see Table 4). The correspondence analysis will result in two sets of factor scores. The absolute numbers of the table are given by n, and hence the probability matrix can be computed as $Z = n^{-1}X$. The row total and column totals of Z are given by $r = Z1_j$, and $c = Z1_i$, and $D_r = diag(r)$, and $D_c = diag(c)$. The factor scores can be then computed by performing a singular value decomposition: $D_r^{-0.5}\left(Z - rc^T\right)D_c^{-0.5} = P\Delta Q^T$, with P whose columns are the eigenvectors, Δ as the diagonal matrix of the singular values, and Q^T containing the eigenvectors as columns $PP^T = QQ^T = I_s$. For a more detailed definition of the MCA, the reader is referred to (Abdi & Valentin, 2007; Izenman, 2008).

Only the first dimensions of an MCA have high explanatory power of the variance in the data set. Hence, interpretation is often limited to the first dimensions. We notice a nearly exponential decay in explained variance per dimension (Figure 2). Hence, we chose to retain only four dimensions. The following dimensions do not add much additional information. Still, the first 20 dimensions represent approximately 30% of the variability among users interacting with the UN's content. After 175 dimensions, the explained variance added tails off, reducing to zero. In general, we can summarize that the public interaction with the UN is diverse as no single dimension can be used to clearly separate groups with shared self-identification.

5.2. Results and Interpretation

Figure 3 depicts the first and second dimensions of the MCA. The colors represent how much each word contributes to a specific dimension. The first dimension singles out one very distinct cluster of users who self-identify as K-pop fans, "Bts" stands for a Korean pop band, the Bangtan Boys. Their fans self-describe as the "army," meaning the "adorable representative M.C. for youth," and identify with "bts_twt" on Twitter. This community of fans accounts for 40 million followers on social media. BTS are advocates for the UN and have launched "the anti-violence Love Myself campaign with UNICEF." The band performed at the opening of the UN General Assembly in 2021, drawing attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (Lee, 2021). We see the "army" clustering in the third quadrant. Nearby, we also identify a clustering of "love" and "life." Figure 6 shows the words that contribute the strongest to each dimension. Here,
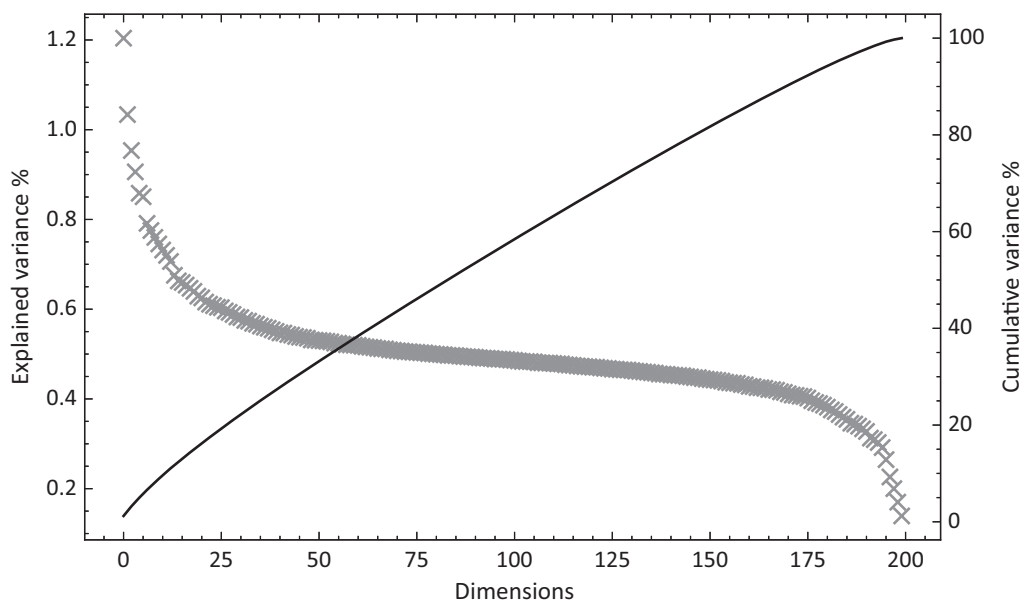

Figure 2. Plot of the MCA explained variance per dimension (grey marks) and cumulative % of explained variance/inertia (black line).
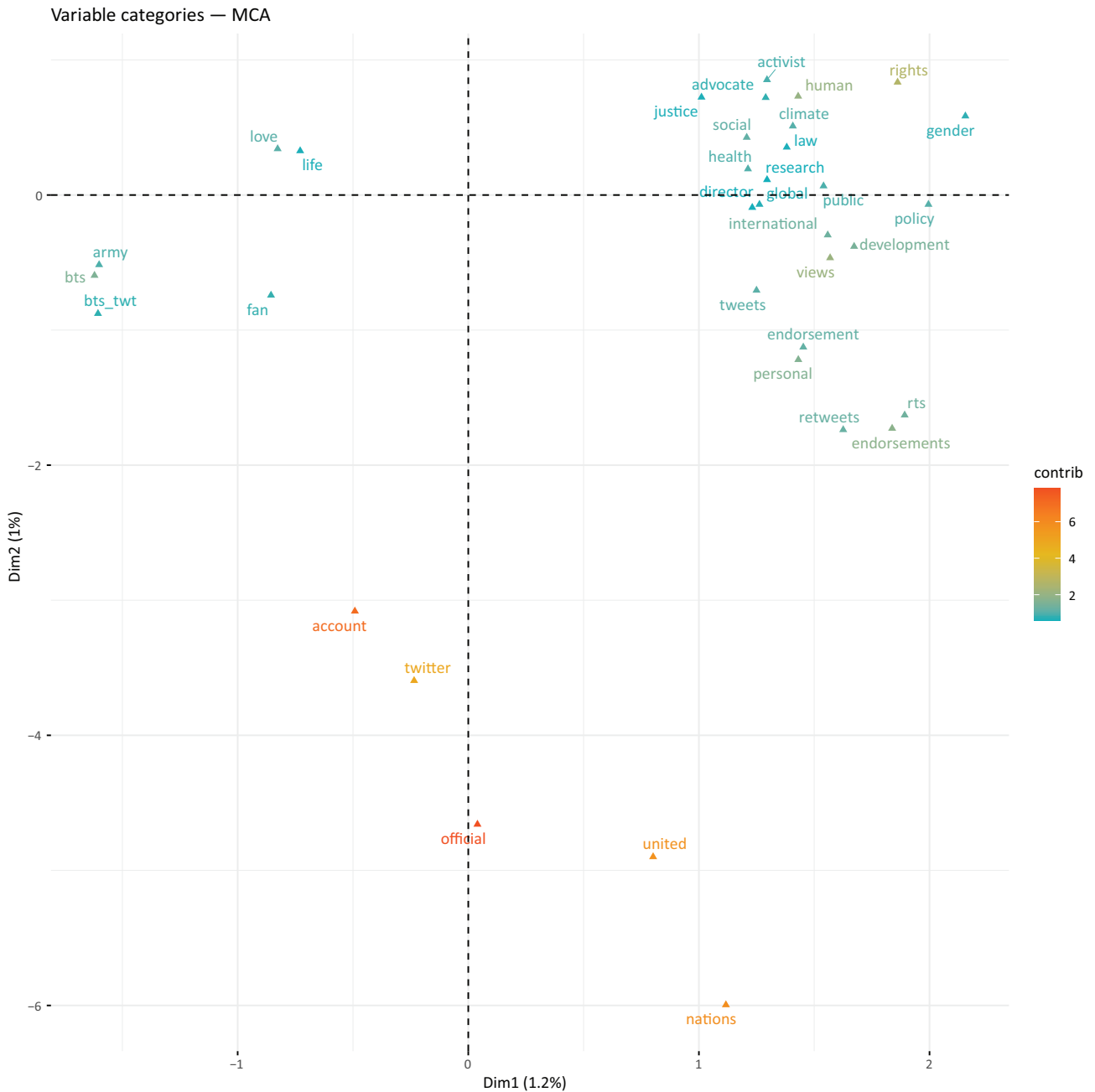
Variable categories — MCA

Figure 3. The first and second dimensions of the MCA.

we see that words such as "international," "human," "rights," "views," and "endorsement" contribute positively and strongly to the first dimension. We interpret these clusters as distinguishing between social media-savvy/ broadcasting groups of users. Social groups that organize around K-pop bands are known for their innovative social media campaigns and their activism for progressive causes. Minority groups feature strongly among K-pop fans. They use social media for community building, self-organization, and collective campaigns (Bruner, 2020). In contrast, the words "views" and "endorsement" in the fourth quadrant indicate a broadcasting use of social media on the other end of the first dimension. Here, users regard social media as a vehicle to broadcast their opinion and readings. Still, the broadcasting

users signal more identification with the UN, as they use words in their bios that feature prominently in UN jargon ("development," "international," "global," and "policy").

The second dimension singles out a cluster of users who self-identify with words such as "united," "nations," "official," "Twitter," and "account." These words contribute negatively to the second dimension. At the same time, we see negative contributions of the words "advocate," "activist," "human," and "rights." We interpret this dimension as distinguishing between organizational accounts/representatives of the UN and private users. This organizational/private dimension explains 1% of the variance in our dataset. As Figure 3 indicates, an account that identifies as organizational does not self-identify with words such as "justice" or "gender." Here,

we see a sense of neutrality that characterizes organizational UN accounts; they do not use words interpreted as political.

The third dimension (Figure 4) visualizes a cluster of users who use words specific to Twitter for self-identification: "retweets," "endorsement," "personal," "views," and "opinions" clusters in quadrant three. With such words, users typically convey that they do not endorse their retweets. They tweet their personal views and opinion but do not represent their employer on Twitter. We interpret this dimension as distinguishing between reserved/outspoken users. There is further support for this interpretation: Users who self-identify with "united" "nations" cluster in the second quadrant and contribute positively to this dimension. In this cluster,

we find the official UN accounts that distribute officially approved messages and therefore do not distance themselves from their tweets. In the first quadrant, a group of users identifies with words such as "equality," "human," "rights," and "activist." Arguably, here we see users who identify as human rights activists: they are outspoken and do not present themselves as reserved. Hence, we show that some groups participate in the digital public while maintaining a reserved stance towards this public.

This result qualifies arguments of this thematic issue: Mende and Müller (2023) argue in the editorial that negotiating the public/private distinction is a key characteristic of publics. Indeed, we see a specific group of users that cares about privacy issues and clusters in the third square. Still, this group identifies with words
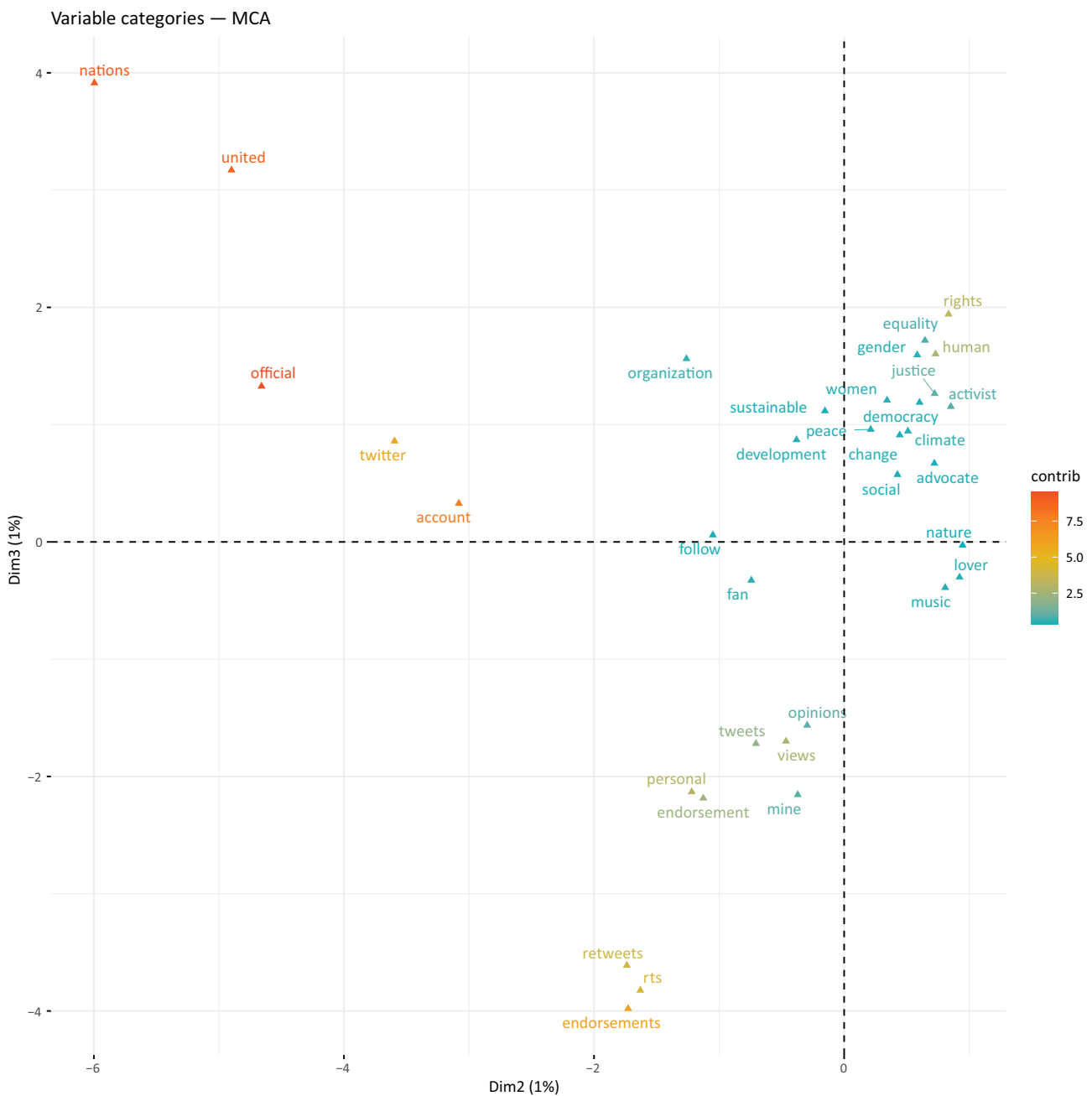

Figure 4. Second and third dimensions of the MCA.

that indicate that they do not tweet their private opinion ("retweet," "is not," and "endorsement") and the opposite ("personal," "views," "my," and "own"). Hence, groups differ not so much concerning whether they consider themselves private or public communicators; rather, they differ in presenting themselves as reserved or outspoken.

In Figure 5, we plot self-identifications with the first and fourth dimensions of the MCA. We interpret the fourth dimension as distinguishing between professional/lay users. In the fourth quadrant, we see a cluster of users who self-identify with their professional, academic, and occupational credentials ("consultant," "researcher," "PhD," "professor," "management," and "director"). The words "international" and "relations"

feature in this cluster. They signal scholars and practitioners with a background in the discipline of IR. This group indicates that the technocratic legacy of international politics partly translates into its digital public (Steffek, 2021). Possibly, these users engage with the UN based on their professional interests. Interestingly, rather politicized concepts of international politics such as "equality," "human," rights," "justice," or "gender" do not feature in the self-identifications of these users. This group of professional users appears interested in maintaining a rather apolitical stance on Twitter. In contrast, the words "human," "rights," "activist," and "endorsement" contribute positively to the first dimension. Activists and other individuals cluster in this group, which does not strongly identify with professional and academic credentials.
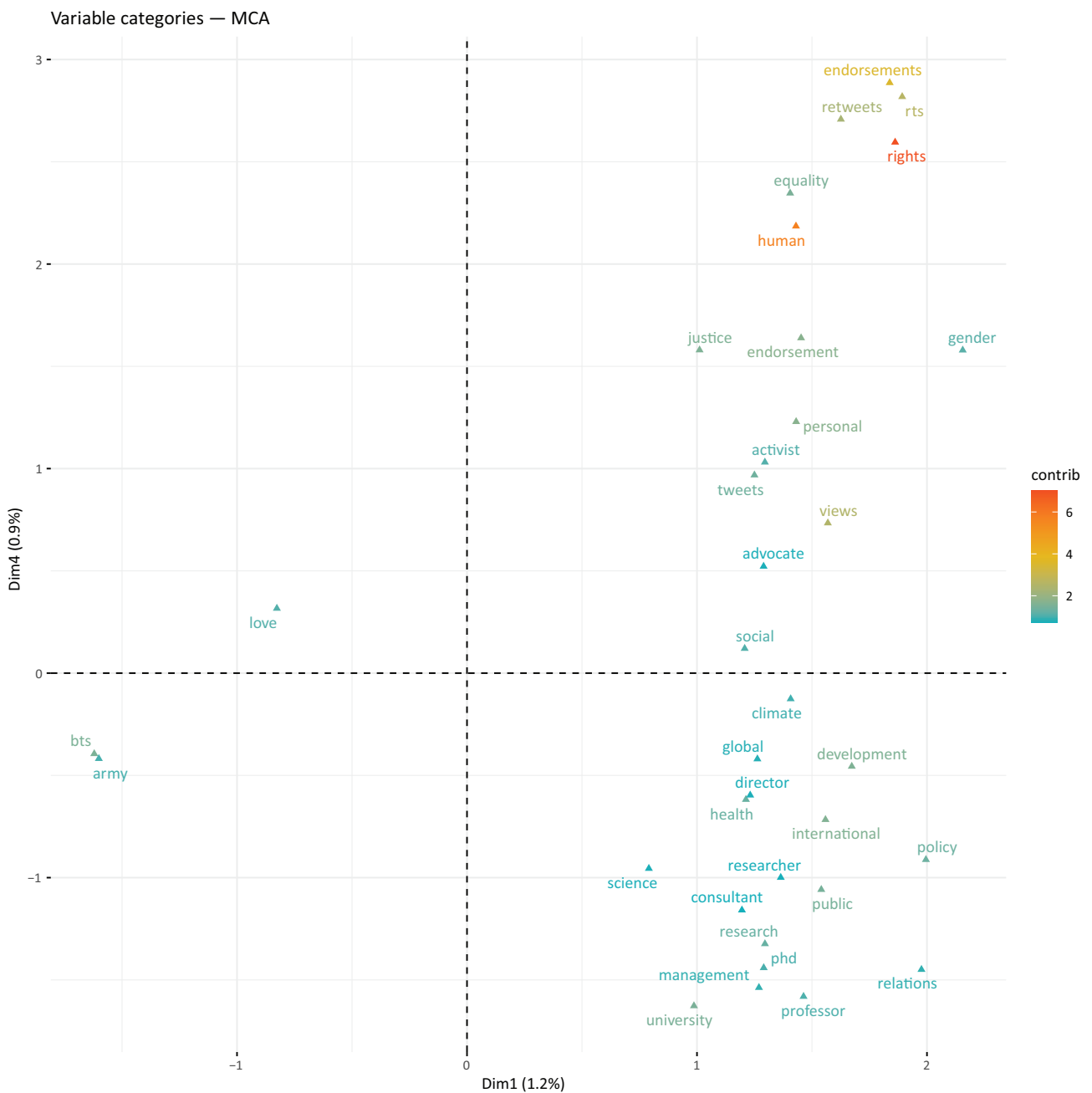

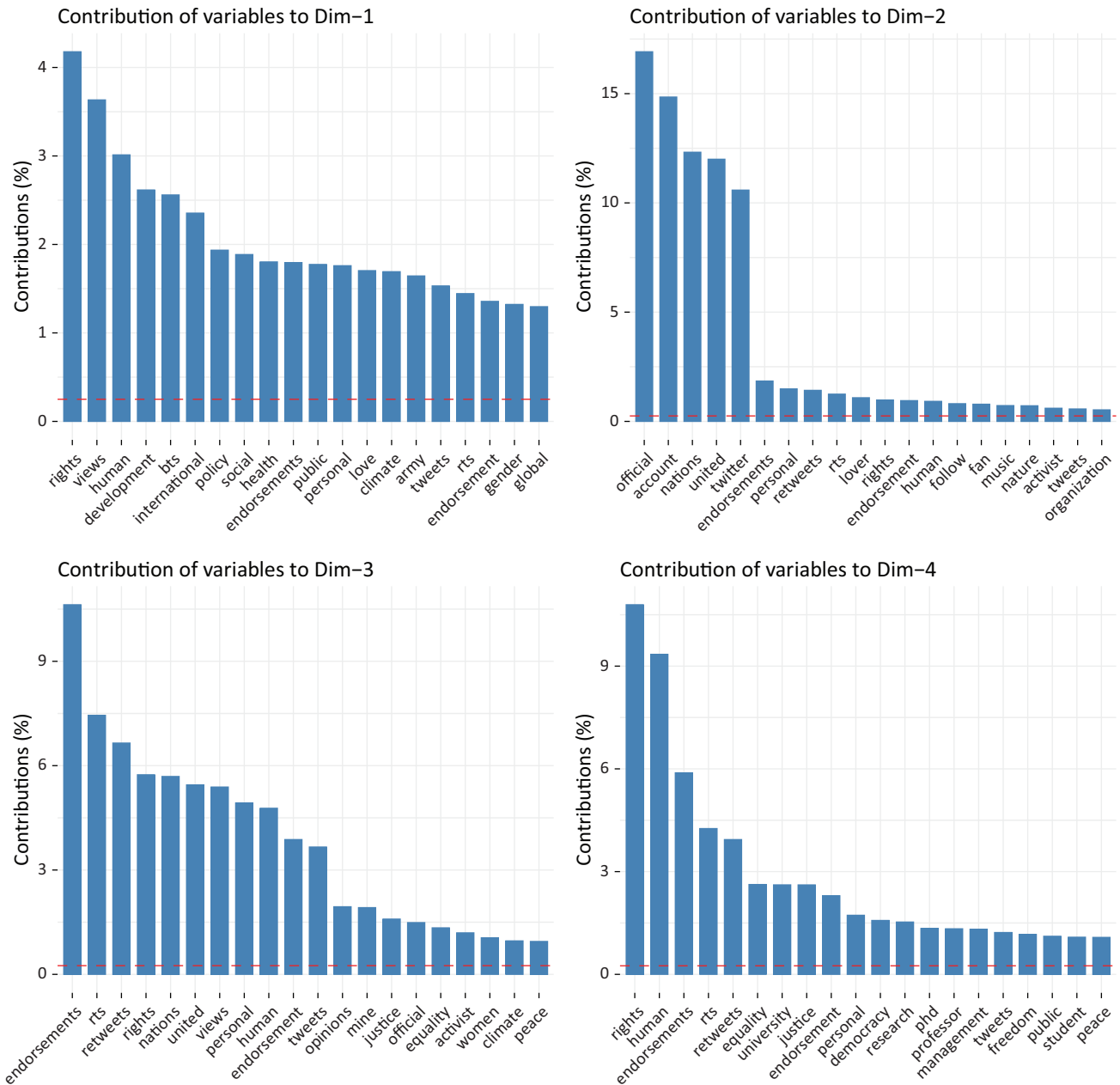**Figure 5.** First and fourth dimensions of the MCA.

Figure 6. Contributions to the different dimensions.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

With the rise of social media, publics of global politics have been transformed (cf. Mende & Müller, 2023). IOs can directly communicate with transnational publics. In addition, social media provides detailed information about the users that constitute such digital publics. In response, this article has explored who participates in these new and salient publics of global politics. We focused on the Twitter account of the UN and analyzed the bios of 243,168 Twitter users who retweeted a tweet from the UN Twitter account from January 1, 2021, to November 15, 2022. We demonstrate for future research the potential of MCA to analyze such "bundles of self-identification" (Bucher & Jasper, 2017).

The analysis provided dimensions that distinguish between clusters of users that use similar words to self-identify, allowing us to interpret the first four dimensions meaningfully. The MCA revealed high heterogeneity in the UN's digital public. In our interpretation of the MCA, we first distinguish between social media-savvy/broadcasting users. One cluster of users strongly identify with the Korean pop band (Bangtan Boys): these users conduct coordinated social media campaigns on progressive political issues. Other users utilize social media to broadcast their opinion. Second, we distinguish between groups of organizational/private users. One cluster of users strongly self-identified with UN organizations, while other self-identifications hinted that they related to the private use of Twitter. Third, we

differentiated between groups of reserved/outspoken users. One group strongly identified as activists and as concerned with human rights issues. Users on the other end of the dimension presented themselves as neutral on social media. Finally, we could differentiate between users along a professional/lay dimension. Some groups of users strongly stress their professional and academic credentials: we find those who self-identify with academia in this cluster.

These results partly support the coding scheme developed by Bexell, Ghassim, et al. (2022) to distinguish between groups in IOs' Twitter publics. We can find similar groups by clustering words in self-descriptions, such as activists and academics (Bexell, Ghassim, et al., 2022). Still, we could not identify clusters of business actors, artists, or politicians. This indicates that these groups might be less distinct in their self-descriptions than other groups. Bexell, Ghassim, et al. (2022) define "citizens" as the residual category of profiles that do not fit one of their codes, including the majority of members of the UN's Twitter public (51%). For such users, we offer a distinction between groups that use social media differently or that share pop cultural identification.

There are limitations to our approach. First, Twitter is a social media platform frequented by specific users. Professionals such as journalists, politicians, and researchers utilize Twitter frequently. Still, this specificity makes our results on the plurality in this public beyond professional elites even more surprising and convincing. Second, our approach detects different clusters of users inductively that use the same words for self-identification. In contrast to established research, we avoided preconceived survey items to analyze who participates in this public. Still, this approach has a drawback: 23% of users did not publish a Twitter bio and were excluded from our analysis.

What does the heterogeneity of the UN's Twitter public mean for global politics? How does it affect digital publics' potential to broker accountability and legitimation of IOs? The heterogeneity of digital publics can support the legitimation and accountability of IOs. In digital publics, IOs engage directly with diverse groups such as media-savvy users, activists, other UN organizations, and academics. Theories of deliberative democracy suggest that such diversity can potentially improve the self-legitimation of IOs, as IOs can potentially convince a wide range of people who have a variety of arguments and stances about their practices (Steffek, 2003). Established literature on IOs' public spheres regards diplomats, expert circles, and NGOs as part of transnational deliberation. Citizenry was represented by NGOs in global politics (Agné et al., 2015; Anderl et al., 2021; Nanz & Steffek, 2004). We show how digital publics are populated by further groups, such as those that share pop-cultural self-identification. IOs can engage with a broader range of arguments and positions on social media; they can convince broader groups about their practices.

Still, IOs might find it challenging to self-legitimize with the same messages in front of such a heterogeneous publics. Institutions with heterogeneous publics muffle their messages to include broad and heterogenous audiences (Stroup & Wong, 2017). Other institutions delimit different parts of their audiences strategically and only engage with supportive groups in their public (Anderl et al., 2019). With regard to the Twitter public of the UN, the UN could easily opt for similar strategies of ignoring some groups of its public, such as the cluster of justice-concerned human rights activists. In contrast to other publics (cf. Mende & Müller, 2023), digital publics do not have formalized mechanisms to ensure that institutions are responsive to all members of the public.

The high heterogeneity might even endanger the manifestation of this public as a public sphere as groups approach this communicative space differently. Some groups use Twitter to broadcast their opinions and engage professionally with IOs, while others regard it as a space for activism. Such heterogeneity can undermine communication between these groups and the UN as they lack a shared notion of the goals of communication on Twitter. For example, some groups are outspoken about their normative goals, while others maintain a reserved stance and avoid words such as "equality" or "justice" in their bios. To ensure deliberation, groups might have to engage in second-order clarification about the purpose of communicative acts on Twitter—such as the appropriateness of normative statements (Deitelhoff & Müller, 2005, p. 168). Still, empirical research has established that such second-order communication in transnational contexts demands several rounds of discussion over longer periods (Deitelhoff, 2009). Social media platforms like Twitter do not support such recursive rounds of justification. Users can easily disconnect and leave a specific site of deliberation, as users can be connected by just one Tweet that catches both of their attention. Here, the Twitter public entails significant differences to the coffee house as the archetypical space of deliberation (Habermas, 1990). As such, social media embodies notions of democracy that regard publics as an ever-evolving and democratic process as open to an ever-changing membership (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Näsström, 2007). Still, this openness of digital publics challenges repetitive rounds of communication necessary for the successful deliberation of such heterogeneous publics.

Future research should explore the interaction of these groups with IOs to thoroughly assess the effects on the accountability or legitimation of IOs. Scholarship should analyze how engagement with IOs on Twitter affects legitimacy beliefs or how users try to hold IOs accountable. Furthermore, research should explore how users change their opinions about IOs when engaging with them on Twitter, improving the self-legitimation of IOs. We provided the first important step for such future work in delimiting the different groups that engage with IOs on Twitter.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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Article

Christian Churches and the Ukraine War: Introducing Religious Publics in Global Politics

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Abstract
Publics in global politics are highly dynamic, considering the multitude of actors involved and the issues addressed. When examining Christian churches and the Ukraine War, it emerges that religions not only react to global politics but also contribute to identifying issues and measures of how to tackle them. The interplay of religious publics, therefore, appears particularly dynamic, warranting a distinct conceptualization. This article thus aims to introduce the concept of religious public(s) in global politics by building upon literature on how publics emerge and which manifestations they can assume. First, four manifestations of publics are examined by conducting a case study on Christianity and the Ukraine War. Employing the case study as a plausibility probe, the findings are re-examined in a second step to develop a typology of religious publics. The article concludes by identifying other areas in which studying religious publics and global politics would prove rewarding.

Issue
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1. Introduction

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, not only did the international society of states react to this breach of international law, but so did various religious communities, albeit in very different ways and at different levels—ranging from the domestic to the global. While the official line of the Russian Orthodox Church was to bless the invasion, numerous Russian Orthodox Church priests as well as the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew condemned the war (cf. "Patriarch of Moscow blames," 2022; "Russian Orthodox leader," 2022; "'You can't bless the war,'" 2022). Beyond the orthodox churches, at the domestic level, religious communities have for example been partaking in the political discourse on the issue of providing arms to the Ukraine (cf. "EKD-Präses," 2022). And at the international level, hybrid state-religious institutions such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers issued a joint declaration in which

they state their willingness to "facilitate the dialogue between all sides" (OIC, 2022). At the transnational level, Jewish organizations, among others, have been coordinating support for Ukrainian refugees. And, finally, at the global level, inter-religious organizations such as the World Council of Churches or the Religions for Peace have issued joint declarations, praying for an end to the war, or even calling directly upon the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill to raise his voice against the war (cf. Religions for Peace, 2022; "WCC acting general secretary," 2022). What can be observed is that religions not only react to global politics, they actively seek to address, promote, or tackle issues, linking the local with the global level. This latter point is one distinguishing aspect of religions in global politics, when considering their widespread local affiliation and transnational representation. Approximately 75% of the world's population is affiliated with one of the world's major religions (PEW, 2015) and is thus also transnationally represented as the selection of examples above indicates.

The definition of religion employed here was developed drawing from both a sociological understanding (see Durkheim, 1915/1965, p. 62) as well as a social constructivist International Relations (IR) approach (see Kubálková, 2000, p. 695). In this context, religion is understood as institutionalized faith:

> Religion is the institutionalization of faith in the divine, expressed in a framework of values and rules based on which the constitutive community of followers interacts with its respective social and natural environment, linking the transcendental with the transnational. Religion often provides ideas on existence and mortality, purpose and significance, order and justice, leading to a sense of identity and hope. (McLarren, 2022, p. 19)

The above-mentioned relation between the individual and the transcendental and the local and the global leads me to the hypothesis that religions can constitute highly dynamic publics in global politics and thus warrant a distinct conceptualization. The aim of this article is, therefore, to introduce the concept of religious public(s) in global politics. To develop such a conceptualization, two "building blocks" are necessary. Mende and Müller (2023, p. 92) examine "what forms of publics exist in the global realm and how they overlap and interact." They identify four manifestations of publics, namely "audiences," "public spheres," "institutions," and "public interests." These serve as the foundation, or building block, to explore forms and dynamics of religious publics. Mende and Müller (2023) also discuss the aspect of the increasing transnationalisation of publics, though without national or sub-national publics disappearing. Since religion is to be found at all levels, often linking these levels, this point offers an additional point of departure in exploring religious publics and global politics.

In a first step, a case study is conducted employing these four manifestations of publics, which are briefly summarized and then applied to Christian churches and the Ukraine War. The examples for each manifestation were selected to reflect at least one Christian church directly involved in or affected by the conflict and one Christian church which can be termed an "observer" party. Due to the limited scope of the article and the illustrative character of the case study, if at least one example per manifestation can be found, this is viewed as sufficient to fulfil the exceptional quality of religions in terms of publics and global politics and thus deserving a distinct conceptualization of "religious publics." Employing the case study as a plausibility probe, the findings are then re-examined in a second step to develop a typology of religious publics. The foundations for this part, or second "building block," can be found in Zürn (2021) in which the author examines when and how publics can and should emerge. He lists three necessary conditions for a public to be able to form as a "collective" in the global space, namely the acceptance of the del-

egation of power, mobilization, and mutual recognition (p. 173). While the first step helps establish the dynamics in the interplay and overlap of religious publics, the second step examines what constitutes such religious publics and how they emerge, subsequently introducing three types of religious publics. The article concludes by identifying other areas in which studying religious publics and global politics would prove rewarding.

Perhaps surprisingly, the literature which links publics with global politics closely examines this transnationalisation of publics, yet it does not offer a systematic conceptualization of religious publics, which arguably always encompass a transnational dimension (cf. Albert et al., 2018; Fraser, 2007, 2021; Holtgreve et al., 2021; Stone, 2020; Zürn, 2018, 2021). This observation also applies to research that focuses on the domestic level, such as the research by Swatos and Wellman (1999) on religious publics in the USA. In particular, Zürn's (2021) ideas on how publics can evolve and also merge, are revisited here to explore the conceptualization of religious publics. A more general observation can be made regarding the gaps which remain in studying religion in IR. While a "religious turn" was proclaimed by some scholars (cf. Kratochvíl, 2009; Kubálková, 2013) and others sought to bring religion back from "exile" (Petito & Hatzopoulos, 2003), religion has indeed enjoyed increasing attention in the past two decades. However, a methodical inclusion of religion in theoretical frameworks and analytical models has been laggard at best (for a more detailed overview of the position of religion in IR see McLarren, 2022). To sum up, the article taps into the overall potential of including religion in IR and the more specific possibility of adding insight into publics and global politics.

2. Case Study: Christian Churches and the Ukraine War

In the following, Christianity, as a world religion, and the Ukraine War, as an ongoing issue of global politics, are examined to inductively explore the concept of religious publics. Following up on the assumptions laid out above, this case study seeks to address the hypothesis that religions can constitute highly dynamic publics in global politics and thus warrant a distinct conceptualization. Since, however, one cannot test that which has not been conceptualized and to avoid a tautological trap, this case study is presented as a plausibility probe, i.e., "an intermediary step between hypothesis generation and hypothesis testing" (Levy, 2008, p. 3).

2.1. Publics as Audiences

According to Mende and Müller (2023), this type of manifestation can be found when groups of actors share a common attention focus. The attention can be focused on political as well as non-political issues and events and in the case of the former, when considering global politics, the focus can be on one specific aspect, rather than global politics in its entirety. What is more, "the

key characteristic is not co-presence but co-orientation" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 92). The audiences relevant to the present article are those who pay attention to the same political issue (e.g., migration) or event (e.g., the war in Ukraine). In other words, the public here is understood as manifested in a group of actors who are observers with a joint awareness or at least attention to a political issue or event. Potentially, such an audience could also be mobilized.

Since religion is constituted by a community of followers, there is, by definition, always an audience when studying religions. However, in this case, the question arises whether there is a joint (religious) audience regarding the Ukraine War. At the local level, such an audience can, for example, be found in the shape of parish members who are joined in their common attention focus on their faith and religious aspects of life (attending church, bible study groups, etc.). Regarding their common interest in the Ukraine War, such a common attention focus can be motivated either intrinsically (e.g., based on their convictions) or extrinsically (e.g., guided by a preacher's sermon).

An example at a local parish level of such an audience is the Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church in Baltimore, Maryland, which has expressed its common attention in the shape of a prayer published on its homepage:

> With much anguish we see the tragic events continuing in Ukraine….So much death, destruction, suffering and hatred have been caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine….As Orthodox Christians, we do not support violence and aggression….We keep praying for peace, and we call upon our hierarchs to do everything in their power to stop hostilities. (Holy Trinity, 2023)

Speaking as "we" this parish identifies as a group with a joint focus and goes a step further, referring to "brothers and sisters in Christ" (Holy Trinity, 2023), thereby not only referring to the common attention focus but also to the common religious identity. To what extent this prayer was intrinsically motivated by concerned parish members or extrinsically guided by the local parish priest cannot be established based on the material available.

Moving away from the local parish level to the level of leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and, hence, the societal level, an example can be found of how an audience is "created" top-down, namely by the head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill. The patriarch has repeatedly legitimized the war and addressed the topic in his sermons. In the context of publics as audiences, one representative example shall be included here of how the patriarch has extrinsically sought to establish an audience with the common attention focus on the Ukraine War (the Russian Orthodox Church does not refer to it as the Ukraine War but has adopted the government's official terminology and speaks of "special operation" or "situation in Ukraine"; see http://www.

patriarchia.ru). On 13 March 2022, three weeks after the Russian attacks on Ukraine, Patriarch Kirill celebrated the liturgy of St. Basil at the central Russian Orthodox Church Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, located vis-à-vis the Red Square. During the service, Patriarch Kirill presented the head of National Guard Viktor Zolotov with an icon of Mary. He proclaimed this should serve as inspiration for the young Russian soldiers defending their home country with the words: "Let this image inspire young soldiers who take the oath, who embark on the path of defending the fatherland" (Russian Orthodox leader," 2022). Given the high visibility of such an event and such a gesture, not only did the patriarch guide his religious audience to a common attention focus, he also merged a religious liturgy with political issues. This inextricably linked the religious with the political.

Both examples are taken from the Russian Orthodox Church and both audiences have the same common attention focus, however disparate the attitudes may be. Following the definition of this manifestation of publics, there is more discussion to be had as to whether they constitute one greater audience and what role the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations have in terms of these audiences emerging in the first place. Since the first example is ambivalent as to its direct involvement (friends or family engaged in or affected by the war), another example is presented, namely that of an "observer" party. Such an example can be found in the "general audiences" the Catholic pope regularly holds. As the term already reveals, there is a joint group interested in what the pope has to convey, usually on an overarching theme. When looking specifically at the Ukraine War, Pope Francis has repeatedly taken the opportunity of such general audiences to express his reactions to the war, representing the voice of the Roman Catholic Church as a whole. Over the course of a year, he has spoken of "victims whose innocent blood cries to Heaven" (Vatican, 2022). He pleaded: "Put an end to this war! Silence the weapons! Stop sowing death and destruction!" (Vatican, 2022). "The toll of dead, wounded, refugees and displaced persons, destruction, economic and social damage speaks for itself. May the Lord forgive so many crimes and so much violence" (Vatican, 2023). Similar to the case of Patriarch Kirill, these words are addressed to a wider audience—or public. Significantly, a group of Ukrainian members of parliament was present at the latter general audience quoted above (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2023), indicating that the audience is by no means limited to Roman Catholic believers, but rather an audience that is united in its common interest in political issues or events. The three examples listed here demonstrate that religious publics can be found in the manifestation of audiences in different contexts.

2.2. Publics as Public Spheres

The second manifestation goes beyond mere groups with a common focus and refers to "communicative

spaces" (Mende & Müller, 2023) created by these groups. The members are not simply observers with a common interest, but rather there is interaction within the group which leads to discourse. In this manifestation, the authors also observe that there can be both political as well as non-political manifestations. "Political publics are discursive spheres in which the governance of common affairs is debated and the related decisions are legitimised and contested" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 92). Perhaps the central point is the observation that in this manifestation of public the act of engaging with one another's arguments is what joins the members of such a sphere. There is a dynamic element here since the action and reaction can be perpetuated and therefore endure, possibly leading to an institutionalization, though this is a distinct manifestation discussed further below.

As established above, religions are constituted by their believers, however, this does not yet reveal anything about the structures of the respective religions, for example how democratic or hierarchical they are. In "The Pope, the Public, and International Relations—Postsecular Transformations," Barbato (2020, p. 2) observes that:

> [A] new space emerged when priests, prophets and philosophers no longer restricted their role to that of a critical counsellor to the prince or a disputing scholar among scholars, but instead started to understand themselves as facilitators in their own right for the poor and illiterate masses.

This, arguably, represented the emergence of a public sphere and religion features as a bridge between the private and the public, rather than as an element to distinguish the two from one another.

An example of a public sphere created by religion, and in particular within Christianity in the context of the Ukraine War, is the sphere among Christian churches, namely between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), i.e., an example of a Christian church immediately involved/affected by the war and an observer party. Less than two weeks after the Russian invasion, the president of the COMECE, Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg, wrote to Patriarch Kirill:

> I dare to implore your Holiness in the spirit of fraternity: please, address an urgent appeal to Russian authorities to immediately stop the hostilities against the Ukrainian people and to show goodwill for seeking a diplomatic solution to the conflict, based on dialogue, common sense and respect for international law. (COMECE, 2022a)

Nine days later, the then Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR) Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion, replied on behalf of the patriarch, stating that "the relationships between the West and Russia have reached a deadlock….Today His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia does much to restore peace and trust, in the Ukrainian land in particular, working hard every day to make this happen" (Hilarion, 2022). Both the letter and the ensuing actions by the Russian Orthodox Church and the COMECE indicate that no further joint initiatives were sought. The next communication then took place when the COMECE informed Patriarch Kirill of the COMECE's initiative of calling for a ceasefire during Easter celebrations, appealing to President Putin and President Zelensky in a joint letter (COMECE, 2022b, 2022c). What is significant here is that Patriarch Kirill was not consulted beforehand and ensuing events also show that he did not follow suit.

In this illustrative case, the interaction took place among "official" representatives of the churches, rather than among a broad group of believers. Yet, the example demonstrates that public spheres exist within and between Christian churches which allow for members to engage in a discourse on "common affairs." These can be viewed here as the overall common affair or "good" of peace and how the churches individually and jointly should position themselves in view of the war or on more specific policy questions. The examples also point to the divisions which can be understood as a space for contestation on the one hand and the discontinuation of a discourse on the other hand. Either way, a (religious) public manifest in a public sphere is available, if the members wish to engage.

2.3. Publics as Institutions

In this third manifestation, institutions are an expression of agency and are deemed to be public based on their goal of managing common affairs and/or to produce common goods (Mende & Müller, 2023). "This manifestation of publics is…inextricably interlinked with politics as it denotes how a group of actors organises and regulates its common affairs" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 92). The main difference to the preceding two manifestations is that there is an element of representation which goes hand-in-hand with an "institutional framework." In other words, while the first manifestation of public merely indicates a common focus on an issue or an event and the second type of public is manifest in discourse, this third manifestation has a more enduring character combined with the aspect of agency, being able to make decisions and take action with the aim of producing common goods. Not every institution can necessarily act (international conventions, regimes). However, in this understanding of public, the institution has exactly that capability.

Considering the definition of religion employed in this article, the Christian churches studied here can all be understood as institutions. The following examples explore how they can also be understood as institutions

that assume a public character in that they not only provide a public sphere but also claim to act on behalf of a group of actors (their believers).

The Protestant Church in Germany (2022), which describes itself as a "Communion of 20 Lutheran, Reformed, and United Protestant Churches," is presented here as an example of an institution that acts in the name of a religious public. Its constitution thus already points to its aim of giving the numerous different Protestant churches in Germany agency in terms of having visibility but also the ability to reflect, decide, and act. In other words, the Protestant Church in Germany is a prime example of a public as institution. The common good in question in this context is arguably the greater good of peace and how it can be maintained or achieved. When the question of providing Ukraine with weapons emerged in Germany several weeks after the war started, this triggered a discussion within the Protestant Church in Germany, which can be viewed as the ability to reflect. The "commissioner for peace" of the Protestant Church in Germany, Bishop Friedrich Kramer, addressed the dilemma the Church found itself in, stating that while Ukraine had a natural right to defend itself, peace could only be achieved without weapons. In his essay "Just Peace and Military Violence" (Bedford-Strohm, 2022), one of the Church's most prominent figures, the Bavarian Bishop and former Chair of the Protestant Church in Germany Council Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, argued that defending oneself with weapons was morally acceptable. Thus, supporting those who were attacked was equally justified, always under the caveat of proportionality or just means (Bedford-Strohm, 2022). These two camps within the German Protestant Church took part in the public discourse, for example by publishing, participating in interviews, or television debates. They also reflect two discourse formations within German society and the government itself. While the Protestant Church in Germany was not able to decide on a joint position on the question of providing arms, they did decide on the common position that they believed that Ukraine had a right to self-defence (see "Beschluss zu Frieden," 2022). Not only can a public sphere be observed here, but the institution of the Protestant Church in Germany develops positions within its own institution. These joint positions on creating, promoting, or maintaining common goods are then transported into the overall public discourse, either by politicians who are themselves members of the Protestant Church in Germany or by representatives engaging in public debates.

Unlike in the other three manifestations, the second example presented here is not that of a Christian church directly affected by the war. Instead, the second example is the Roman Catholic church as it represents a Christian church and a (religious) public manifest in an institution not only at a domestic/national level such as the Protestant Church in Germany but also at an international and transnational level. The Catholic church arguably has more agency internationally than the Protestant

Church in Germany, since it is officially represented at the United Nations as the Holy See with the status of a permanent observer. As has been indicated above, the Catholic church has repeatedly expressed concern regarding the Ukraine War. What is more, it has also offered to serve as a mediator between the warring parties. The example presented here is how the Catholic church seeks to improve a common good, namely the effectiveness of the United Nations. The Ukraine War has triggered an unusually critical response by the Roman Catholic church aimed at the United Nations. At a general audience in April 2022, Pope Francis stated that, "in the current war in Ukraine, we are witnessing the impotence of the United Nations Organization" (Vatican, 2022). This was elaborated in more detail by Archbishop Caccia, addressing the United Nations General Assembly as the representative of the Holy See, underlining "the significant dysfunction present in this organization's security architecture and that of the entire multilateral system" (Caccia, 2023). Publics that take institutional shapes can be observed here in that not only a group of over one billion Catholic believers are represented, but, rather, the Holy See is seeking to improve the multilateral system, particularly the United Nations in order to maintain peace and protect the innocent (not limited to Roman Catholics).

2.4. Publics as Public Interests

The final manifestation is perhaps also the least tangible, as public interests are often (legitimately or not) proclaimed by actors in the name of a certain group, which only comes into existence through this act of identifying common goods. It is this act of speaking on behalf of, thereby constructing, and making "the interest or well-being of said group a normative reference point for politics" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 93) that makes this manifestation political. This differs from the manifestation as audience, since there is both a normative component and the element of an expressed appeal or even agenda. It also differs from the public sphere, since a discourse as such is not necessarily required, given a joint understanding of what the common good is. This does not preclude that this type could morph into a public as a public sphere or even develop into a public possessing institutional agency.

In the example presented under publics as audience, Patriarch Kirill was mentioned as providing arguments for legitimizing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, blessing soldiers and weapons. The patriarch is officially the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and thus speaks in the name of all believers. This, however, not only happens within religious contexts but also beyond. In January 2023, the new chairman of the DECR (mentioned above under public as public sphere), Metropolitan Anthony, addressed the United Nations Security Council. In this speech directed at a global public, he stated:

Russian Orthodox Church on her own and in cooperation with other Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant confessions and representatives of world traditional religions is taking part within the realm of possibility in defending the rights of religious believers all over the world, and Christians in particular. At present we have grave concerns about the flagrant violation of human and constitutional rights of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine. (Anthony, 2023)

By listing these various Christian churches, the chairman implies that he is not only speaking on behalf of members of the Russian Orthodox Church, but rather in the name of broader (Christian) public interests. He calls upon the "esteemed Council members" (Anthony, 2023), making the well-being of the "largest confession of the country" the normative reference point, which, according to him, is under threat by "unlawful actions of the Ukrainian state authorities." However, there is another "public interest" found within the Russian Orthodox Church itself. Initiated in March 2022 and signed by almost 300 Russian Orthodox Church priests in the meantime, a joint appeal was published online as an interactive document (CPNN, 2022). These priests explicitly identify the public interest as "the life of every person is a priceless and unique gift of God, and therefore we wish all the soldiers—both Russian and Ukrainian—to return to their homes and families unharmed" ("Russian Orthodox priests," 2022). While they also point to the suffering of the Ukrainians, they "mourn the ordeal to which our brothers and sisters in Ukraine were unfairly subjected" ("Russian Orthodox priests," 2022), they do not identify the Ukrainian authorities as the perpetrators. These two brief examples indicate that even within one Christian church different normative reference points and publics are constructed, sometimes reaching beyond the own church and even addressing political leaders directly.

A very prominent example of a specific public interest which has become even more prominent since the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been that of the protection and support of refugees. Representatives from the entire spectrum of Christian churches have been pleading for support and creating awareness of the plight of Ukrainian refugees. This ranges from individual representatives such as Pope Francis offering prayers and providing aid (Vatican, 2022), to joint efforts such as those by the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) providing humanitarian aid (IOCC, 2023). But it is also manifest in joint religious-secular initiatives such as can be seen in the cooperation between the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and the (non-religious) initiative Welcome.US which describes itself as a "non-partisan, non-profit incubator for projects that turn common pain into common purpose" (Welcome.US, 2023). The example above which looks at varying claims to upholding and pursuing public interests within the Russian Orthodox Church and this latter aspect of differing groups mobilizing own or joining forces to further the public interest of refugee protection all indicate that there is a case for public interests that are based on religious conceptions of publics.

3. Conceptualizing "Religious Publics"

The hypothesis that religions can constitute highly dynamic publics in global politics and thus warrant a distinct conceptualization was examined by reviewing four manifestations in connection with Christianity as one religion and the Ukraine War as a global political issue. At least one example could be found for each of the four manifestations, ranging from an audience at the local parish level to the expression of public interests at the international level. As the short overview of manifestations of publics in the context of a religion and a case of global politics illustrated, religion indeed is often manifested in more than one type of public in global politics. What it has also demonstrated is that there is not just *one* religious public. The next step, then, is to explore possibilities of conceptualizing religious public(s), to better grasp the interplay of these manifestations.

Looking at the domestic level, Habermas (2011, p. 27) observes that, "as long as religious communities remain a vital force in civil society, their contribution to the legitimation process reflects an at least indirect reference to religion, which 'the political' retains even within a secular state." Holst and Molander (2015) offer an interesting debate on the status of religious citizens in this public discourse and whether they "suffer an asymmetrical cognitive burden." What makes religion so complex and at the same time significant when studying public(s) and global politics, is not only the constitution of the religions themselves, but also the political structures within which they are manifested, be it within the state or global governance institutions. Following up on the question, Barbato (2020, p. 16) addresses as to "whether religion is a constitutive or a temporary element of the public discourse'':

> Religious discourses in exchange with secular discourses are not only rich enough to prepare cognitive notions and imaginations of a better world but also possess the motivational impact to work for them. Religious discourses which are themselves open to other religious and secular discourses can help to form islands of moral arguing in the transformation process of globalisation. Habermas calls societies which go beyond rigid secularism and accept religion as a moral source postsecular. (Barbato, 2012, p. 1081)

While Habermas (2011) identifies the significance of religious contributions in public discourse in terms of fostering legitimacy, Barbato (2012, 2020) points to the manifestations of religions as public in terms of public

spheres and public interests. The cases discussed here could, arguably, be subsumed in term of postsecular publics. However, that would not do the dynamic interplay of different manifestations justice, since the examples also revealed that religious publics are manifold, can bridge the local with the global, and—at times—even constitute global politics. When reviewing the case study of Christian churches and the Ukraine War and considering the religious reactions mentioned in the introduction, three types of religious publics can be identified: so-called "mono-religious publics," "joint-religious publics," and "secular-religious publics."

The four manifestations introduced by Mende and Müller (2023) were employed as a foundation in inductively grasping religious publics. All four manifestations could be identified within, between, and beyond the Christian churches examined in the case study. These four manifestations are therefore helpful in demonstrating and analytically grasping the manifoldness and dynamics of religious publics. They appear in different constellations—an audience often goes hand-in-hand with a public sphere; institutions enable claims to public interests, etc. What is more, these four manifestations are not limited to one or several Christian churches or Christianity as a whole. While not explicitly mentioned in the case study, there are numerous examples of inter-religious versions of all of the manifestations identified above.

As mentioned above, Zürn's (2021) work on how publics can and should emerge to overcome the current crisis of global governance provides the second building block, as it helps establish how publics evolve. Some caveats are necessary here. The first caveat is that Zürn explores what he terms a "counterfactual" public, in other words, he studies publics that do not exist. A second caveat is that he argues that the mere existence of a governance system makes a public normatively desirable, though the assumption is that these are only possible in the context of liberal-democratic states (Zürn, 2021, p. 160). He is thus interested in the conditions necessary for such global political publics to emerge. A final caveat is that Zürn's understanding of publics most closely resembles what Mende and Müller (2023) would term public as institution. The definition of religion employed in this article grasps religions as institutions, yet as the empirical examples have shown, religious publics can assume other manifestations as well. Zürn's institutional understanding of public is used to conceptualize religious publics. However, it shall not preclude other manifestations.

For a political public to emerge, the following conditions, presented as questions, need to be met. The first one reads: "Are there indications of a broad acceptance of the functional necessity of regulations and decision-making processes that transcend borders?" (Zürn, 2021, p. 173). This refers to an acceptance of delegating decision-making powers to political institutions. The second question he raises is "whether there are societal groups capable of and willing to develop

their own expectations and strategies towards international institutions" (Zürn, 2021, p. 175). He also calls this the condition of being able to mobilize the group's own resources. Thirdly, he addresses the question as to the mutual recognition of rights of the members of a given public, i.e., whether the freedom of speech and an acceptance of mutual obligations are given (Zürn, 2021, p. 176). Perhaps surprisingly, despite the fact that religions are not per se liberal-democratic, these three conditions can be observed in the emergence of religious publics in the global governance context.

A first explorative conceptualization of religious publics might read: religious publics fulfill the condition of accepting the delegation of power to a higher entity (usually in the form of a religious authority), the condition of being able to mobilize own attitudes and support vis-à-vis this higher entity, and there is a mutual recognition of egality and freedom of speech. When they emerge, religious publics can assume one or more manifestations in the shape of audience, public sphere, institutions, and public interests. They can take on the shape of mono-religious, joint-religious, or secular-religious publics (as illustrated in Table 1).

Mono-religious publics are at the core of this article. They are groups (or, in this case, churches) within a single religion that jointly fulfil the condition of accepting and delegating authority to a higher entity. The common higher entity would be the Christian notion of God, yet the individual churches might have religious leaders or institutions to which authority is delegated, and there is also a parallel acceptance of secular authority. There is a potential of mobilization within the religion to devise new standpoints or strategies and this goes hand-in-hand with the aspect of mutual recognition. Even in the case of churches with strong hierarchical and often undemocratic structures, there is space for contestation. They can assume all four manifestations.

When studying the Ukraine War, *joint-religious publics* can be identified, for example, in the shape of inter-religious audiences and the public spheres provided by them. More institutionalized forms such as Religions for Peace can also take on agency and develop public interests. This type of religious public is characterized by the shared identity of being religious, regardless of the religion in question. Inter-religious dialogues are an example of such a public and specifically the Parliament of the World's Religions represents such a space in which various "religious" come together with the joint vision of a "world of peace, justice and sustainability" (Parliament of Religions, 2021). The aspect of delegating authority to a higher entity can take on different forms, either in that there is a joint (albeit not identical) understanding of a higher power, or in the sense that the authority is delegated to the joint common inter-religious institution. There is once again the potential to mobilize, and the foundations of inter-religious formats are based on the common understanding of egality. These joint religious publics are usually transnational and the issues which

Table 1. Types of religious publics.

Type of religious public	Description	Manifestations	Role in Ukraine War
Mono-religious	One or more groups belonging to the same religion	Audience, sphere, institution, interests	Legitimizing the war; contributing to domestic debates on providing arms; mediating between conflict parties; navel-gazing; apathy; appealing to state and international actors
Joint-religious	Can be both ad-hoc as well as institutionalized and can focus on one or more issues; members from at least two different religions are involved	Audience, sphere, institution, interests	Issuing joint statements; calling for dialogue; mobilizing support for refugees
Secular-religious or post-secular	Ad-hoc formations between religious and non-religious groups, usually focused on one issue	Audience, sphere, interests	Political will-formation regarding weapon deliveries; refugee support; combating hunger

are addressed, or the political will, which is formed, targets global political issues. These joint-religious publics can also assume all four manifestations. A sub-type of this category is so-called "single-issue religious publics," which are formed by followers of various religions and are joined by a common issue.

The example shown above was that of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA cooperating with a non-religious organisation to promote joint public interests. As Fox and Sandler (2004, p. 49) observe, "a policy maker who can successfully portray a political cause as a religious one has a powerful tool for mobilizing support and silencing opposition." In other words, *joint secular-religious publics* pose a reciprocal strengthening of legitimacy and authority between the religious and secular members in order to promote their global political aims. Or, as Habermas would define it, "societies which go beyond rigid secularism and accept religion as a moral source" (as cited in Barbato, 2012, p. 1081). Unlike the other two types, this type of religious public is unlikely to develop institutional agency, since cooperation is usually ad-hoc and limited to one issue. This does not exclude institutions per se but makes them less likely.

4. Conclusion

The guiding hypothesis of this article is that religions can constitute highly dynamic publics in global politics and thus warrant a distinct conceptualization. This was examined using categories or manifestations of publics as devised by Mende and Müller (2023) and conditions for publics to emerge according to Zürn (2021). The case study itself demonstrated that a single religion can assume all four manifestations. In other words, the hypothesis proved to be true and thus justified a

distinct conceptualization of religious public(s). Yet the case study also indicated the high degree of pluralism within one church vis-à-vis a single global political issue, namely that of the Ukraine War. The case shows that religions cannot be grasped as monolithic constructs and, despite strong hierarchical structures, there is a great dynamic expressed in inter- and intra-church discourse. The case also underlines how intertwined religious publics and global politics are, for example when considering the schism within the orthodox churches of Russia and Ukraine. In other words, due to the manifoldness of manifestations, but also of understandings of authority, the potential for mobilization, and mutual recognition, religious publics can be conceptualized distinctly. The three types introduced here are of an explorative nature. First findings indicate that they can be applied to other religions and inter-religious or secular-religious constellations beyond the one examined here. As mentioned in the introduction, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation is in itself an under-researched religious public that has also reacted to the Ukraine War. Another promising case to consider is that of the broad spectrum of publics within Judaism not just in the case of the Ukraine War. Moving away from the Ukraine War, especially the global issues of migration and climate change could benefit from studying religious publics, as this would help identify (additional) public spheres, argumentations, and mechanisms of mobilization.

Introducing religious publics, however, also serves another purpose, for it allows another take on the question of publics and global politics. When looking at religions, the actors, spheres, and institutions in question are most often not organized democratically. Particularly the two examples of the Russian Orthodox Church and of the Roman Catholic Church examined in this article

represent religious institutions which have strong hierarchies and rigid structures. Yet, the manifestations of public studied here show that contestation is possible and observable. And in those institutions which are more democratically organized, such as the Protestant Church in Germany (in Germany), participants in the discourse agree to disagree, giving space to disagreement rather than forcing unity in the name of harmony. These observations indicate that the forms of public identified by Mende and Müller (2023) can also be applied to non-democratic spaces. An overall argument for studying religions in the context of global politics can also be made, as they can serve as a source for better understanding the emergence or change of public common goods, be it in identifying them, but also understanding in how they are prioritized or legitimized. Finally, by introducing and differentiating between three forms of religious publics, religion(s) in global politics but also in IR can be studied in a more nuanced way.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Shaping Global Public Spheres Through International Law: An Investigation Into International Climate Change Law

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Abstract
This article makes three arguments to contribute to this thematic issue's intention of examining the role of public spheres in global politics. To begin with, it attempts to develop the concept of "strong" public spheres to include plenary organs of international institutions. It believes in the potential of this concept as a heuristic fiction. The study then examines the role of international law in shaping global public spheres and their role in global politics. International law's characteristics have contributed to the current incomplete manifestations of global publics. Not only has international law constructed the institutional frameworks of the "strong" public sphere within international institutions, but it has also integrated civil society actors into the deliberative processes of will formation of these institutions. Finally, this research turns to international climate change law as a case study. The institutional structures created by international climate change law have not only created one "strong" public sphere in the form of the conference of the parties but rely on a second "strong" global public, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which aims to institutionalise the global climate science community without abandoning an intergovernmental structure. What is more, the paradigm shift accompanying the Paris Agreement has made global climate change governance increasingly reliant on an active transnational global public sphere.

Keywords
global public spheres; international climate change law; public international law; public sphere theory

1. Introduction: Global Governance and Public Spheres

Global governance studies have demonstrated how the relationship between publics and global politics has profoundly changed. This transformation has affected the manifestations of publics present in the global realm and how they "shape and are shaped by global politics" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 95). This observation presupposes a certain understanding of what might constitute a public at a global scale.

Fraser defines a public, or a public sphere, as a "space for the communicative generation of public opinion" and "a vehicle for marshalling [as well as channelling] public opinion as a political force" (Fraser, 2014, p. 7). Nevertheless, the features and functions of an *Öffentlichkeit* (i.e., public) have been developed and theorised in relation to the territorial nation-state and its

imagined community, its propagated national identity (Habermas, 1962). In the context of the Westphalian nation-state, the public sphere is clearly theorised as distinct from the state: "Although the state is so to speak the executor of the public political sphere, it is not a part of it… The public sphere [is to be understood] as a sphere which mediates between society and the state (…)" (Habermas et al., 1974, p. 115). Still, public sphere theory also acknowledges that certain organs of the state may operate as a public sphere. With the emergence of parliamentary sovereignty, two distinguishable types of public spheres emerge, the so-called "weak" publics—civil society which generates public opinion but not laws (Fraser, 1990, p. 75; Habermas, 1992, pp. 373–382)—and "strong" publics—structures of public deliberation within the state (such as parliament) whose deliberations may result in sovereign law-making. In this domestic context,

the role of law within the interplay between the state and the public sphere(s) is twofold: On the one hand, the law is supposed to codify the general interest articulated by the public (Fraser, 2014, pp. 9, 13). On the other hand, and structurally more important, the law dictates the relationship between the state and society (regarding the normative potential of law for the creation of (European) society, see von Bogdandy, 2022). It is the role of the law to protect how "weak" publics generate public opinion and control the state (Marxsen, 2011, p. 217), as well as to regulate how strong publics are constituted and make use of state power.

In contrast to this established theorisation, the notion of a public at the global level is a subject of considerable discussion. Evidently, the same characteristics and standards of a public sphere at the national level cannot be promisingly applied to the global scale simply because the conditions of an emerging public sphere differ greatly from the national context (Zürn, 2021, p. 162). There is nothing remotely comparable to a sovereign state at the global level, nor is there a comparable imagined community or society. Faced with these strikingly different constellations, some scholars state the absence of a normatively meaningful political public sphere and proceed to examine the effects of such an absence (Zürn, 2021).

Compared to such a radical conclusion, it may be just as promising to investigate which kind of "lesser" manifestations of publics have emerged in the global political system, what kind of (imagined) community these manifestations have contributed to, and to what extent they participate in global politics. The editorial of this thematic issue develops a conceptual framework for this purpose (Mende & Müller, 2023). The editors distinguish four types of manifestations of publics at the global level: audiences, discursive spheres, institutions, and public interests. This article aims to contribute to this framework by analysing the role of international law in the process of shaping the publics at the global level and integrating them into processes of global politics. Just as law's decisive role in shaping the relationship between the state and public sphere has been analysed in the domestic context, so international law deserves to be investigated in its role for global publics.

Firstly, this article will reconsider the notion of the global public sphere, proposing an understanding of this concept that includes the plenary organs of international institutions (Section 2.1). Thereafter, it will suggest that international law has contributed to the development of the current landscape and manifestations of global publics and has played an important role in its conceptualisation (Section 2.2). This article will then turn to international climate change law and demonstrate that it has been the scene of a conscious and continual process of shaping manifestations of global public spheres (Section 3). I suggest that international law pursues and promotes a certain vision for global publics and their role in global politics. The intention is to lay the groundwork for further critical perspectives regarding the necessity

to rethink the critical function of public sphere theory in a global context and how the international legal system, in particular the climate regime, aims at including non-state actors.

2. Global Public Spheres and International Law

2.1. The Global Public Sphere in Theory

A global political system has solidified, which functionally requires a public sphere or public spheres (Zürn, 2021, p. 161). Still, a public sphere comparable to that of the national context does not exist at the global level and, in the absence of world government, cannot exist. Still, efforts have been made to theorise global publics spheres in the current context of global politics and the international legal order. These efforts approach the concept of a public sphere as a "heuristic fiction" (Vaihinger, 1913), a pragmatic concept that derives its critical thrust from the process of its application to an institutional reality, which does not (yet) fully satisfy the concept's criteria. This means that theorisations of a global public sphere must develop their normative and legitimacy-generating functions in light of the current manifestations of such spheres. If not, such a conceptualisation cannot generate normative thrust in the first place.

Most of the efforts to theorise such global public spheres have focused on the notion of transnational publics (Nash, 2014). This echoes the central idea of opposing the public sphere to the state to act as a counterweight and keep the latter in check (Fraser, 1990, p. 75). These transnational publics have mostly been theorised as opposing the institutions created by the inter-national legal order, hegemonic states, and influential private industries (Habermas, 2008, p. 10, instead speaks of a transnational level of world society and therein includes some international organisations). While this article will follow the widely accepted understanding of the transnational public sphere, the conceptualisation of global public spheres that I propose attempts to transpose another aspect of public sphere theory to the global context: the idea of "strong" publics developed by Fraser (Fraser, 1990, pp. 75–76, 1991). With the emergence of parliamentary democracy, Fraser observes the emergence of strong publics as the "publics whose discourse encompasses both opinion-formation and decision-making," "a locus of public deliberation culminating in legally binding decisions" (Fraser, 1990, p. 75). Certainly, in the absence of a democratic world-state, a strong public comparable to that of a parliament does not exist at the global level. Nevertheless, following the rationale of the existing inter-national legal system, the notion of "strong" public might be beneficially adapted to the global level and its inter-state characteristics.

With the advent of global governance and the multiplication of international organisations and other international institutions, interstate cooperation has, to some

extent, detached itself from the original Hobbesian vision of the international order. The international organisations that have emerged usually have plenary bodies, where representatives of all member states meet regularly. These plenary organs typically have some form of decision-making power (even if often only regarding the internal functioning of the organisation and, beyond that, only via formally non-binding instruments, as is the case for the UN General Assembly). In general, these plenary bodies serve as the central deliberative organs and constitute a discursive sphere dedicated to contributing to over-arching opinion formation and consensus-building. As such international organisations create political spaces for the articulation of common interests. Their deliberative organs are not only instruments for managing common problems but must also be seen as institutionalised fora of global politics (see Klabbers, 2005 on the international organisation as *agora*), as "space[s] for the communicative generation of [global, inter-national] public opinion" (Fraser, 2014, p. 7).

The theorisation of a global public sphere applied in this article transcribes the distinction between "strong" and "weak" publics, developed by Fraser, to the global level by distinguishing between the "weak" public sphere of a transnational civil society and the "strong" public sphere that manifests in the deliberative plenary bodies of international organisations and institutions. In the typology of public spheres, suggested by Mende and Müller, these strong public spheres fall in the category of institutions (Mende & Müller, 2023). Clearly, they differ strongly in their characteristics from their national counterparts due to the international legal framework they are situated in. Transposing this dual understanding of a public sphere to the global level means that, on the one hand, it encompasses inter-national public spheres, which manifest in the deliberative plenary organs of international organisations and institutions, and, on the other hand, transnational public spheres composed of civil society actors.

Several arguments have been raised against such and similar theorisations. Among those is the argument that even within the deliberative organs of international organisations, the member states of these organisations continue to act in a particularistic manner following their own interests and are accountable (if at all) only to their own constituencies. Even in cases of deliberation leading to consensus, "the convergence of states' interests around a set of shared values or programmatic objectives should not be confused with 'publicness'" (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 336; similarly, Habermas, 2005). However, Habermas himself thinks that an international order capable of a global public sphere does not necessarily require the complete disappearance of the states and their interests into that international order and its communicative spheres (Habermas, 2005, p. 229). On the contrary, we can observe that the density of international organisations, as well as the deliberative prac-

tices within these institutions, have forced states to cooperate and compromise. It is the discursive sphere created by international organisations and institutions that acts as a melting pot in which the particularistic negotiation positions of states can fuse around shared values (von Bogdandy & Habermas, 2013, p. 301). This has even gone so far that states consider themselves to be part of an international community, even if, of course, they do not always act accordingly (see Lindberg, 2014). This international community is composed of a network of international institutions and organisations that contain deliberative organs which act as spaces for the creation of one specific form of public opinion: the inter-state public opinion (Johnstone, 2011, p. 18; Mitzen, 2005, pp. 406–408).

A second argument raised against the presence of strong publics at the global level is the fact that, according to Fraser's conceptualisation, the "strong" public sphere is supposed to be capable of binding and enforceable law-making and must be accountable to the "weak" public sphere (Fraser, 1990, p. 75). These conditions are not met in a manner comparable to the context of a democratic nation-state: It lacks an overarching democratic world-state equipped with an elected "strong" public sphere in which all parties engage on equal footing (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 222). Moreover, the "weak" transnational public sphere that is in the process of formation, emerges under very different circumstances and with very different characteristics than in the context of a democratic nation-state. The most apparent difference to the context of the nation-state is that both these spheres are much further removed from the concerned individuals than in the case of the domestic publics. This is why Habermas suggests a dual strategy that considers both individuals (world citizens) and states as the relevant subjects from which the legitimacy of international public authority needs to derive (Habermas, 2005, p. 244). The "strong" public spheres at the global level derive their legitimacy from the representatives of nation-states (which act as intermediaries for the national demos) irrespective of the political system of the nation-state. Additionally, the space for political negotiations and elaborations of common views is suffused with power imbalances and unequal opportunities despite the formally egalitarian plane of sovereign equality (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 229). Finally, the legal instruments of the existing and fragmented international organisations are often formally non-binding and even less enforceable (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 229). Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that they are devoid of authoritative character, for example, soft law instruments often play a functionally equivalent role to hard law (Pauwelyn et al., 2014; von Bogdandy et al., 2017; White, 2016). The reality of an inegalitarian international institutional landscape, which is fragmented along a multitude of substantive and geographic lines should not lead to the conclusion of the inexistence of a new form of "strong" sectoral public spheres. This would

risk depriving the concept of public sphere of analytical, critical, and normative potential at the global level.

Of course, the theorisation of "strong" global public spheres presented here harbours risks of losing a degree of the critical force intrinsic to its conceptualisation, namely, the normative legitimacy and political efficacy of public opinion developed in the context of the nation-state (Fraser, 2014, p. 20). In applying this understanding, I do not wish to turn a blind eye to the need to rethink legitimacy and political efficacy as critical functions for a theorisation of a global public sphere or to ignore the fact that these observable forms of "strong" global publics are often exposed to and impotent towards the domination by hegemonic states, a-politicised economic rationales, and transnational private actors. Furthermore, I do not suggest that these "strong" publics sufficiently legitimate all acts of international institutions. On the contrary, my intention is to develop a concept that can incorporate the lesser, "incomplete" (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 215) forms of publics that have emerged at the global level and, in doing so, make these forms of publics more accessible to critique. I suggest that the conceptualisation of "strong" global publics can be analytically useful in identifying those institutions which should be conceived as part of rudimentary global public spheres and open these institutions to being scrutinised by a concept that has a critical normative function and potential. Identifying the existing rudimentary "strong" public spheres might constitute a basis for further inquiries into the presence or absence of the necessary critical functions of public spheres and for the necessary rethinking of legitimacy and political efficacy as critical functions.

2.2. International Law and Global Public Spheres

The editorial of this thematic issue does not specifically address the role of international law in the interrelationship between publics and global politics (Mende & Müller, 2023). Nevertheless, international law is key—the understanding of international law employed here is not restricted to its established sources, such as treaties, custom, and general principles, but extends to international institutions' (soft) legal instruments. Despite being an increasingly influential phenomenon of transnationalisation, international law still plays a central role in canalising the processes of global politics. Moreover, in the formation of a global public sphere, international law plays a role comparable to domestic law at the level of the nation state. Of course, international law faces multiple limitations unknown to domestic law. Nevertheless, similarly to national law, international law codifies the result of a general interest articulated by the "strong" public spheres at the international level (e.g., in the form of legal instruments adopted by the plenary bodies of international organisations). Additionally, it dictates the organisational structure of these "strong" publics, their functioning, and how they integrate the public opinion generated by "weak" publics, for example, with the inclu-

sion of certain non-state actors in deliberative processes and the formation of public opinion. It comes as no surprise then that the constitutionalisation of international law has been considered a prerequisite for global public spheres to emerge (Brunkhorst, 2002; Habermas, 2008). Consequently, international law has actively shaped the manifestations of public spheres and institutionalised their role in global politics. Although many manifestations of global publics also develop outside the purview of international law, or even in reaction to its insufficiencies, international law embodies a certain idea of global publics, their manifestations, and their role in global politics.

Public international law has always been largely state-centric. It follows a private law paradigm and is classically portrayed as "a horizontal order of co-existence based on consent" (for a critical engagement with this see von Bogdandy et al., 2017, p. 118). With the advent of global governance, this paradigm has become increasingly inadequate to describe a legal order that has developed a sophisticated institutional structure, which has heavily altered horizontal relations between states and how negotiations take place, compromises are articulated, and consensus or, in some cases, sufficient majorities are found. This institutional structure of international law is particularly marked by the success of international organisations, which have created political spaces for the articulation of common interests (Klabbers, 2005).

However, with their last big surge of success in the 1990s and early 2000s, also came an increasing loss in clarity of their legal conceptualisation, if they ever had any (Golia & Peters, 2022, p. 25). Simultaneously, international organisations and their bureaucracies have increasingly begun to wield and exercise considerable amounts of public authority (Biermann & Siebenhüner, 2009; von Bogdandy et al., 2017). International legal scholars quickly grew aware of the issues of lacking legitimacy, transparency, and accountability of these institutional structures and their authoritative acts. Consequently, considerable efforts were undertaken to further develop the international legal framework in order to equip it with the necessary instruments to fully grasp, control, and legitimise these authoritative acts. Such attempts can be found in fields like international institutional law, global constitutionalism, global administrative law, and the international public authority approach. Some of these attempts were explicitly keen on incorporating discourse theory and public sphere theory into their normative frameworks (Goldmann, 2016). This indicates the critical potential of applying public sphere theory analytically as well as critically to international legal frameworks.

While the normative aspirations that try to grapple with these developments are still being refined and further adapted to the ever-changing reality, the existing legal structures of international organisations have clearly already played a part in the institutionalisation of certain manifestations of global public spheres within processes of global politics. International institutional law "provide[s] for the legal constructions constituting a

space for politics" (Venzke, 2008, p. 1425) for an "international community." These legal constructions have established the plenary bodies as a form of "strong" global public spheres. The international bureaucracies that have developed around these "strong" publics, of course, do not constitute global public spheres themselves, but they have considerable influence over the formation of opinion that takes place within the "strong" global publics of international organisations (see Section 3.2).

Moreover, international law has not only contributed to the specific manifestations of "strong" global publics, but it has also, from the very origins of international institutional law, influenced the institutionalised manifestations of emerging "weak" transnational spheres. As Habermas et al. (1974, p. 115) state, "[t]he public sphere [is to be understood] as a sphere which mediates between society and the state." Just as law organises this process of mediation at the national level so does international law at the global level, even if not with the same all-encompassing authority. By integrating a varied range of non-state actors in the deliberative processes of international organisations, international institutional law articulates a certain understanding of what is to be considered global society and what it considers to be the "weak" transnational public spheres, which should mediate between the "strong" global public spheres within international organisations and its imagined/constructed global society.

2.3. International Organisations and the Inclusion of Non-State Actors

Many public sphere theorists have begun to develop a theorisation of transnational public spheres (for an overview, see Fraser, 2021). This process, as this thematic issue indicates, is far from being concluded. A part of the discussion has revolved around the questions of to what extent NGOs and other civil society groups should be considered part of this new transnational public sphere and to what extent they represent societal public opinion. International law has been rather clear in its programmatic attitude towards these questions. From very early on, it viewed these actors as part of a public sphere, might it be from different national spheres or one transnational sphere. International institutional law has from its earliest days been influenced by these actors.

The involvement of NGOs and other non-state actors in international legal processes goes back to the very formation of international organisations. They grew out of and in symbiosis with industrial, professional, academic, and other early forms of non-governmental organisations, or, to put it differently, civil society associations (Charnovitz, 1997; Golia & Peters, 2022, p. 29). Throughout the last two centuries, one can frequently observe an "oscillation" between "private trans-national associations [and] inter-governmental organizations" not seldomly resulting in the hybridity of institutions (Peters & Peter, 2012, p. 187). The (historic) role of

NGOs in the formation of the global political system through international law and international institutions is not disputed. It is well-recognised that NGOs play an important role in the "development, interpretation, judicial application, and enforcement of international law" (Charnovitz, 2006, p. 352). International law itself formalised (at least some of) the roles played by NGOs. For example, Article 71 of the UN Charter pertaining to the functioning of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) institutionalised the possibility of consultation with NGOs. This set a benchmark for other UN institutions so that today (if certain conditions are met) some participation of NGOs is generally accepted (Charnovitz, 1997, pp. 249–256). As such, NGOs have contributed to the "creation of a new international ethos" (Törnquist-Chesnier, 2010, p. 260), through their participation in the various processes surrounding international law.

What can one conclude about the manifestations of "strong" and "weak" global public spheres and the role of international law? Some have concluded that NGOs play such a central role in the decision-making processes of international organisations that they cannot fall into the category of "weak" publics (Eriksen & Sending, 2013, p. 229). Still, the framework and rationale behind international law seem to contradict this assumption. States are still the central subjects of international law, the centre of the deliberative process, and are in the driving seat of decision-making within the plenary bodies of international organisations. Therefore, NGOs and other civil society actors do not become part of the "strong" global public constructed by international law. Rather, international law has awarded them an important role as voices of a transnational public sphere in the deliberative processes of international organisations even if it can be disputed whether they can fill that role in a normatively sufficient manner.

By integrating NGOs and other civil society actors into deliberative processes, international institutional law has established a particular relation between these "weak" and "strong" public spheres. In doing so, international law has supported the conception of international organisations and institutions as a communicative space that, next to its member states and the "strong" publics they form in plenary bodies, consciously included a wide range of actors that it perceives as a part of some form of the transnational public sphere (Scholte, 2016). In this conception, international organisations are capable of generating a public opinion beyond that of the convergence of self-interested positions of individual member states, ideally leading to the creation of a distinct "will" of the international organisation (the notion of "distinct will" also operates as a heuristic fiction; Klabbers, 2015, p. 13).

2.4. The Proceduralisation of International Law and Its Institutionalising Effect on Global Publics

A final development in international law has played an important role in the conceptualisation of global public

spheres. This is the *proceduralisation* of international law. Several fields of international law, especially international environmental law, have been witnessing the establishment of "procedural frameworks for consensus-building, long-term interaction, standard-setting, and performance assessment" (Brunnée, 2019, p. 106).

The *proceduralisation* of international law has raised the criticism that international law had started to yield to the "governance mindset" and to "managerialism" (Koskenniemi, 2007, pp. 13, 29). This would weaken international environmental law as it would not lead to an "enhancement of substantive rules, but their displacement by procedure" (Brunnée, 2019, p. 110) making the subject matter "amenable for diplomatic treatment" (Koskenniemi, 1991, p. 78). But a more constructivist reading of this *proceduralisation* uncovers that, because of it, international law "can operate as…a 'surface' for a thin (legal) community of political adversaries" (Brunnée, 2019, p. 113). The *proceduralisation* of international law strengthens its interactional characteristics. It is interactional because it stipulates that the emergence of legal obligations can only result on a basis of shared understandings and sustained practices of legality, which require institutionalised fora for continuous and regular interaction that allow input by the relevant actors (Brunnée, 2004, p. 51; Brunnée & Toope, 2010, Chapters 1 and 4). Through its *proceduralisation*, international law develops international organisations and their laws more and more as a "surface," a space, a forum for communicative interactions that lead to the formation of opinions and understandings of an (international) community.

3. International Climate Change Law: A Specific Vision for Global Publics

The previous observations on the role of international law have been kept very general, conscious of its persisting fragmentation (Koskenniemi & Leino, 2002; Peters, 2017). Depending on the field in question, international law has contributed to different institutional and procedural landscapes. Of course, this means that it has affected the manifestations of global publics differently, depending on the area of law in question. Consequently, the fragmentation of international law translates into a fragmentation of the landscape of global publics. Thus, uncovering the role of international law in the architecture of global publics can only be done one fragment and one "sectoral" global public at a time (Zürn, 2021, p. 163). International climate change law is a particularly interesting object of inquiry due to its institutional structures and processes that rely on the participation of a large range of actors. It has been the scene of a conscious and continual process of shaping manifestations of global public spheres and integrating private non-state actors as members of a transnational public sphere in processes of global climate change politics. Especially with the Paris Agreement (2015), international climate change law has

undergone a paradigm shift (Franzius, 2017), envisaging a catalytic regime that is increasingly reliant on strong and active global publics.

3.1. Multilateral Environmental Agreements

International environmental law relies on multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), which are international treaties between multiple state parties with an environmental subject matter (Staal, 2019, p. 24). Once concluded, they form the basis for further development of international environmental law in a specific subject matter. MEAs establish a specific kind of institution, a plenary treaty body, that convenes representatives of all treaty parties at regular intervals determined by the MEA. They are called conferences of the parties (COP) and/or meetings of the parties (MOP) and are charged with further developing the legal regime of the MEA. The legal character of these COPs/MOPs is disputed, being neither an international organisation with an independent legal personality nor mere diplomatic conferences (Staal, 2019, p. 30).

The relevant framework convention in the field of international climate change law is the UNFCCC. As a framework convention, it does not contain fully developed substantive obligations, but rather general principles to facilitate "[the] gathering and exchange of information, and [the] establish[ment] of institutions and processes for further treaty development" (Staal, 2019, p. 27). This has had one significant side effect: most of its normative thrust is directed towards creating institutionalised fora and procedures aimed at the development of shared understandings and sustained practices of legality. Therefore, the primary intention is to create a "strong" interstate public sphere which offers a communicative space for the generation of common opinions that can then be transposed into legal instruments.

Constructivist international relations as well as international law scholars have supported this understanding of the institutional structures established by MEAs. They have argued that such legal frameworks not only promote the creation of spaces for the development of social practices and interactions but also have considerable influence over international politics, as they allow for deeper levels of shared understanding to build upon (Brunnée & Toope, 2000; Brunnée, 2004). In this regard, the structures of MEAs are a central phenomenon of the *proceduralisation* of international law. In the climate regime, this *proceduralisation* is not only limited to the framework convention (UNFCCC) but has increasingly spread to the subsequent agreements and protocols, which were adopted under the framework convention. While the Kyoto Protocol still followed a top-down approach (nearly universal to international law) by positing legally binding, substantive targets, and timetables for emission reductions, the Paris Agreement adopted more of a bottom-up approach regarding climate mitigation efforts, thereby placing procedural obligations

ever more at the centre of the climate regime. By replacing internationally binding emission reduction obligations with the obligation of conduct for nation-states to regularly submit self-imposed (necessarily progressing; Paris Agreement, 2015, Article 4.3) nationally determined contributions (NDCs; Voigt & Ferreira, 2016), the Paris Agreement "places the catalytic logic at its core, constituting…perhaps the first major catalytic regime" (Hale, 2018, p. 16). This catalytic logic is grounded on procedural obligations with an unmistakable emphasis on transparency obligations and the process of global stocktaking (Paris Agreement, 2015, Articles 13 and 14). It hopes to stimulate first-movers and, via the iteration of commitments, builds on the transfer of experiences and an increasing effect of prior action to subsequent action (Hale, 2018, pp. 3, 16). The reliance on "binding procedural obligations…are meant to drive substantive steps by the parties" (Brunnée, 2018, p. 103).

The generation of common understandings and opinions within these "strong" global publics spheres is increasingly dependent on insights from and on communication with non-state actors, such as civil society actors and the scientific communities (Bodansky & Diringer, 2010, pp. 5–11; Schiele, 2014, p. 30). It is in this regard that the international bureaucracy behind the UNFCCC has taken an increasingly central role.

3.2. Orchestration and Global Publics

Orchestration has been defined as a "process whereby states, or intergovernmental organizations initiate, guide, broaden, and strengthen transnational governance by non-state and/or sub-state actors" (Abbott & Snidal, 2009; Hale & Roger, 2013, p. 60). My contribution employs a wider understanding that also includes processes by which international institutions rely on each other regarding their governance efforts. Within the structures of MEAs, the reliance on orchestration becomes particularly apparent in the work of the secretariats (Hickmann et al., 2019). The secretariat of the UNFCCC was established under Article 8 of the Framework Convention (UNFCCC, 1992). Its main tasks are to provide the COP as well as the bodies established under the Convention with the necessary arrangements for their respective sessions, with services as required, to compile and transmit reports submitted to it by other bodies, and to ensure the necessary coordination with the secretariats of other relevant international bodies. The UNFCCC and similar MEAs have relied greatly on the secretariat's administrative mandate to organise and coordinate the functioning of their multilateral conventions and integrate and disseminate information compiled by other bodies within these processes and the larger UN context.

These international bureaucracies themselves do not constitute global public spheres, rather they take up a role of connecting the "strong" public sphere of the COP with other international institutions. This means that part of what international bureaucracies do is to introduce the knowledge and understandings developed by other international institutions often in exchange with non-state actors into the negotiation process of the "strong" global publics. The climate regime currently depends on such coordination of numerous other UN institutions related to environmental policy. These institutions are generally characterised by their limited substantive management responsibilities, their mandate to coordinate processes of policymaking, and their capacity to provide these processes with the necessary tools and information. One example is the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Absent of management responsibilities, UNEP was mainly charged with the dissemination of information as well as the coordination of policymaking, initially between states, but increasingly also between the growing number of relevant UN agencies. Additionally, UNEP established relationships with NGOs, including those in the UN-guided processes of global environmental governance (Bodansky, 2010, pp. 29, 118).

The "strong" global public sphere of the COP is very much dependent on this orchestration as it provides the information necessary to form a common understanding and public opinion. The centrality of orchestration for the climate regime becomes particularly salient regarding the necessity of a common scientific basis. For this reason (amongst others), the UNFCCC established the permanent Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice, acting as a "link between the scientific information provided by expert sources…on the one hand, and the policy-oriented needs of the COP" (https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/subsidiary-bodies/sbsta). In the climate regime, this scientific expertise is primarily provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

3.2.1. Integration and Institutionalisation of a Global Public of Climate Scientists

The IPCC has become an actor relying on a heavily institutionalised scientific network supplying the scientific basis for international climate negotiations (Beck & Mahony, 2018; Provost, 2019). It has been established as the "authoritative voice of international science" and must be understood as a science-policy "boundary organization" (Beck & Mahony, 2018, pp. 1, 3). The institutional structure of the IPCC reflects its position between the scientific and the political. Its plenary body is composed of representatives from all member states and approves the scientific reports conducted by the separate working groups which in turn are composed of scientists from the member states. The IPCC has developed formalised rules of procedure to assure the inclusion of relevant scientific evidence on global warming and ensure the correct representation of scientists from the Global South. Conscious of its work at the border between the political and the scientific, the IPCC

always tried to be clear regarding its position and has self-identified as a scientific body which was "policy relevant" but "policy neutral" (Beck & Mahony, 2018, p. 5). However successful the IPCC is in these regards, its institutional structure is intent on representing the global climate science community. It does so by combining an intergovernmental model of representation with the effort of formalising the procedures of the accumulation and assessment of scientific data. It seems that the IPCC represents the effort to institutionalise a global public sphere for the scientific community within the UN system—a strong public sphere at that. Even if the IPCC reports do not constitute any form of a binding legal instrument, they have become incredibly authoritative and the central scientific reference point within the framework of the UNFCCC.

3.2.2. The Reliance of the Conferences of the Parties on a Transnational Public Sphere

The institutional landscape previously outlined has also always aspired towards the mobilisation of civil society and other private actors. Within the UNFCCC framework, access and inclusion of non-state actors to a range of deliberative and participatory mechanisms around the COPs have continuously increased (Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2006). This mirrors the general practice within the UN system, in which non-governmental organisations qualified in the matters of a given agreement are admitted as observers.

Cynically one could remark that "out of the many thousands of people only about a hundred actually did anything" (Bodansky, 2010, p. 108). This is true to the extent that only a fraction of the people attending the COPs/MOPs are involved in the inter-state diplomatic negotiations. But, as Bodansky (2010, p. 108) also notes, it is because "[i]nternational environmental conferences and processes…are multi-ring circuses," namely, "trade shows, public relations and educational arenas, and quasi-academic conferences," that "government operators do not operate freely. They are subject to a tight set of constraints, emanating from a wide array of actors" (see also Rietig, 2016). It is these actors and their roles that "represent an essential and unique feature of the climate regime and its ability for long-term momentum and ambition" (Klein et al., 2017, p. 51).

These yearly COPs then are much more than a meeting of the "strong" public sphere, the plenary treaty body of the UNFFC. It unites civil society actors from all over the globe and offers an institutional frame for the transnational public sphere they make up. This is not to say that this transnational public sphere did not begin to form before the establishment of the UNFCCC, but that the COP offers a space for the formation, solidification, and articulation of the public opinion of that transnational public sphere. What is more, it is also a space to hold the member states and the COP publicly

accountable for their actions (or inactions). With the adoption of the Paris Agreement, this last role becomes ever more important. Its pledge and review system is built upon a legitimisation strategy that strongly relies on transparency and the accessibility of information on the member states efforts. The Paris Agreement and the subsequent COPs have continuously mentioned the importance of public participation in the climate regime and rely on the weak transnational public sphere to hold the member states accountable (examining the risks, Lee et al., 2012).

But with the Paris Agreement, the international climate regime places an additional task of scrutiny on the transnational public sphere, namely, to also hold private actors accountable to their commitments.

3.3. The Emerging Role of Transnational Publics in the Current Stage of Hybrid Multilateralism

Climate governance was never limited to the intergovernmental processes of the UNFCCC (Nasiritousi et al., 2014). Alternative arenas of transnational governance have developed various experiments in climate governance ranging from private carbon reporting, labelling, and offsetting schemes to the networks of sub-state actors, such as transnational city networks (Pattberg & Stripple, 2008, p. 369). The paradigm shift of the Paris Agreement reflected the attempt to include these transnational efforts at climate change governance within the UNFCCC. The Copenhagen COP (Copenhagen Climate Accord, 2009) laid the groundwork for establishing platforms for private actors to pledge and coordinate their climate mitigation efforts under the umbrella of the UNFCCC (Bäckstrand et al., 2017). These platforms for non-state actors follow a similar bottom-up logic established for member-state pledges. Both seek to unlock the agency of the actors they address (Hale & Roger, 2013, p. 64).

The platforms referred to here are the Lima–Paris Action Agenda (LPAA) and the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA). Both, the LPAA and NAZCA were launched at COP-20 in Lima, one year before the conclusion of the Paris Agreement (Lima Call for Climate Action, 2014). The LPAA offered a platform to showcase selected cooperative climate-action initiatives, while NAZCA is an online portal and aggregator of climate actions from sub-state and non-state actors, which is operated by the UNFCCC secretariat and relies on voluntary bottom-up reporting of actions, commitments, and pledges by actors (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017). Additionally, two High-Level Climate Champions were created in the COP decision accompanying the Paris Agreement (Report of the Conference of the Parties on its twenty-first session, 2015), which were meant to effectively include non-state actors in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. Ahead of the COP-26, in 2020, these High-Level Climate Champions launched the Race to Zero Campaign, giving non-state actors a platform to pledge to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 at the latest

(Hsu et al., 2018; https://unfccc.int/climate-action/race-to-zero-campaign).

Both the LPAA and the NAZCA as well as the appointment of the two High-Level Champions originated from the UNFCCC process and it is important to note the "special [orchestrating] role" the UNFCCC takes up by pursuing "a form of institutionalization that blurs the conventional distinctions between public and private, intergovernmental and transnational actors" (Hale & Roger, 2013, p. 61). What is striking is that the efforts of private actors are no longer merely seen "as alternatives to or substitutes for national and intergovernmental commitments, [but] as… complements to…national pledges" (Chan et al., 2015, p. 469). Moreover, "with universal membership, the UNFCCC [seemingly] provides the secretariat…[with] legitimacy to convene and orchestrate non-state initiatives in pursuit of public goals" (Chan et al., 2015, p. 470), which has resulted in the climate regime developing towards hybrid multilateralism. On the one hand, this is characterised by the bottom-up architecture regarding state pledges that depend on global publics to act as experts and watchdogs. On the other hand, it encourages pledges by non-state actors (not unsimilar to the pledges by states) and openly depends on their implementation efforts (Bäckstrand et al., 2017, pp. 574–575). However, what is still lacking regarding the institutional framework in charge of capturing non-state pledges is a transparency and accountability framework similar to the one of the Paris Agreement regarding the NDCs of nation-states (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017, pp. 18–20; Streck, 2021; Voigt, 2016). It is in this regard that the climate regime currently relies even more on the scrutiny of the transnational public sphere that it has helped institutionalise around the COPs.

4. Conclusion

In order to contribute to this thematic issue, this article analyses how international law has contributed to shaping global publics and their role in global politics. It first attempts to translate the concept of "strong" public spheres to include plenary organs of international institutions. It does not do so to argue that these plenary organs sufficiently fulfil the functions of legitimacy and political efficacy of a public sphere, but because it builds on the potential of the concept of public sphere as a heuristic fiction. Understanding international institutions' plenary organs as incomplete "strong" public spheres allows us to critically assess their current role given the concept's critical potential.

International law's characteristics and developments have contributed to the state of institutionalisation of global publics. Not only has international law constructed the institutional frameworks of the "strong" public sphere within international institutions, it has also integrated NGOs as civil society actors into the deliberative processes of will formation of these institutions. Consequently, international law has institution-

alised processes/spaces for representatives of "weak" transnational public spheres to play a role in the processes of global politics within these international institutions. The increasing *proceduralisation* of international law has underlined its role in the construction of global public spheres ever more clearly.

In particular, the institutional structures created by international climate change law have not only established one inter-state "strong" public sphere in the form of COPs but also rely on a second "strong" global public, the IPCC, which is unique as it aims to institutionalise the global climate science community without abandoning an intergovernmental structure. The paradigm shift accompanying the Paris Agreement has made international climate change law ever more reliant on an actively manifesting transnational global public sphere to exercise scrutiny over both member-states and private actors participating in the hybrid multilateralism of the climate regime.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Article

Assembling Publics: Microsoft, Cybersecurity, and Public-Private Relations

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Abstract
In this article, we advance the literature on publics in international politics by exploring the nexus between publicness and big tech companies. This nexus finds a significant expression in the increasing impact of big tech companies to mediate disputes over societal problems, deliver social goods and rearticulate public-private relationships. We develop an analytical framework by combining recent scholarship on assemblage theory and publics, allowing us to understand publicness as enacted in practices which revolve around issues and rearticulate relations of authority and legitimacy. To demonstrate the value of the framework, we show how Microsoft is involved in assembling publicness around cybersecurity. Microsoft does so by problematising and countering state-led cybersecurity activities, questioning the state as a protector of its citizens and proposing governance measures to establish the tech sector as authoritative, and legitimate "first responders." With this rearticulating of public-private relations, we see the emergence of a political subject for whom security is not solely the right of a citizen secured by the state but also a customer service provided as a service agreement. The study hence offers important insights into the connection between publicness and cybersecurity, state and big tech relations, and the formation of authority and legitimacy in international politics.

Keywords
assemblage; big tech; citizen-user; cybersecurity; global governance; international politics; Microsoft; public

1. Introduction

In this article, we advance the literature on publics in international politics by exploring how big tech companies assemble distinct forms of publicness, arguing that it marks important transformations in contemporary global governance. To do so, we develop an analytical framework uniting recent scholarship on assemblage theory and public theory. In line with the goal of the thematic issue (Mende & Müller, 2023), we do not ask if a global public exists but investigate the various manifestations of publics. Mende and Müller (2023, p. 92) identify four manifestations of global publics, and we contribute primarily to the understanding of the second manifestation: Publics are groups of actors that form communicative spaces….What makes the group of actors hang

together is that its members react and refer to each other's arguments about the issue. In this article, we specifically focus on how private companies can create these issues and how thereby, a public is assembled. More specifically, we examine how Microsoft assembles publicness around cybersecurity and thereby rearticulates relations of authority and legitimacy between big tech companies, citizens, and the state.

Research on the international political role of private companies has produced valuable knowledge about present forms of global governance (Hofferberth, 2019; Mende, 2023), security practices (Berling & Bueger, 2015; Leander, 2005), and the corporate power of big tech (Beaumier et al., 2020; Monsees et al., 2023; Srivastava, 2021). This article draws on but also extends insights from this literature to examine the nexus

between publics and private companies in international politics. This nexus, we argue, finds a significant expression in the increasing impact of big tech companies, elsewhere captured in concepts such as "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2019), "internet-industry complex" (Flyverbom et al., 2019), or "data capitalism" (West, 2019). However, what is at stake here is not just a simple transfer of public functions from the state to the private sector. What we tease out is the ambivalence of the rearticulation of public and private. While private companies help in making issues relevant to public problems (such as privacy and cybersecurity), they also claim capability, legitimacy, and authority by providing social goods. In the case of cybersecurity, we observe a tension in which citizens become users in need of the protection provided by big tech companies. This is an expression of a broader trend in which relations of authority and legitimacy between both states and companies as well as companies and individuals are being rearticulated through extensive commercialization and corporate regulation of cybersecurity (Beaumeir, 2020; Christensen & Petersen, 2017; Liebetrau & Monsees, 2022).

In order to demonstrate how this plays out and captures the assembling of publicness, we develop an analytical framework combining works on assemblage theory and publics in global governance (Best & Gheciu, 2014; Bueger, 2018; Walters & D'Aoust, 2015), critical security studies (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009; Monsees, 2019; Stevens, 2016), and sociology (Marres, 2012). Building on these diverse approaches, we treat assembling publicness as a research strategy for empirically grounded analysis of the process of composition (Buchanan, 2020, p. 458) rather than a unified theory or approach (Bueger & Liebetrau, 2023, p. 240), enabling us to examine publicness as enacted in practices, which revolve around issues and rearticulating relations of authority and legitimacy.

While existing literature has shown how developments in communication technology, the internet, and social media demand a rethink of the public sphere (Baum & Potter, 2019; Dahlgren, 2005; Papacharissi, 2002; Pond & Lewis, 2019), we focus on big tech companies given their unique role in mediating disputes over public problems, delivering societal goods, and rearticulating public-private relationships (Culpepper & Thelen, 2020; Oyedemi, 2020). Concretely, we explore Microsoft's involvement in cybersecurity. Cybersecurity is an issue that has emerged with the development of information communication technologies in everyday life (Dunn Cavelty & Wenger, 2020). Appearing as a new kind of public good over which states and commercial actors are negotiating the boundaries for their respective roles, cybersecurity is a paradigmatic case for understanding how private companies can assemble publics.

In the remainder of this article, we first develop the analytical framework of assembling publicness. In the main part of the research, we show how Microsoft is involved in assembling publicness around the issue of cybersecurity. This section illustrates how the assem-

bling of publics achieves political force by rearticulating public-private relations and the formation of authority and legitimacy in cybersecurity governance. In the conclusion, we suggest three ways as for further research to unpack the assembling of publicness in international politics on the one hand, and problematize big tech practices and their political implications on the other.

2. Assembling Publicness in International Politics

Developing an analytical approach which draws on assemblage theory, critical security studies, sociology, and sciences and technology studies, this section lays the foundation for the following analysis, which examines Microsoft's efforts to assemble publicness around cybersecurity. The section consists of two parts. The first situates the article in relation to the existing literature on IR and the thematic issue. The second outlines the assemblage approach and how it allows us to capture the formation of publics through three central features, namely, practices, issues, and power relations.

2.1. Manifestations of Publicness

This article speaks to two major changes to international politics observed in IR in the past decades. The first concerns the shift from government to governance invoked by the global governance literature (Rosenau, 1995; Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992). As stressed by Mende and Müller (2023, p. 91), global governance is "characterised by a complex and constantly evolving constellation of actors—among them states, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and firms—that perform governance tasks and assume governance authority" (Avant et al., 2010; Stone, 2020; Zürn, 2018, as cited in Mende & Müller, 2023). Zooming in on privatization and commercialization of security, scholars have shown how public and private are not two pre-existing realms but emergent spheres in which relations of legitimacy, authority, and responsibility are distributed, negotiated, and contested (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009; Avant, 2005; Krahmann, 2008; Leander, 2005; Leander & van Munster, 2007). However, as Walters and D'Aoust (2015, p. 47) observe, publics "remain undertheorised and underproblematised in critical security studies." We thus build on previous work that highlighted how publics manifest through practices but expand on it with a distinct focus on big tech companies and security governance, rather than centering on privatization, commercialization, or neoliberalism as it is usually the case in the literature (Walters & D'Aoust, 2015, p. 48).

Alongside this development, scholars have explored the existence, possibility, and importance of global publics. They have analysed how the proliferation of transnational issues (e.g., trade, finance, and environment), actors (e.g., IOs and NGOs), and governance arrangements demands us to pay attention to publicness at a global and transnational level (Best & Gheciu, 2014; Brem-Wilson,

2017; Eckersley, 2007; Mitzen, 2005; Norman, 2019; Ruggie, 2004; Volkmer, 2014). According to the introduction to the thematic issue, this literature has been preoccupied with analysing and debating whether a global public exists or not. Here, we rather follow the editors' suggestion to embrace and "investigate various manifestations of publics that exist in, and co-evolve with, global politics" (Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 92). Taking that as our starting point, we explore how big tech companies assemble forms of publicness, arguing that it marks important transformations in contemporary global governance.

In doing so, we understand publics as plural, situated, and dynamic. Their existence and boundaries are due to constant (trans)formation, negotiation, and contestation (Dean, 1999; Dewey, 1999; Fraser, 1990; Marres, 2007). We hence need an analytical perspective that can grasp emergent and multiple empirical manifestations of publics as well as their effects on claims to legitimacy and authority. To capture this formation, we construct an analytical strategy that introduces the manifestation of publics through three central features and presuppositions: practices, issues, and power relations.

2.2. Assembling Publicness as an Analytical Strategy

Our research strategy allows us to examine how publics "are assembled and actor constellations produced, without relying on an a priori definition on the identity, position or interest of actors" (Bueger & Liebetrau, 2023, p. 240), while emphasising that the assembling of publics is provisional, processual, and dynamic (Stevens, 2016, pp. 32–36). This research strategy thereby directs the study away from answering essentialist questions, such as what a global or international public is or where it is located, towards an empirically grounded analysis of how publicness emerges, stabilises, and decays. The framework does not exclude the possibility that publics reach a form in which they are organised by a dominating logic, are institutionalised, or are hierarchically structured. However, rather than presume a priori how publics are ordered and structured, it leaves this question open to empirical analysis.

Our research strategy thus assumes that publicness is specific to certain times. This means that publics are distinct from the logics, criteria, or definitions that are assumed to be stable across time and space. This could mean, for example, assuming that there a "public" or "private" realm exists as a fixed sphere unaltered by its agents' behaviour. Following on from this, our approach is reflexive. The analyst does not have a God's eye view from which to construct objective and ahistorical definitions and concepts (Haraway, 1988). One result of thinking in these terms is that "every time we make reality claims in science we are helping to make some social reality more or less real" (Law & Urry, 2004, p. 396). Consequently, the analytical framework contains a double move. It aims to identify and describe situated

publicness in context and to problematize it further for critical purposes (Aradau & Huysmans, 2014).

First, both assemblage theory and sociological concepts of publics emphasize the importance of practice (Acuto & Curtis, 2014; Bueger, 2018; Marres & Lezaun, 2011; Monsees, 2019). Shifting the analytical perspective towards assembling publicness through practice is a crucial step. IR scholars have demonstrated how the enactment of publics plays out in practice. For instance, Walters and D'Aoust (2015) demonstrate how publics are enacted through paintings and public demonstrations. Each public addresses itself in a particular way towards the state; it can either reify or challenge the previous (Walters & D'Aoust, 2015, p. 59). Best and Gheciu (2014) focus on the importance of practice and the performative aspects of public-making. We follow their understanding of public-making practices as practices:

> That seek to claim particular problems, actors, or processes *as* public—or of common concern—and in doing so, that effectively work to constitute those issues as public. In other words, public-making practices are performative: they seek to create the things that they describe. (Best & Gheciu, 2014, p. 32)

Linking this to assemblage thinking, we understand publicness as based on relations and practice "in the sense that it depends on assembling practices involving actors, objects, rules, or principles in a particular territorial space and time, which gives them meaning in relation to one another" (Kolmasova, 2022, pp. 1329–1230). Drawing on Bueger (2018, p. 619), we argue that the assembling of publicness requires "consistent practical work" and must "always remain unstable and open to tensions and contestation." This prompts research to engage empirically with public assembling practices.

Second, a critical function of the assemblage framework is that it brings to the fore "a specific historical, political, and economic conjuncture in which an issue becomes a problem" (Ong & Collier, 2005, p. 14). An assemblage framework emphasizes the ambivalence, contestation, and multiplicity of public-making practices (Bueger & Liebetrau, 2023, p. 238). This idea fits hand in glove with sociological conceptions of multiple publics emerging in relation to problems and issues (Callon et al., 2009; Marres, 2007). For example, Marres (2007, 2012) directs our attention to how publics emerge as a result of issue formation. The public is not a pre-constituted sphere in which issues are deliberated. Rather, issues are perceived as needing action, and a public emerges as a result. This also means that publics are not necessarily linked to state politics but can be found everywhere and assembled around a multiplicity of actor or things (Honig, 2017; Marres, 2012; Marres & Lezaun, 2011). We argue that when we pay attention to public-making practices, we need to seriously consider how certain issues become public issues without reading them back into a state-centred framework. The political power

of how big tech assembles publics only becomes visible when we look at the state and big tech symmetrically. Consequently, the making of publics is far from a neutral undertaking but a highly political practice. Combining assemblage thinking and sociological conceptions of publics sensitises us to the ambiguity, contestation, and disagreement over the issues at stake, and, following on from that, rearticulations of public-private relations. This allows us to identify how the notion of a citizen-user becomes core to Microsoft's assembling of publicness around cybersecurity.

Lastly, assemblage thinking addresses questions relating to power, authority, and legitimacy (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2009, p. 3, 14). Primarily, it allows us to see how assemblages generate the capacity to act in particular ways, rendering some actors more powerful than others (Bueger & Liebetrau, 2023, p. 243). When studying relations and practices of assembling publicness, we study how capability, expertise, and knowledge might become authoritative and legitimate. Zooming in on the historical concept of the public, it refers to the emergence of a public in which an opinion is formed. This public was considered both the opposite of the private sphere and the opposition to the state's power (Habermas, 1962, p. 55). In a democracy, the role of the public is to legitimize the actions of the state (Habermas, 1962, p. 82, 97). From this perspective, legitimate policies are those which are formulated in the name of the public and mirror the public's interest (Eckersley, 2007, p. 334). Legitimacy then relies on recognition by subjects (citizens) (Gronau & Schmidtke, 2016). In line with the overall analytical perspective, legitimacy is thus not a legal or formal concept but a relational and performative concept (Kratochwil, 2006). If publicness does not only centre on the state, formations and relations of legitimacy are multiple. As we show below, this means that claims about legitimacy can hinge on relations between private companies and citizens. Claiming to act in the public's interests or to fulfil the public's needs endows one with legitimacy and authority to act. Assemblage theory allows us to scrutinize how publicness is assembled across actors and thus enacts relations of authority and legitimacy.

In sum, we see that who appears as a public actor or what issue is considered a public problem is the outcome of political processes. If we consider the public and the private as a result of political processes, the consequences of assigning something or someone as being public come into view. Claiming that an issue is a public problem or that someone acts in the public interest means simultaneously making claims about certain actors' authority and legitimacy (Dean, 1999). Deploying the assemblage framework hence enables us to examine processes of political ordering that are enmeshed with reconfiguring publicness. As we illustrate below, Microsoft assembles in assembling publicness around cybersecurity by challenging state behaviour in cyberspace and claiming authority and legitimacy for itself

(and the tech sector) as a cybersecurity provider. These ordering processes unfold political power by influencing relations of legitimacy and authority.

3. Assembling Publicness: Microsoft, Cybersecurity, and Public-Private Relations

The following section presents an analysis of Microsoft's cybersecurity practices that demonstrates how the assemblage framework helps to think about publics in international politics. Microsoft has more than one billion customers in more than 140 markets. The company owns, operates, and leases data centres in more than 20 countries (Smith & Browne, 2019). Microsoft has promoted significant cybersecurity initiatives involving states, companies, and international organisations, such as the Digital Geneva Convention (Microsoft, 2017), the Cybersecurity Tech Accord (Smith, 2018a), and the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace (81 states and more than 700 companies are supporting the call. As you can see in the following link: https://pariscall.international/en). Exploring the changing relationship between states, big tech, and citizens, recent scholarship has demonstrated how Microsoft positions itself as a dominant player in global cybersecurity governance, namely through practices of norm entrepreneurship and policy shaping (Fairbank, 2019; Gorwa & Peez, 2020; Hurel & Lobato, 2018). We add to this existing literature by examining how Microsoft also assembles publics around cybersecurity and thereby shifts notions of legitimacy and authority.

Put in methods terms, and following Flyvbjerg (2006, pp. 232–233), we consider the case of Microsoft a paradigmatic case as it highlights general characteristics and serves as an exemplar suitable for reinterpretation, contestation, and comparison by other scholars. We follow a qualitative-interpretative research design (Klotz & Prakash, 2008; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Examining the assembling of publicness around cybersecurity, we focus on sites of tensions and moments of controversy from the 2013 Snowden revelations to the present, analysing Microsoft's practices, accounts, and relations (Loughlan et al., 2015, pp. 38–39). In doing so, we rely on multiple empirical sources, including policy reports, white papers, speeches, blog posts, press releases, news sources covering Microsoft's actions, existing scholarship on Microsoft, as well as engagement in cybersecurity workshops, conferences, and debates featuring Microsoft practitioners. We analysed these documents collaboratively in several rounds, thereby following an iterative research strategy going back and forth between theoretical reflection and empirical analysis.

3.1. Problematising Cybersecurity: Destabilising State Authority and Legitimacy

A decade ago, Edward Snowden famously disclosed information about the extensive intelligence practices

of the US National Security Agency and its partner services. The revelations surprised seasoned observers, questioned established understandings of the legitimacy of the institutions involved, and stimulated intense political controversy, confirming transformations in the relations between state security practices and democratic procedures, state and civil society, and state and corporate interests (Bauman et al., 2014, p. 122). The files revealed how intelligence services, particularly the US National Security Agency and Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), rely on voluntary or forced collaborations with private providers such as Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Verizon, and Vodafone. Despite their involvement in the collection of user data, the US tech industry publicly criticized the US government, called for intelligence reform, and pushed for stronger cyber security standards, rebuilding public and consumer trust (Roberts & Kiss, 2013).

Microsoft played a crucial role in this campaign. Brad Smith, then Microsoft's general counsel, compared the government surveillance to "sophisticated malware or cyber attacks" and emphasized that Microsoft "are taking steps to ensure governments use legal process rather than technological brute force to access customer data" (Arthur, 2013). Corporate Vice President Scott Charney (2013) noted that "industry creates and operates most of the infrastructure that enables cyberspace" and argued that global cyber security norm building would hence benefit from including private companies to ensure "that nation-state behaviour in cyberspace does not erode the fundamental trust and security mechanisms of the internet." The increasing awareness of mass surveillance highlights the ambiguous role of state agencies in protecting as well as targeting its citizens' private sphere (see Monsees, 2019). While Microsoft's primary focus was on creating international norms that rein in government behaviour in cyberspace, the company emphasized the need for a multistakeholder approach, portraying this as an "operational reality rather than an ideology," thereby underlining the central role of the private sector in defending cyberspace and its users (McKay et al., 2014, pp. 14–16). Similarly, McKay et al. (2014) emphasised that "military espionage and other surreptitious activity reminds us that governments often have other interests that conflict with their role as protectors." Microsoft compared the contradictory cybersecurity priorities of the government to an industry that "wants to protect the security and privacy of users, and support efforts to protect public safety and national security" (Microsoft, 2014). The company outlines a transnational public problem concerning the growing dependence on digital technology and the vulnerability of tech customers. Microsoft relates this problem to the contradictory role of governments as both protectors and perpetrators in cyberspace. This provides a first glimpse of Microsoft's central role in defining state activities in cyberspace as a global problem and assembling publicness around it. In doing so, Microsoft questions the state's historical

role as the primary provider of security and puts forth a notion of a citizen-user—a subject that is in need of protection in cyberspace through state actions as well as that provided by companies. We thus observe an ambivalent dynamic in which the relation between companies and states is renegotiated and not a simple empowering of big tech at the cost of the state.

3.2. Proposing a Digital Geneva Convention: Assembling Publicness Around Cybersecurity

Still unsatisfied with government action in and discussion about cyberspace, Microsoft scaled up its efforts in 2017 by proposing a Digital Geneva Convention to strengthen global cybersecurity (Microsoft, 2017; Smith, 2017a). Microsoft reiterated its commitment to ensuring corporate protection of users from the state in cyberspace: "The world needs new international rules to protect the public from nation-state threats in cyberspace. In short, the world needs a Digital Geneva Convention" (Microsoft, 2017). In this context, Smith (2017b) clarified the changing relationship between states and companies:

> Let's face it; cyberspace is the new battlefield. The world of potential war has migrated from land to sea to air and now cyberspace….Cyberspace is owned and operated by the private sector. It is private property, whether it is submarine cables, datacenters, servers, laptops, or smartphones….it puts you in a different position, because when it comes to these attacks in cyberspace, we not only are the plane of battle, we are the world's first responders. Instead of nation-state attacks being met by responses from other nation-states, they are being met by us.

Smith (2017b) directs attention to the ways in which the cybersecurity practices of tech companies challenge the traditional security prerogative of the state. He contrasts a privately owned and operated cyberspace to conventional nation-state territory and national security responsibility. Smith thereby portrays the corporate tech sector as a global security actor in its own right, acting not just when mobilized by the state (Christensen & Liebetrau, 2019). This shows how Microsoft and the tech sector have "significant capacity to bolster or undermine government authority" and to increase "public demands for the companies to take action to protect users from governments" (Eichensehr, 2019, p. 668). This neither erodes state power nor is it automatically opposed to it, but it shows how relations of authority and legitimacy concerning cybersecurity between state and companies can become rearticulated.

According to Smith (2018b), the authority and legitimacy bestowed upon Microsoft and the tech sector stems not only from a lack of state capability but also from the fact that "nation-state hacking has evolved into attacks on civilians in times of peace." Consequently,

private tech companies have "to help deter and respond to nation-state cyberattacks." They thereby increasingly "stand as competing power centers, challenging the primacy of governments." (Eichensehr, 2019, p. 668). Grounded in its supposed neutrality and expertise, Microsoft and the tech sector emerge as core actors in identifying cyber insecurity as a global problem and protecting against future security challenges. Microsoft thus not only defines what the problem is but also assembles publicness around it through its different initiatives (and the involvement of multiple global actors). As a result, the assembled public challenges the distribution of authority and legitimacy between states and private companies in relation to cybersecurity.

We see the contours of a vulnerable and de-territorialized public, or community of affected, as Dewey (1999) called it, being assembled around cyber insecurity, consisting of a user who has a right to security and is in need of protection from the state. As emphasized by Smith (2017b):

> We've pledged our support for defending every customer everywhere in the face of cyberattacks, regardless of their nationality. This weekend, whether it's in London, New York, Moscow, Delhi, Sao Paulo, or Beijing, we're putting this principle into action and working with customers around the world.

Microsoft calls upon digital citizens and endows them with a universal right to protection that is determined neither by territoriality nor nationality. Through such digital acts (Isin & Ruppert, 2017), Microsoft enacts a new political subject—a citizen-user—that co-exists in the privately owned and operated cyberspace and the territory of states. For this subject, security is not solely the right of a citizen secured by the state, but also a service stipulated in the terms of agreement between Microsoft and its customers. Microsoft thus assembles an issue public around cybersecurity. The result is, however, not only the creation of certain norms but a challenge to boundary drawing as to what counts as "private" and what as "public" authority and legitimacy. In the next subsection, we look at how the lines of public and private are redrawn in more detail.

3.3. Aiming to Sit at the Head of the Table: Rearticulating Public-Private Relations

While Microsoft's proposals for a Digital Geneva Convention received extensive attention across state entities and private companies, the initiative was also perceived as brazen and met with pushback (Gorwa & Peez, 2020, p. 265; Jeutner, 2019, p. 161). Hence, in April 2018, Microsoft initiated the Cybersecurity Tech Accord (CTA). The CTA toned down the language of the Digital Geneva Convention. It was launched by a group of 34 technology companies, including giants such as Microsoft and Facebook, and a diverse group of interna-

tional telecoms, hardware manufacturers, open-source software providers, and cybersecurity threat intelligence companies. The CTA is a four-point reformulation of central features of the Digital Geneva Convention principles of responsible behaviour in cyberspace for the private sector. According to one of the four principles, the "no offense," accord signees "will not help governments launch cyberattacks against innocent citizens and enterprises, and will protect against tampering or exploitation of their products and services through every stage of technology development, design and distribution" (The Cybersecurity Tech Accord, 2017). While the "stronger defence" principle encompasses a commitment to "protect all customers globally regardless of the motivation for attacks online." (The Cybersecurity Tech Accord, 2017). As Gorwa and Peez (2020, p. 279) stress, the Tech Accord demonstrates a major departure from past norm-building efforts in the cyber realm since it is led by tech companies and not states.

Continuing these efforts, Microsoft initiated the Digital Peace Now campaign in 2018. It is a global policy effort urging world leaders and citizens to create digital world peace (O'Sullivan, 2018a). Announcing the start of the campaign, Microsoft states that "Digital Peace Now is going to be all about people—people banding together to tell their world leaders that the internet must be a peaceful, shared community" (O'Sullivan, 2018a). In line with this, the campaign promotes two general courses of action. The first one is to "demand government action" by signing the online "Digital Peace Petition" (Digital Peace Now, n.d.). The second one encourages citizens to join the campaign and consider cybersecurity concerns when voting (O'Sullivan, 2018b). Once more, we see how Microsoft calls upon digital citizens and endows them with a universal right to protection determined neither by territoriality nor by nationality, while still relying on the state by demanding changes in government action. A public is thus assembled in which Microsoft defines the problem and the object of protection. However, the demarcation of this public does not follow those of a nation-state nor traditional notions of public and private authority.

Microsoft continues to form new spaces of cybersecurity governance, in which companies and government actors contest and renegotiate their respective authority and legitimacy regarding cybersecurity and the protection of individuals. At the time of writing, this has culminated in Microsoft's (informal) co-authorship of the French government initiative of the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace and its sponsorship of the recently founded Cyber Peace Institute (Broeders & van der Berg, 2020, p. 11). Fairbank (2019, p. 16) argues that "through the CTA and the Paris Call, Microsoft has helped bring together valuable actor groups within industry, civil society and global government that encourage the adoption of international cybersecurity norms." Gorwa and Peez (2020, p. 273) go one step further in arguing that "Microsoft has not only aimed for a seat

at the table, but for the seat at the head of the table as the cyber-norms effort grows with initiatives such as the Paris Call." This underlines how Microsoft, through its continued efforts in cybersecurity governance, plays a key role in assembling publicness around cybersecurity and rearticulating governance relations of authority and legitimacy across public and private actors.

In sum, the analysis shows how Microsoft assembles publicness around the issue of cybersecurity, which contours it defines as a global problem, and claims is solvable only through the intervention of private companies on account of their neutrality, expertise, and extensive reach. The analysis highlights the ways in which relations of authority and legitimacy between both states and companies, as well as companies and individuals, are being rearticulated through extensive commercialization and corporate regulation of cybersecurity, relying on ownership of infrastructure, technical expertise, and global customer bases.

4. Conclusion

To explore the nexus between publicness and big tech companies, this article introduced an analytical framework for assembling publicness. By shifting the perspective from state-based territorial and institutional conditions of publicness to processes of public-making, the framework provided tools to defamiliarize and rethink relations between companies and states on the one hand, and companies and individuals on the other. Investigating these relations through Microsoft's assembling of publicness around cybersecurity, we saw how claims to authority and legitimacy rearticulated public-private relations. This demonstrates that paying further attention to the assembling of publicness, without automatically reading it back into strict spatial or functional frames, is of fundamental importance to our understanding of publicness in international politics, including how the practices of big tech companies question conventional politics and political ordering. In conclusion, we therefore suggest three ways forward as to how further research can unpack the assembling of publicness in international politics on the one hand and problematize big tech practices and their political implications on the other.

First, looking closer at the political and democratic implications of the analysis, we observe an ambiguous double movement: On the one hand, it shows how, through assembling publicness, new issues which cannot be sufficiently addressed by national politics, are put on the international political agenda. It opens possibilities for engagement in the processes of determining what cybersecurity is, can, and should be, as well as determining the political issues at stake and, not least, who has a legitimate stake in these issues and a right to security. On the other hand, the analysis demonstrates how assembling publicness by a private company alters subject positions and can lead to the creation of a citizen-user, where rights become services that customer need to pay for. From a democratic perspective, this is problematic since the erosion of the role of the state as the provider of security clashes with the right of the citizen to claim protection against outside threats. As critical security studies have shown, many of today's persistent security issues, such as climate change and migration, do not neatly align with the spatio-functional borders of the state and its institutional framework (Walker, 2010). Rather, they implicate a wide range of different actors, technologies, and governance measures, cutting across spatial and functional lines of demarcation. Rooted in various strands of IR research on the role of private companies in the constitution of international politics and public policy, future research could unpack this ambiguity and its political and normative consequences through the assembling of publicness.

Second, the analysis suggests there is further work to be done in examining how big tech practices rearticulate public-private relations by questioning state behaviour, providing social goods, and assembling publicness. A prime case here is the recent unprecedented support to Ukraine offered by Microsoft and other tech companies (Microsoft, 2022). It has been argued that a key reason Ukraine has not suffered a major cyber-blow is exactly because of this support. Microsoft moved Ukrainian digital data to its European cloud facilities, Google provided free licensing of its products, Palantir offered data analytics software, and Starlink satellites permitted Ukraine to keep its critical communication running. The involvement of big tech on the side of Ukraine shows that big tech companies now play a decisive role in war. This involvement could also be scrutinized in light of Microsoft's and other tech companies' activities in the past decades.

Investigating the extent to which big tech has "become supplemental sovereigns, governing individuals alongside states" (Eichensehr, 2019, p. 668), the research could also explore the role and political implications of these companies in providing other social goods such as health or mobility (Maghalaes & Couldry, 2021). This would allow us to grasp the manifold forms of authority and legitimacy that big tech companies can assume in global governance. Such studies could benefit from problematising how big tech practices of assembling publicness intersect with questions concerning the enduring legacies of state-centrism, Western bias, gender relations, and socio-economic status.

Third, the framework paves the way for an open-ended, empirically driven research agenda on assembling publicness in international politics and governance, allowing scholarship to examine the evolvement of public-private and state-company relations over time to grasp both continuity and change in the contemporary role of private companies in the constitution of publicness and relations of authority and legitimacy. Leveraging perspectives from international political economy, the history of international relations, and

international political sociology dealing with the role of private companies, could support research on the assembling of publicness to spark alternative imaginaries and nurture novel futures of public-private relations in international politics.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

European Union's Regulating of Social Media: A Discourse Analysis of the Digital Services Act

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Abstract

Traditional conceptions of democratic publics are changing due to the rise of social media as a global communication tool. While social media brings people together globally and creates new spaces for creativity and resistance, it is also a space of harassment, discrimination, and violence. As recent debates about hate speech and the distribution of "fake news" have shown, the political responsibilities and consequences of regulating online content remain unclear. More recently, the EU is increasingly paying attention to platform providers. How is the EU legitimizing its new approach to social media platform regulation and how will this legislation shape transnational publics? This article contributes to ongoing debates on platform regulation by governments and other political authorities (especially the EU as a transnational legislator) and discussions about the shape of online publics. By applying a discourse analytical perspective, key legitimation narratives can be explored. I argue that the EU claims political authority over corporate interests by introducing new legislation to regulate social media platforms with the Digital Services Act. On the one hand, the EU imagines an idealized democratic online public without harmful and illegal content. On the other hand, the new legislation serves the EU's agenda on digital sovereignty, taking back control from big and US-based enterprises. There is a strong consensus about four legitimation narratives: (a) "What is illegal offline has to be illegal online"; (b) the EU is "taking back control"; (c) the EU is "protecting small businesses, consumers, and our citizens against big tech"; (d) the EU is developing "a golden standard and rulebook beyond the EU." Held together by the idea of democratic procedures, authority, and sovereignty, these narratives are demanding more action from social media providers to act on harmful and illegal content.

Keywords

content moderation; Digital Services Act; EU regulation; freedom of expression; social media platforms

1. Introduction

Love and hate, knowledge and disinformation, legitimate protest, and inflammatory agitation are only one click apart. Envisioned as an emancipatory project once, online communities increasingly reveal the dark side of user harassment, algorithmic policing, and state control. Surprisingly little is known about the political struggles that evolve around policies of online content regulation and their impact on the shape and characteristics of digital publics (DeNardis et al., 2020; Gorwa, 2019a; Van Dijck, 2021). In the light of online disinformation, harassment, and radicalization, calls within the EU are strong to revise the present model of self-regulation where primarily social media platforms define the rules and procedures of online content moderation. As European Parliament member Arba Kokalari (European People's Party) said, "The new rules will put an end to the digital Wild West where the big platforms set the rules themselves and criminal content goes viral" (EPP Group, 2022).

While the EU is not policing online content directly, it has formulated a more detailed position on platform responsibilities. The European Commission made two legislative proposals in December 2020, the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA).

On 23 April 2022, a political agreement was reached, and the European Parliament voted in favor of the Commission's proposals in July 2022. Executive Vice-President of the European Commission Margrethe Vestager tweeted: "Yes! Today @Europarl_EN adopted #DSA & #DMA regulations: 🇪🇺 strong, ambitious & global first rulebook of #online platforms. Now I'm looking forward to the adoption by @EUCouncil. Congratulations to all of us 🥂 https://europa.eu/!vcx4W8'' (Vestager, 2022).

How is the EU legitimizing its new approach to social media platform regulation and how will this legislation shape transnational publics? These two questions are entangled as the former is mainly empirical while the latter is reflecting on its implications for a public sphere, understood as an "ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters" (Fraser, 1990, p. 59), and why we, as researchers, social media users, and citizens should pay attention to it.

In this article, I argue that the EU claims political authority over corporate interests by introducing new legislation to regulate social media platforms. On the one hand, the EU imagines an idealized democratic online public without harmful and illegal content. On the other hand, the new legislation serves the EU's agenda on digital sovereignty, taking back control from big *and* US-based enterprises. There is a strong consensus about four legitimation narratives, articulated by members of the European Parliament: (a) "What is illegal offline has to be illegal online"; (b) the EU is "taking back control"; (c) the EU is "protecting small businesses, consumers, and our citizens against big tech"; and (d) it is developing "a golden standard and rulebook beyond the EU." Held together by the idea of democratic procedures and political sovereignty, these narratives are demanding more action from social media providers to act on harmful and illegal content.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, I show how the EU's approach to social media platform regulation evolved and how members of the European Parliament and the Commission are legitimizing new legislation, the DSA. After a brief contextualization of existing approaches in response to the spread of harmful and illegal social media content by governments and platform providers (Flew, 2022; Gorwa, 2019a, 2019b), I utilize a discourse analytical approach to reconstruct legitimation narratives articulated by members of the European Parliament. These narratives, I assume, contribute to the legitimation of the DSA by combining knowledge, ideas, and arguments to produce an intelligible rationale for supporting the legislation. While the DSA is the central focus of this article as it speaks to online content moderation and its implications for the shape of digital publics, the DMA is not discussed systematically. Second, this article is situated within the literature on the transforming and transformative site of publics and the public sphere (Castells, 2008; De Blasio et al., 2020; Nash, 2014; Papacharissi, 2002; Schlesinger,

2020; Staab & Thiel, 2022). Referring to the introduction of this thematic issue by Mende and Müller (2023), I understand publics as political communication spaces entangled with specific audiences, institutions, and interests. Although the EU is not directly policing harmful and illegal online activities, it is indirectly shaping digital publics through this legislation by setting the frames for the sayable and seeable.

2. Platform Regulation and Illegal Online Content: Who Is Responsible?

Platform governance defines a steadily growing interdisciplinary research field. Legal scholars investigate the policies of platforms and how new norms of internet regulation evolve (Kettemann, 2020; Klonick, 2017). International relations scholars discuss the impact of social media on diplomacy (Manor, 2019), how the mediatization of violent conflicts affects politics (Geis & Schlag, 2017), and the public communication strategies of international organizations (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2020). Research from media and communication studies deepens our understanding, for example, of online communications' characteristics and user behavior regarding illegal and harmful content (Kunst et al., 2021; Porten-Cheé et al., 2020) and the regulation of media systems (Humprecht et al., 2022). More generally, scholars also investigate the polycentric nature of internet governance and critically reflect on new modes of platform governance (Gorwa, 2019b; Hofmann, 2020). At the intersection of political theory and digital politics, some researchers have recently called to describe and explain the digital transformation of knowledge orders more comprehensively to understand the changing nature of publics and democratic orders (Berg et al., 2020; Habermas, 2021).

I understand platforms as digital service providers that allow users to create and share content, interact with other users, and participate in online communities (Flew, 2022; Gorwa, 2019a, 2019b). While I am primarily interested in social media platforms that create a communicative space for discussing public and private matters, search engines like Google or marketplaces like Amazon present platforms too. As more people turn to social media platforms to communicate, share information, and consume news, the platform providers are becoming key gatekeepers of information and opinion, with significant influence over public discourses (Klonick, 2017). The "platformization" (Poell et al., 2019) of communication challenges traditional notions of the public sphere as a space for free debate and open deliberation. Through algorithms, digital platforms may prioritize content to (indirectly) shape user opinions and interests. The Cambridge Analytica scandal exemplified how gathered data can be used to manipulate the political choices of users (Aradau & Blanke, 2022; Bellanova, 2017). In general, there is a growing need to critically examine the role of digital, especially social media platforms in shaping

publics and thereby the sayable and seeable. It is necessary to understand the evolving rules, norms, and practices of moderating harmful and removing illegal content to evaluate their impact on fair and transparent procedures as well as on fundamental democratic norms, especially the freedom of expression. Therefore, platform governance directs attention to the legal, political, and economic sites of how platforms govern and are governed (Gorwa, 2019b; Klonick, 2017).

2.1. Defining Online Content as Harmful and Illegal

The internet is experienced as a digital space which fundamentally transforms private and public life. On the one hand, digital communication technologies and infrastructures make it possible that people can share private moments and discuss public matters despite geographical, social, and cultural distances. On the other hand, increasing online interaction and easy access to information do not enhance political participation and social progress automatically. In 2020, 55% of citizens in the EU-28 used social media networks (Statista, 2020), facing the risk to be directly confronted with offensive content that is graphic, pornographic, racist, xenophobic, or misogynist (Hoffmann, 2019). While some people perceive this content as a violation of rights and a source of insecurity, others believe that much of it is and should be protected by the freedom of expression.

Discussions about harmful and illegal online content are nothing new (Wall, 2001). However, what counts as such is not naturally given, but socially and relationally constructed. The assessment of harmful and illegal content highly depends on the context and often requires case-by-case decisions (DeCook et al., 2022; Monsees, 2021). Most intermediaries invest in artificial intelligence and are designing algorithms that remove content automatically without further inspection (Beer, 2017; Hoffmann, 2019; Katzenbach & Ulbricht, 2019). Most social networking services nowadays publish transparency reports on their moderation policies and practices. Content acted upon due to its assessment as hate speech, for example, increased on Facebook from 9.6 million (January to March 2020) to 22.5 million pieces (April to June 2020; Facebook Transparency Center, 2020). From July to September 2022, Facebook acted on 10.6 million pieces (Facebook Transparency Center, 2022). Twitter has acted upon 1.1 million accounts due to hateful conduct between January and June 2021 (Twitter Transparency Center, 2021).

The designations "illegal" and "harmful" are often used in combination for characterizing problematic online content. While the latter is sometimes narrowly defined as content that is harmful to minors, it can refer to offensive and inflammatory content more generally. What "illegal" actually means varies between states due to national laws and jurisdiction (e.g., protection of personality and privacy rights, insult and defamation of public servants and foreign heads of state). Even within the

EU, a comment shared on Twitter might be prosecuted due to national (criminal) law in Germany but tolerable in France or Portugal (Delcker, 2020; Rosemain, 2020). Facebook and YouTube, for example, respond to these different national demands by blocking content for a specific geographical community.

2.2. Actors, Types, and Practices of Regulation

The fact that both platform providers and governments respond to harmful and illegal online content illustrates the complexities and polycentric nature of internet governance (DeNardis et al., 2020; Hofmann et al., 2017; Scholte, 2017). Regulating social media content has been a new terrain for platforms and legislators. Scholars have shown that US political and corporate interests of minimal and slight regulations remain powerful in shaping the practices and policies of platforms (Carr, 2015, p. 642; Hofmann, 2020). Because Meta, Alphabet/Google, and Twitter are not defined as publishers but as intermediaries, they are not liable for the content shared by users. The so-called "safe harbors legislation" was first introduced in 1996 by the US Congress with the Communications Decency Act. The e-Commerce Directive of the EU in 2000 reiterated this opinion. If illegal content is shared, platforms are not liable but may police such content due to their terms of service.

In the last two decades, non-legal regulations like codes of conduct or terms of service have been the dominant and preferred mode applied by social media platforms to monitor user-generated and shared content (Gorwa, 2019a; Schlag, 2022). Most providers have created applications where users (and law enforcement agencies) can report violations of these terms (Beer, 2017; Hoffmann, 2019; Kunst et al., 2021; Porten-Cheé et al., 2020) and algorithms support the automatic detection of forbidden content (Katzenbach & Ulbricht, 2019). Moderators review content and decide whether it must be removed or stays online. Reports show how distressful this work can be for moderators located around the world (Beetz et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019). It is, however, trending that social media platforms are constantly revising their policies towards more specific rules, increasingly investing in human and algorithmic moderation, and creating appeal bodies to review decisions (Katzenbach & Ulbricht, 2019; Kettemann, 2020; Klonick, 2019).

These efforts to specify rules and procedures are accompanied by national legislation to define the responsibilities of social media platforms what and how to (not) regulate content (Flew, 2022; Gorwa, 2019a, 2019b). National governments and parliaments increasingly adopt regulations for platforms, however in different ways. The project Freedom on the Net (Freedom House, 2021, 2022) detects a worldwide trend to restrict freedoms for the sake of national security. While many authoritarian regimes implement control and command mechanisms with a centralized agency to regulate

internet access and available content (Flonk, 2021; Flonk et al., 2020), most democracies have advocated a free, less monitored internet (Haggart et al., 2021). Several national legislators within the EU have problematized the exposure of extremely violent and pornographic content, hate speech, "fake news," extremism, and propaganda as cases from France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Austria indicate. They agree that content regulation should not be exclusively in the hands of platforms taking decisions mainly in compliance with their private terms of service. Some member states of the EU already apply a more coercive approach towards social media platforms within their jurisdiction. Notably, in 2017 the German Parliament approved the Network Enforcement Act which defines compliance rules and time frames for social networking services to remove content that is illegal in Germany (Delcker, 2020; Echikson & Knodt, 2018). In France, a similar legislative proposal (Avia Law) has been drafted but was rejected by the Constitutional Court (Rosemain, 2020). Ireland, Italy, Austria, and the UK have launched initiatives or already passed laws (Schlesinger, 2022). All these acts by national legislators to define responsibilities and liabilities, though, have provoked intensive criticism by various groups like the former UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (Kaye, 2019).

The transnational and international image of social media platform governance and online content regulation is even more fragmented as policies, jurisdiction, and scopes of social media do not overlap automatically. Internationally, the UN World Summits on the Information Society created an arena for public–private negotiations in 2003 (Dany, 2012), followed by institutions like the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, Internet Governance Forum, and International Telecommunication Union which assure minimal standards, interoperability, and the infrastructure of the world wide web (Musiani et al., 2016; Scholte, 2017). These bodies, though, do neither identify intermediaries' responsibilities nor implement policies of online content regulation.

As a transnational political actor, it is the EU with the European Parliament and Commission who are outlining a more vocal profile to regulate platforms of different kinds. Since its implementation of the e-Commerce Directive, the EU is supplementing public–private voluntary initiatives with a legally binding approach to platform regulation. In 2018, the EU revised its Audio-Visual Media Services Directive and approved four additional directives that tackle "illegal and harmful content" (i.e., Counter-Terrorism Directive, Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Directive, Counter-Racism Framework Decision, Copyright in Digital Single Market Directive). The adoption of a new Directive on Copyrights in the Digital Single Market already caused major public attention. In October 2018, YouTube's CEO Susan Wojcicki warned in an open letter to users that parts of this legis-

lation are "a threat to both your livelihood and your ability to share your voice with the world" (Wojcicki, 2018). Europe-wide demonstrations followed with a campaign on #SaveYourInternet.

With the adoption of the DSA in 2022, the EU is revising the self-regulatory model where social media platforms were free to define rules and procedures of online content moderation and moderation practices on their own terms (Hofmann, 2020; Rone, 2021). While many recent publications focus on the policies and practices of social media platforms (Gorwa, 2019a; Riesewieck & Block, 2018; Roberts, 2019), I will zoom in on the EU's approach to platform regulation by utilizing a discourse theoretical perspective (Lynggaard, 2019). How do members of the European Parliament and Commission legitimize a new legislative proposal? How does the discourse function, according to its key narratives? Looking at the EU has two advantages. First, it is possible to investigate the most noticeable transnational initiative to define the terms of platform and online content regulation by a political authority. Second, zooming in only on the EU discourse makes visible the specific legitimation narratives to regulate social media platforms and provides a starting point for a more systematic comparison of policies by national and international actors.

3. The Evolution of the Digital Services Act: Legitimation Narratives of the European Parliament and Commission

3.1. Contextualizing the Digital Services Act

Since the e-Commerce Directive was adopted in 2000, the EU is paying increasing attention to how platform providers are shaping digital markets and services. Accordingly, the EU established the East StratCom Task Force to act against Russian disinformation in 2015 (Argomaniz, 2015) and agreed upon an EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online in 2016 (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). In 2017, the European Parliament published a Resolution on Online Platforms and the Digital Single Market, followed by an EU Code of Practice on Disinformation and Action Plan in 2018. Finally, in 2020, the first proposal of legislation in the European Parliament appeared which aimed at harmonizing the existing policies into one framework. The negotiations between Commission and Parliament were twofold, including legislation on digital services (becoming the DSA) and digital markets (becoming the DMA). The Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection (IMCO) drafted the Parliament's position. Other associated committees were the Civil Liberties Committee (LIBE), Legal Affairs Committee (JURI), Industry, Research, and Energy Committee (ITRE), Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee (FEMM), Culture and Education Committee (CULT), Transport and Tourism Committee (TRAN), and the Economic Committee (ECON) which provided

opinions on the legislation. Christel Schaldemose (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament) acted as the rapporteur for the IMCO Committee. On the side of the commission, Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager and Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton headed the negotiations. After the European Parliament voted in favor of the first IMCO report on 20 January 2022, so-called trilogue negotiations between Parliament, Council, and Commission started. After five months of various meetings, the members of the European Parliament voted on the consolidated text on 5 July 2022.

Schaldemose (2021) explained that the DSA intends to set a new "golden standard" of online content and platform regulation characterized by "transparency, accountability, better protection and democratic control." As European Commission President von der Leyen announced that "it will ensure that the online environment remains a safe space, safeguarding freedom of expression and opportunities for digital businesses" (European Commission, 2022a). The Commission states on its homepage that the DSA and DMA "form a single set of new rules that will be applicable across the whole EU to create a safer and more open digital space" (European Commission, 2022b).

While some experts believe that the EU policy "has shifted from a liberal economic perspective to a constitutional approach aimed to protect fundamental rights and democratic values" (De Gregorio, 2021, p. 41), economic interests remain a key issue. On the one hand, it was reported that big tech companies lobbied at the late stage of the trilogue to secure their business model (Goujard, 2022). On the other hand, key legitimation narratives articulated by members of the European Parliament are referring to the protection of small, European businesses and consumers, particularly (and not surprisingly) in relation to the DMA. In addition, it was the IMCO Committee that technically led the legislation process. Given this context, I ask how the EU is legitimizing its new approach to social media platform regulation.

3.2. Legitimation Narratives of the European Parliament and Commission

Taking a closer look at the political discourse, I illustrate how members of the European Parliament and Commission shaped four narratives that legitimized a new regulation. I utilize a discourse theoretical approach to reconstruct legitimation narratives articulated by members of the European Parliament. These narratives, I argue, contribute to the legitimation of the DSA by combining knowledge, ideas, and arguments to produce an intelligible rationale for supporting the legislation. In general, a discourse represents a system of meaning-making practices, power relations, and institutions. Thus, discourses shape what is perceived as intelligible, normal,

and legitimate. Therefore, discourse analysis equips us with a methodological perspective to understand the contingent processes and outcomes of policymaking in the EU (Lynggaard, 2019).

Reconstructing legitimation narratives is a practical device to empirically explore the meaning-making practices of political agents. In the case of the DSA, the "stories" political decision-makers tell contribute to the legitimation (or critique) of the proposed legislation. These narratives state a problem, outline how it can be solved, fix contingent meaning, and thus enable political action. A nodal point, then, is a site of signification around which discourse is constructed and through which power relations manifest (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Nabers, 2015). Given the fluidity of meaning, nodal points symbolize temporal fixations. They hold together a range of narratives and re-produce a temporarily uncontested meaningful center of the discourse. These points limit the productivity and fluidity of discursive practices and "make predication possible" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 99). They tie together a number of narratives, for example, by establishing "democracy" as the connecting point to overcome political struggles by temporarily stabilizing an assumed shared meaning.

The European Parliament met two times to publicly debate the proposals, on 19 January 2022 and 4 July 2022. Video documentation of the parliament's sitting is the main source for the analysis (European Parliament, 2022a, 2022b). As the accessible data is limited, the findings cannot be generalized. Divisions between parties and groups were minimal, and substantial critique was only voiced by members of the right-wing group Identity and Democracy (e.g. Roman Haider, Freedom Party of Austria; Alessandra Basso, Lega; Markus Buchheit, Alternative for Germany). Thus, the scale of political struggles was modest and probably contributed to a relatively fast legislation process.

3.2.1. Narrative I: "What Is Illegal Offline Has to Be Illegal Online (and What Is Legal Offline Is Legal Online)''

Already mentioned in the European Parliament's Resolution on Online Platforms and the Digital Single Market from 2017, a key story within the debate is that on- and offline worlds are equal and should be harmonized. If content is illegal offline, it is illegal online, too. However, realities are complicated by the fact that norms apply differently within the EU. First, the legislators of members states and (national) courts finally decide about legality, taking EU law as well as national laws into account. Second, the EU has no competence over criminal law, which is primarily a matter of national legislation and jurisdiction. For example, Germany, France, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Romania, Lithuania, and Slovakia have laws against Holocaust denial. However, some countries have no specific laws about this matter, and it would be up to the general laws about incitement to violence to tackle Holocaust denial legally. It should

also be mentioned that Roman Haider used the counter-argument "what is lawful offline should be lawful online" during the January sitting to mainly voice critique.

3.2.2. Narrative II: "Taking Back Control"

A recurring story in the parliamentary debates is that the EU is taking back control by adopting the DSA and DMA. big tech companies have become too powerful, exploiting citizens and consumers by collecting data, the story goes. For members of the European Parliament, legislation, then, serves as a tool to prioritize politics and the common good over business interests. They are putting "democracy over profits," as Alexandra Geese (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance) said in the debate on 4 July 2022 (Geese, 2022). The EU, however, is not defining legal/illegal content itself which leaves room for interpretation by the platform providers. It is a meta-regulatory and procedural approach that certainly intends to balance corporate interests and user protection.

3.2.3. Narrative III: "Protecting Small Businesses, Consumers, and Our Citizens Against Big Tech"

The aim to take back control is closely related to size and implicitly the provenance of platform providers. It is about controlling big companies like Meta and Google to protect small(er) businesses, consumers, and citizens within the EU. Not mentioned by most members of the European Parliament and Commission is the geopolitical side of the story: Meta, Google, and Twitter are US-based companies. The DSA and DMA, thus, might also indicate protectionist aims within the EU's initiative to "digital sovereignty." However, this narrative is not only about the proception of businesses but the people, imagined twice, as consumers and citizens. While the former subjectivation iterates the economic interests, the latter is pointing to political rights (e.g., freedom of expression and anti-discrimination). By safeguarding the people, the EU becomes the heroic figure fighting against "Goliath," bringing an end to the "Wild West online," while defending fundamental civil rights, as some politicians argued.

3.2.4. Narrative IV: "A Golden Standard and Rulebook Beyond the European Union"

Not all members of the European Parliament are happy with the DSA (and DMA). Some wished for more, and some wished for less precise rules. Substantial critique is voiced by members of the right-wing Identity and Democracy Group, referring to "censorship," an "attack on the freedom of opinion," and the establishment of a "surveillance state." Only Patrick Breyer and Mikuláš Peksa (both part of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance) understand the DSA and DMA as a "missed opportunity" to constrain the power of platforms. In the debate on 4 July 2022, Breyer concluded that "we failed"

and Peksa demands that "the fight for digital civil rights continues" (European Parliament, 2022b). Most politicians, however, are highly enthusiastic and understand the DSA as a "rulebook" for others and a "new gold standard for digital regulation around the world" as Vestager and Schaldemose argued in the parliament's session on 19 January 2022 (Schaldemose, 2022). While some EU member states already had similar laws in place, globally applicable rules and procedures to moderate illegal online content remain the exception. Imagining itself as a role model, "leading by example," as Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton claimed in the July session (European Parliament, 2022b), has been a common narrative of the EU, especially when norms and expectations of the normal are diffused globally (Manners, 2006).

In my reading, the key nodal point that ties together the four narratives and fixes the discourse is the idea of democratic procedures and political sovereignty embodied by the EU itself. On the one hand, the EU imagines an idealized democratic online public without harmful and illegal content. This is how the European Parliament and the Commission want to see it: Democratically legitimized politics prevail over corporate interests and safeguard civilized online communication and civil rights. On the other hand, the new legislation serves the EU's agenda on digital sovereignty, taking back control from big *and* US-based enterprises. It may contribute to strengthening the EU's position in the global competition over technology, businesses, and infrastructure (Monsees & Lambach, 2022). Indeed, enhancing authority over and through all aspects of digital life is a key project for the current Commission (Bellanova et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion: How European Union Policies Are Affecting the Shape of Public Spheres

EU's legislation on social media platforms is not only a matter of policy-making. It finally leads to questions about the normative qualities of digital publics as well as the actors and practices that should define the sayable and seeable. Many scholars represent the public sphere in ideal and normative terms. Referencing Habermas, it is closely related to deliberation and democracy (Bernholz et al., 2021; Staab & Thiel, 2022). The public sphere refers to a space in which individuals come together to discuss issues of public concern openly and freely. This space is typically considered to be independent of governmental control and should be accessible to all members of society (Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1989). Publics and the public sphere are frequently used interchangeably although the latter does signal a stronger normative interpretation. In conclusion, I primarily refer to publics shaped by social media (and its regulation) in empirical terms. However, these spaces affect our theoretical understanding of a public sphere as an idealized foundation of deliberate democracy. Therefore, we should be

highly attentive when public and private actors advocate a stronger regulation of such communicative spaces.

Many scholars have argued that changes in communication technologies will affect the publics, claiming that the internet is defining a "new public sphere" (Castells, 2008; De Blasio et al., 2020; Habermas, 2021; Papacharissi, 2002). However, platforms are not truly independent of government control and corporate influence, as they are privately owned and can be subject to censorship and manipulation. Additionally, these platforms can be seen as echo chambers (Habermas, 2021), where individuals are only exposed to information and perspectives that align with their own beliefs, rather than a diverse set of perspectives. Either way, social media has pluralized virtual publics by shaping audiences, denoting institutions and infrastructures, and providing a space for the formulation of common interests (Napoli, 2019). Therefore, how social media platforms are (not) regulated affects the normative foundations of democratic order. Who can participate how in public spheres is essential, as Fraser (1990) already argued three decades ago. The political discourses and policies of the EU are thus a test case that makes visible how digital publics are reshaped by both governments and platform providers (Mende & Müller, 2023). Three conclusions can be outlined that show avenues for further research at the intersection of politics, governance, and global publics to close gaps of empirical knowledge and theoretical reflection.

First, the EU's meta-approach to social media platform regulation shows how the distinction between public and private matters is frequently re-written. How users are communicating online is not a private matter any longer but has moved into the spotlight of legislators. The EU intends to strengthen authentic and trustworthy communication by demanding platforms take down harmful and illegal content. Second, technological designs and devices define such online communication. Whether it is a pointed statement in up to 280 characters or a meme, forms and types of communication are changing. Public spheres are thus much more diverse in terms of content, interaction, and participation than they used to be. EU politics are responding to this diversity with a meta-regulatory and procedural approach to balance conflicting norms and interests. Hence, some content might be "lawful, but awful" (Keller, 2022), as a common saying goes. Third, as rules and procedures are revised by public and private actors alike, the degree of transparency is renegotiated. The EU itself is demanding more transparency from platforms on how they actually apply algorithms, delete content, or process complaints. While Meta, for example, has founded an appeal body, other platforms remain less transparent when it comes to their moderation practices and procedures (Klonick, 2019). Finally, policies of content regulation, either by public or private actors, direct more attention to legitimacy problems and legitimation strategies. Who has the authority and responsibility to control what is said and seen in public (Schlag, 2022)? How do public and private

actors justify regulations (differently)? Therefore, online content regulation and moderation tremendously affect the normative foundations of democratic order. It is a struggle for the "best possible democratic governance *of* platforms in a society that is governed *by* platforms" (Gollatz, 2016).

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Satellites and the Changing Politics of Transparency in World Politics

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Abstract
This article explores the degree to which commercial satellite imagery has empowered non-state actors in the politics of transparency in world politics. This question has received renewed attention in the wake of the disclosure of China's new missile silos in 2021 as well as Russia's war against Ukraine since 2022. The article contributes to research on this question by teasing out the competition over authority undergirding the politics of transparency. It does so in two steps: it conceptualizes the politics of transparency as involving a combination of state and non-state actors engaging in transparency efforts against another state or other states and it distinguishes four aspects of the empowerment of non-state actors in such constellations of actors: (a) the emergence of new or better disclosure devices that (b) bolster the expertise of some non-state actors, (c) giving them more influence over public debates, and (d) prompting changes in the policies of relevant actors. The article uses this framework to explore the factors that affected the degree of empowerment of non-state actors in the two cases of China's new missile silos as well as Russia's war against Ukraine. It highlights three factors: the interplay between state and non-state transparency makers, the polarization of public spheres, and the ability of states targeted by the transparency efforts to fragment public spheres.

Issue
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1. Introduction

In the last decades, technological change has given non-state actors greater ability to make visible and known what state actors, or other non-state actors, do. Satellites have been central to this story. Notably, based on the analysis of commercial satellite imagery, US researchers made public the Chinese construction of new silo fields for nuclear missiles in 2021. The disclosure of the silo fields prompted *The Economist* ("Open-source intelligence," 2021) to proclaim that "open-source intelligence" (in the sense of analysis drawing on commercial satellite imagery and social media data) was challenging "state monopolies on information," thereby changing the dynamics of world politics.

This article explores the degree to which commercial satellite imagery has empowered non-state actors in the politics of transparency in world politics. Commercial satellite imagery denotes pictures of select

parts of Earth taken by for-profit companies using remote-sensing objects orbiting Earth in (outer) space. During the Cold War, remote-sensing satellites were the preserve of states. Since the 1990s, however, satellite imagery has become more widely available thanks to the rise of satellite companies, most of them from the US, such as Space Imaging, DigitalGlobe, Maxar, and Planet Labs. As research in International Relations and beyond has shown, diverse non-state actors, such as non-governmental organizations, researchers, journalists, or the satellite companies themselves, have used satellite imagery to raise awareness for political issues and promote policies for their governance in various fields, among them human rights and environmentalism (see Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Sharman, 2022; Litfin, 2002; Rothe & Shim, 2018) but also climate politics (Gupta, 2023) and security politics (see Lawrence, 2020; Lin-Greenberg & Milonopoulos, 2021; Witjes & Olbrich, 2017; Zegart, 2022, pp. 238–250). This research has

provided important insights into the empowering effects of the rise of commercial satellite imagery for non-state actors, with some scholars proclaiming the advent of a new "age of transparency" (Larkin, 2016). At the same time, it has also highlighted the limits of this process. Some states, particularly the US, still have considerable control over which satellite imagery is available and which is not (see Witjes & Olbrich, 2017). Moreover, many non-state actors come from Western countries and reproduce Western interpretations of political issues (see Rothe & Shim, 2018). The debate has gained new momentum with the prominent use of commercial satellite imagery by non-state actors in the context of the war in Ukraine, which has led some observers to once again speak of a new era of transparency in which non-state actors are able, thanks to commercial satellite imagery and social media feeds, to track the activities of states much more closely than before (e.g., "OSINT: A new era," 2022). This has re-opened the question of how much the rise of commercial satellite imagery has changed the politics of transparency.

The politics of transparency are key to the theme of this thematic issue: the publics that partake in global politics. The politics of transparency shape the knowledge that publics have about the political issues that they debate—and whether they are aware of these issues in the first place. The article seeks to contribute to research on how satellites change the politics of transparency by highlighting the competition over authority underpinning it. Transparency is not simply about the availability of information regarding political issues. Rather, it is a process of "managing visibilities" (Flyverbom, 2019, p. 3) in which actors attempt to guide political attention towards certain issues, and certain aspects of these issues, in order to shape how they are governed.

The article starts by unpacking the politics of transparency in two steps. It highlights that the politics of transparency often involve some combination of state and non-state actors striving to influence what certain other states do. These politics take place before several publics in the sense of public spheres as defined in the introduction to this thematic issue: communicative spaces in which actors engage in debates over events or issues (see Mende & Müller, 2023; Section 2). To probe into the dynamics of such constellations of actors, the article then identifies four key aspects in which technological developments such as the increasing availability of commercial satellite imagery can potentially empower non-state actors: (a) by giving them new disclosure abilities, (b) by helping them to become recognized experts on an issue, which in turn gives them the ability (c) to (re)shape public debates on the issue, and (d) to compel (state) actors to change their policies regarding the issue (Section 3). To illustrate the framework and further theory development, the article explores and compares the two high-profile cases that gave new momentum to the debate about the effects of technological develop-

ments on the politics of transparency: the disclosures of new Chinese nuclear missile silos in 2011 and Russia's military build-up and subsequent war against Ukraine in 2021–2022 (Section 4).

The article contributes to research on satellites and the changing politics of transparency in two ways. Firstly, it highlights that these politics involve an interplay between state and non-state transparency makers. In both cases, the US government prompted (through policy arguments or initial disclosures) transparency efforts by non-state actors, thus initiating the transparency efforts and then outsourcing key parts of them. The interplay between state and non-state transparency makers thus gave the non-state actors a prominent role. Secondly, the proposed framework provides insights into the factors that limit the empowerment of non-state actors. While previous research has emphasized idiosyncrasies of commercial satellite imagery (in particular, the control of the US government over the mostly US-based companies providing the imagery as well as the fees that these companies charge) as factors limiting the empowerment of non-state actors, the article points to additional factors that stem not from the idiosyncrasies of commercial satellite imagery but rather are related to the nature of the politics of transparency as a competition over authority. The case studies highlight two such factors: the polarization of public spheres, both national and transnational, as well as the ability of states targeted by the transparency efforts to fragment public spheres, that is, to decouple their national debates from transnational ones.

2. A Competition Over Authority Before Several Publics

World politics revolves around the governance of issues such as international security, the climate, global pandemics, or global development. One fundamental idea of democratically organized political systems is that the public should know enough about these issues to be able to judge the performances of those that govern them and, based on this knowledge, hold them accountable for their performance. Transparency, the classical liberal argument goes, fosters more informed public debates and allows the public to check the arguments that governments use to legitimize their (foreign) policies (Larkin, 2016; for conceptualizations of transparency in international relations, see also Lord, 2006; McCarthy & Fluck, 2017). Foreign policy—and by extension, world politics—has traditionally been a realm in which governments have a considerable knowledge advantage over the public that holds them accountable. By making the issues more transparent, non-state actors diminish this advantage, thus constraining the "elasticity of reality" (Baum & Potter, 2019, pp. 751–752) that governments enjoy, that is the range of plausible arguments that they can make about world politics.

However, what the issues are, what is problematic about them, and how they are to be governed is often

subject to political contention. As Sending (2015, p. 11) argues, world politics is characterized by competition over authority. Various actors, both state and non-state, "compete with each other to be recognized as authorities on what is to be governed, how, and why." Actors can be authorities in two senses: they can be "in authority" and/or "an authority" (Kratochwil, 2006, p. 306). The first sense denotes political authority, that is, the recognized competence to make binding decisions for a constituency of actors. The second sense denotes epistemic authority, that is, the ascribed expertise to provide special and politically pertinent knowledge about the issues (see Zürn, 2018, pp. 50–53). When non-state actors engage in transparency efforts, they strive for epistemic authority that enables them to influence debates on how the issues are to be governed. What Krause Hansen and Flyverbom (2015) term "disclosure devices," that is, particular ways of making things more transparent such as the production of rankings (see Ringel, 2023) or the analysis of satellite images, are tools that actors use to gain attention and influence in the competition over attention and influence. The promotion of transparency is, in this perspective, not a neutral endeavor but a strategy that actors pursue to assert certain interpretations of the issues and to establish themselves as experts on how these issues are to be governed.

There is a tendency in the research on the geopolitics of satellite imagery to approach the empowerment of non-state actors through a state vs. non-state actors lens. When scholars explore whether the gaze of non-state actors differs from that of states (e.g., Rothe & Shim, 2018), or highlight that some state actors retain considerable control over what the commercial satellite companies can do (e.g., Witjes & Olbrich, 2017), or study the implications of the reduced control that states have over disclosure decisions (e.g., Lin-Greenberg & Milonopoulos, 2021), they implicitly or explicitly adopt a state vs. non-state actors perspective. Often, though, the politics of transparency feature constellations of actors in which both state and non-state actors seek to make the activities of another state or another set of states more transparent. The cases of China's missile silos and Russia's war against Ukraine exemplify such constellations. They involve a state actor, the US, and various non-state actors (in particular researchers, journalists, and satellite companies from the US and other Western states) engaging in transparency efforts against China and Russia, respectively.

The dynamics of these constellations go beyond those implied in a simple "state vs. non-state actors" dichotomy. On the one hand, some state and non-state actors work in tandem to raise public awareness for certain issues and generate pressure on another state or other states. The non-state actors, in other words, side with some states against others. On the other hand, even while siding against some other state(s), the state and non-state actors nonetheless still compete for political attention and influence. There is, in other words, a competition among different transparency makers—that is, actors seeking to make an issue more transparent—which may differ not only in their abilities but also in their ideas of how the issue is to be governed.

Furthermore, such constellations involve several publics and, with them, several possible channels of influence. To use a simple example, state A and non-state actor B seek to make the activities of state C more transparent. Then pressure on state C can be generated in one of three (combinable) ways: by convincing the national public of state A that a reaction is necessary, by mobilizing a transnational public (and with it, additional states, international organizations, and non-state actors) to put pressure on state C, or by prompting the national public in state C to demand that the state reconsider its activities. The expertise ascribed to the transparency makers may differ across these publics, as does their influence. The dynamic of the ensuing politics of transparency depends to a considerable degree on how state C reacts to the transparency initiative. State C can change its activities, thus giving in to the pressure. But it can also attempt to weather the pressure by engaging in a political battle over what the public thinks about the activities or by attempting to suppress such a debate.

3. Four Aspects of the Empowerment of Non-State Actors

The framework thus starts from the assumption that the politics of transparency often resemble situations in which combinations of state and non-state actors seek to make activities of another state, or other states, more transparent. Such constellations are not specific to commercial satellite imagery as a disclosure device but can also arise when non-state actors rely on, for example, social media feeds to track what some states do or compile and publish rankings to name and shame. There are differences between these disclosure devices. Commercial satellite imagery is, for instance, sometimes described as open-source intelligence in the same vein as social media feeds (e.g., "Open-source intelligence", 2021; "OSINT: A new era," 2022). However, the access to and use of commercial satellite imagery is considerably more costly than the analysis of social media feeds, which limits the number of non-state actors that can draw on it for their transparency efforts. What these disclosure devices nonetheless have in common is that they are tools that state or non-state actors use to generate insights into the activities of some state(s) and to leverage these insights to gain political attention and influence.

To assess how much the politics of transparency change when non-state actors use new or newly available disclosure devices such as commercial satellite imagery, it seems, therefore, useful to unpack the process through which the non-state actors gain attention and influence. The following four aspects matter for how powerful the non-state actors become.

The first aspect is the opportunity to improve or create new disclosure devices. This aspect thus relates to the disclosure ability of actors, that is, their capacity to make an issue more transparent. The disclosure ability is affected by technological change, e.g., the rise of commercial satellite companies, but is also affected by political and legal circumstances, such as laws constraining or allowing the use of certain satellites or satellite images (see Litfin, 2002, pp. 74–75; Witjes & Olbrich, 2017, p. 530). New technologies can increase the disclosure ability of non-state actors relative to governments by making it harder for governments to hide certain activities or by making non-state actors less dependent on friendly governments as providers of information on these activities.

The second aspect is the translation of this disclosure ability into recognized expertise on the issue. Expertise is a claim to special knowledge about an issue, be it because of experience or—more relevant with regard to disclosure devices—because of certain skills (see Eyal, 2019, pp. 21–42). The acceptance of this claim by actors relevant to the governance of the issue is crucial to the ability of actors using disclosure devices to establish themselves as (epistemic) authorities on the issue (see Sending, 2015, p. 21; Zürn, 2018, pp. 52–53). New technologies can make the competition over authority more dynamic when they give rise to new forms of expertise, thus potentially facilitating the rise of new experts. Established experts, though, can also leverage the new forms of expertise to sustain and bolster their status.

The third aspect is the influence on public debates. Multiple actors often claim to be experts or are regarded as experts on an issue. As Loehrke et al. (2021, p. 3) note, the spread of open-source practices has entailed a "convergence of practices shared by journalists, intelligence professionals, nongovernmental experts, and other interested citizens." However, it has also "added competition among actors seeking to inform the public policy conversation" (Loehrke et al., 2021, p. 3). That some actors are recognized as experts does not imply that they are able to (re)shape public debates on the issue. For that to happen, the knowledge that they produce and circulate needs to be recognized by other actors in the public sphere(s) as pertinent enough that, because of the disclosures, these actors adopt certain interpretations of the issue and accordingly argue for certain ways of governing it. The polarization of political debates, though, may result in situations in which actors are recognized as experts within only one camp but not others, thus limiting their influence on these debates (for the effects of polarization on public debates, see Baum & Potter, 2019).

The fourth aspect is the influence on the policies of the relevant actors. This influence can be both direct and indirect. It is direct when the actors whose activities are made (more) transparent react to the disclosures and change their activities. It is indirect when the transparency efforts prompt other actors to change their policies vis-à-vis the actor whose activities are made (more) transparent. As discussed above, the influence on the policies of the relevant actors happens through the influence of public debates and the ways these public debates prompt the relevant actors to adopt certain policies. That said, some actors may welcome the dynamics that the disclosures made by non-state actors inject into public debates because these dynamics are conducive to their policy aims. These actors are then not prompted by the disclosures to adapt their policies but rather capitalize on them to legitimize the policies they adopt. In such cases, the actors—so to speak—outsource parts of the legitimation of their policies to the non-state actors. Other actors, in contrast, may dislike the dynamics generated by the disclosures and seek to suppress the ensuing public debates, for instance by refusing to discuss the issue or by seeking to keep the debates away from the publics that are crucial to the legitimation of the policies.

The distinction between these four aspects provides a qualitative measure of how much technological developments, such as the rise of commercial satellite companies, change the politics of transparency and empower non-state actors. The power dynamics undergirding the politics of transparency are most strongly reshaped when all four aspects are fulfilled, that is when non-state actors are able to successfully leverage disclosure devices to establish themselves as key experts, reshape public debates, and prompt changes in the policies of relevant actors. Furthermore, the distinction helps to structure and focus the exploration of the factors that enable and limit the empowerment of non-state actors.

4. A New Age of Transparency?

This section presents two brief case studies to illustrate the framework developed above and to contribute to further theory development on the changing politics of transparency. The two cases are the transparency efforts relating to new Chinese nuclear missile fields in 2021 and Russia's military build-up and war against Ukraine since 2022.

The two cases are treated as paradigmatic cases in the current debate about the advent of a new age of transparency (e.g., "Open-source intelligence," 2021; "OSINT: A new era," 2022). These cases are paradigmatic in the sense that they involve political debates characterized by a prominent role of non-state actors who, by using commercial satellite imagery, are able to generate a new level of transparency about the activities of certain states. At the same time, given the geopolitical tensions that they involve, the two cases are, in some sense, extreme. But because key processes (in the case studies, those enabling and limiting the empowerment of non-state actors) are particularly pronounced in such cases, they are helpful for teasing out these processes and generating hypotheses for further research (Gerring,

2007, pp. 101–105). The two cases are characterized by in-case variation as the non-state actors impacted US and transnational debates, but their impact on China and Russia was more limited, as both states have continued with the activities that the non-state actors disclosed. This makes the two cases useful for exploring the factors that limit the empowerment of non-state actors, which will help to further refine the framework developed above. The framework, and especially the four aspects that it highlights, provides the structure and focus for the analysis and comparison of the cases (see George & Bennett, 2005, on structured and focused case comparisons). To probe these factors, the case studies draw on a mix of primary sources (such as publications by non-state actors, government statements, and newspaper articles), complemented by secondary literature.

Table 1 summarises the findings. The case studies reveal a dynamic between state and non-state transparency makers in which the state transparency maker (the US) prompts and partly outsources the transparency-making to non-state actors. They point to two factors that limit the empowerment of the non-state actors: the polarization of political debates and the purposive fragmentation of public spheres.

4.1. China's Silo Fields

China's nuclear arsenal is considerably smaller than the arsenals of the two biggest nuclear powers, the US and Russia. No international organization publishes statistics on the arsenals of the nine states possessing nuclear weapons in the world. Nor does any state. The most prominent transparency maker publishing such statistics is a non-governmental organization, the Washington-based Federation of American Scientists (FAS), which estimates Russia's total arsenal (including deployed and retired weapons) to include 5,889 warheads; the US' arsenal, 5,244; and China's arsenal, 410. Russia and the US, though, only deploy parts of their arsenal: 1,674 warheads in Russia's case and 1,670 warheads in the US case (see Kristensen, Korda, Johns, & Kohn, 2023).

A longstanding debate, especially in US security politics, is whether or not China strives to enlarge its arsenal to diminish the difference. The Trump administration revived the debate by claiming that China was "expanding" its arsenal "rapidly" and was "likely to at least double its size in the years ahead" (Ford, 2020, p. 2). In 2021, three disclosures then injected new momentum into the debate. On 30 June, the *Washington Post* reported that

Table 1. The politics of transparency in the two cases.

	Case 1: Chinese silos	Case 2: Russia's war against Ukraine
Disclosure devices	Increased abilities of non-state actors.	Increased abilities of non-state actors.
	Use of abilities to search for Chinese silos prompted and encouraged by a state actor (US).	A state actor (US) initially played an important role in the disclosure of Russian activities.
Expertise	Satellite imagery is accepted as a pertinent disclosure device within the US (and transnational) debate.	Satellite imagery is accepted as a pertinent disclosure device within the US and transnational debate.
	Use of satellite imagery bolstered the status of established experts in this debate.	Used by journalists and researchers.
		Use showcased the expertise of satellite companies.
Influence on public debates	Disclosures gave new momentum to the US debate about possible Chinese nuclear build-up.	Initial disclosures started a transnational debate about Russia's intentions.
	But due to the polarization of the debate, the non-state actors could not control the momentum.	Russia initially participated in this debate, then—after the war started—sought to decouple its national public from the transnational debate.
	China refused to engage in a debate.	
	Reactions by Chinese media are shaped by the polarization of the transnational debate.	
Influence on policies	Disclosures helped the US to legitimize its nuclear modernization program.	Disclosures helped the US to rally (Western) support for Ukraine.
	China continued its nuclear program.	Russia neither abandoned its plan to attack Ukraine nor has so far stopped the attack.

researchers from the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) in Monterey, California, had discovered the construction of a new field with more than 100 nuclear missile silos in China (see Warrick, 2021). On 26 July, the *New York Times* announced that researchers from the FAS had found a second silo field that was under construction (see Broad & Sanger, 2021). On 12 August, the *Washington Times* reported that an analyst from the US Air Force's Air University had detected early construction work for a third silo field (see Gertz, 2021). All three revelations were based on the analysis of satellite imagery.

Disclosure ability: All nuclear powers practice some degree of secrecy about their arsenals. Democracies such as the US, Great Britain, and France, though, reveal considerably more about their nuclear forces than autocracies such as China and Russia. Given this secrecy, non-state actors had long depended on what the nuclear powers chose to reveal and what transparency-fostering governments, notably the US administration, published about the arsenals of other, less transparent nuclear powers (see Norris & Kristensen, 2015). This situation has changed considerably with the rise of commercial satellite companies. The growing availability of satellite imagery has offered non-state actors powerful new means for finding and tracking nuclear facilities and forces (see Zegart, 2022, pp. 232–234). An early indication was the disclosure of Iran's nuclear facility in Natanz by a US-based NGO, the Institute for Science and International Security, in 2002 (see Lawrence, 2020). Commercial satellite imagery has thus boosted the disclosure abilities of non-state actors, enabling them to partially circumvent the secrecy practices of states such as China while at the same time making them less dependent on the US government as a source for information about the nuclear programs of other states. The revelations about China's silo fields showcased this enhanced disclosure ability.

Expertise: A range of actors draws on commercial satellite imagery to produce knowledge about nuclear arsenals. The first two disclosures, though, were not made by newcomers to the debate on nuclear politics but by actors that were already established experts. The CNS and FAS have both used commercial satellite imagery for years for tracing developments in nuclear arsenals and, by doing so, have established themselves as epistemic authorities on the matter (see also Lawrence, 2020, p. 534). The CNS found the first silo field when Jeffrey Lewis, one of its senior analysts who had worked on Chinese nuclear forces for some time (e.g., Lewis, 2014), tasked Decker Eveleth, a fellow, to check the "rumor that has been going around Washington" that China was "dramatically expanding" the number of its nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missiles (Lewis, 2021). The FAS, as mentioned, is arguably the key authority publishing knowledge on the arsenals of the various nuclear powers. Since the late 1980s, it has published statistics and descriptions of the arsenals in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* and the *Yearbooks* of

the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. In February 2021, the FAS had already discovered the construction of 14 new silos at a Chinese training ground. After the CNS disclosed the first silo field, the FAS checked for other sites, finding the second silo field (see Broad & Sanger, 2021). While the CNS and the FAS have been widely accepted as experts within the US and (Western) transnational debate on global nuclear politics (for an overview, see Bugos & Masterson, 2021), Chinese media challenged their expertise following the disclosures. Notably, Xijin Hu, the editor-in-chief of the *Global Times*, an English-speaking newspaper published by the Communist Party, decried Lewis as an "amateur" who did not understand nuclear technology (Hu, 2021).

Influence on public debates: The disclosures injected new momentum in the US debate while China refused to engage in a debate. The politics of transparency were characterized by competition among transparency makers, with the claims made by the US government about China's activities spurring non-state actors to dig deeper, with both the CNS and FAS relying on images provided by Planet Labs and later also Maxar, which in turn spurred efforts by others, including the Air University which used satellite images from the European Space Agency. The cumulative effect of this competition was a sequence of disclosures that substantiated the government's claims without the government having to disclose images from its own satellites. With "approximately 300 apparent silos under construction," the FAS concluded, China was pursuing an "unprecedented nuclear build-up," which made it more likely that "China's total ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missiles] force could potentially exceed that of either Russia and the US in the foreseeable future" (Korda & Kristensen, 2021). For the commander of the US nuclear forces, the disclosures revealed a "strategic breakout by China," and he suggested that open-source analysts should "keep looking" for more construction activities (as cited in Gertz, 2021).

The CNS and the FAS sought to curb the dynamic generated by their disclosures within the US debate. The US debate pitted proponents of a modernization and expansion of the US nuclear arsenal against proponents of nuclear restraint and arms control (for an overview, see Bugos & Masterson, 2021). The former welcomed the disclosures as further proof that the US had to improve its nuclear forces to prevail in the impending arms race. In a congressional hearing in March 2022, for instance, the already mentioned commander of US nuclear forces noted that since his last testimony, "commercial satellite imagery [had] revealed three new nuclear missile fields in western China," which he argued vindicated his earlier warnings that China was moving beyond its previous strategy of minimal deterrence and rapidly expanding its nuclear capabilities (Richard, 2022, p. 5). The CNS and the FAS traditionally side with the proponents of nuclear restraint and arms control. They accordingly warned of the risks inherent in arms races, suggested that the

silo constructions could also be a sign of Chinese worries about the survivability of its nuclear forces in the face of modernized US nuclear forces, and made a case for arms control solutions (see Korda & Kristensen, 2021; Lewis, 2021). Put differently: the disclosures intervened in a polarized debate in which each side sought to mobilize the revelations for their own purposes and in which the non-state states positioned themselves on one of the two sides, which limited the influence they had over the debate.

The Chinese government has sought to avoid a public debate on the disclosures. The *Global Times* suspected the disclosures were a plot by the US government to "squeeze the room for China's nuclear development through public opinion pressure," urging the Chinese government to side-step this plot by neither confirming nor denying the disclosures (Hu, 2021). So far, the Chinese government has followed this advice. For instance, in a media briefing in January 2022, the director general of the Arms Control Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry declined to confirm the existence of the silos. He added, though, that satellite imagery was not a good basis for estimating the size of China's nuclear arsenal (see Moritsugu, 2022). In an editorial, the *Global Times* went a step further, accusing "politicians and media in Washington" of "hyp[ing] disinformation such as 'China is building missile silos in its northwest'" in order to legitimize the modernization of its nuclear program ("US eyes," 2022). The comments by the *Global Times* illustrate how the geopolitical struggle between the US and China has polarized the transnational debate. For the *Global Times*, the non-state actors were no more than pawns in the US plot to perpetuate its nuclear superiority.

Influence on the policies of relevant actors: The disclosures did not lead to substantial changes in China's nuclear program, but they helped the US government to justify the modernization of its own nuclear forces. China has continued modernizing and expanding its nuclear arsenal while insisting that its strategy is still minimal deterrence and that it is not interested in a nuclear arms race (see Kristensen, Korda, & Johns, 2023). The US government, in turn, has incorporated the diagnosis of a rapidly expanding Chinese nuclear arsenal into its nuclear strategy. Its Nuclear Posture Review, published in October 2022, noted that China "has embarked on an ambitious expansion, modernization, and diversification of its nuclear forces" and "likely intends to possess at least 1,000 deliverable warheads by the end of the decade" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022, p. 4).

4.2. Russia's War Against Ukraine

Satellites enable state and non-state actors not only to detect nuclear missile silos but also the deployment of conventional military forces. Such satellite images have played a prominent part in Russia's war against Ukraine. The politics of transparency can be divided into two phases: The first phase began in October 2021

with media reports about US concerns over the Russian deployment of substantial military forces near Ukraine (e.g., Sonne et al., 2021). This phase was characterized by Russia's denial of any intent to attack Ukraine and Western public debate about whether the increasing Russian deployments around Ukraine were preparation for war or merely a political pressure game (see Harris et al., 2022). The politics of transparency then entered a new, second phase when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. This phase, which is still ongoing at the time of the writing of this article (April 2023), has been characterized by debate about the course of the war and the suffering and destruction it has caused.

Disclosure ability: Commercial satellite imagery has increased the abilities of non-state actors to track substantial deployments of conventional military forces. Compared to the case of China's silos, the politics of transparency have nonetheless involved a stronger role of a state actor. The US government set key impulses for the transnational public debate. The October 2021 disclosure was followed by a second and more substantial one in early December 2021. The *Washington Post* published an article based on US intelligence that described how Russia was amassing up to 175,000 soldiers on the Ukrainian borders (see Harris & Sonne, 2021). The article included several satellite images provided by DigitalGlobe (a subsidiary of Maxar) showing Russian military camps near Ukraine. The availability of commercial satellite imagery thus allowed the US to disclose the Russian build-up without having to publish imagery from its own spy satellites. At the same time, it also enabled non-state actors to provide the transnational public first with frequent updates on the Russian deployments and then, after the war had begun, with insights into how the war was unfolding. Media outlets, for instance, used satellite images of a kilometers-long immobile Russian convoy to highlight Russia's logistical failures (see Thebault, 2022). The focus on Russian activities has been a deliberate bias. Commercial satellite companies come from the West, often have contracts with Western governments (see Teicher, 2022), and have used their disclosure ability selectively to make Russian activities more transparent, but not usually the Ukrainian ones.

Expertise: States have abstained from publishing imagery from their spy satellites on the war in Ukraine. This has created an opening for non-state actors to leverage commercial satellite imagery to position themselves as actors with special knowledge about the war. Two groups of actors can be distinguished in this regard. The first group consists of journalists. Satellite images have been a prominent element of the media coverage of the war. Most of these images come from Maxar, which has granted special access to its image archives to a number of media partners, among the *BBC*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times,* and *The Washington Post* (see Teicher, 2022). This arrangement has been mutually beneficial: The media outlets

had "unprecedented access to commercial satellite imagery" (Beale, 2022), which enabled them to visually substantiate their coverage in new ways and to provide insights that other media outlets could not provide. Maxar, in turn, could brand itself as a company that supports global public interests. The arrangement, however, also illustrates that commercial satellite companies can—and do—influence the competition over authority by selecting some non-state actors, but not others, as partners, thus giving them an edge in the competition.

The second group comprises non-state actors that have monitored Russia's military build-up and the subsequent war. One prominent example is the Institute for the Study of War which has published regular reports, including maps, about relevant battles in the war on its website (see Institute for the Study of War, 2022). The institute draws on a number of sources to produce these reports, including satellite imagery. The reports, in turn, have been used by media outlets as an authoritative information source for how the war unfolds (e.g., "Russia-Ukraine war at a glance," 2023).

Influence on public debates: The disclosures in late 2021 and early 2022 sparked a transnational debate about the intentions behind Russia's military build-up. Russia initially denied any intent to invade Ukraine, arguing that the satellite images showed nothing but military exercises. "We have no intention of attacking, staging an offensive on or invading Ukraine," Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov insisted in January 2022 (cited in Khurshudyan et al., 2022). In contrast to China's (non-)reaction to the silo disclosures, Russia thus initially engaged in a transnational public debate about the disclosures, challenging the Western interpretation of what the satellite images showed. Once the war started, though, Russia sought to keep the debate away from its own population by passing legislation restricting what could publicly be said about the war and what the media could report (see Troianovski & Safronova, 2022). Its reaction, in other words, was to fragment the public debate, separating the transnational public debate from the public debate within Russia.

Influence on the policies of relevant actors: The disclosures helped the US to garner support among Western governments for a strong stance against Russia's aggression (see Harris et al., 2022). Moreover, several commercial satellite companies provide imagery to Ukraine, thus helping it keep track of Russian troop movements (see Ignatius, 2022). As in the case of China's silos, however, the public disclosures have so far not compelled the state targeted by the transparency efforts to abandon its activities. The disclosures neither stopped Russia from attacking Ukraine nor has Russia so far ended its attacks. That said, the transparency efforts nonetheless impacted Russia's policies. The laws it passed to regulate what the Russian media and public can and cannot say about the war are an effort to keep the transnational debate—including the satellite images published by Western media—away from the Russian population.

Russia, in other words, has reacted to the Western efforts to make the war more visible with a regime geared towards making it less visible—or, more precisely, towards making those aspects that do not conform to the story that the Russian government wants to tell less visible.

5. Conclusion

How much has commercial satellite imagery empowered non-state actors in the politics of transparency? China's missile silos and the war in Ukraine have brought new attention to this question, with some observers arguing that they herald the advent of a new age of transparency with a more empowered role for non-state actors. To examine this argument, the article first highlighted that the politics of transparency are part of a competition over authority in which state and non-state actors seek to position themselves as the key (epistemic) authorities whose interpretations of political issues matter for how they are governed. The article then developed a framework that analytically unpacks the empowerment of non-state actors in this competition over authority into four aspects: the development of new disclosure devices, the expertise that these disclosure devices help to build up, the influence that they give the non-state actors over public debates, and the impact they thus have on the policies of the relevant actors. The case studies show that commercial satellite imagery helped non-state actors to create a new level of transparency and to position themselves as experts in US and transnational debates. But they also highlight limits in the power that the non-state actors thus gained: they could only partially shape the debates, and their disclosures did not lead to a substantial change in the Chinese and Russian activities that they sought to make more transparent.

The framework and the explorative case studies suggest several factors that help to explain the impact on US and Western debates and the limited impact on China and Russia. The first is the interplay between different transparency makers. In both cases, a state actor, the US, prompted (China's silos) or kick-started (Russia's preparation for war) the transparency efforts, and non-state actors then continued them, encouraged by the state actor, which could in this sense partially out-source the transparency efforts. The second factor is the polarization of public spheres. In the US debate on China's missile silos, the non-state actors were widely accepted as experts, but proponents of a more robust nuclear force posture and proponents of nuclear restraint and arms control interpreted the disclosures differently. While the non-state actors gave the debate new momentum, they were unable to control it. The geopolitical tensions between the great powers have contributed to a polarization of the transnational public sphere. Chinese media accordingly dismissed the silo disclosures as a US plot to legitimize its own nuclear program. The third factor is the fragmentation of public spheres. After initially engaging

in a debate about the satellite images depicting growing Russian deployments around Ukraine, Russia passed laws that considerably restricted what Russian media could report about the war, thus decoupling the Russian public sphere from the transnational one. As the second and third factor underscore, the dynamics of the politics of transparency can only be fully grasped when taking into account the nature of the relevant publics and their impact on how the politics of transparency play out.

How generalizable are these findings? The article only applies the framework to the use of commercial satellite imagery in security politics. However, the situation that the framework depicts and unpacks—that is, constellations in which combinations of state and non-state actors engage in transparency efforts with regard to the activities of another state actor or other state actors—is neither specific to this particular disclosure device nor this particular policy field. The framework can, in this sense, be used in future research to explore whether the identified factors also play a role in other policy fields and which (combinations of) disclosure devices help non-state actors most to gain political attention and influence.

Given that the interplay of state and non-state transparency makers has, in both cases, helped the US to legitimize its policies directed against China and Russia, another avenue of research would be the question of the effects of the empowerment of non-state actors on the power dynamics between states. The empowerment of non-state actors increases the power of some states—particularly those with the same policy preferences—while challenging the power of others. There is thus a strategic dimension to the empowerment of non-state actors, with the former states having an interest in fostering the empowerment and the latter an interest in hampering it.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

The Janus Face of Valuation: Global Performance Indicators as Powerful and Criticized Public Measures

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Abstract
The article conceptualizes global performance indicators as public measures that are powerful but also receive a wide range of criticism. Global performance indicators derive their power from combining three analytically distinct elements: (a) commensuration (comparing performances on a common metric), (b) visual simplification (presenting performances in an appealing format), and (c) serialization (framing performance as a continuous developing property). However, the very same elements are often subject to criticism. The producers of global performance indicators, therefore, defend methodologies and the validity of commensurated numbers, meet charges of visual oversimplification by professing sobriety and nuance, and balance temporal continuity and discontinuity. By conceptualizing global performance indicators as powerful and criticized public measures, the article draws attention to the Janus face of valuation, which the producers must tackle continuously. Investing considerable time, energy, and resources, these organizations are a key feature of today's vast indicator culture.

Issue
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1. Introduction

Global performance indicators (GPIs) have proliferated at an astonishing rate over the past decades and are shaping the modern world, which seems beholden to an all-encompassing "indicator culture" (Merry, 2016, p. 9). Here are just a few examples of the vast number and great diversity of GPIs published nowadays (Lokot & Wijermars, 2023; Mennicken & Espeland, 2019): the influential *Trafficking in Persons Report* by the US State Department rates countries' efforts at combatting human trafficking (Kelley & Simmons, 2015); the *Aid Transparency Index* by the NGO Publish What You Fund has arguably moved the field of foreign aid by evaluating the commitment of donor organizations to being open about their funding activities (Honig & Weaver, 2019); the OECD's much-discussed Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) monitors the degree to which national education systems are dedicated to "quality education" (Landahl, 2020).

The ubiquity of GPIs can lure us into simply taking the indicator culture for granted. Social science research certainly has shown a tendency to treat GPIs as social facts, albeit regrettable ones, and to contextualize their proliferation in larger transformations, which are used as structural explanations. Two larger transformations stand out in current debates. First, many work backward from a widespread "trust in numbers" (Porter, 1995) that apparently renders quantitative judgment objective. Second, the proliferation of GPIs is often discussed with regard to unequal "international conditions" (Gutterman, 2014, p. 392), particularly in "political and economic contexts" (Merry, 2016, p. 208; see also Kelley & Simmons, 2019). Such explanations offer critically important information on the current indicator frenzy and shed light on some of the underlying dynamics. Still, they account for only part of the story. In addition, they are liable to create path dependencies that ultimately impede our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of GPIs:

(a) The "magic of numbers" (Merry, 2016, p. 127) has become a conceptual shorthand and convenient catch-all formula. Extending the analytical scope, recent scholarship has argued that there is more to contemporary valuation devices than just numbers (Ringel et al., 2021), which suggests that we should ask what other factors might account for the power that is frequently ascribed to GPIs.

(b) By interpreting GPIs as (passive) carriers of global inequalities, scholarly debates gravitate toward the macro level and a "top-down" view. Some, though, have chosen a "bottom-up" strategy, asking how organizations facilitate global inequalities (Fehl & Freistein, 2020). In doing so, they grant the organizations that produce GPIs (GPI producers) a more active role (Ringel et al., 2020).

Building on previous work by the author (Ringel, 2021; Ringel et al., 2020) and synthesizing the diverse kinds of literature on publics, quantification, valuation, and GPIs, this article aims to contribute to a better understanding of "how indicators work in practice" (Nelken, 2015, p. 317) by bracketing the purported magic of numbers and by asking what role the producers play in the overall process. Thus, instead of taking their institutionalization for granted or treating it as a regrettable fact, GPIs are approached as inherently "volatile" (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015, p. 891) public measures and their proliferation "a puzzle requiring explanation" (Beaumont & Towns, 2021, p. 1471).

After introducing GPIs as forms of valuation that are embedded in relational constellations of producers, targets, and publics (Section 2), the article connects their power to the combination of three elements: commensuration, visual simplification, and serialization (Section 3). However, the same elements also provide the grounds for challenges that constantly threaten to chip away at the credibility of GPIs (Section 4). Far from being unrelated, GPI power and GPI critique are two sides of the same coin, constituting what will be referred to as the Janus face of valuation. As we shall see, both building GPI power and navigating GPI critique are tasks that the producers fulfill by committing substantial amounts of time, energy, and resources.

The *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI) serves as an empirical illustration of the conceptual argument throughout this article. Corruption has emerged as a global challenge over the past three decades, not least due to the advocacy of a rapidly growing coalition supported by such powerful international organizations as the OECD and the World Bank. But it appears that within that coalition, the NGO Transparency International (TI) has been able to leverage the CPI, its flagship publication, to take over a leading role and distinguish itself as "an important agent of change" (Wang & Rosenau, 2001, p. 31; see also Andersson & Heywood, 2009; Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). Exerting high levels of influence while also continuing to attract controversy, the CPI is an excellent case to exemplify the Janus face of valuation.

2. GPIs as Public Forms of Valuation

Studies on GPIs have documented changes in laws and regulations, the adoption of new standards, widespread reforms, and growing concerns about global challenges like public sector corruption, the quality of education, and climate change (Beaumont & Towns, 2021; Brankovic, 2021; Davis et al., 2012; Honig & Weaver, 2019; Hunter & Shaffer, 2022; Kelley, 2017; Kelley & Simmons, 2015, 2019; Landahl, 2020; Wang & Rosenau, 2001). To further our understanding of these impacts, we must tease out "a broader focus on the wider sets of relationships through which [GPIs] emerge and remain authoritative" (Beaumont & Towns, 2021, p. 1469). It seems that this wider set of relationships comprises three main categories of actors: producers, targets, and publics (see also Samiolo & Mehrpouya, 2021; Waibel et al., 2021; Werron, 2014). Most *producers* of GPIs are organizations: international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, research centers, or, occasionally, for-profit companies. Nation states, the *targets* of GPIs, are evaluated in terms of their ability to perform in a chosen category such as health care, freedom of the press, and corruption control, or in any other tasks they are seen as fitted to fulfill. Lastly, GPIs also address *publics*, whom they present with the opportunity to evaluate the performances of nation-states.

Unlike the producers and targets of GPIs, publics are a rather elusive concept, and defining them is a challenging task. In a very basic sense, publics emerges under the condition of what is generally called "publicity." In contrast to in-person conversations or private correspondence, public communication does not have a specific recipient but is, to use Brighenti's (2018, p. 25) term, "infrastructural"—once brought into existence, it takes on a life of its own and becomes "an 'air' that we breathe, an atmospheric component of society." There are different theories of "infrastructural" communication, each having direct implications for how we conceptualize publics. The editorial of this thematic issue (Mende & Müller, 2023) distinguishes four manifestations of publics: audiences, public spheres, institutions, and public interests. The second and fourth manifestations, public spheres and public interests, are key to unpacking the wider sets of relationships between producers, targets, and publics. Public spheres, and how they become arenas where publics interests are articulated, might be thought of in at least two different ways.

First, numerous studies approach public spheres as being "a concrete audience," even "a crowd witnessing itself in visible space" (Warner, 2002, p. 50). Accordingly, publics are smaller or larger groups of people who may be in proximity to one another or communicating at a distance. Modern nation-states have multiple publics: citizens, voters, the media, academics, lobbyists, civil

society, corporations, etc. (Beaumont & Towns, 2021). GPIs assume the role of a "visibility agent" (Harness et al., 2022) that empowers these publics by transforming them into stakeholders who can evaluate nation-state performances, even if they only know little about the subject matter. For instance, most of us struggle when we try to grasp how modern health care systems work, but the *Global Health Security Index* offers an overall picture that radically reduces the asymmetry between health care experts and laypeople who are provided with the means to make up their own minds. The targets—government officials and civil servants—become aware of GPIs either when they follow public debates or because stakeholders confront them directly. Exposed to forms of valuation that cater to diverse publics, nation-states regularly engage in "status maintenance behavior" (Kelley, 2017, p. 52), which is also a popular theme in research.

There is another side to the emergence of today's vast indicator culture that has largely escaped scholarly attention: Contemporary GPIs not only put pressure on nation-states but also face challenges that ultimately endanger their producers' carefully built credibility as third parties (Hunter & Shaffer, 2022; Lokot & Wijermars, 2023; Nelken, 2015). On closer inspection, GPI critique, the flipside of GPI power, is a widespread phenomenon originating from different sources. Unsurprisingly, the representatives of nation-states consistently push back against GPIs (Merry, 2016). The media, too, act as promulgators of critique: journalists not only use GPIs in their reporting on nation-states but also comment on the measures themselves. The scientific community, another stakeholder, is just as much invested in calling GPIs methodologies and data quality into question as in supporting them. And finally, civil society also appears to be ambivalent: on the one hand, supporting and promoting GPIs while, on the other, finding faults in them (such as "complacency"). Like other nontraditional experts (Chong & Bourgoin, 2020; Ringel, 2021), GPI producers are evidently no strangers to contestation and put considerable effort into maintaining their evaluative credibility (Lokot & Wijermars, 2023). All things considered, the publicity of GPIs is a double-edged sword, putting producers and targets under pressure, thereby facilitating what I suggest calling the Janus face of valuation.

We can further explore this idea by turning to a second way of thinking about public spheres and public interests. This viewpoint is less interested in actors and instead foregrounds the larger discursive environment. Released in reports, newspaper articles, websites, launch events, etc., GPIs have an audience that, according to Werron (2014, p. 65), is "indefinite, unlimited, and thus basically unknowable." Not so much addressing specific groups of people but rather amorphous entities such as voters, patients, investors, or even mankind, GPIs enact "imaginations of the audience that project the audience as a 'public' of attentive and critical individuals rather than an unreceptive, undifferentiated 'mass'."

It does not matter whether these imaginations have any correspondence to reality because a public sphere is "a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself" (Warner, 2002, p. 50). Instead of pondering what "real" preferences groups of people might hold, such conceptualizations of publics foreground their socially constructed nature. An increase in GPI power is therefore likely if the imaginations of publics as attentive observers of nation-state performance are spread in discourse. The same applies to GPI critique, which is likely to increase pressure on the producers to the extent that it can reach larger publics and successfully claim to speak on their behalf.

Valuation devices such as GPIs amplify what Power et al. (2009, p. 309) call reputational risk, which "can be regarded as the purest man-made risk of organizing as such, namely the risk of how one is perceived by others." Emerging from public discourse, reputation is an inherently social attribute awarded by others: no person or organization directly controls their own reputation. With the proliferation of highly diverse, and adverse, valuation practices in recent decades, we are witnessing a general trend toward "the internalization of concern about how activities might be regarded" (Power et al., 2009, p. 309). Organizations are, in other words, bound to expect reputational risk to be lurking around the corner so that GPIs likely wield more power over their targets and fuel more challenges to their producers' credibility by being able to create the impression that they could cause reputational risk.

Both understandings can help us get a better sense of the relational constellations in which GPIs are embedded. Conceptualizations of public spheres as sites of engagement between different actors reveal how stakeholders may use GPIs as a resource in their efforts to exert pressure—on targets or producers. Others conceptualize publics and their interests as socially constructed claims. Whether stakeholders "really" make use of them or not, GPIs generate pressure by virtue of their publicity. This means that GPIs, once embedded in public discourse, can be powerful irrespective of their utilization by stakeholders and, conversely, hold the potential to sway producers to act as if they were expecting challenges to chip away at their credibility. Treating both understandings as complementary, this article takes into account engagements between producers, targets, and publics as well as the more tacit pressure stemming from the placement of GPIs in public discourse.

3. GPI Power

GPIs have similarities with other public forms of valuation, especially rankings. Building on previous work (Ringel, 2021), this section defines GPIs as devices that derive their power from combining: (a) commensuration, (b) visual simplification, and (c) serialization, each element being built through the investment of considerable time, energy, and resources by the producers.

3.1. Commensuration: Making Nation-State Performance Comparable on a Common Metric

Commensuration is commonly defined as the social process of assembling entities—commodities, universities, corporations, people, and countless others—on a common metric (Espeland & Stevens, 2008). On the surface, commensuration may appear as unobtrusive and innocent, but research has shed light on its performative properties, suggesting that, rather than measuring something that is already out there, commensuration produces value, meaning that the relationship between estimation and value is "circular—better, entangled" (Brighenti, 2018, p. 25).

GPI producers commensurate nation-state performances on ordinal scales such as good/bad, better/worse, or enough/not enough, thereby establishing social hierarchies between performers (Fourcade, 2016; Towns & Rumelili, 2017). Notably, the calculations undergirding commensurated numbers are "epistemic practices" (Kalthoff, 2005, p. 70) in that they are produced "based on a consistent set of rules" (Bartl et al., 2019, p. 10), that is, methodologies. By drawing on scientific principles, GPI producers take the role of "disinterested arbiters who provide neutral information" (Beaumont & Towns, 2021, p. 1476). The theories, ideologies, and political goals they have grafted onto the metrics are practically concealed (or "blackboxed"), and the commensurated numbers, once rendered "scientifically legitimate" (Nelken, 2015, p. 329), can benefit from an aura of trustworthiness (Porter, 1995; see also Davis et al., 2012; Merry, 2016).

GPI producers devise different strategies to craft trustworthy numbers (Bandola-Gill et al., 2023). Over time, the producers who use primary data seem to have switched from previously informal and casual methods to a conspicuously formalized and standardized production process (Zerndt, 2020). Take the *Access to Medicine Index* by the Access to Medicine Foundation: According to a study, the team responsible for the index was constantly reminded that it must "act as a robot" (Mehrpouya & Samiolo, 2016, p. 22) to minimize (potential) accusations of human bias or error. GPIs that are either partly or fully built from secondary data—composite indicators—aggregate different sources in "long interpretive chains" (Merry, 2016, p. 209) to tap into the credibility of these external sources. Whether primary or secondary sources are used, transparency has apparently evolved as a key source of legitimacy. Showing a marked interest in leveraging the cultural worth of "openness" by sharing (carefully prepared) information about their methodology and data, GPI producers resemble other nontraditional experts who utilize transparency to (pro)actively build trust because they do not possess the received authority of professional practice (Chong & Bourgoin, 2020).

The CPI is a composite indicator, commensurating (perceptions of) corruption on a global scale by aggregating several independent data sources. Being "very careful to appear neutral and noninterventionist" (Wang & Rosenau, 2001, p. 36), TI leans heavily on scientific principles when defining public sector corruption, deciding on methodological standards, or collecting and interpreting data, all of which is explained extensively in various documents to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the numbers in use. For example, the document "Frequently Asked Questions" (Transparency International, 2020) offers answers to questions such as: "What is the *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI)?"/"Which data sources are used for the CPI?"/"Why do we need the CPI if 13 other sources measure manifestations of corruption in the public sector?" TI also discusses its methodological decisions and how these decisions influence the scores. An update to the CPI methodology in 2012 is explained as follows: "From 2012, we will be using the raw scores from each of the data sources, which provide greater transparency as to how the CPI scores have been constructed" (Transparency International, 2012, pp. 1–2).

3.2. Visual Simplification: Presenting Valuations of Nation-State Performance in Appealing Formats

Numbers do not exist independently of the shape they are given. Espeland and Stevens (2008, p. 422) have argued that producers of numerical judgments show an inclination to take aesthetic matters into account as they craft "compelling, elegant, and even beautiful…numerical pictures." Studies on quantification that explore this theme have come to a similar conclusion, revealing that visual devices hold "communicative possibilities that are not found in the original [numerical] information" (Ronzani & Gatzweiler, 2022, p. 3; see also Pollock & D'Adderio, 2012).

Visualization is a key instrument in world politics (Freistein & Gadinger, 2022). In contrast to publications such as statistical yearbooks, which require high levels of numerical competency on the part of the reader, GPIs use aesthetic appeal to attract both expert and lay audiences (Bandola-Gill et al., 2021; Hansen & Flyverbom, 2015; Kelley & Simmons, 2019; Merry, 2016). Regardless of how sophisticated the terminology, (political) theories, methodologies, and data may be, a digestible presentational style makes GPIs entertaining and offers the audience an experience that is "more immediate" (Bandola-Gill et al., 2021, p. 34).

League tables erase ambiguities and nuances by visualizing an entire field of observation in clear-cut ranks (Davis et al., 2012). Across multiple sectors (higher education, tourism, professional sports, etc.), this format has emerged as the most common representation of hierarchical order (Ringel et al., 2021). World maps are specifically used to visualize nation-state performances, usually by assigning colors based on a country's score, and play a major role in the public relations strategies of GPI producers (Bandola-Gill et al., 2021). Language, too, is used

to achieve visual simplification. In a very basic sense, the label attached to a GPI already signifies "a simplification of what the index purports to measure or rank" (Davis et al., 2012, p. 75). Other examples are the punchy slogans and catchy "one-liners" which loom large on websites, in social media campaigns, PowerPoint slides, reports, and brochures (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015).

The CPI is evidently geared toward visual simplification. The cover of the CPI 2021 report features an evocative picture of two hands exchanging money, which obviously alludes to bribery. In this CPI report, the index is introduced under the headline "180 countries. 180 scores. How does your country measure up?" (Transparency International, 2022a, p. 2), presented as a world map, and followed by an "executive summary" that links the scores to current world affairs, in this case, the pandemic: "Two years into the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, this year's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) reveals that corruption levels have stagnated worldwide" (Transparency International, 2022a, p. 4). TI's website likewise offers many examples of visual simplification: the CPI is advertised in blogs, videos, hyperlinks (to videos with titles such as *Corruption Perceptions Index Explained*), and PowerPoint slides. In addition, social media posts use an informal style of communication to reach targeted audiences, as illustrated by the following tweets, sent from TI's official account: "5 fun facts about corruption: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. Corruption is no fun. AT ALL. [angry emoticon] Do not tolerate it [angry emoticon]" (Transparency International, 2022b).

3.3. Serialization: Transforming Nation-State Performance Into a Developing Property

The third element of GPI power is that the status conferred on "performers" is inevitably subject to change, resulting in careers in which they "climb," "stagnate," or "fall." Ringel and Werron (2021) propose the term serialization to conceptualize the "close connection between time and social order" (Landahl, 2020, p. 627). Achieved through an elaborate balancing act that ensures stability while also preserving "the possibility of change" (Fourcade, 2016, p. 184), serialization, thus understood, depends on the ability of GPI producers to fulfill two distinct tasks. Only then can a "dry collection of numbers" (Landahl, 2020, p. 632) become a major event on the world stage (Brankovic, 2021).

The first task involves constructing narratives of performance as a volatile and elusive property that has to be measured repeatedly. For example, university rankings are rooted in the premise that institutional performance constantly increases or decreases; the same holds true for modern art rankings, which promotes the idea of a highly dynamic art market where "trends" abound (Ringel & Werron, 2021). What distinguishes GPIs from these forms of quantitative valuation is an inherently global scope and a focus on a unique type of actor—the nation-state—that is thought of as continuously "devel-

oping" (which is not to say "improving"). Heavily engaged in "scripting" (Auld & Morris, 2021, p. 186), GPI producers project imaginaries of volatile nation-state performances by crafting storylines that bring together diverse settings, events, and characters in reference to specific forms of temporality.

The second task involves putting the scripted storylines into practice by producing and publishing quantitative valuations on a regular basis so that each version is connected to past and (potential) future ones (Ringel & Werron, 2021). Depending on the context, "regular" can mean very different things. In tourism, for example, the online platform TripAdvisor continuously updates scores, thereby accelerating the temporal order. Most GPIs establish annual publication cycles, though some are biennial, and a few (such as PISA) triennial. Because of the large number of GPIs being issued, finding a launch date can be very difficult. Moreover, GPIs face the challenge of addressing at one and the same time not only an integrated global system but also national political arenas and media debates (De Paola & Pirttilä-Backman, 2023).

Attending to both dimensions of serialization, the CPI generates high levels of attention (Andersson & Heywood, 2009; Wang & Rosenau, 2001). Corruption is framed as a developing property "out there," making periodic measurement and publication paramount. The 2021 report consistently invokes this frame. For instance, we are informed about the "most significant *five-year movers*" and told that "the CPI shows that control of corruption has *stagnated* or *worsened* in 86 percent of countries over the last decade" (Transparency International, 2022a, p. 7, emphasis added). By guaranteeing a year-by-year publication cycle and connecting present, past, and future scores in tables such as "CPI score changes, 2012–2021'' (Transparency International, 2022a, p. 7), TI enacts the CPI's basic storyline of corruption as being a global challenge that nation-states must tackle if they want to participate in the world's long-term improvement. TI also practices serialization on its website where an interactive map features a drop-down menu (allowing users to make temporal comparisons) and arrows next to country scores (indicating movement up or down).

4. GPI Critique

GPI power emerges from the combination of commensuration, visual simplification, and serialization. As we have seen, the producers are vital in this regard: they make commensuration possible (by devising "sound" methodologies and calculative practices); they craft visually appealing numerical pictures; and they implement serialized temporal orders. GPI critique is related to the same combination of elements that the producers also navigate by devoting considerable time, energy, and resources.

4.1. Commensuration: Fighting "Methodological Battles"

The extant literature has a penchant for connecting the proliferation of quantitative valuation devices to "the general social acceptance of practices of data collection and analysis" (Merry, 2016, p. 30). The same does not hold for GPIs: albeit numbers-based, their calculations almost never receive "general social acceptance." Different publics, most notably scholars, consistently give voice to methodological criticism and call the quality of data into question (Bandola-Gill et al., 2023; Nelken, 2015). Studies focusing on how the producers of quantitative valuations in other sectors typically respond to—methodology and data-related criticism—have revealed several strategies, among them the rejection of agency: university rankers, for example, position themselves as merely observing and measuring university performance, which, they claim, exists irrespective of what they do (Hamann & Ringel, 2023). GPI producers face greater difficulties in this regard. Their attempts to assume the role of disinterested monitors are apt to be viewed with suspicion on account of their embrace of a political agenda, such as the expansion of political freedoms, ending human trafficking, or improving education systems (Bandola-Gill et al., 2021; Merry, 2016; Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). How, then, do GPI producers defend the "methodological veracity" (Beaumont & Towns, 2021, p. 1471) of their commensurated numbers when they are accused of lacking both the authority and neutrality that are necessary for this task?

One way in which GPI producers navigate (potential) "methodological battles" (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015, p. 901) is by actively engaging in "consensus building" (Samiolo & Mehrpouya, 2021, p. 83; see also Bandola-Gill et al., 2023). They apply a range of inclusionary measures in the process of defining methodologies and gathering data to enroll "the audience in the means of qualifying the object" (Chong & Bourgoin, 2020, p. 89). To put it differently, publics are transformed into manageable stakeholders, the most important being the scientific community, civil society, and the public bureaucracy (elected officials, appointees, and civil servants):

(a) Studies point to a growing number of interactions between GPI producers and scholars at conferences and workshops, where ample room is given for critical discussions revolving around methodological and data-related issues. These interactions become more permanent if scholars accept invitations from the producers to serve on boards or expert committees (Davis et al., 2012; Merry, 2016; Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015);

(b) By engaging with NGOs, activists, and representatives of social movements, GPI producers ensure that politically speaking, they are on a solid ideological footing and cannot so easily be accused of

having a "democratic deficit" (Beaumont & Towns, 2021, p. 1472);

(c) GPI producers also foster relationships with elected officials, appointees, and public servants. Presented with an opportunity to make their voices heard by reviewing the data before their release, these stakeholders are more likely to accept being the object of evaluation—or at least refrain from open hostility (Honig & Weaver, 2019).

These and other types of seemingly neutral engagements effectively lure stakeholders onto a playing field that has been shaped by the GPI producers and is therefore tilted in their favor (Samiolo & Mehrpouya, 2021). Irrespective of any critical intentions they may have had in mind, once scholars, experts, NGOs, activists, elected officials, appointees, and public servants enter this playing field, they are bound to be co-opted as witnesses to the (promise of the) validity and soundness of GPIs.

The CPI has been consistently criticized for its methodology and data (Andersson & Heywood, 2009). The following quote from an article published in *Foreign Policy* is just one of many examples:

> The problem with the index…can be found in the name. Perceptions are not facts, and in this case they may be an unhelpfully distorted reflection of the truth….The point here is not that any of these underlying sources are bad, or wrong, or anything other than what they claim. The point is that in aggregating them, the result lacks any sense of diversity. (Cobham, 2013)

Exposed to challenges of this kind, TI relies heavily on its engagement with experts whose approval the organization constantly seeks and invokes in public statements (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). Until 2009 the economist Johann Graf Lambsdorff spoke for the CPI and, acting as the index's public face, provided extensive explanations as well as responses to critics, where necessary, in his role as a scholar. Another strategy applied by TI to defend the CPI is its dissociation from the data used for the production of the index, which, according to this line of argument, is collected by other—reputable—institutions: "The 2020 CPI draws on 13 data sources from 12 independent institutions specialising in governance and business climate analysis. The sources of information used for the CPI 2020 are based on data published in the previous two years" (Transparency International, 2020, p. 1).

4.2. Visual Simplification: Professing Nuance

Although visual simplification is an indispensable element in the success of contemporary GPIs, we should not neglect its propensity to trigger challenges. When critics refer to a lack of nuance and sobriety, what they usually have in mind are the streamlined messages, spectacular

launch events, and bright colors in which GPIs are advertised. This reveals that visual simplification is only one side of the equation that must somehow be combined with testimonials to one's scientific credibility. But how is it possible to present "contested images of the world in simplified form" while at the same time professing "expert knowledge" (Broome et al., 2018, p. 529)? The literature points to different strategies by which these conflicting demands are navigated.

First, there seems to be a trend toward formalized, standardized, and progressively longer reports, issued both in print and digitally. These reports address informed and lay audiences alike (Zapp, 2022). Informed audiences of scholars, experts, policymakers, and administrators receive sophisticated methodological explanations and interpretations of the data, which underscore an organization's compliance with professional standards. Lay audiences (activists, journalists, interested citizens, etc.) are the main intended recipients of the executive summaries, bullet points, and graphical elements also to be found in reports as well as various videos, press statements, and social media campaigns. Owing to a certain interpretative flexibility and fuzziness, reports resemble boundary objects—artifacts that connect multiple social worlds and frames of reference. Given this multiplicity of purposes, it comes as no surprise that the preparation of reports is demanding and time-consuming (Zapp, 2022).

A second strategy for dealing with the conflicting demands of "visual simplification" and "professing nuance" is to downplay the narrative of winners and losers, whereby GPI producers "balance the clarity of message of the ranking and its political acceptability" (Bandola-Gill et al., 2021, p. 29). The world map is a prime example: by emphasizing areas or regions instead of individual performers, it avoids a "clear judgment on 'underperforming' countries" (Bandola-Gill et al., 2021, p. 41). In a similar vein, interactive maps entice the visitors of websites into becoming involved by allowing them to create individualized numerical pictures. This too alleviates the impression of a lack of scholarly sobriety and nuance.

Third, GPI producers strike a different note when engaging directly with some of their stakeholders after the publication. A study has shown that representatives of the previously mentioned Access to Medicine Foundation neglect the rank order of league tables in their engagement with the targets. Instead, they seek to enter into in-depth conversations about how the data could (and should) be interpreted in ways that reflect the full complexity of the findings (Samiolo & Mehrpouya, 2021).

The following quote from an article published in the *Washington Post* illustrates how the CPI's visual simplification is often subject to criticism: "It can be fun looking at tables like this" the author (Hough, 2016) admits, "and many people will indeed do precisely that over the next few days"—-yet, readers are told, "we should be careful before reading too much into the data. The CPI is a particularly poor tool with which to judge a coun-

try's anti-corruption successes and failures. Academic research highlights four reasons why." Preemptively countering charges to the effect that the CPI is nothing more than "fun," TI has turned into a prolific publisher of documents that are clearly designed to attest to the index's academic credentials. In its "Frequently Asked Questions" (Transparency International, 2020, p. 4), TI reminds us that the CPI, contrary to common misconceptions, "is limited in scope, capturing perceptions of the extent of corruption in the public sector, from the perspective of business people and country experts." In order to cover the "different aspects of corruption," the document continues, "Transparency International produces a range of both qualitative and quantitative research on corruption, both at the global level and at the national level.''

4.3. Serialization: Balancing Continuity and Discontinuity

Received wisdom in the social sciences has it that established GPIs face fewer challenges than new ones, which are more likely to receive criticism, whether directed at labels, methodologies, or data (Merry, 2016). The recent scandal surrounding the (as of now) terminated *Ease of Doing Business Index*, an example used by Davis et al. (2012) to illustrate the stability of serialized GPIs, suggests that this is not always the case. Moreover, a closer look reveals that any form of serialization requires constant care and attention, whatever the degree of institutionalization (Bowers & Prato, 2019). We should note that, compared to commensuration and visual simplification, critiques of serialization tend to be less frequent. But because GPI producers have to expect that serialization poses reputational risks, at least hypothetically, potential statements are of just as much consequence to them as actual ones.

As has been established, serialized GPIs stabilize a temporal order that makes nation-state performance a continually developing property: published at regular intervals, iterations are presented as being sufficiently similar to one another to appear intertwined. A periodically published GPI must argue that the 2011 edition follows directly from the edition of 2010 and leads on equally directly to that of 2012. Revisions, which usually affect the methodology, disrupt this sequential ordering. If, for example, the 2011 edition uses different data or devises new calculative practices, it ceases to be the direct successor of 2010 and, as a result, serialization is suspended. Why would GPI producers choose to imperil the temporal rhythm that they have so carefully crafted?

There is reason to believe, for one thing, that some methodological revisions are made in the pursuit of newsworthiness. As a study on corporate rankings has suggested, it is not enough to ensure regular publication, scores should also show sufficient movement in the projected ordinal scale to sustain an audience's interest (Bowers & Prato, 2019). This seems to apply to GPIs as well (Beaumont & Towns, 2021; Brankovic, 2021): scores

that remain similar over the years can easily be perceived as "boring" because they are "too predictable." A study of PISA, for example, emphasizes the necessity of presenting "an unpredictable and changing hierarchy of educational systems…that conveys the image of a world in flux…of decline and development, of rising and falling stars" (Landahl, 2020, p. 633).

Validity is another reason for revisions that disrupt serialization. Sometimes, circumstantial changes such as legal reforms or the availability of new data make updates necessary (Merry, 2016). In other cases, revelations of methodological flaws put pressure on GPI producers who subsequently try to exploit revisions by invoking them in their public communication, where they claim that past and present flaws have been or will be rectified (Ringel, 2021). Under these conditions, rather than posing a threat, "continuous scientific debate and refinement remains part of the indicator's further life" (Davis et al., 2012, p. 89). What is more, critics are enlisted into a collective project of ultimate improvement to which their "constructive criticism" might contribute, whether they intended it to or not.

Serialized GPIs depend on their producers' skills in navigating continuity and discontinuity. But thus far, research has shown only minor interest in how these conflicting demands are tackled. One option is to recalculate the scores of previous iterations, which, depending on the methodology and staff available, can be quite costly and complicated. Alternatively, GPI producers could practice "organized hypocrisy" (Brunsson, 1989) by decoupling what they say ("talk") from what they do ("action") in order to survive in increasingly complex environments (Ringel, 2021). While perhaps more efficient in terms of costs and time, this strategy is delicate in a different way: it makes the producers vulnerable to charges of inconsistencies between "talk" and "action."

TI has attended to the task of balancing continuity and discontinuity throughout the history of the CPI. As described in the previous section, different iterations are skillfully interwoven in a seamless web of measurements that transform corruption into a continually developing property. At the same time, the methodology has been subject to change. Until 2009 revisions were planned and executed by Johann Graf Lambsdorff. But, as TI was forced to realize, relying on one person comes with a price attached. In 2009, Lambsdorff denounced the CPI in an e-mail published by Global Integrity (Global Integrity, 2009) and called for the index's termination: "TI-S [TI Secretariat] will try to continue somehow with a substitute for the CPI," he suspected, which is why he thought it "time for me to let them go their way. From now on, it is only TI-S which will sign responsible for the outcome. I won't be out there to take the honor, nor the blame" (Global Integrity, 2009). He further made it clear that "I won't be out their [sic] to provide academic credibility and link the data to an international research agenda that hast [sic] swept through all major scientific journals" (Global Integrity, 2009).

Lo and behold, the CPI survived the attack—by leveraging the opportunities of methodological reform. A document published in 2012 explains that the latest edition "has been calculated using an updated methodology," which TI "developed following a comprehensive review and consultation process, both within the Transparency International movement and with the help of external experts. The updated methodology has been reviewed and validated by an independent statistical assessment" (Transparency International, 2012, p. 1). The document also highlights that "due to the update in the methodology, 2011 CPI scores are not comparable with CPI 2012 scores….Scores from the CPI 2011 and previous editions should not be compared with scores from 2012." TI has reaffirmed this stipulation over the years, for instance in its "Frequently Asked Questions," where readers are reminded that "due to a change in our methodology in 2012, results from before that year cannot be compared. Only CPI results from 2012 onwards can be compared" (Transparency International, 2020, p. 3).

Among the strategies at its disposal to navigate continuity and discontinuity, TI apparently favors "organized hypocrisy." Statements such as the above, which seek to discourage comparisons between the editions published before and after 2012, affirm the scholarly standards of (critical) expert audiences. This, however, stands in contrast to the interactive map on the TI website, which is obviously designed to be consumed by (larger) lay audiences. Devoid of the nuances so vividly put on display in methodological statements, the interactive map's drop-down menu mentioned earlier presents an uninterrupted temporal sequence from 1995 (the publication of the first CPI) until the latest edition, including, of course, scores from before and after 2012.

5. Conclusion

There is ample evidence that GPIs have a profound impact on the world. They prompt changes in laws and regulations, spread new standards, create favorable conditions for widespread reforms, and bring awareness to global challenges. What are the main drivers of today's vast "indicator culture" (Merry, 2016, p. 9)? Showing a preference for structural explanations, social science research tends to contextualize the proliferation of GPIs in larger transformations, notably the institutionalization of trust in numbers and global inequalities.

Synthesizing the pieces of literature on quantification, publics, and valuation as well as empirical studies on GPIs, this article has shed light on other factors. GPIs were conceptualized as Janus-faced valuation devices because the very sources of their power—commensuration, visual simplification, and serialization—also fuel challenges to their credibility. The organizations that produce GPIs dedicate a great deal of time, energy, and resources to assuming the role of "visibility agents" (Harness et al., 2022) who address, and speak on behalf of, publics. In this capacity, they

fulfill the intertwined tasks of building GPI power and navigating GPI critique. A major implication of this conceptual argument is that structural explanations such as a trust in numbers and global inequalities, although providing vital insights, only tell half the story. As for the trust in numbers, we have seen that visual simplification and serialization are just as important as the calculative practices themselves. And, despite perhaps profiting from the favorable "top-down" conditions of global inequalities, the producers are deeply invested in sustaining GPIs "bottom-up."

The general thrust of this article was towards a general perspective. It is therefore essential that future studies provide in-depth knowledge on variations between GPIs and how their producers deal with the tasks of building GPI power and navigating GPI critique. Variations may be studied concerning the three elements: commensuration, visual simplification, and serialization.

Each type of commensuration comes with its own affordances and constraints. The definition of "nation-state performance," for example, is a dimension in which we can expect intriguing variations, both substantively and analytically. Substantively, there is a staggering variety of nation-state performances that GPIs claim to measure, which begs the question of why some gain traction and become powerful, despite still being criticized, while others are simply ignored or meet such a degree of resistance that they ultimately fail (Lokot & Wijermars, 2023). Analytically speaking, most GPIs emphasize positive characteristics such as who has the best healthcare system, who can deliver quality education, and so forth. Yet there are a select few cases of GPIs that measure and highlight negative performances, with the *Global Slavery Index* being a prime example (Brankovic, 2021). The logic of ordering is another dimension of interest (Towns & Rumelili, 2017). Some GPIs, such as the *Human Development Index*, operate according to a zero-sum logic: ranks of nation-states come at the expense of their competitors. Others, such as the *Trafficking in Persons Report*, are made into ratings or classifications, which amount to hierarchies between classes or categories rather than individual performers. Finally, special attention should be given to GPIs that have switched from one type of order to another (Hunter & Shaffer, 2022).

Because GPI producers make extensive use of visual simplification when they try to reach larger publics, they increase the risk of being criticized for a lack of sobriety and nuance. Previous research has provided some indications that global reports—a very common type of publication—are a valuable empirical source that reveals directly how GPI power and GPI critique are navigated in practice (Ringel, 2021; Zapp, 2022). Building on these findings, future studies could provide in-depth ethnographic accounts of how reports are crafted, thereby opening the black box of GPI production (Mennicken & Espeland, 2019). Alternatively, reports could be analyzed as manifestations of discourse and sites where narratives are promoted (Auld & Morris, 2021).

By virtue of serialization, GPIs create a fluid status order that puts the target's reputation at risk. The producers deal with accusations related to their impact in different ways. Notably, some GPIs are explicitly designed to intervene while others, such as the CPI, take great care to remove themselves from the picture by assuming the role of the disinterested observer. The issue at hand is then not if GPIs have an impact but whether or not their producers admit to having agency and embrace their role by verbalizing and promoting specific notions of public interests (Mehrpouya & Samiolo, 2016). Among those who explicitly see their role as being facilitators of public interests, we can distinguish between "reformist" and "revolutionary" GPIs (Seabrooke & Wigan, 2015). Reformist GPIs are moderate; they seek incremental change within agreed-upon parameters. Revolutionary GPIs, by contrast, seek radical change whereby they fundamentally question established orders of worth. We might expect reformist and revolutionary GPIs to use different strategies when tackling the tasks of building serialized GPI power and navigating serialization-related GPI critique.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

European Think Tanks as a Channel of EU Public Diplomacy Towards Transnational Publics

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Abstract
This article examines the role of European think tanks in public diplomacy efforts of the EU. It builds on Bourdieu's field theory and concept of capital using data from EU official documents, website materials, and semi-structured interviews with representatives of think tanks from Brussels, France, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, as well as their networks and the EU institutions. The article argues that EU institutions provide financial support for think tanks to obtain political capital in the form of internal and external legitimacy. The European Commission mobilises think tank academic capital by funding their educational activities, which helps to deal with the "democratic deficit" and plays the role of intellectual "soft power" by training current and future policymakers in Europe and beyond as potential allies in competition with other regions. Due to the particularity of the EU public sphere, characterised by the lack of outreach mass media, the European Commission tries to improve its capacity to shape public opinion at the European and global levels by using think tank publicity capital in its communication activities via new media platforms, distinguished by direct access to wider audiences. The European Commission benefits from think tank social capital, encouraging them to create transnational networks regarded as contributing to the promotion of integration within the EU, building relations with candidate countries, and strengthening its position in multilateral negotiations. Although the citizen's dimension is not always at the core of practices of European think tanks, this article demonstrates their effectiveness as a channel of public diplomacy towards transnational publics.

Keywords
Bourdieu; capital; European Commission; European Union; field theory; public diplomacy; think tanks

1. Introduction

The state has until recently been regarded as the main actor of public diplomacy (PD). Due to globalisation and the international expansion of civil society, non-state actors have increasingly entered the world politics arena (La Porte, 2012). Ministries of foreign affairs now share the diplomatic realm with think tanks (TTs), universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and others (Pisarska, 2016). Moreover, considerable migration flows and the development of new information technologies significantly blurred the boundaries between national and international affairs. In these conditions, the PD concept has to be transformed into a new PD, comprising domestic and external non-state actors, as government

collaborators in PD implementation and as autonomous PD actors. Recent studies focus more on the PD domestic dimension, where domestic non-state actors contribute to the effectiveness of PD abroad (Huijgh, 2019; La Porte, 2012). Engaging with one's own domestic constituency with a view to foreign policy development and external identity-building has become part of countries' PD strategy (Melissen, 2005). The notion of a PD audience also has to be extended, with "strategic publics" including both domestic and foreign publics (Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 432). A widespread use of social media in foreign affairs has brought the emergence of new PD forms, such as PD 2.0, social media PD, and post-truth PD targeting foreign or domestic publics (Wu, 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic has urged expanding the

state-centric PD's perspective to a humanity-centred PD, comprising the wider needs of global publics (Zaharna, 2022). Nevertheless, the involvement of (inter)national non-state actors in both international and domestic dimensions of PD is still not sufficiently empirically investigated, while the theoretical framework of the relationship between state and non-state actors in PD efforts needs to be further elaborated.

PD's domestic dimension should be considered part of the ongoing democratisation of foreign policy, with the increasing participation of domestic stakeholders in foreign policy formulation, debate, and implementation. Ministries of foreign affairs have recognised that domestic public support for a government's foreign policy is essential to their internal and international legitimacy, where the former is a prerequisite for the latter (Huijgh, 2011). Civil society participation in EU policymaking is regarded as a remedy for the so-called "democratic deficit" (Vauchez, 2014, p. 7), as well as a tool to gain internal and international legitimacy (Schmidt, 2013). The development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the growing public demands for transparency and accountability mean the European Commission is increasingly seeking to explain its policies in the field of external relations to both domestic EU publics and its external stakeholders to form a positive public image, advance European values, and reinforce the EU's public legitimacy (Michalski, 2005). Taking into account that lack of domestic and international public support enfeebles EU legitimacy, the issues concerning the involvement of domestic citizens in the EU's PD projects have become increasingly relevant. The EU has reconsidered its practices directed at civil society engagement and has initiated several participatory initiatives, including the Europe for Citizens Programme (Huijgh, 2019). In its description, TTs along with NGOs and other groups are considered part of "civil society," playing "a key part in public life." TTs and policy research organisations are seen as "invaluable in providing visions for the future," and as "generating ideas and recommendations on how to approach complex issues, such as EU policies, active European citizenship, identity and values" (European Commission, 2012).

TTs are usually seen as part of civil society or as a particular type of NGO (Jezierska, 2018; Stone, 2007) and even regarded as the "civil society elite." TT hybrid identity means "they both are and are not part of civil society." Most TTs emphasise their difference from other civil society organisations to demarcate their specific field in the socio-political milieu (Jezierska, 2020, pp. 153, 156). TTs differ from other NGOs by a less narrowly normative research and the aspiration to be directly engaged in policy-shaping processes (Bajenova, 2019). On the basis of financial data declared by the organisations registered at the EU Transparency Register (2017), 235 TTs and research organisations occupy the third position (about 10%)—just after companies and groups (18%) and NGOs, platforms, and networks (36%)—among 2,256

recipients of the funding received from EU institutions in the form of grants or procurement. Taking into account that the majority of interest groups registered in the Transparency Register represent business and producer interests (about 50%), the European Commission seems to subsidise citizen groups to a greater extent than other types of organisations to balance dialogue with civil society and to encourage their wider participation (Bouwen, 2009).

TTs exceed "national policy spaces," increasingly entering the European "public sphere" (Bajenova, 2019, p. 62; Barani & Sciortino, 2011, p. 40; Stone, 2013), also supported by EU institutions, seeking foreign and domestic public support for their policy decisions. Although some studies demonstrate that TTs contribute to states' diplomatic efforts and implement diplomatic functions themselves (Tyler et al., 2017), the involvement of TTs in diplomacy has only recently begun to attract the more comprehensive attention of scholars. Menegazzi (2021) considers the development of TTs focused on international affairs as a main priority for Chinese PD. Bardauskaitė (2022) argues that the Baltic states employ TTs as tools of foreign and security policies to disseminate Baltic positions abroad and to influence foreign TTs. Besides state-centric studies, some scholars consider the relations of TTs with international and supranational organisations in their diplomatic and foreign policy efforts: examining the interrelationship between UNESCO and TTs in intellectual diplomacy (Desmoulins & Rondot, 2018) or showing active TT engagement in developing the 2016 European Global Strategy (Veselinović, 2022). However, further empirical work is required to assess TT involvement in EU PD.

This article studies the role of European TTs in the EU PD towards domestic and foreign publics. It contributes thus to the academic literature in both theoretical and empirical aspects. First, the chosen research question is relatively new in the field of European studies. Currently, there are no important scientific works analysing how the EU involves TTs in both domestic and international dimensions of its PD practices. Recent studies investigating PD at the EU level focus solely on certain aspects of EU PD, such as specific actors (Aggestam & Hedling, 2020; Altman & Shore, 2014) or specific activities (Hedling, 2020; Yifan Yang, 2015), while more comprehensive studies analysing both internal and external dimensions of EU PD (Fanoulis & Revelas, 2023; Michalski, 2005) do not address TT involvement in these efforts. Second, this article analyses empirical data drawing on a conceptual framework combining Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and the language of different forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/2014) with the concept of "intermestic" PD (Huijgh, 2019). The article examines domestic and international approaches to public involvement of European TTs operating at the EU and national levels. Thus, it extends Medvetz's (2012b) approach, studying American TTs based on a Bourdieusian analytical framework to the European level and thereby contributing

to the study of TTs and their networks at a transnational level (Bajenova, 2019, 2023; Plehwe, 2014; Stone, 2013) and to a conceptualisation of the interrelation between domestic and international dimensions of PD (Huijgh, 2012, 2019). The article also enriches empirically the scholarly discussion on the role of civil society in a broader sense in coping with the EU's "democratic deficit" and the crisis of legitimacy in EU governance (Marxsen, 2015; Vauchez, 2014).

2. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

As a diplomatic practice, PD focuses on diplomatic communication between political actors and foreign and domestic general publics. As a multidisciplinary field of study, it is an area of research resulting in multiple definitions and practices often exceeding the limits of those related to diplomatic studies. If the PD's domestic dimension directed towards domestic civil society as publics, partners, and actors has been neglected, the role of non-state actors has been regarded as particularly important in PD's success. However, PD should adapt to a mobile, virtually connected, and interdependent world where the domestic and foreign spheres increasingly penetrate each other (Huijgh, 2019). Therefore, the engagement of domestic non-state actors in broader PD initiatives and their consideration in the framework of the PD concept has also taken on special significance (Huijgh, 2012), having important repercussions for updating and broadening its notion: featuring both the object and the subject of this activity; underscoring the significance of gaining (and retaining) legitimacy seen as trust and support from domestic citizens and demonstrating effectiveness in coping with international problems (where legitimacy and effectiveness are prerequisites for intervening and representing citizens' interests abroad); representing the shift from the domestic-international differentiation, persistent in state-centric definitions, towards an "intermestic" PD concept better answering the new conditions of blurring boundaries between domestic and international spheres provoked by the "intermestic" PD actors, possessing "domestic interests with international projection" (La Porte, 2012, p. 444). Moreover, PD research and practice should include both foreign and domestic citizens as potential "strategic publics." Domestic publics, previously seen as "non-publics" or "inactive publics" due to their low levels of knowledge or interest in PD, can be recognised as legitimate stakeholders affected by, or possessing the possibility to influence a nation's ability to attain its PD objectives (Fitzpatrick, 2012, p. 432).

To analyse the role of European TTs in the EU PD's international and domestic dimensions I use Pierre Bourdieu's field theory and his concept of capital. The "field" in this theory is seen as a game, where participants own particular forms of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992/2014, p. 143). The players' strategies depend on their posses-

sion of a particular capital in the field, convertible in other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's theory offers a solution to the endless debate over the "TT" definition. Traditional Anglo-American definitions (McGann, 2017; Rich, 2004) and more flexible definitions proposed by scholars studying EU TTs (Sherrington, 2000) contain some allusion to the notion of "independence." Considering the unclear boundary between policy analysts and the state in some countries, using independence as a determining TT feature is not useful (Stone, 2013). Avoiding one all-embracing definition or any pre-defined typology for European TTs, typical of the institutionalist perspective (Kelstrup, 2016; Ullrich, 2004), this approach allows analysing European TTs as empirical questions, conceptualising them as "boundary organisations" collecting various forms of capital (Bajenova, 2019, p. 62; Medvetz, 2012a, 2012b).

Medvetz (2012b) has employed this approach and its developments (Eyal, 2013; Wacquant, 2004) to conceptualise TT's importance in American policymaking, defining them as structures divided by the paradigms of academic, political, economic, and media fields, reasoning from their dependence on those organisations from which they are often portrayed as independent because they rely on them for funding, personnel, recognition, and practices. Whereas the typological approach conceals hybridity as a major TT feature, Medvetz (2012b, pp. 35–36) portrays TTs in "relational terms," emphasising the social relations to other fields and among TTs, ensuring their existence. This approach is compatible with a more relational approach towards PD, emphasising the significance of establishing mutually beneficial relationships between a state and its strategic publics (Zaharna & Uysal, 2016). However, the Bourdieu-inspired works analysing TTs dealt mainly with organisations embedded in a single country and their role at the national level (Medvetz, 2012b). The transnational nature of TTs and political foundations is emphasised, underscoring their embeddedness in their national political space in their activities on a supranational level (Dakowska, 2014). Simultaneously, Bourdieu's followers increasingly transfer his field concept to a global (Buchholz, 2016) or European level (Georgakakis & Rowell, 2013; Kauppi, 2003).

Here, I analyse the forms of capital EU institutions exchange with TTs to gain political capital as "a form of symbolic capital, credit founded on credence or belief and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 192) in the form of public legitimacy in both foreign and domestic public spheres by looking at four manifestations of publics: audiences, public interests, public spheres, and institutions (Mende & Müller, 2023).

European TTs generate economic capital described as "immediately and directly convertible into money" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) by obtaining EU public funding as a manifestation of their "utility" for EU institutions (Bajenova, 2019) or their main "audience" in their PD efforts, sharing "a common attention focus"

(Mende & Müller, 2023, p. 93), thus aiming to influence transnational audiences. PD includes educational activities intending to affect foreign governments through their citizens (van Ham, 2005). European TTs exchange their academic capital represented as a particular form of cultural capital in its "institutionalised state," i.e., "in the form of academic qualifications" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247), providing education activities as part of their "public interest" mission, for economic capital in the form of EU funding. Public interest frequently contributes to the production of "publicness" in global politics (Mende & Müller, 2023).

The global development of digital technologies transformed the relational dynamics between state actors and publics, where non-state actors, using social media, have also become important players in PD communication (Zaharna & Uysal, 2016). Although Bourdieu analysed the influence of a specific media platform in his book *On Television* (Bourdieu, 1996), he did not use the term "media capital," which applied to TTs includes "access to the means of publicity" and special media-related skills (Medvetz, 2012b, p. 140). The term "publicity capital" is more appropriate to describe strategies for accumulating publicity of European TTs, considering the specific characteristics of the EU "public sphere" (Bajenova, 2019, pp. 64–65). In this manifestation of publics, European TTs create "communicative spaces" by participating in debates (Mende & Müller, 2023), using a social media presence as one of the essential elements of their publicity capital (Bajenova, 2019) to communicate with particular audiences because of the scarcity of outreach mass media (Perez, 2014).

PD is more effective in a network model of international relations than in the traditional hierarchical state-centric model (Hocking, 2005). Network capital of European TTs, as a particular form of social capital defined as "possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships" and "socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name" (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248–249), important in the framework of EU policy because it enhances the legitimacy of EU policymaking, is generated through their membership in transnational TT networks (Bajenova, 2019, 2023), which can be seen as "institutions" established by the group of actors to operate on their behalf. Their publicness is based on their claimed representation (Mende & Müller, 2023).

This research builds on the analysis of semi-structured interviews, carried out in 2014–2015, with representatives of EU institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European External Action Service) and 24 TTs in Brussels, France, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom, as well as their networks. The study is enriched by the analysis of official EU documents and materials from the websites of EU institutions, TTs, and their networks. As a method, document analysis is essential to qualitative research, providing comprehensive information on the

object of analysis (Dieu, 2008). The initial TT sample was constructed following analysis of the various surveys, reports, and registers (Boucher, 2004; Missiroli & Ioannides, 2012; Transparency Register, 2014) of European TTs, refined and complemented based on the recommendations of research participants. To select organisations, I used the following criteria: membership in transnational TT networks, appearance in international and European TT rankings, and participation in EU funding programs. This enabled including in the sample those organisations functioning either exclusively at the EU level or at both EU and national levels. Having a Brussels office and registration in the Transparency Register accounting for a strong EU focus were complimentary but not exclusive criteria. Due to the dilemma of defining TTs, the strict criteria to differentiate TTs from other organisations were not determined before starting the fieldwork. A question about the perception by TT experts of their own organisations and TTs in general was included in the interview guide, which enabled defining boundaries of the TT field from the standpoint of its representatives. The question of a TT definition was also included in the interview guides for representatives of the European institutions, which complemented this internal field view by the view from outside. The study sample includes permanent not-for-profit organisations, describing themselves and/or recognised externally as "TTs" but taking various legal forms according to the practices in their countries (registered charity, *association internationale sans but lucrative* (AISBL), political foundation, *fondation d'utilité publique*). The exclusion of for-profit organisations reflects the "public interest" mission of TTs, often associated with the "TT" label (Stone, 2013, p. 74). The "permanent" criterion allowed for the exclusion of temporary advisory or expert groups. However, legal independence, achieved by establishing a private structure (Stone, 2013), is not often compatible with the political environment of the studied countries. Therefore, I included in my sample two organisations affiliated with ministries of foreign affairs and two university-based research centres working on international and domestic policies, not legally independent from universities, recognised as TTs externally through appearance in international TT rankings or membership of European TT networks. The collected information was reduced, coded, and grouped to analyse factual data on the selected TTs and the opinions of the research participants concerning their organisations and the TT space in general (see Smith, 2000). I used thematic analysis to determine, analyse, and interpret patterns in my research material. This method was chosen for its flexibility and theoretical independence. Themes within data were identified inductively. This approach allowed to reveal semantic themes related to TT activities and a "latent" theme of "publicness," as well as their underlying conceptualisations (intermestic PD and forms of capital) explaining the data's semantic content (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. Academic Capital of European Think Tanks: Public Interest Mission or Intellectual "Soft Power" of the EU

One of the essential functions claimed by many TTs is to inform and educate the general public (Rich, 2004), which is conditioned by their charitable status, implying they serve the public interest (Stone, 2013). The purpose of the Institute for Public Policy Research (2016), a British TT, "is to conduct and promote research into, and to educate the public in, the economic, social and political sciences." Another British TT Policy Exchange's (2016) mission "as an educational charity" is "to develop and promote new policy ideas which deliver better public services, a stronger society and a more dynamic economy." Concurrently, although education is still not a principal TT role (Stone, 2013), many of them organise educational activities (Medvetz, 2010). This phenomenon increasingly concerns European TTs, working on European affairs (Bajenova, 2016, Lewis et al., 2022, pp. 71–76). According to Boucher (2004), the main TT activities in the EU-15 included educational work (12%), scholarships (11%), and executive training (10%).

A research director of a French TT on European affairs notes: "In the sphere of education, what we do is…we teach, we teach a lot, we do much post-graduate training, we offer many post-graduate courses" (interview, Paris, June 2014, translated from French by the author).

European TTs organise training programmes for government, EU officials, and other practitioners. The Belgian TT Egmont Institute and the Slovenian Centre for European Perspective are among 12 implementing partners co-funding Europe's New Training Initiative for Civilian Crisis Management with the European Commission (90%), which trains members of the EU, UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and African Union (AU) missions (Egmont, 2016). Besides executive education, some TTs strive to link academia and the policy field. The Brussels-based TT Bruegel (2016) offers a visiting fellowship programme for academics, policymakers, practitioners, and Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellows funded by the European Commission, for short-term research visits, research cooperation, and communication with its members and audience. The Centre for European Policy Studies, also based in Brussels, goes further, creating the CEPS Academy in 2015. Its motto—"Preparing the student of today to make a contribution to the Europe of tomorrow!"—is reflected in its mission "to equip both students and professionals with original insights and tools to better understand the European Union," which "will stimulate interest in EU policymaking and encourage fresh thinking among the younger generation of Europeans who will shape and lead the EU in the future" (Centre for European Policy Studies, 2016). Finally, some TTs establish master's and doctoral training programmes. The German Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP), portrayed as "a forum for exchange between academia, politics, administration and political education" (IEP, 2016a),

actively participates in the European policy education sector (IEP, 2016d). It offers, together with the Centre International de Formation Européenne, the online master's programme for postgraduates and young professionals from wider Central Asia (IEP, 2016c) and the PhD Support Programme for students from Central Asia and the Caucasus (IEP, 2016b), which are funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and the European Commission in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme (Lewis et al., 2022, pp. 71–76).

These initiatives, increasingly widespread in the world (Kelstrup, 2016), might be seen as a manifestation of the TT "public interest" mission (Boucher, 2004; Stone, 2013); they are also strategic investments not only in academic capital, becoming part of the "academic" field and thereby increasing public credibility, but also in political capital, training future political elites in Europe and beyond (Kelstrup, 2016; Lewis et al., 2022, pp. 71–76). This political capital can be exchanged with EU institutions for their economic capital through European funding programmes, such as the Erasmus+ programme and Jean Monnet activities, which support "active European citizenship" and focus on "the role of the EU in a globalised world" (European Commission, n.d.). The potential long-term impact of Jean Monnet activities on policy-making is seen in the education of EU citizens in aspects of European integration to publicise the credibility of Europe and to solve the problem of "the EU democratic deficit" (European Commission, 2015, p. 45), but also as "soft diplomacy" instruments in the EU's relations with other world regions (European Commission, 2015, p. 51). The European External Action Service (2022) lists Jean Monnet activities among "global initiatives" to illustrate "PD in action." TTs are among the main recipients of this funding because of their public image as a "bridge" between research and policy (Stone, 2013), as well as their important role in the global competition to export ideas (Wallace, 2004). Although TT educational initiatives blur the long-established boundaries between universities and TTs (Bajenova, 2016; Kelstrup, 2016; Lewis et al., 2022, pp. 71–76), they can be seen not only as a tool in the competition between different knowledge providers but also as an instrument of intellectual "soft power," i.e., a country's ability to influence other states through "attractive" culture, values, and policies (Nye, 2009, p. 161), in order to build the internal and external legitimacy of the EU, exporting its values and convincing foreign publics to accept its norms (Spence, 2009).

4. The Role of Think Tank Publicity Capital in the EU Public Sphere: "Bringing the Union Closer to Citizens"

In the 1990s, as a consequence of the EU legitimacy crisis and because of its obligation to inform citizens about EU policies, the European Commission began to implement programmes to raise the transparency of decision-making and increase civil society participation (Perez, 2014). In spite of the important growth

of EU media coverage, owing to the increasing grasp of EU-related questions in political debates in many member-states, news media still analysed the EU in the light of domestic problems, following its administrative technicalities, the complex character of decision-making, and geographical distance (Aldrin, 2013). Therefore, the EU institutions tried to improve their reach to the general public by involving NGOs, local authorities, trade unions, and TTs in their communication activities (Perez, 2014).

In 2016, EU Foreign ministers determined PD as one of the strategic priorities for accomplishing the EU Global Strategy and emphasised "the need of joining up efforts in the field of PD including strategic communication, inside and outside the EU" (Council of the European Union, 2016, p. 3). According to the EU Global Strategy (2016, p. 23), the EU will invest in PD "in order to connect EU foreign policy with citizens and better communicate it to our partners…fostering an open and inquiring media environment within and beyond the EU, also working with local players and through social media."

Under the overall goal of "bringing the Union closer to citizens," the European Commission's Europe for Citizens Programme established for the period 2014–2020 had two principal aims: "to contribute to citizens' understanding of the Union, its history and diversity" and "to foster European citizenship and to improve conditions for civic and democratic participation at Union level" (Council Regulation of 14 April 2014, 2014, p. 5). The programme funded actions implemented at a transnational level or with a European dimension, including structural support for organisations regarded as "bodies pursuing an aim of general Union interest." The funding could be provided in the form of operating or action grants or public procurement contracts for organising events, studies and research, information and dissemination tools, monitoring, and evaluation. The programme was intended for "all stakeholders promoting European citizenship and integration," including "European public policy research organisations" (TTs), civil society organisations, and educational and research organisations (Council Regulation of 14 April 2014, 2014, pp. 6–7). The budget for carrying out this programme for the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020 was fixed at 185,468,000 euros (European Commission & European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2017a). European TTs and civil society organisations active across the EU can receive operating grants, supporting their activities. Both strands of the programme European Remembrance and Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation distinguished "TTs" among the applicant organisations from "platforms of pan-European organisations" and "civil society organisations." This programme defined European TTs as organisations which "provide a link between research and policymaking at European level" and "help to find solutions to problems and facilitate interaction between scientists, intellectuals and decision-makers" (European Commission & European

Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2017b, pp. 4, 13–14). Ten TTs granted under Democratic Engagement and Civic Participation in 2017 out of 36 organisations of all the categories granted under both strands included one Brussels-based TT and two French TTs working on European affairs: Fondation Robert Schuman and Notre Europe—Jacques Delors Institute (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2017). Brussels-based TT European Policy Centre (2017) has repeatedly received an operating grant under this programme, amounting, in 2016, to 250,000 euros (11% of its total funding).

Although EU funding can be seen as an indicator of credibility in the eyes of EU institutions, it can also raise the question of TT independence. Those "pro-European" TTs receiving EU funding in the form of operating grants claim they do commissioned studies for European institutions relatively rarely, not to limit their critical ability and to avoid becoming a European Commission "service provider," doing research projects within the EU framework programmes. However, TTs actively taking part in the Horizon 2020 research programme consider that this type of funding gives them more "leeway" to determine their research priorities and assumes intellectual independence concerning research findings. The complexity of procedures related to getting EU funding can partly explain the financial "independence" of some British TTs from EU institutions, affirming that their purpose is to retain their intellectual independence.

Although the main focus of the Europe for Citizens Programme was EU-based civil society organisations and citizens, the Council Regulation of 14 April 2014 (2014, pp. 5, 7–8, 12) also emphasised the "transnational and multilateral" character of the programme, concerning both its actions, which should "be implemented on a transnational basis or should have a European dimension," and its actors, involving participants from the member states, the European Free Trade Association countries, and "acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidates." Moreover, it stipulated the necessity of "the coherence and the complementarity" between the programme and other EU initiatives, including those related to "enlargement and the external action of the Union."

The Council Regulation of 14 April 2014 (2014) also underlined the importance of networking and the multiplier effects, including the use of social media, especially to reach the younger generation. For example, "dissemination," one of the award criteria for funding through operating grants under this programme, evaluates applicants' work programmes in terms of their potential to "create a multiplier effect among a wider audience than that directly participating in the activities" (European Commission & European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2017b, p. 21). TTs are well-known among EU institutions as capable of generating awareness of a specific problem and disseminating policies: "We know they have this kind of capacity, wide enough membership, that they will be able

to disseminate information and so on, which we don't have" (interview, European Commission representative, Brussels, March 2015).

TTs working on European affairs increasingly use internet technologies to reach the wider public. Many TTs disseminate information on European subjects to academics and others through regular email updates and multilingual electronic newsletters provided free of charge. Some TTs have even developed applications for smartphones and increasingly establish their presence on social media, thus enlarging and broadening their potential impact and their audience, diverse from that engaged in their activity via traditional media. The main social media tool for Euro-focussed TTs is Twitter, which in theory was to help them communicate directly with policymakers and opinion leaders (Bajenova, 2019). Facebook is also used by some TTs to reach out to younger people working in EU institutions. As audio-visual materials on social media make complex publications more "digestible" for the general public, TTs increasingly use YouTube and Suncloud to attract the attention of their target audiences to their activities in a cost-effective, flexible, and user-friendly way.

As for the language of dissemination privileged by stand-alone TTs, British and Brussels-based TTs publish exclusively in English. French TTs on European affairs produce their products in both English and French "to target all the actors of the public debates on Europe, in Europe and even beyond" (interview, TT representative, Paris, November 2014). If they have an office in other countries, they also translate certain publications into the local language. Both stand-alone TTs and university-based research centres publish their research results in English, but if for the latter this is a precondition for professional recognition, TTs aim to have a bigger "impact" disseminating their research beyond their national borders.

The complex nature of the European communication system and the limited number of available outreach instruments means European TTs use alternative low-cost methods to inform their audiences (e-mail subscription, social media), targeting specific groups directly, but without achieving the "atmospheric impact" granted by national mass media (Perez, 2014, p. 329). While social media assume both a social and a media component (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), even the most successful TTs in social media presence are more effective in its "media" component, i.e., careful choice of social media platform compatible with their target audience, while their success in the "social" component, such as active engagement with their "followers" through interaction and feedback, is less evident, as already observed in traditional communication channels. Most European TTs face the common challenge of being interactive, explained by some TTs by the lack of resources or their incapacity to be completely open online with their followers "not seriously engaged in issues." However, the main dynamic of the "new global communications era," where interactivity is a central characteristic, concentrates not on "information as a product," but on "communication as a process" (Zaharna, 2007, pp. 216–217).

TTs describe themselves as information channels for the educated public and claim their role as bridges between the policy world and the general public, however, they are not always able to fulfil these assertions or even do not intend to (Barani & Sciortino, 2011). Although many TTs widely disseminate their research results, through their publications freely available online to shape the "climate of opinion" (Denham & Garnett, 1998, p. 16), their relationship with the general public can be seen as a "one-way, top-down process," where the public is regarded as a subject to be informed in place of a source of ideas (Stone, 2013, p. 74). TTs' relationships with the political field are of a more reciprocal nature; EU institutions also seem to be interested more in their media capacity than their social engagement with the general public. Along with other European NGOs, TTs and their networks are seen as "information relays," serving as supplementary channels for the European Commission to widely disseminate information on EU policies to the general public (European Commission, 2000, p. 6). Thus, instead of being an "interface" between elites and citizens, they play "brokerage and gate-keeping roles" (Stone, 2013, p. 76). Although their potential to foster the emergence of a European public sphere is called into question—it is questionable that TTs could present unbiased reasoning in the public sphere playing an advisory role for the policy-makers, without turning into simple channels of propaganda (Barani & Sciortino, 2011)—their role in PD towards European and foreign publics is evident. However, states (or EU institutions) in PD still seem to regard themselves as possessing control over the communication process (Zaharna & Uysal, 2016).

5. Social Capital of European Think Tank Networks: European and Global Dimension of Public Diplomacy

The networks also serve as "multipliers spreading awareness of the EU and showing policies in action" (European Commission, 2001, p. 14). Taking into account the need for more active communication by institutions with the general public on European issues, the communication policy of the European Commission and the other institutions use networks to disseminate information at both national and local levels (European Commission, 2001, pp. 8–9). Such cooperation has advantages for both domestic and international dimensions of EU PD.

5.1. European Dimension: Facilitation of Consultation Process at the EU Level

The TT networks are seen as "powerful mechanisms for exchanging and for progressing." Keeping "dynamic centres of knowledge and excellence in more than one or two places…makes Europe very unique in the world" and

determines its future (interview, European Commission representative, Brussels, October 2014). The EU documents also mirror this positive view. According to the European Commission (2000, p. 5), the European NGO networks foster the formation of a "European public opinion." The European Commission (2001, p. 16) affirms that networking at the European and global level demonstrates "clear benefits" combining resources "in the common interest of EU citizens," these "structured and open networks should form a scientific reference system to support EU policymaking."

The European Commission believes that European networks contribute to its dialogue with civil society. Policymakers could get better input if the organisation moderating a TT network, often located in Brussels, explains how to work with EU institutions (Bajenova, 2019): "These networks improve the quality of consultation and cooperation" (interview, European Commission representative, Brussels, March 2015). "Self-selection by the NGO community," through "the setting-up of networks," is considered a "useful alternative" to selection by the European Commission of its "interlocutors" (European Commission, 2000, p. 11). The European Commission fosters organisations to collaborate in European networks with one "constituent representative body" operating on behalf of its members reducing the number of contracts managed by the European Commission (2000, p. 19), which "considerably facilitate the efficiency of the consultation process," while ensuring their representativeness with regard to their "roots" in the different EU member-states (European Commission, 2000, p. 9). "The ability of European NGO associations and networks to channel and focus the views of the various national NGOs is very useful for the Commission" (European Commission, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, European TT networks aim to attract at least one organisation from all EU member states (Bajenova, 2019, 2023). Although representativeness at the European level should not be applied as the only assessment criterion of "the relevance or quality of comments," it is considered in a consultation process (European Commission, 2002, pp. 11–12). Representativeness is very important for EU institutions to ensure the transparency and objectivity of the consultation process, which determines their own legitimacy (Bajenova, 2019); NGOs and their associations should be "democratic and transparent as regards their membership and claims to representativeness" (European Commission, 2000, p. 9). The European Commission underlines the "increasingly significant role" of expertise in "preparing and monitoring decisions," along with "undermined public confidence in expert-based policy-making'' due to the "opacity" of the EU system of expert committees or insufficient information about how they function. The main concerns are related to the actual deciding power of experts and policymakers, as well as to the content and independence of the expert recommendations (European Commission, 2001,

pp. 15–16). TT networks possessing wide and diverse membership have the potential to rectify the exclusive character of the EU consultation process with civil society (Bajenova, 2019; Marxsen, 2015).

5.2. Global Dimension of Think Tank Networks: "Bridges to the Applicant Countries and to the World"

Networks seem to help "building bridges to the applicant countries and to the world" (European Commission, 2001, p. 14). In the opinion of our interviewee in the European Commission, the main problem in their relations with civil society organisations in Serbia is "when they work with us they perceive this as an endorsement," which is not the case in Brussels (interview, Brussels, March 2015). Therefore, participation in projects supported by the EU necessitates cooperation with the European Representative Network Organization, regarded as contributing to a "better understanding of European institutions and their functioning," as well as disseminating "new methods of work" and "good practices" among organisations in candidate countries, mainly in Serbia (SIPU International, 2011, p. 13).

European TT networks often include organisations from candidate countries as full or associate members, which can facilitate the enlargement process (Bajenova, 2019). Involvement in these networks of partners from other parts of the world is seen as "absolutely natural" (interview, European Commission representative, Brussels, October 2014). A stronger consideration of the global dimension by the EU "through a more proactive approach to international networks" could even mean "strengthen[ing] its voice in multilateral negotiations" (European Commission, 2001, p. 22). The project Think Global—Act European of the French Jacques Delors Institute (2017), uniting 16 TTs and co-funded by the European Commission, is one example of such initiatives (Bajenova, 2019).

5.3. Representativity and Exclusivity of Think Tank Networks

Taking into account these apparent benefits, the European Commission (2000, 2001) supports these networks financially. Some TT networks are mainly funded by or were initially created with funding from European institutions. The Trans European Policy Studies Association (2017) has important funding sources from the Europe for Citizens grant, projects funded by the European Commission, and studies for the European Parliament. The European Policy Institutes Network (2008) was partially funded in the framework of the PRINCE Future of Europe programme of the European Commission. The first three years of activity of the European Network of Economic Policy Research Institutes were funded by the European Commission under the Fifth Research Framework Programme (Centre for European Policy Studies, 2017).

Such TT networks are intended to reduce the number of actors while being representative. They do not always achieve inclusivity and surmount the danger of "misappropriation" of the collectively owned social capital by dominant network members (see Bourdieu, 1986, p. 251). Nominating the interlocutors for dialogue with the European Commission by the NGO community, the NGO networks should provide information on the criteria for their selection. In the case of regular consultations with a limited number of NGO networks, for transparency reasons, the general public needs to be informed about their legal status, goals, membership, and main funding sources. This data can be provided by the structures themselves; however, the mandatory character of revealing such information is not indicated (European Commission, 2000), along with the debates concerning the mandatory character of the European Transparency Register (European Commission, 2016). These measures are not sufficient to avoid the issue of exclusivity within some of these networks, which, claiming their representativity, rely mostly on active members based in Brussels or old member-states, while others lacking resources often cannot actively participate in their projects. This leads to their marginalisation or even exclusion. However, besides internal exclusivity within these networks, they themselves can be represented as the whole spectrum of civil society stakeholders, where EU institutions, striving for internal and external legitimacy, financially support TT networks with large formally representative membership in exchange for their social capital (Bajenova, 2019, 2023).

6. Conclusions

This article examined the role of European TTs in the EU's PD efforts towards domestic and foreign publics based on Bourdieu's field theory and the concept of "intermestic" PD (Huijgh, 2019). The article argues that the EU institutions provide financial support (economic capital) for TTs claiming their role as bridges between the policy world and the general public in order to gain domestic and international public legitimacy (political capital). It shows that all manifestations of publics such as interests, audiences, spheres, and institutions are present in this relationship, while the main dynamic which shapes their interconnections is the aim to legitimise EU governance at both domestic and global levels (see Mende & Müller, 2023). The European Commission mobilises TT academic capital funding their educational activities, seen as a manifestation of the TT "public interest" mission, to deal with the issue of "the EU democratic deficit" through education of EU citizens in the aspects of European integration, but also to use them as "soft power" instruments in its international relations. Due to the lack of outreach mass media in the EU public sphere and the increasing movement of the policy debate online, the European Commission tries to shape public opinion at the EU and global level by employing TT

publicity capital in its communication activities via new media platforms, to access wider audiences. TTs which describe themselves as channels of information for the educated public serve as "information relays" for the European Commission to widely disseminate information on EU policies to domestic and foreign publics. Finally, the European Commission benefits from TT social capital, encouraging them to create transnational networks with a wide formal representative membership to facilitate the consultation process with civil society at the European level, but also relations with the civil society from the candidate countries and beyond.

This study shows that increasing penetration of the domestic and foreign spheres in the interdependent world (Huijgh, 2019) blurs boundaries between domestic and international dimensions of the EU's PD, meaning both the object and the subject of this activity, as well as its instruments. European TTs operating at global, EU, and national levels as EU collaborators in PD implementation can be seen not only as "intermestic," but as transnational PD actors. Moreover, their PD audience includes both foreign and domestic citizens, where "domestic" publics targeted by European TTs are also of a transnational nature, representing not only citizens of a particular country, but EU citizens or the European general public as a whole. The PD tools, privileged by European TTs, such as social media and networks, are also highly transnational. So, this article demonstrates that the state-centric domestic-international differentiation is not relevant for such "transnational" PD actors, as EU and European TTs. Therefore, following the new transnationalism perspective investigating the interrelations between state and non-state actors across national borders to achieve political and social goals at national, international, and global levels (Orenstein & Schmitz, 2006), this article argues that a concept of transnational PD even better than "intermestic" PD reflects the new conditions of blurring boundaries between domestic and international spheres of PD efforts at the EU level.

Although the public dimension is not always the primary concern of European TTs, this article reveals the funding of European TTs and their networks by EU institutions to maximise their public legitimacy in exchange for TT academic, publicity, and social capital, which indirectly proves TT utility as a channel of PD towards transnational publics. TTs contribute to the establishment of such manifestations of publics as "audiences" and "public spheres" creating transnational digital "communicative spaces" targeting wider transnational publics, "institutions" launching transnational networks claiming to be representative, as well as declaring their "public interest" mission educating domestic and foreign citizens, thereby producing "publicness" essential to the "legitimation" of EU policymaking (see Mende & Müller, 2023). However, although TTs use "public-centric" PD tools, i.e., digital media and networks, typical of relational and network approaches to PD (see Hocking, 2005), they still remain "state-based," where

the EU often initiates, funds, and strives to control these
PD activities (see Zaharna & Uysal, 2016, p. 112) failing
to provide true interactivity and representativeness that
would allow for wider publics to become fully active PD
participants. Therefore, the state-public relationship in
our case can be described as a scalene triangle where EU
institutions and TTs have a mutually beneficial relation-
ship, where the latter represents not the autonomous
players, but "soft power" tools, "information relays," or
awareness "multipliers" for the former, while transna-
tional publics are seen as a subject to inform, to educate,
and to represent.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Public Legitimation by "Going Personal"? The Ambiguous Role of International Organization Officials on Social Media

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Abstract
International organizations increasingly use social media to target citizens with an abundance of content, which tends to stylize officials across ranks as the "personal face" of institutional processes. Such practices suggest a new degree of access to the every day of multilateralism that has traditionally taken place on camera and with the aid of diplomatic discretion. What is more, in these practices the intuitive truth of images on social media often blends with a more credible expression of emotional states—such as enthusiasm, sympathy, anger, or shame—which facilitates the legitimation of international organizations as credible agents of shared values and norms. At the same time, however, such personalization arguably suggests a problematic dependency on the credible conduct of international organization officials as it might undermine institutional claims to depersonalized "rational-legal" authority in international politics and local arenas of implementation alike. Also, it aggravates existing problems of decoupling action in global governance from its political symbolism, because international organizations use social media by and large to communicate "top-down," despite claiming a more personal mode of communication among peers. To illustrate this argument, the article takes on content shared by leading officials of the UN, the IMF, the WHO, and the WTO on Twitter.

Issue
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1. Introduction

International organizations (IOs) like the UN, the WHO, and the IMF face an increasingly complex and assertive societal environment (Bexell et al., 2021; Copelovitch & Pevehouse, 2019; Dingwerth et al., 2019; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019). For decades, they have learned to co-exist with—and partly accommodate to—successive waves of politicization in which transnational advocacy for more effectively addressing cosmopolitan concerns such as human rights violations, environmental degradation, or global inequalities played a leading role (della Porta, 2007; O'Brien et al., 2000; Zürn et al., 2012). More recently, right-wing populism has come to prominently address IOs as linchpins of such progressive "global-

ism," making IOs powerful symbols on both sides of a deepening cleavage between cosmopolitan (or "liberal") and anti-cosmopolitan (or "anti-liberal") orientations in many Western societies (Hooghe et al., 2019b; Kriesi et al., 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; Strijbis et al., 2018).

Such politicization has spurred scholarly interest in the popular legitimacy of global governance—i.e., the extent to which citizens consider an IO's authority to be appropriately exercised (Bexell et al., 2022; Dellmuth et al., 2022; Sommerer et al., 2022; Tallberg et al., 2018). The main focus in this literature has been on the sources of legitimacy beliefs (e.g., Dellmuth et al., 2022; Ghassim et al., 2022), while the way IOs communicate vis-à-vis a wider public has found much less attention in the field of IO studies and beyond (exceptions include Capelos

& Wurzer, 2009; Dingwerth et al., 2019; Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018; Gronau & Schmidtke, 2016; von Billerbeck, 2020). This is unfortunate, as the way IOs address their "legitimating communities" (Symons, 2011) is arguably key to understanding the dynamics of IO politicization if not the future trajectories of global governance in broader terms.

Strikingly, most IOs now rely heavily on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for reaching out to citizens directly (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020). These platforms have important advantages for political communication but also pose new challenges such as a highly competitive economy of attention and the fragmentation of audiences driven by the networked curation of content and selective exposure (Barberá & Zeitzoff, 2017; Conover et al., 2011; Garrett, 2009; N. Hall et al., 2020; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Williams et al., 2015).

This contribution focuses on a specific aspect of such communication: the remarkable presence of IO officials, who take center stage in how IO communicate in digital spheres. While IO press releases have focused on textual reports of major meetings and visits for some time, social media accounts of IOs now provide a constant stream of news and images that gets their users closer to how officials across ranks do international governance every day—be it in terms of their own statements, organizing intergovernmental negotiations, meeting with the various stakeholders of global governance, or supervising global policy programs on the ground. According to the main argument developed in this contribution, such "personalization" of IO digital communication facilitates as well as challenges how international authority is articulated and, by implication, (self-)legitimated towards a wider (digital) public.

To begin with, such personalization suggests a new degree of access to the performance of global politics that has traditionally taken place *on camera* and in a mode of diplomatic discretion. In this context, the intuitive truth of images blends with a more credible expression of emotional states—such as enthusiasm, sympathy, anger, or shame—by individual officials and as part of their "emotional labor" (A. R. Hochschild, 2012) on behalf of an abstract institutional structure. Social media arguably better afford officials to display emotional states vis-à-vis a broader audience of citizens directly. Thus, their increased presence online facilitates the public legitimation of IOs as credible agents of shared values and contributes to the public recognition of IOs as legitimate actors.

However, there are important ambiguities of such "personalized" communication of IOs, such as the sublime but notable tension of a more personalized self-presentation of IOs with their own claim to "rational-legal" authority (Barnett & Finnemore, 2005). What is more, observers have already noted a danger of problematic "trivialization" of IO public communication that trades a new focus on personal performances

and credibility at the expense of institutional transparency in terms of "hard facts" about decisions and actions (Krzyżanowski, 2018). While conclusive evidence is still lacking, intuition suggests that the new emphasis on the individual officeholder might aggravate existing problems of global governance, such as the lamentable de-coupling of political symbolism from action and the increased fragmentation of political communication online.

With this line of argument, my contribution directly speaks to the overall theme of the thematic issue in multiple ways. In keeping with the introduction, I understand publics as spheres of political communication, legitimation, and contestation, with powerful institutions as important actors as well as addressees, common claims of public interests, and an audience that chose to selectively expose to and process such communication. Regarding its most relevant dynamics, my argument foregrounds how a specific technology of communication—social media—affords and affects the legitimation of an increasingly relevant type of public institutions—IOs—while, at the same time, renegotiating the extent to which their legitimation shifts boundaries of the private and the public, by "personalizing" institutional communication.

After briefly illustrating what I mean by "personalization" in IO social media communication, my argument evolves in three steps, each expanding on one of the aforementioned claims. First, personalization is part and parcel of officials' "emotional labor," that is the professional performance of emotions such as joy, compassion, grief, and determination in public. Through emotional labor, IO officials help to legitimize IOs as credible and responsive agents working for a better world. Second, the socio-technological conditions of social media communication are key to understanding how such personalization has become a plausible strategy of institutional communication, shifting its emphasis on the individual official's emotional performance to go viral. Third, such personalization may backfire in various ways—by trivializing international politics, disappointing expectations of "real" action, playing the game of populism, or fostering fragmentation—thus calling for a more comprehensive investigation of IO digital communication as well as its impact on how global governance is discussed in networked public spheres.

2. International Organization Digital Communication and Its Personalization

Communication departments of many IOs have been remarkably active in digital spheres of communication for years now (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2020; Groves, 2018; Hofferberth, 2020; see also Aue & Börgel, 2023). Virtually all of them created their own websites early on and a recent study on the institutional development of IOs from a global perspective even declared an active webpage to be an operational criterion for the respective

IO to be relevant for a systematic investigation of this organizational field (Hooghe et al., 2019a). There is more notable variation regarding the regular use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, or Instagram—platforms that can be categorized as social media to the extent they allow users to connect with others by setting up unique profiles and sharing user-generated content (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Gillespie, 2018). By the end of 2021, a recent survey of Facebook and Twitter profiles for a selection of 50 IOs found a total of 486 Facebook pages and 946 Twitter handles run by these organizations (Ecker-Ehrhardt, in press). Only 10 did not actively use Facebook, while seven did not run any official handle on Twitter. In fact, only very small and or highly specialized organizations did neither tweet nor post (Ecker-Ehrhardt, in press).

One of the most active IOs on social media for more than a decade has been the UN. In early 2022, the UN Social Media Team—located at the UN Secretariate's Department of Global Communication—had 23 posts responsible for managing 166 accounts on 14 different social media platforms (in order of relevance: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Flickr, Medium, Youku, Weibo, Tumblr, TikTok, WeChat, Snapchat, and Pinterest) while many more have been run by other parts of the organization. As of May 2023, its main English Twitter handle (@UN) has about 16.2 million followers alone, while the respective account on Facebook (@unitednations) has about 7.4 million. Notably, respective numbers for other major organizations in this field are substantially lower but still suggest an enormous reach: For example, the Twitter handles @IMF and @NATO have a fellowship of about 2.1 million and 1.8 million, respectively. After the pandemic, @WHO is even followed by about 12.2 million. Such numbers add up to an immense amount of total online engagement because the content is promoted across digital platforms: For example, fighting against misinformation on Covid-19, the UN's Verified campaign alone generated about 660 million video views in 2020 and now serves those responsible as a "flagship example of delivering on the objectives of the UN global communications strategy of leading the narrative, inspiring people to care and mobilizing action" (UN, 2021, p. 9).

Such virality according to common engagement metrics is arguably based on various tools of digital communication. For example, IOs have successfully employed their own hashtags as important "soft structures" of storytelling (Papacharissi, 2016) and to garner affiliated "hashtag publics" (Rambukkana, 2015) for a long time (Pamment, 2016). In 2020, the UN-promoted hashtag #ClimateAction successfully generated about 35 million engagements (likes, shares, and comments; UN, 2021, p. 12). Additional tools include the use of celebrities and influencers as important "force multipliers" on social media. To illustrate, the K-pop group BTS repeatedly spurred massive user engagement with UN accounts online—such as in the case of their speech calling for the younger generation to care for sustainable development at the 75th UN General Assembly, which drew about 485.000 likes on Twitter and more than eight million views on YouTube (see BTS, 2020a, 2020b).

In two related ways, Twitter communication of major IOs may serve to illustrate the remarkable emphasis on the personal presence and performances of individual officeholders (Krzyżanowski, 2018; Maronkova, 2016). To some extent, such "personalization" has been first of all part and parcel of a more general trend to enhance and diversify IO public communication in general and social media presences of IOs more specifically: In addition to the main "institutional" accounts (e.g., @UN) and its bodies (e.g., @UNHumanRights) or agencies (e.g., @UNEP), a large number of accounts communicating on behalf of the organization now belong to specific offices (e.g., @UN_PGA of the current president of the UN General Assembly) or even individual office holders *ad personam* (e.g., @antonioguterres of the UN Secretary-General or @volker_turk of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). These accounts are quite successful in reaching out to the public on social media as well: Antonio Guterres has about 2.1 million followers, the Director-General of the WHO Tedros Adhanom has 1.9 million, Jens Stoltenberg of NATO 822 k, and the IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva at least about 284 k. The personal account @NOIweala of WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala even surpasses @WTO considerably in terms of followership (2.1. million compared to 547 k).

By implication, individual office holders' personalized way of representing their organization on social media has become a regular part of their every day as it is now an eminent feature of IO social media communication. Figure 1 provides a sample of Twitter communication of these handles, illustrating what content their followers are likely to receive as part of their daily social media diet. In late April and early May 2023, such diet contains a significant share of reporting on how IOs' leading officials have facilitated cooperation among important stakeholders in global governance—such as governments, businesses, and civil society—by meeting up, shaking hands, and speaking as well as carefully listening to what their representatives had to say. The first tweet of Okonjo-Iweala (Figure 1, top left) shows how such content often looks, combining three images from the multiple "photo ops" such events typically provide. Followers of these Twitter accounts also received video footage in which the respective officials directly addressed a broader audience in a speech—as in the case of Tedros Ghebreyesus' tweet (Figure 1, top right), where he promotes a WHO (2023) report as part of the WHO Global Action Plan on Promoting the Health of Refugees and Migrants. Beyond such content, these IO officials regularly provided content that claims a more personal access to their every day, for example, by celebrating personal relationships with colleagues and joint engagement for global governance (Figure 1,

center row). Regularly, the fine lines between private and professional roles blurred when communication linked personal experiences to organizational matters—for example, a commitment to "climate action, climate justice and a better, more peaceful world" (Figure 1, bottom left), the appreciation of mothers as "greatest role models" (Figure 1, bottom mid), or an openness to all those of "potential, peace, love, hope" (Figure 1, bottom right).

Again, this sample does not claim to be representative, especially considering that Twitter is just one of many platforms IOs tend to now employ for communication

Figure 1. Selected tweets from personal handles of top officials of four major IOs (UN, IMF, WHO, and WTO). Note: All tweets are archived and searchable at Wayback Machine (https://web.archive.org). Sources: Adhanom Ghebreyesus (2023a, 2023b, 2023c); Georgieva (2023a, 2023b); Guterres (2023); Okonjo-Iweala (2023a, 2023b).

and previous research has rightly pointed to the many peculiarities of platforms regarding their specific features and usership (e.g., Bossetta, 2018). However, despite such limitations, the sampled tweets illustrate a broader class of content shaping the imagery of global governance on social media. It arguably pushes the public enactment of professional roles to a new quality of personal closeness and co-presence in terms of sharing authentic emotional states with other users on Twitter and beyond. Implications of such "personalization" for the (de)legitimation of international governance are still insufficiently theorized, so I take on theories that might help to capture the role of emotional expressions for IO legitimation in the next section, before turning to the socio-technological conditions of their employment in digital communication.

3. International Organization Officials' Performances as Emotional Labor

IOs gain legitimacy as "community organizations" (Abbott & Snidal, 1998) representing as well as advocating shared norms and values. They are recognized as "moral authorities" (Barnett & Finnemore, 2005) if such efforts credibly serve the normative aspirations of their audience and become contested if not (Ignatieff & Appiah, 2003; Kriesi et al., 2008; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Ex officio, IO officials are deemed important in both ways: as representatives of shared values as well as norm entrepreneurs (Fröhlich, 2014) that are expected to show leadership—internally and externally—in representing/promoting community norms and values with a necessary degree of personal authenticity and integrity.

A core competence for effectively doing so is arguably a credible performance of emotional states that certify an authentic commitment to those values and norms. The concept of "emotional labor" is helpful for theorizing the performative quality of officials' expressions (Tompea, 2021). In the famous definition of A. Hochschild (2012, p. 7), "emotional labor" denotes the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display." Such management can be authentic to varying degrees, for which Hochschild has coined the twin concepts "surface acting" and "deep acting." In the case of the former, a person intentionally enacts emotional states that are not actually felt, thus emotions remain superficial; in the case of the latter, a person displays "a real feeling that has been self-induced'' (A. Hochschild, 2012, p. 35), a competence "diplomates and actors" are said to do best and "small children" to do worst (A. Hochschild, 2012, p. 33).

In both cases, emotional labor implies several related and intrinsically complex tasks, including the empathically emotive sensing of others' affective states and the strategic employment of emotional expressions (Guy et al., 2014). Sociologists suggest that such emotional labor is essential for understanding organizational life in and beyond public administrations, defining very much how leaders successfully cope with motivational issues inside the organization (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). More important for my argument, however, is the external relevance of emotional labor, that is to make outside stakeholders accept organizational claims to authority. From the upper echelon of institutional power down to the rank-and-file bureaucrats in direct interaction with citizens, public administrations are concerned with being credible by controlling emotional states to some extent—not least to successfully claim "rational-legal authority" by strictly following "the rule of formal impersonality…'without hatred or passion'" (Weber & Tribe, 2019, p. 611).

However, public service increasingly requires competence to treat citizens beyond mere fairness and courtesy and to listen to their concerns as part of the job (Guy et al., 2014; Macnamara, 2018). Showing compassion has been found to be a key capability for spurring institutional trust, for example, in case of public emergencies (Malecki et al., 2021; Mastracci et al., 2014). Relatedly, scholars have discussed at length the eminent role that public officials can play by performing acts of remorse, regret, and apology to influence public perceptions of institutional failure and restore public reputation as responsive to public concerns (Benoit, 1997; Capelos & Wurzer, 2009; Coombs, 2007; Hearit, 2006). For the international realm, scholars of so-called "emotional diplomacy" have argued that the credible display of emotional states such as anger, sympathy, or guilt by official representatives (as well as citizens) can have a huge impact on relations between societies, for example, as in the case of Israel and Germany after the Holocaust (T. H. Hall, 2015). Remarkably, some research on organizational leadership of UN senior officials has already pointed to the eminent role of "emotional intelligence," suggesting that "leaders are expected to be sensitive to the needs of their constituents and subordinates, to show concern, understanding and respect" (F. Hochschild, 2010, p. 30).

In line with this reading of IO officials' performative role, the personalization of IO public communication arguably suggests a new relevance of their emotional expressions for credibly representing shared values and norms (including public responsiveness) to successfully claim and legitimize a role as "global governors" (Avant et al., 2010).

4. The Socio-Technological Conditions of Social Media and Personalization

According to the main argument developed here, social media is where the imagery of IO officials' emotional labor increasingly takes center stage. Officials' emotional expression has always played some role in international diplomacy (including IO communication) as well as domestic realms, for example during election campaigns of political candidates (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Relatedly,

news organizations, in general, tend to select and frame politics with a focus on individual personality and action, thus arguably gratifying such communication of political events or institutions in order to attract audience attention and broaden public resonance (O'Neill & Harcup, 2020). However, in the digital world, institutions face new incentives for employing emotional expressions of officials if directly addressing citizens by means of social-media-based "digital diplomacy" (Bjola & Zaiotti, 2020).

On social media communication goes "many-to-many" and is largely based on a logic of virality in terms of a "network-enhanced word of mouth" (Klinger & Svensson, 2015, p. 1248). Production of content is cheap; hence networks are characterized by an abundance of voices and viewpoints, making attention a scarce resource. However, competition for attention "invite[s] affective attunement, support[s] affective investment, and propagate[s] affectively charged expression" (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 308; see also Hansen et al., 2011; Veltri & Atanasova, 2017). Consequently, the current usage of digital communication by larger IOs such as the UN suggests a privileged targeting of an audience that is hoped to empathically connect with a moral cause such as humanitarian aid, human rights, or sustainable development (Bouchard, 2020; UN, 2021).

At the same time, social media affords "social grooming" (Dunbar, 1998), that is, sharing gossip to strengthen social bonds by reaffirming one's and others' commitments with shared norms and responsibilities. Over time, humans have developed many tools for expanding the outreach of "social grooming" activities beyond the time-consuming task of checking others' backs for lice, with social media as one of the more recent but transformative socio-technological inventions (Donath, 2007). Symbolic acts such as expressing gratitude, condolences, or congratulations are typical ingredients of "social grooming" on social media—and are now widely performed by governmental agencies vis-à-vis organizational stakeholders (DePaula et al., 2018). For IOs, social media thus provide immense opportunities for self-legitimation, if IO-officials' "social grooming" successfully strengthens bonds with a broader usership.

Notably, social media afford the immediate and direct communication of visual content, which allows one to more credibly claim authenticity by providing, for example, timely visual evidence of human suffering (Bleiker & Kay, 2007; Freistein & Gadinger, 2020; Geis & Schlag, 2017). Similarly, authenticity as an added value of visualization is important for understanding the significance of emotional states displayed in the public realm. As psychologists have long argued, we intuitively assume the non-verbal expression of emotional states to be the hardest to fake (Fox & Spector, 2000). Thus, IO officials that know how to (deeply en)act emotional narratives of concern, grief, and commitment may significantly contribute to more effective self-legitimation of IOs as "moral authorities" by providing credible visual representations of emotional states on social media.

5. The Multiple Ambiguities of Personalized International Organization Self-Legitimation

Are there significant consequences of such self-legitimation based on IO officials' presence and performances that call for more scientific engagement with these practices? While we do not know yet, intuition suggests important ambiguities regarding how such personalization might spur institutional legitimation but also how such legitimation might actually reflect a problematic decline of public accountability.

To start with, IO officials' increasing presence on social media may arguably go some way toward overcoming the widely lamented remoteness of international governance. Thus, it may create social legitimacy of specific IOs and contribute to the legitimation of global governance despite widespread contestation of the "liberal international order" (Hooghe et al., 2019b; Ikenberry, 2010; Zürn et al., 2012). For example, imagery suggesting the passionate attentiveness of WTO officials vis-à-vis stakeholders (e.g., Figure 1, upper left), should have some "representational force" because "being seen to listen is now itself an act of public engagement" (Di Martino, 2020, p. 133). In much the same way, UN officials pledging to consistently care for how future generations will look back on the UN's current commitment to "fight for climate action, climate justice and a better, more peaceful world" (Figure 1, bottom left) might even restore some public confidence in the accountability of global action. Finally, the self-representation of WHO staff as authentically being "#ProudToBeWHO" (e.g., Figure 1, center) might contribute toward understanding international civil service as joyful, relatable, and interesting. Thus, personalized communication may also help to make the respective organization a better place to work, as the demand for emotional labor as part of the every day of leading officials might have an immense impact on organizational culture as well as individual job satisfaction across ranks (Guy et al., 2014; Hedling, 2023). However, intuition suggests that consequences might be much more complex and contradictory.

5.1. Depoliticizing Trivialization

A focus on personality in the public sphere may make IO officials more relatable; however, it potentially fosters a trivialization of public discourse. Important information about decisions, actions, and impact of IOs may be displaced by superfluities—as has been lamented, for example, regarding the self-presentation of NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg when sharing his fandom for David Bowie (Maronkova, 2016). Others have uttered similar concerns, for example, regarding EU social media communication (Krzyżanowski, 2018). Much more systematic empirical research is needed, addressing whether and how personalization really increases the proportion of what is deemed "non-political content" and whether this fosters a

depoliticization of IOs. Much (if not most) of IO officials' current public performances on social media might arguably be directly related to political goals, decisions, or actions and does not fit the bill as clearly—as the sample of tweets shown in Figure 1 nicely illustrates.

5.2. Populist Temptation

The increasing contestation of liberal IOs by right-wing populism has fueled scholarly interest in the ideological underpinnings of populism and its narrative focus on juxtaposing an inaccessible liberal elite with the populist leader and its embrace of a personalization of power (Destradi & Plagemann, 2019). A trend of IO communication to emphasize the "personal face" can in some way be read as a strategic response to populist contestation. At the same time, it arguably reaffirms the populist disdain of "faceless bureaucratic machineries," by shifting focus on the individual officeholder and her or his personal leadership. Consequently, it arguably undermines IOs' claim to rational-legal authority, which is very much based on claims to "depersonalize" international politics (Barnett & Finnemore, 2005, p. 164). Alluding to the personality of organizational leaders ultimately triggers questions about the extent to which personal backgrounds and preferences fairly reflect the complex realities the respective organization has to address and accommodate, a tension which can become substantially aggravated if moving from the national to global institutions.

5.3. Rhetorical Entrapment

Relatedly, officials' display of emotions can arguably bolster claims of moral authority as they can backfire if disappointed. Along the lines of what Schimmelfennig (2001) has called "rhetorical entrapment," T. H. Hall (2015, p. 28) has argued that "disengaging from an emotional performance mid-display because it had become costly would render it insincere." Thus, personalization leaves organizations vulnerable to the many tensions officials' personal conduct—private or professional—can introduce to credibly performing organizational norms and values (Coombs, 2007; Hearit, 2006). Prominent cases in the IO organizational field include allegations of corruption (oil-for-food at the UN), patronage (Paul Wolfowitz's "Rizagate" at the World Bank), sexual harassment (Ruud Lubbers at UNHCR), sexual assault (Dominique Strauss-Kahn of the IMF), or organized sexual exploitation and abuse (UN peacekeepers). One may add the scandal surrounding the previous UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, who left the post years before; however, "the affair became an international scandal, precisely because Waldheim had been Secretary-General of the UN…holding the organization retroactively responsible for the selection of a Secretary-General with a highly dubious moral stature" (Lehmann, 2011, p. 7).

5.4. Organized Hypocrisy

What is more, those at the receiving end of IO governance regularly use social media to complain or call for action—after all, web 2.0 is defined by affording a new level of access and interactivity (see also Aue & Börgel, 2023; Schlag, 2023). Notably, social media have been positively received as promising tools for making public administration more dialogical, while also disappointing respective hopes for deliberative democratization (Knox, 2016). Adding to this more general theme, the social media presences of IOs are instructive. They are performative by suggesting attention if not a willingness for dialogue, but they are very much an empty gesture to the extent no one seems to listen nor respond on behalf of the IO anyway. This arguably holds true if alluding to officials' personal (co-)presences on social media, suggesting that the respective IO somehow acknowledges and buys into the more horizontal mode of communication among peers. Such empty gestures arguably contribute to the overall problematic decoupling of symbolic performances and political action that haunts international governance across issue areas (Lipson, 2007). A proliferation of more personalized forms of IO (self-)legitimation adds to such hypocrisy a new layer of symbolic deception.

5.5. Personalized Costs of Institutional Failure

On a personal level, the aforementioned ambiguities imply immense challenges for the individual official who is supposed to constantly project the self as part of (personalized) institutional communication in general and to credibly perform emotions more specifically (Hedling, 2023). After all, an organization's failure to consistently deliver on its values and promises may undermine officials' personal reputations if it is attributed not to institutional constraints but a lack of truthfulness of the individual IO official. For example, if confronting the personalized commitments of UN leaders to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and civil employees (Figure 2, left), many critics inside and outside the UN will remember how its leadership repeatedly sent strong signals of being personally "outraged," "appalled," or "sickened" by such cases in the past, while still failing to effectively prevent or sanction them (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). Relatedly, such failure comes with immense cognitive and emotional costs for the individual employee, the more these are supposed to personally perform organizational commitments that they can assume to remain largely symbolic and not matched by organizational action. By implication, emotional labor also increases employees' need for strategically coping with institutional failure in order to keep functioning—and a matching obligation of organizations to reflect on the ambiguities of personalization for those employees who are supposed to provide the "human resources" (Mastracci, 2022).

Figure 2. Two tweets from UN handles. Note: All tweets are archived and searchable at Wayback Machine (https://web.archive.org). Sources: Guterres (2019); Jan met de Pet (2018).

5.6. Polarized Fragmentation

Finally, there are unclear consequences for the degree to which the personalization of IO communication will contribute to the inclusiveness of public debates. Much has been written about a "digital divide" (Norris, 2001), which may arguably spur fragmentation among digital "haves" and "have-nots" the more relevant political institutions—including IOs—shift their attention of providing relevant information from offline to online spheres. Less overtly, however, practices of personalized communication might further add to the widely noted fragmentation of digital spheres per se. On social media users can more deliberately choose what to receive and share, enhancing the chances that a self-selective "echo chamber" emerges out of a process of "selective exposure" and algorithm-based filtering (Sunstein, 2018). For example, negative emotional campaigning (typically with strong visuals and testimonials) that went well offline in the past (a famous example is the tobacco control campaigns; see Dunlop et al., 2014) seems to be much less effective online because users simply turn off if confronted with messages they do not like (Hamill et al., 2015). Similarly, the enhanced personal display of emotions by IO officials might contribute to the more credible promotion of (liberal) norms and values. At the same time, however, such display may arguably foster the fragmentation of online communication up to a point where IO communication only reaches cosmopolitans that already share promoted norms and values—and joyfully consumes personal performances of IO officials feeling reassured

about what is right or wrong in the world (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2021). For those concerned about past military interventions or current support for Ukraine, NATO officials mourning the death of pop-cultural icons such as David Bowie (Maronkova, 2016) might not change much, despite spurring skepticism that NATO aims at diverting public attention away from more sinister actions. Similarly, for those fearing that an inaccessible globalist elite is planning the end of "Western civilization" by means of global migration governance, seeing UN officials joyfully cheering a Global Compact for Migration might just prove the ruthlessness and disrespect of such "globalist parties" for what normal folks hold dear (e.g., Figure 2, right). Nevertheless, chances are good that only the most politically active of those critics will continue to self-expose to such performances of IO officials. More moderate sceptics, however, will presumably tend to completely avoid them. Thus, emotional performances might ultimately work towards fragmentation, curtailing the reach of IO communication overall, including the less personal messages informing about what the respective IO does or does not do. Such impact of the personalized forms of IO (self-)legitimation would be detrimental to the most important role of IO public communication in times of "post-truth" (Adler & Drieschova, 2021): to provide credible information across ideological camps to make a global consensus about collective action possible and to legitimately act on behalf of such consensus by means of institutionalized coordination and implementation.

6. Conclusions

The everyday routines and performances of IO officials are now an essential part of how international authority is visualized and communicated vis-à-vis online publics. As argued in this contribution to the thematic issue, such imagery may effectively enhance the public recognition of IOs as credible guardians of shared values and principles as it may undermine normative claims to represent "depersonalized" rational-legal authority, to care for public transparency or to buy into a more horizontal mode of democratic dialogue. At the same time, material conditions of networked communication may effectively limit the reach of such legitimation practices, because skeptics can easily avoid their reception. Thus, personalization may even fuel a process of fragmentation, which has been widely received as detrimental to normative standards of deliberation as well as political accountability. Are these consequences real and significant? While we do not know yet, they call for more scientific engagement with public self-legitimation of IOs in general and practices of its more personalized forms more specifically. Fortunately, the methodological toolbox of IR has remarkably been filled with complementary approaches to address this challenge: Qualitative research can provide an in-depth analysis of the textual means and imagery of personalized representations and may thus greatly contribute, for example, by working towards a comprehensive typology of "personalized" practices in and of IO social media communication. Participant observation and interviews can further help to reconstruct such practices inside IO communication departments as well as the extent to which these practices force officials to cope with the inherent challenges of constantly projecting oneself online. Quantitative analysis of social media content can help to generalize about the trajectory of personalization as well as the causal conditions of sharing and commenting on respective content online. Finally, experimental research focused on the impact of personalization can dig into ways people perceive respective content and whether it is effectively used to form or update individual beliefs in the legitimacy of IOs. Thus, further research can go beyond the careful description of such practices itself, as legitimation research (too) often does. It can (and should) aim at more comprehensively investigating its reception by online publics as well as its structural impact on how such crowds give meaning to international authority in terms of legitimacy.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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