

Categorization in International Organizations / Doron Ella

Abstract

This paper explores why certain IOs officially categorize their member-states while others do not. It also examines the specific problems that categorization mechanisms are intended to solve. Building on theories of rational design, I argue that categorization is intended to provide a solution to cooperation problems in IOs and assist in preventing possible defections of participating member-states. I hypothesize that categorization is more likely to be incorporated and employed in IOs with heterogeneous membership in terms of capabilities and/or preferences; in IOs that deal with issues characterized by high levels of uncertainty about the state of the world; and in IOs that require deep cooperation and therefore are highly institutionalized. To test these hypotheses, I created a new dataset on categorization, encompassing information on 156 IOs established between 1868 and 2015 and ranging across 12 issue-areas. A multivariate logistic regression with robust standard errors is used to estimate the empirical relationships between the variables. This study finds that IOs may consider categorization as a proper alternative to other solutions, such as exclusion, for problems that stem from divergent power distributions; it assists in lowering states' uncertainties about the consequences of cooperation, as it clarifies current and future distribution of possible costs and benefits; and, it assists in minimizing the compliance costs of less powerful participant-states.

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