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After Exit:
Alternative Leaders, Authoritative Institutions, and Resilience in the face of Hegemonic Withdrawal

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Abstract:

While the United States (US) have been one of the key promoters of the rule-based international order, they have regularly terminated their commitment to or participation within multilateral institutions. Faced with the severe challenge of hegemonic withdrawal, some multilateral institutions decay while others are resilient. This paper develops a theoretical framework to explain this variation. I suggest that hegemonic withdrawal poses a twofold challenge for multilateral cooperation as it deprives the institution of material capacities and questions its legitimacy. I argue that whether multilateral institutions withstand this challenge depends on alternative leaders and an institution's authority. Multilateral institutions are more likely to be resilient (1) when remaining states possess significant soft and hard power and are willing to take over leadership; or (2) when institutions possess extensive capacities and legitimacy in their own right. A logistical regression analysis based on my original *ExitUS Database* of 115 instances of US withdrawal from multilateral institutions from 1945 through 2020 lends support to my theoretical expectations.

Keywords:
Contested Multilateralism; Exit; Hegemonic Stability Theory; Institutionalism; Institutional Decay; Institutional Resilience; Vitality; Withdrawal.

1 Introduction

The international order, based on multilateral institutions, is under severe pressure (Colgan & Keohane, 2017; Haas, 2018; Ikenberry, 2018a; Lake, Martin, & Risse, 2021).[1] It took one of the hardest blows from the United States (US), which are often considered as one of its key promoters if not creator (Ikenberry, 2001; Mastanduno, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2019a; Mousseau, 2019). Under the Trump Administration, the US engaged in what was characterized as a "withdrawal doctrine" (Haas, 2018), a "retreat from multilateralism" (Duncombe & Dunne, 2018, p. 27), or an "exit from hegemony" (Cooley & Nexon, 2020). The hegemon withdrew its commitment to or participation in numerous multilateral institutions, ranging from the World Health Organization (WHO) to the Paris Agreement on climate change and from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement (Heinkelmann-Wild, Kruck, & Daßler, 2020). Overall, scholars agree on the importance of US hegemony for the post-war international order and that hegemonic withdrawal challenges the cooperation in multilateral institutions it is based on (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Hofmann, 2019, p. 3; Fioretos, 2018, 7; Ikenberry, 2018b, p. 20; Mearsheimer, 2019a, p. 9).

However, the impact of hegemonic withdrawal varies considerably across multilateral institutions: Some multilateral institutions decay after hegemonic withdrawal. For instance, after the US withdrew from the 'Iran deal', the Iranian government stopped compliance with its rules. Furthermore, both UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) suffer from severe financial crisis since the US withdrew. By contrast, other multilateral institutions remained resilient after hegemonic withdrawal. For instance, after the Trump Administration terminated its support, the Paris Agreement's provisions were even deepened, and remaining member states relied on the WHO to cope with the Corona pandemic.

This variation also poses a puzzle for two strands of literature that hold opposing expectations about how multilateral institutions cope with the challenges of hegemonic withdrawal. A first, *pessimistic* strand rests on the assumptions of Hegemonic Stability Theory (HST) (Arce M, 2001; Gilpin, 1981, pp. 29–34; Charles Poor Kindleberger, 1976; Charles P. Kindleberger, 1986;

1 While not being a cohesive entity formed at one moment in time, "[i]nternational order is manifest in the settled rules and arrangements between states that define and guide their interaction" (Ikenberry, 2012a, p. 12). International institutions then are "building blocks of orders" and "prescribe acceptable kinds of behavior and proscribe unacceptable forms of behavior" (Mearsheimer, 2019b, p. 9). International institutions are sets of rules meant to govern state behavior and can take the form of multilateral agreements or intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) (Martin and Simmons, 2013, 328f.).

Krasner, 1976, 322f.; see also, Lake, 1993) and emphasizes that hegemonic leadership is necessary to achieve and sustain multilateral cooperation. Without the hegemon, multilateral institutions are doomed (Acharya, 2017, p. 280; Layne, 2018, p. 111; Mearsheimer, 2019a, p. 7). By contrast, a more *optimistic* strand builds on institutionalist assumptions (Ikenberry, 2012b; Robert Owen Keohane, 1984, pp. 89–107; Norrlof, 2010; Snidal, 1985) and holds that hegemonic leadership is dispensable for the maintenance of multilateral institutions. As institutions are considered 'sticky' or even 'locked in' after their creation, they are expected to prevail hegemonic withdrawal and stay resilient (Duncombe & Dunne, 2018; Fioretos, 2018, 6f.; Ikenberry, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Jahn, 2018; Stokes, 2018). Why are some multilateral institutions resilient while others decay after hegemonic withdrawal?

To solve this puzzle, this paper combines insights from both strands and develops a theoretical framework that accounts for institutional resilience and decay after hegemonic withdrawal. The hegemon's value for multilateral cooperation stems from its superior hard and soft power. Accordingly, hegemonic withdrawal poses a twofold challenge for an abandoned institution: by withdrawing from a multilateral institution, the hegemon (1) deprives the institution of material capacities; and (2) questions its legitimacy. Whether multilateral institutions withstand this challenge depends on alternative leaders and an institution's authority. Multilateral institutions are more likely to be resilient (1) when remaining states possess significant soft and hard power and are willing to take over leadership; or (2) when institutions possess extensive capacities and legitimacy in their own right. Both alternative leaders and authoritative institutions have the means to absorb the blow of hegemonic withdrawal. Powerful states can use their hard and soft power to (collectively) address the twofold challenge of hegemonic withdrawal. Moreover, authoritative institutions that possess capacities and legitimacy in their own right tend to be self-sustaining. As states value an authoritative institution's assets or believe in its appropriateness, they will maintain it.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 develops my theoretical framework. I first theorize the twofold challenge posed by hegemonic withdrawal to multilateral institutions. I then explain how alternative leaders as well as authoritative institution contribute to institutional resilience. Section 3 introduces the *ExitUS Database* comprising 115 cases of hegemonic withdrawal from multilateral institutions from 1945-2020 and presents the operationalization of the dependent and independent variables. I test my hypotheses by running logistic regression models. Section 4 discusses the results, which support my theoretical expectations and hold against a number of robustness checks. Section 5 concludes by reflecting on the implications these findings yield for the future of the institutional order.

2 Theory

2.1 The challenges of hegemonic withdrawal for multilateral institutions

The US emerged from World War II as the most powerful state in the international system.[2] As liberal hegemon, the US facilitated the creation of an international order based on multilateral institutions (Börzel & Zürn, 2021; Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild et al., 2020; Ikenberry, 2001, 2012b; Lake et al., 2021; Mastanduno, 2019; Mousseau, 2019). Ever since, the US as "exceptional state" (Milewicz & Snidal, 2016, p. 827) regularly used its superior soft and hard power to promote multilateral cooperation. However, the US have also demonstrated continued skepticism towards multilateral institutions (Lake, 1999; Lake et al., 2021). Their unwillingness to sustain multilateral cooperation repeatedly resulted in withdrawal from multilateral agreements and IGOs.[3]

Figure 1 shows that the US terminating their commitment to or participation within multilateral institutions continued a regular feature of international politics from 1945 through 2020.[4] For instance, the US withdrew from IGOs such as UNESCO in 1984, the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in 1996, and temporarily, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1982. Moreover, all Republican US presidents since Ronald Reagan terminated funding the UNFPA completely and so did President Barack Obama with regards to UNESCO in 2011. The US also withdrew their commitment to multilateral agreements such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1999 and the Kyoto Protocoll in 2001. Overall, I observed 115 instances of US withdrawal from multilateral institutions since 1945.

Hegemonic withdrawal constitutes a twofold challenge for cooperation in multilateral institutions, which ultimately rests on states' active participation and compliance.[5] By terminating its commitment to or participation in a multilateral institution, the hegemon not only takes away its material backing but also questions its legitimacy.

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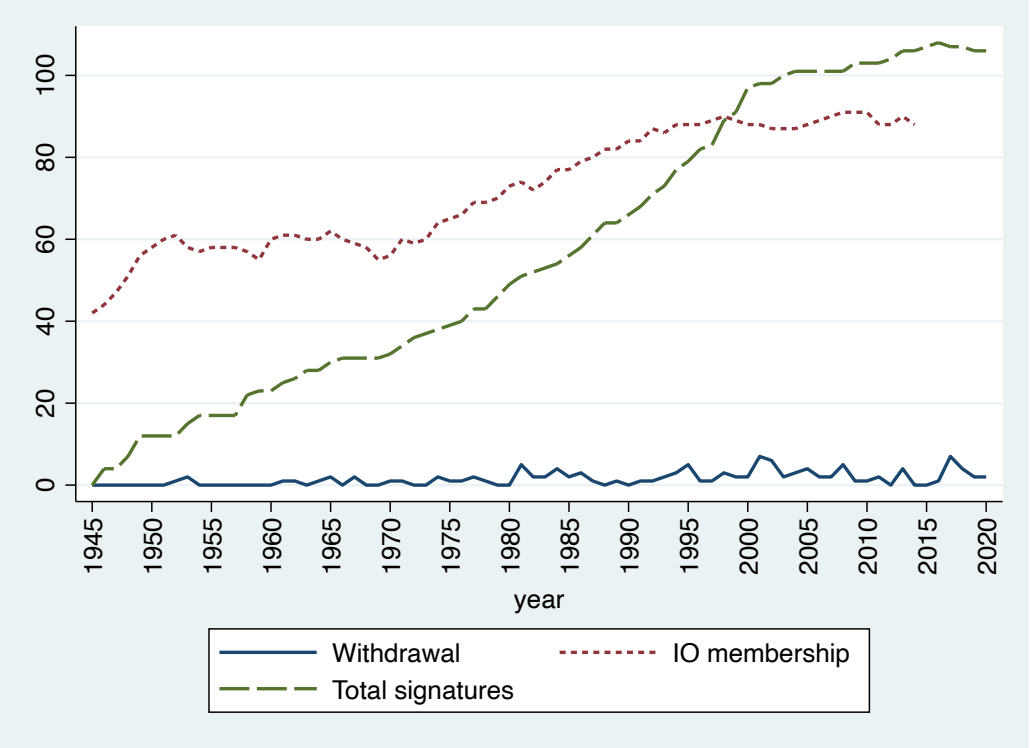
2 For the purpose of this paper, I consider the US as the hegemon based on its superior capabilities since 1945 (see, e.g., Layne, Wohlforth, and Brooks, 2018; Ikenberry, 2001, 2012b; Milewicz and Snidal, 2016, pp. 827–829).

3 The US also have a record of rejecting to join multilateral institutions in the first place (Fehl, 2012; Bower, 2017; Brem and Stiles, 2009; Price, 2005; Thimm, 2016).

4 Withdrawal – or exit – can comprise both the termination of formal participation as well as de facto commitment to an institution, and it might be followed by a turn to unilateralism or multilateral alternatives (cf. Börzel and Zürn, 2021, p. 9). The unwillingness to continue support for a multilateral institution can stem from both the executive as well as the legislative.

5 For compatible understandings of multilateral cooperation see, e.g. J. Pevehouse, Nordstrom, and Warnke, 2004; Gray, 2018; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018; Rittberger, Zangl, Kruck, and Dijkstra, 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2019, p. 4; Copelovitch, Hobolt, and Walter, 2019; Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2019; Bower, 2017.

Figure 1: Multilateral cooperation and hegemonic withdrawal 1945-2020.



Note: IO membership counts US membership in IOs from 1945-2014, including pre-existing IGOs (J. C. W. Pevehouse, Nordstrom, McManus, & Jamison, 2019); total signatures counts all multilateral agreements signed by the US from 1945-2020 (UNTC, 2020); hegemonic withdrawal counts instances where the US withdrew from both types of institutions (ExitUS Database).

First, hegemonic withdrawal challenges multilateral cooperation by depriving an institution of its material backing, giving rise to a *capacity gap*. Due to its extraordinary hard power, a hegemon can use inducements and threats to gain support for institutions or to compel compliance with their rules (see Abbott & Snidal, 1998; Gilpin, 1981; Koremenos, Lipson, & Snidal, 2001; Krasner, 1976; Mearsheimer, 1994; Milewicz & Snidal, 2016; Schneider & Urpelainen, 2013; Thompson, 2006). In turn, when the hegemon retrenches its engagement and stops providing crucial material and political resources to an institution, this likely harms its operational maintenance – let alone its deepening in response to potentially pressing global problems. In turn, other states might be reluctant to join or continue cooperation in an institution abandoned by the hegemon. Cooperation without the hegemon tends to be less useful and costlier (see Fehl, 2012; Price, 2005, p. 139; von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019, p. 16). Moreover, participants might not comply with institutional rules if these are not backed up by the hegemon's power. Overall, hegemonic withdrawal yields direct negative effects on the range of activities, authority, and effectiveness of an institution.

Second, hegemonic withdrawal challenges multilateral cooperation through its *de-legitimation*. Due to its extraordinary position in the international system and soft power, the hegemon tends to be a reference point for appropriate behavior. This position allows it to promote multilateral cooperation through persuasion (Cox, 1987; Gill, 1995; Guzman, 2008; Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990; Kern, 2004; Klotz, 1995; Percy, 2007; Sandholtz, 2007; Sandholtz & Stiles, 2009; Thomas, 2000, 2001). By withdrawing from a multilateral institution, the hegemon prominently questions its appropriateness, thereby directly undermining an institution's legitimacy (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2020). As the authority of a multilateral institution fundamentally depends on its legitimacy (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006; Tallberg, Bäckstrand, & Scholte, 2018a; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019b), hegemonic withdrawal harms the abandoned institution's authority (see Bäckstrand & Söderbaum, 2018, p. 112; Heinkelmann-Wild et al., 2020; Kruck, Hobbach, Heinkelmann-Wild, & Daßler, 2020; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019a). Moreover, hegemonic withdrawal also provides opponents of an institution with an opportunity to justify their non-compliance with its rules (Carnegie & Carson, 2019) or even de-legitimize the institution further and promote alternatives (see, Bäckstrand & Söderbaum, 2018, p. 115; Cottrell, 2009, pp. 223–224; Walter, 2020). Thereby, hegemonic withdrawal might trigger a "non-compliance cascade" (Panke & Petersohn, 2012, p. 721; see also, McKeown, 2009, p. 11). The twofold challenge of hegemonic withdrawal may even be self-reinforcing as a loss of legitimacy likely impacts an institution's capacities and thus performance; and a loss in performance likely impacts an institution's legitimacy (see Bäckstrand & Söderbaum, 2018, p. 112; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019a).

However, the challenge of hegemonic withdrawal is only one part of the story. Whether cooperation in multilateral institutions ultimately withstands the capacity loss and de-legitimation by the hegemon also depends on characteristics of the respective institution and its participants. Multilateral institutions are more likely to be resilient after hegemonic withdrawal when remaining states possess significant soft and hard power and are willing to take over leadership; or when institutions possess strong capacities and high legitimacy in their own right. Both alternative leaders and authoritative institutions have the means to absorb the blow of hegemonic withdrawal. Powerful states can draw on their hard and soft power to (collectively) address the twofold challenge of hegemonic withdrawal. Moreover, authoritative institutions that possess capacities and legitimacy in their own right tend to be self-sustaining. As states value an institution's assets or believe in its appropriateness, they will maintain it. In the remainder of this section, I explain how alternative leaders and authoritative institutions are conducive to institutional resilience after hegemonic withdrawal.

2.1 Alternative leaders

Powerful states participating in a multilateral institution abandoned by the hegemon can take over leadership and address the twofold challenge posed by hegemonic withdrawal. While less powerful than the hegemon, (a small group of) states that possess significant soft and hard power are well equipped to counter the twofold challenge of hegemonic withdrawal (see Brem, 2009, p. 181; Fehl, 2012, pp. 43–44; Fehl & Thimm, 2019; Milewicz & Snidal, 2016, p. 826; Snidal, 1985). Powerful states can use their *hard power* to address the capacity gap left by the hegemon. Vast material resources allow states to sustain the operational functioning of the institution and effectively address the cooperation problem at hand. For instance, they can draw on their economic power to close the funding gaps left by the hegemon. Moreover, powerful states can use their own capacities to sustain compliance with institutional rules by issue-linkage, side-payments, or (threatening) sanctions. In turn, confidence that institutional rules will be adhered makes it attractive for states to participate in or join a multilateral institution. Powerful states can also counter the de-legitimation challenge posed by hegemonic withdrawal by drawing on their *soft power*. They can re-legitimate an institution by defending its value in the public or even shame the hegemon for abandoning it. By continuing participating in the institution, they act as role models for weaker states or can use their diplomatic capacities to persuade them to sustain or join multilateral cooperation. Overall, their (combined) power allows alternative leaders to compensate the capacity loss and re-legitimate an institution. And when multiple powerful states participate in the abandoned institution, their relatively small number enables collective action. After all, an exclusive subset of powerful states is more able to coordinate actions and avoid freeriding among their ranks than the total number of remaining participants; and their superior diplomatic capacities, such as representations in international institutions or other states, further facilitates coordination (Milewicz & Snidal, 2016, p. 826; Snidal, 1985).

Powerful states are not only in an advantageous position to counter the challenge of hegemonic withdrawal but also possess strong incentives to step in after hegemonic withdrawal. First of all, powerful states have joined an institution to advance a joint interest in cooperation benefits and this initial interest will likely persist (see Abbott & Snidal, 1998; Axelrod & Keohane, 1986; Hall & Taylor, 1996; Robert Owen Keohane, 1984; Robert O. Keohane & Nye, 1977; Koremenos et al., 2001; Zürn, 1992). Their cooperation benefits also tend to surpass those of weaker states as their societies and economies tend to be larger and more globalized (Snidal, 1985). Second, when the hegemon withdraws from an institution, this leaves a power vacuum that allows other powerful states to shape its rules. As their contributions to multilateral

cooperation increase, so does the dependence of weaker states as well as international bureaucracies (Milewicz & Snidal, 2016, 825-826, 829; Viola, Snidal, & Zürn, 2015, p. 232; Zangl & Zürn, 2003, pp. 246–254; see also, Stone, 2011, 2013). Finally, saving a multilateral institution abandoned by the hegemon promises prestige both at the international and domestic level (see Cohen, 1995; Gilpin, 1981; Powlick & Katz, 1998; Schweller & Pu, 2011; Stiles, 2009, p. 11).

However, the benefits for powerful states to take over leadership are constrained by the *hegemon's relevance* for a specific institution. Even after withdrawal, the hegemon can still impact institutional cooperation in at least two different ways. First, the hegemon might be of 'systemic relevance' for solving a specific cooperation problem due to its possession of specific assets, such as nuclear weapons, or its contribution to a global problem, e.g., carbon emissions (see Fehl, 2012, 3-27, 44; Stiles, 2009, 6f.). In such cases, the hegemon's inaction weakens cooperation. Second, the hegemon might also try to actively undermine multilateral cooperation after exit by employing coercive means to drive weaker states away from an institution (Daßler, Heinkelmann-Wild, & Kruck, 2019). For instance, the Trump Administration actively tried to sabotage the UNRWA as well as the Iran Nuclear Deal by putting pressure on remaining participants after withdrawing from these institutions. Where the hegemon continues to negatively affect cooperation after its withdrawal, the costs powerful states have to bear to revive the abandoned institution might outweigh their benefits. After all, the cooperation benefits will be lower when the hegemon remains relevant. Moreover, when weaker states do not benefit from sustained cooperation, they will be less willing to accept alternative leaders' attempts to increase their influence within an institution. Finally, also the potential prestige gained from standing up for an institution likely depends on its functionality after hegemonic withdrawal. Overall, this leads me to the following hypotheses:

H_1: *The more powerful states participate in a multilateral institution, the more likely it is resilient after hegemonic withdrawal (alternative leaders hypothesis).*

H_2: *Hegemonic relevance for the provision of a cooperation good renders institutional resilience after hegemonic withdrawal less likely (hegemonic relevance hypothesis).*

2.2 Authoritative institutions

Multilateral institutions can also contribute to their own resilience when they are authoritative, i.e., possess extensive capacities and legitimacy in their own right (Weber, [1922] 2013; see also Fioretos & Tallberg, 2020, pp. 4–5). As states value an institution's assets or believe in its appropriateness, they are more likely maintain it. This renders authoritative institutions resilient.

Institutions that possess significant *capacities* on their own are more likely to overcome the withdrawal of the material backing by the hegemon. Institutional capacities may constitute of highly precise rules negotiated among its participants, the establishment of a focal point for future negotiations, as well as the delegation of authority to international bureaucracies to make or implement new rules and to monitor and even enforce compliance (see, Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Hooghe & Marks, 2015; Koremenos et al., 2001; Zürn, Binder, & Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2012). A capable institution is in a better position to resist the challenge of hegemonic withdrawal. First, when participating states made high investments in terms of sovereignty and negotiation costs in an institution, they will be less likely to sacrifice it. After all, institutions tend to be more costly to create than to maintain (Debre & Dijkstra, 2020; Jupille, Mattli, & Snidal, 2013; Robert Owen Keohane, 1984; Wallander, 2000). Second, and relatedly, institutional capacities constitute assets that make the institution attractive to join (see Abbott & Snidal, 1998; Wallander, 2000). Third, states will expect compliance by fellow participants to be higher when an institution specifies or even delegates monitoring or sanctioning mechanisms. Especially the centralization of sanctioning mechanisms helps to overcome the freeriding problem of sanctioning non-compliance (see Panke & Petersohn, 2012, 737, note 7). Finally, when institutions have their own independent bureaucracy, the administration itself can coordinate the defense against hegemonic withdrawal and organize support for the institution (see Bernholz, 2009; Debre & Dijkstra, 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2020; Hirschmann, 2020; McCalla, 1996). For instance, when the bureaucracy possesses the ability to collect voluntary contributions by states or civil society actors, it may campaign for funding to fill the funding gap left by the hegemon (see Goetz & Patz, 2017).

Institutions that possess a high level of *legitimacy* in the first place are in an advantaged position to withstand their de-legitimation through the hegemon. A multilateral institution is legitimate when there is a strong (ideational) consensus on the goals and values the institution promotes (Cottrell, 2009, 2016; Hurd, 2007). By participating in the institution, states do not only affirm these norms, but legitimate institutions may also have a 'deep impact' on them. By repeated

and habitual behavior reproducing the norm, actors are socialized into accepting it as a standard for 'good' behavior, which can, eventually, become part of their identity (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Panke & Petersohn, 2012, p. 722; Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). Legitimate institutions thus possess a normative 'stickiness' (see Crawford, 2002, p. 109; Keck & Sikkink, 2014, p. 35). When the hegemon withdrawals from an institution, those participants who have internalized its norms will perceive the hegemon's behavior as inappropriate. They will thus not follow the hegemon and abandon multilateral cooperation and might even publicly defend the institution and shame the hegemon for rejecting it (see Adler-Nissen, 2014; Risse et al., 1999; Squatrito, Lundgren, & Sommerer, 2019). Second, highly legitimate institutions will often be defended by third parties, such as civil society actors, who advocate their norms. They will not only shame the hegemon for withdrawing from the institution but also those states who consider following the hegemon's example. The reputational costs of withdrawing from an institution broadly perceived as legitimate might deter even those states who have not (yet) internalized underlying norms themselves. Finally, when member states delegated tasks to an international bureaucracy, the institution develops agency itself. Its staff will be its strongest supporter. The bureaucracy will fend off the legitimacy challenge posed by hegemonic withdrawal. It will speak up in the public and shame the hegemon for its choice to withdrawal from the institution (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2020).

Legitimacy beliefs vary considerably across multilateral institutions and different audiences (see Dingwerth, Witt, Lehnmann, Reichelt, & Weise, 2019; Tallberg, Bäckstrand, & Scholte, 2018b; Tallberg & Zürn, 2019a; Zaum, 2013). A prime example for a consensual norm in the post-war period are human rights, which constitute a key pillar of the current international order (Börzel & Zürn, 2021; Lake et al., 2021). Even though differences exist with regards to their substantive definition and the depth of their internalization across countries and their governments, the public commitment to human rights is ubiquitous among states. While human rights are at the core of democratic societies, also autocratic countries are keen to (at least rhetorically) commit to human rights. Moreover, strong civil society organizations uphold the principle of human rights (Risse et al., 1999, 2013). Hence, it will be more costly for remaining participants to follow the hegemon in abandoning an institution relating to human rights as compared to those, e.g., relating to economic issues. Overall, this leads me to expecct:

H_3: The higher the institutionalization of a multilateral institution, the more likely it is resilient after hegemonic withdrawal (institutionalization hypothesis).

H_4: Institutions enshrining human rights are more likely to be resilient after hegemonic withdrawal (institutional legitimacy hypothesis).

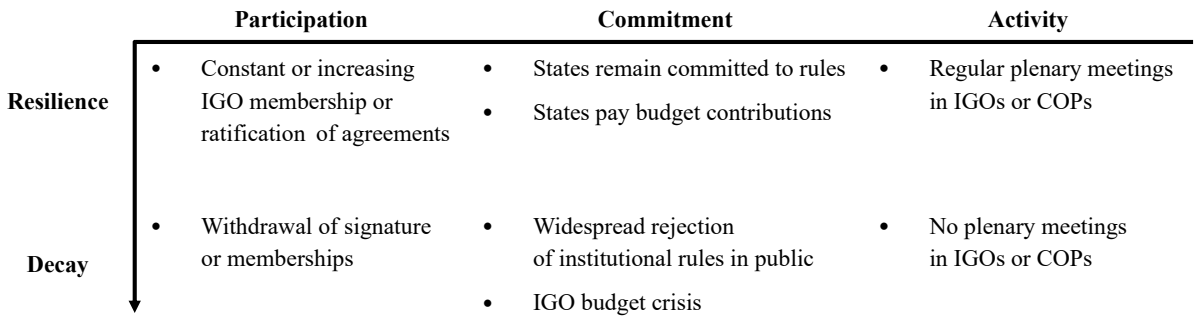
3 Research design

I compiled the *ExitUS Database* to test my hypotheses. It includes information on the withdrawal of the US from multilateral institutions from 1945 through 2020. I adopt a broad understanding of multilateral institutions that includes both agreements and IGOs by defining them as sets of rules meant to govern the behavior of at least three participating states (Martin & Simmons, 2013, 328f.). For the purpose of this paper, hegemonic withdrawal comprises both 'hard' cases where the hegemon terminates its formal participation as well as 'soft' instances of withdrawal where the hegemon remains a formal participant but effectively ends its commitment by not ratifying a signed agreement or completely cutting its financial contributions. I opted for the period after World War II since the US were the single most powerful state in the international system and with regards to multilateral cooperation in particular (Ikenberry, 2001, 2012b; Layne et al., 2018; Milewicz & Snidal, 2016, pp. 827–829). While this focus limits generalizability beyond US hegemony, it allows me to control for characteristics of the hegemon, such as being a liberal democracy, as well as the absence of great power warfare which could be confounding factors driving remaining states' choice to participate or abandon institutional cooperation (see e.g. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018, 2020). More practically, as data availability for this period is comparatively advantageous, I was able to collect information on hegemonic withdrawals in a more systematic and comparable manner than possible for any other period. Overall, my *ExitUS Database* comprises 115 cases of US withdrawal from multilateral institutions from 1945 through 2020.[6]

My *dependent variable* measures the occurrence of institutional resilience and decay after hegemonic withdrawal. For the purpose of this paper, I evaluate cooperation in multilateral institutions based on (1) the participation of states, (2) their compliance with basic institutional rules, and (3) their active engagement in regular activities, such as plenary meetings or conferences of parties (COPs). I consider institutions as resilient when participation, commitment, and activity remain constant or even increase after hegemonic withdrawal. An institution decays once cooperation decreases along one or more of these dimensions. Figure 2 shows the dimensions of cooperation in multilateral institutions along with the criteria for resilience and decay.

6 In Appendix Section A.1, I present the process of data collection in more detail and also discuss limitations of existing datasets on multilateral institutions.

Figure 2: Three dimensions of institutional cooperation and criteria for resilience and decay.



To operationalize institutional resilience and decay, I combined indicators for the three dimensions of cooperation. For each institution I assessed (1) participation based on the number of IGO members or ratifications of an agreement; (2) commitment based on states' contributions to an IGO's budget or states' public commitment to agreements; and (3) activity based on states' plenary meetings for IGOs and COPs for agreements.[7] As I am interested in the *relative* resilience or decay after hegemonic withdrawal (and not the absolute level of institutional cooperation), I used the status quo ante as a benchmark and compared the three indicators 10 years before and after hegemonic withdrawal.[8]

- **Resilience:** An institution is coded as resilient when institutional cooperation in *all* three dimensions remained stable after hegemonic withdrawal or even increased. I thus consider stability in an institution's participation, commitment, and activity individually necessary and jointly sufficient for institutional resilience. First, the number of IGO members or the ratification rate an agreement remained stable. Second, the remaining states demonstrated their commitment by filling the gap in an IGO's budget left by the US or by not questioning an agreement's validity in public. Third, IGO plenary meetings or COPs for agreements continued regularly.[9]
- **Decay:** An institution is coded as in decay when I observed a decline in at least one of the three dimensions of institutional cooperation.[10] In other words, I consider an indication of decay in one of the three dimensions sufficient for institution decay. First,

7 In Appendix Section A.2, I present for each indicator the coding rules as well as sources.

8 For instances of hegemonic withdrawal after 2009 as well as those institutions that were younger than 10 years at the time of US withdrawal, I relied on the available years.

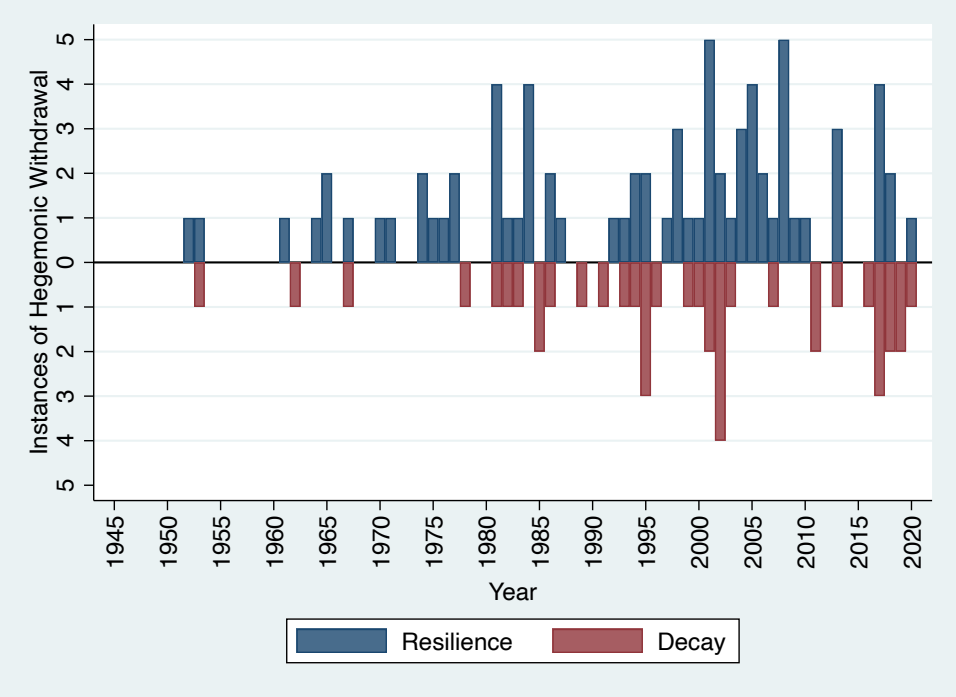
9 While I generally consider yearly meetings necessary for the activity of an organization, this must not be the case for agreements. If no COPs took place before, I thus did not consider an agreement's activity as decayed after hegemonic withdrawal.

10 In the exceptional case that an institution was terminated, I consider the institution in decay if it is not replaced by a functional equivalent by the remaining participants.

other states withdrew from an IGO or the rate of ratifications decreased. Second, other states do not close the funding gap in an IGO's budget left by the US or even cut funding themselves – or increasingly reject an agreement's rules in the public. Third, IGOs fail to hold plenary meetings or the average frequency of COPs decreases.

Figure 3 depicts the trajectories of multilateral institutions after hegemonic withdrawal over time. While 75 multilateral institutions (65%) are resilient after hegemonic withdrawal, 40 cases show indications of decay (35%). Resilience and decay vary across issue areas, such as security, economy, and human rights. Resilience and decay also vary within institution types: in 40 out of 50 instances of hegemonic withdrawal from IGOs (80%) and 36 out of 65 instances of hegemonic withdrawal from multilateral agreements (55%) the institution remained resilient. Finally, while hegemonic withdrawal was more frequent after than during the Cold War, the share of institutional resilience is equally distributed across both periods: 28 out of 40 (70%) during the Cold War and 48 out of 75 (64%) after the Cold War.

Figure 3. Resilience and decay after hegemonic withdrawal 1945-2020.



Note: own compilation based on ExitUS Database.

To understand why in some cases institutions remain resilient while other institutions decay, I run a logistic regression analysis using the resilience-decay dummy as dependent variable. I operationalized the *independent variables* of my theoretical model as follows:

- **Multilateral powers:** To determine whether potential alternative leaders are present in an institution at the time of hegemonic withdrawal, I draw on data provided by Milewicz and Snidal (2016) who define multilateral powers as those states who possess high capacities and are independent from the US. Their power index consists of ten variables reflecting three dimensions of power: military, economic, as well as social and human capital. For the purpose of this paper, a state qualifies as multilateral power when the power index assumes a value above 1.5 and trade independence from the US is higher than 0.8.[11] I opted for these thresholds as, for the recent years, mostly the G20 states meet this definition who Milewicz and Snidal (2016) regard as key multilateral powers. Accordingly, I used the number of G20 states participating in an institution as a proxy for the years after 2008, which are not covered by their data.
- **Relevance of the hegemon:** As existing indicators of overall power are unable to grasp the hegemon's issue-specific relevance, I qualitatively evaluated the importance of the US for each case. Based on the available sources such as the coverage by quality newspapers, think tank reports, and secondary literature, I assessed (1) whether continued cooperation was still beneficial given issue-specific capabilities of the US; and (2) whether the US (threatened to) actively undermine cooperation. If cooperation without the US was broadly portrayed as unbeneficial or the US undermined an institution from outside, I regard the US as relevant and having a negative effect on cooperation.
- **Institutionalization:** To assess institutionalization, I created an additive index. It counts whether an institution's rules are precise and obligatory, comprises an independent secretariat with a large bureaucracy, and whether the institution is tasked with monitoring, dispute settlement, and rule enforcement. As no single dataset comprised all institutions covered in my analysis, I complied information from different sources, including the Measurement of International Authority (MIA) dataset (Hooghe, Lenz, & Marks, 2019; Hooghe & Marks, 2015), data on IO's degree of independent decision-making power, central monitoring, and enforcement capacity compiled by Karreth and Tir (Karreth & Tir, 2013; Tir & Karreth, 2018), who build on Boehmer, Gartzke, and Nordstrom (2004), as well as on information provided by Reinsberg and Westerwinter (2019) about IGO's design, such as obligation, the independence of the bureaucracy, enforcement, dispute settlement, and monitoring competences. When an institution was not covered by these datasets, I manually coded this information based on the agreement or an IO's

[11] In the Appendix Section A.5, I discuss this choice and probe alternative indicators, such as mere capabilities or the ratio of multilateral powers participating in an institution (instead of their absolute number).

foundational treaty. I approximated an institution's precision by the length of an agreement or an IO's foundational treaty (>10 pages) and the autonomy of international bureaucracies by their size (>50) (see Debre & Dijkstra, 2020).[12]

- **Human rights:** To measure whether an institution (partly) relates to human rights, I drew on the coding of agreements and IGOs provided by my sources (e.g. Elsig, Milewicz, & Stürchler, 2011; IATP, 2005; Lupu, 2016; Milewicz & Snidal, 2016; von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019) and completed the information myself.

I also included several *control variables*, which I carefully selected due to the rather small number of observations. First, I accounted for the *preference divergence* among an institution's participants. Institutions where participating states' preferences converge might in an advantageous position to address the challenges of hegemonic withdrawal as compared to institutions where participating states' preferences diverge. I drew on data of Bailey, Strezhnev, and Voeten (2017) on state's voting in the UN General Assembly as a proxy for states' preferences and calculated the average deviation from the arithmetic mean.[13] Second, I controlled for whether the hegemon withdrew its commitment or terminated its formal participation in a multilateral institution as *soft and hard withdrawals* might differ in their severity (Daßler et al., 2019; Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2020; Kruck et al., 2020; see also, Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2019). I therefore included a dummy indicating whether withdrawal was hard or soft based on the above definition. Third, I account for the *exit period*, i.e., the number of years the hegemon abandoned an institution before it eventually resumed to cooperation as the duration of withdrawal might impact institutional resilience. As the coding of institutional resilience and decay is based on a ten-year period after hegemonic withdrawal (see above), the variable assumes values from 1 to 10.[14] Fourth, I included a dummy for the *Cold War* period. The rational was that the hegemonic position of the US for multilateral cooperation was less pronounced during the Cold War than since 1989, and the support for human rights might also differ between the two periods. Fifth, I included an institution's total *number of participants* at the time of hegemonic withdrawal as it might be correlated with, inter alia, the number of multilateral powers. The variable counts the number of IGO member states or states having ratified an agreement in the year of hegemonic withdrawal. Finally, as an institution's *age* might be correlated with the number of multilateral powers, and might yield

[12] I also probed in Appendix Section A.6 alternative indicators for institutionalization such as delegation, the size of the bureaucracy, and an institution's precision.

[13] For the two years 2019-2020 not covered by the dataset, I the used the values of 2018 as a proxy.

[14] As discussed above, the period of examination is shorter for instances of hegemonic withdrawal after 2010. This is also expressed in a shorter duration of withdrawal. In Appendix Section A.4, I also checked whether repeated withdrawal impacts the results.

potential socializing effects on participating states, I included a variable that counts the logged number of years between an institution's creation and hegemonic withdrawal.

4 Empirical Analysis

4.1 Results

To evaluate whether the four theorized independent variables affect the probability of institutional resilience, I employ a logistic regression. I test my hypotheses by running four main models (see Table 1). Model 1 includes the two independent variables related to alternative leaders, i.e., the number of multilateral powers participating in an institution at the time of hegemonic withdrawal (*alternative leader hypothesis*) as well as the issue-specific relevance of the hegemon (*hegemonic relevance hypothesis*). Model 2 comprises the two variables related to authoritative institutions, i.e., the degree of institutionalization (*institutionalization hypothesis*) and whether the institution relates to human rights (*legitimacy hypothesis*). Model 3 includes all four independent variables of theoretical interest and Model 4 also controls for the effect of preference divergence, the type of withdrawal, the duration of exit, whether the hegemon withdrew during the Cold War or afterwards, the number of participating states, as well as an institution's age at the time of hegemonic withdrawal.

The results corroborate my hypotheses as the four independent variables of theoretical interest are statistically significant at least at the 95% level in all four models. As expected, institutional resilience is more likely to occur as the number of multilateral powers participating in an institution at the time of hegemonic withdrawal increases (*alternative leader hypothesis*). Also corresponding to my theoretical expectations, *hegemonic relevance* decreases the likelihood of resilience (*hegemonic relevance hypothesis*). Further corroborating theoretical expectations, a higher degree of institutionalization is associated with a positive effect on institutional resilience (*institutionalization hypothesis*). Finally, an institution relating to human rights has a higher likelihood of resilience (*legitimacy hypothesis*). None of the control variables has a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable.

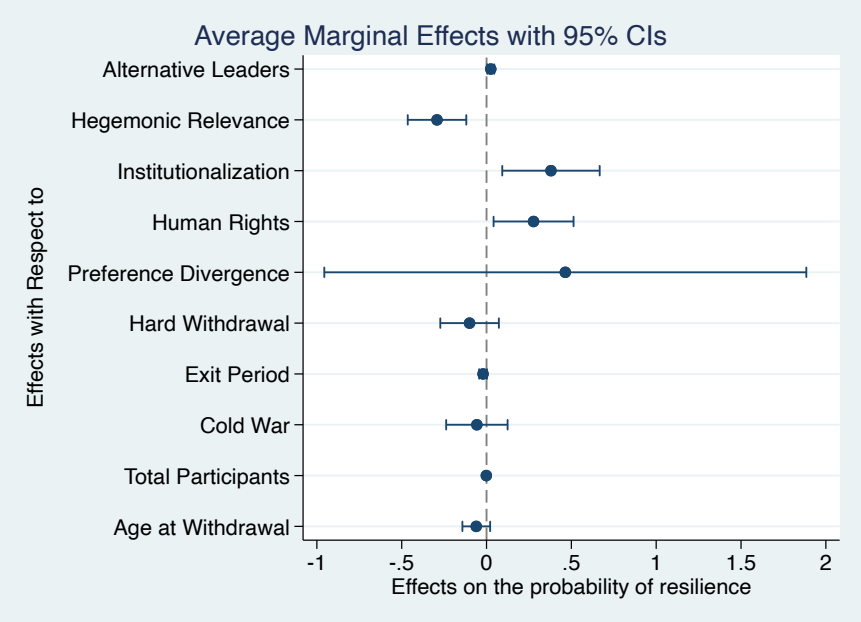
Table 1: Results of three models.

Dep. Var.: Resilience	(1) Alternative leaders	(2) Authoritative institutions	(3) Leaders & Institutions	(4) All controls
Alternative leaders				
Multilateral powers	0.16***		0.11*	0.18*
	(4.33)		(2.52)	(2.21)
Hegemonic relevance	-1.94**		-1.91**	-2.11**
	(-2.93)		(-2.74)	(-2.86)
Authoritative institutions				
Institutionalization		3.11***	1.91*	2.75*
		(3.84)	(1.91)	(2.36)
Human Rights		2.05*	1.72*	2.01*
		(2.57)	(2.03)	(2.14)
Controls				
Preference Divergence				3.36
				(0.64)
Hard Withdrawal				-0.72
				(-1.11)
Exit Period				-0.15
				(-1.67)
Cold War				-0.41
				(-0.61)
Total Participants				-0.01
				(-0.95)
Age				-0.44
				(1.40)
Constant	-0.56	-0.67*	-0.95*	0.84
	(-1.43)	(-1.98)	(-2.21)	(0.71)
AIC	118.0694	126.0768	113.7365	119.9100
BIC	126.3042	134.3116	127.4612	150.1042
Observations	115	115	115	115

Note: logistic regression estimates; z statistics in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

The independent variables of theoretical interest are not only statistically significant but also have a strong substantive effect on the dependent variable. Figure 4 presents *first difference estimates* for Model 4. These indicate the change in the predicted probability of institutional resilience given a one-unit change in the respective independent variable with all other variables being at their observed values. Institutionalization has the strongest effect. It increases the likelihood of resilience after hegemonic withdrawal by 37.97%. When the hegemon is relevant for institutional cooperation, this decreases the likelihood of resilience after hegemonic withdrawal by 29.19%. The human rights issue has a similarly strong, but positive effect on institutional resilience. When an institution relates to human rights, this increases the likelihood of its resilience after hegemonic withdrawal by 27.72%. The number of multilateral powers has the lowest probability as each multilateral power participating in an institution increases the probability of its resilience by 2.49%.

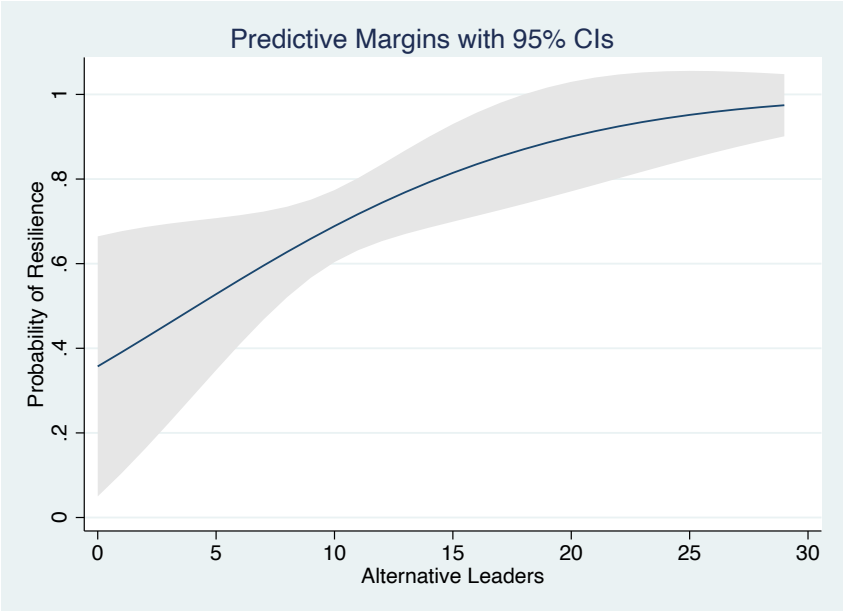
Figure 4: First difference estimates for Model 4.



Note: Discrete first differences computed from Model 4 (95% CIs) while holding all other variables at their observed values.

However, as the number of multilateral powers participating in an institution at the time of hegemonic withdrawal constitutes a semi-continuous variable, Figure 5 graphs the probability of resilience over its full range, that is associated with an increase in the probability of institutional resilience by 61.73%.

Figure 5: The effect of the number of multilateral powers on institutional resilience.



Note: Predicted probabilities computed from Model 4 (95% CIs) while holding all other variables at their observed values.

The results of the logistic regression analysis therefore corroborate my theoretical expectation that the presence of alternative leaders, the absence of the hegemon's issue-specific relevance, the institutionalization and human rights are related to a multilateral institution's resilience after hegemonic withdrawal. These significant relationships are also substantively relevant as changes in these independent variables are associated with substantial shifts in the likelihood of institutional resilience.

I also tested my results through several robustness checks. To begin with, I calculated Model 4 with *additional control variables*: earlier instances of hegemonic withdrawal in the same institution, the average democracy-level of an institution's participants, and their preference convergence with hegemon (see Appendix Section A.4). First, I included *routine* as the hegemon sometimes withdrew from the same institution multiple times or escalated exit from, e.g., a complete funding cut to membership termination. As repeated withdrawals might impact institutional resilience as participants could, for instance, develop a routine to withstand exit (Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2020), I included a dummy that indicates whether the hegemon exited the institution before. Second, I included the *average democracy score* of an institution's participants at the time of hegemonic withdrawal. While democracies generally expected to be more reliable cooperation partners, they also withdraw from multilateral institutions more frequently than autocracies (Daßler & Heinkelmann-Wild, 2021; von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019). Moreover, the support for human rights and the respective

audience costs for withdrawing from respective institutions created by domestic and transnational civil society might differ between autocracies and democracies. I calculated the average for the year of hegemonic withdrawal based on states' polity2 scores sourced from the polity4 dataset (Marshall, Jaggers, & Gurr, 2010), that range from a minimum score of -10 to a maximum score of 10, representing the highest level of state democracy. Finally, I included *preference convergence with the hegemon* among an institution's participants as states that strongly aligne with the hegemon might be more likely to join the hegemon in abandoning the institution. The results for the models including each of these additional control variable as well as all of them at the same time remain unaffected.

With regards to *operationalization*, I also probed different indicators for *multilateral powers* (see Appendix Section A.5). First, I used the power index (without independence) as indicator for the presence of multilateral powers at the time of hegemonic withdrawal. The results generally remain robust. Second, I checked whether the ratio of powerful states participating in an institution is a better indicator than their absolute number. As this alternative indicator fails to reach statistical significance, this only increases my confidence that the absolute number is the more suitable measure for multilateral powers. Furthermore, I calculated a model where I use US overall power, approximated by GDP, as an indicator for *hegemonic relevance* (see Appendix Section A.6). While the results remain stable and significant with regards to other three independent variables of theoretical interest, US overall power does not reach statistical significance. This underlines the necessity of a fine-grained, issue specific coding of hegemonic relevance. I also ran models with alternative indicators for *institutionalization* (see Appendix Section A.7): (1) whether states delegated any authority to a bureaucracy or not (see Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Koremenos et al., 2001; (2) whether this bureaucracy is large and thus possesses considerable agency (see Bernholz, 2009; Debre & Dijkstra, 2019; Gray, 2018); and (3) whether the institution is precise or not (see Abbott & Snidal, 2000; Koremenos et al., 2001). While the effect of the other three independent variables of theoretical interest remains significant, all alternative indicators for institutionalization fail to reach statistical significance. This underlines the need of an index that combines different indicators for institutional capacities.

The results also remain robust when accounting for *fixed effects* of the different types of multilateral institutions included in the sample (see Appendix Section A.8). As the *ExitUS Database* comprises arguably diverse types of multilateral institutions, ranging from stand-alone IOs and UN agencies and funds over multilateral agreements and protocols, I ran models that comprised fixed effects for these institutional types by including three dummies that

indicate (1) whether an institution is an IO or agreement, (2) whether it is an UN emanation or not, and (3) whether it is a protocol or not.[15] The results for the models including each of these dummies as well as all of them at the same time remain unaffected. Finally, I also ran two models with *standard errors clustered on institutions as well years* to account for respective dependencies (see Appendix Section A.9). Again, the results remain unchanged.

4.2 Discussion

As this paper is a snapshot of work in progress, several caveats remain: I still have to check the robustness of the model for different components and thresholds of the dependent variable, i.e., institutional resilience and decay. Moreover, I plan to employ matching or a selection model to address potential selection effects in case that a multilateral institution's characteristics that affect its resilience are correlated with the drivers of hegemonic withdrawal in the first place (see, e.g., Daßler & Heinkelmann-Wild, 2021; von Borzyskowski & Vabulas, 2019).

This paper also yields implications for *future research*. While I identified cross-case correlation between the four suggested independent variables and institutional resilience, causality has to be established on the within-case level. Future studies should thus employ process tracing to probe the theorized causal mechanisms in detailed case studies (see Heinkelmann-Wild, 2020). Future research might also extend this paper's perspective on US hegemony by probing whether the theoretical framework travels to earlier periods dominated by other hegemons, such as Great Britain, or to regional hegemons in regional institutions (see Heinkelmann-Wild, 2021).

Finally, while my analysis focused on multilateral institutions abandoned by the hegemon, its results yield general implications for the study of international institutions' vitality. After all, the challenges posed by hegemonic withdrawal render my sample a rather hard case for institutional resilience. Theoretically, my findings point to the importance of multilateral powers. While scholarship so far focused on institutionalization and bureaucratic agency (Bernholz, 2009; Debre & Dijkstra, 2019; Gray, 2018; Heinkelmann-Wild & Jankauskas, 2020) as well as exogenous factors (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018, 2020), the agency of powerful states might plausibly be of general importance for institutional vitality. Conceptually, this paper suggested a definition of institutional resilience and decay that allows to systematically capture and map empirical variation of institutional vitality. While existing scholarship mostly

15 I did not compute models for the subsamples of each type of institution as this would have decreased the respective number of observations considerably.

embraces a 'life-death' dichotomy (but see Gray, 2018) and studies either institutions (Deitelhoff & Zimmermann, 2019; Panke & Petersohn, 2012, 2016; Price, 2004, 2006), or IGOs (Debre & Dijkstra, 2019; Dijkstra, 2019; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018, 2020; Gray, 2018), my conceptualization allows for a comprehensive perspective on different degrees of vitality in different types of institutions.

5 Conclusion

In this paper, I theoretically developed and empirically tested a framework to account for the variation of resilience and decay after hegemonic withdrawal from multilateral institutions. I started from the assumption that hegemonic withdrawal poses a twofold challenge for multilateral cooperation by depriving the institution of material capacities and questioning its legitimacy. I then suggested that institutional resilience after hegemonic withdrawal depends on alternative leaders and authoritative institutions. First, multilateral cooperation is more likely to be resilient when remaining states possess significant soft and hard power and are willing to take over leadership and (collectively) address the twofold challenge of hegemonic withdrawal. Second, multilateral cooperation is also more likely to be resilient when institutions themselves are highly capable or legitimate as states who value its assets or believe in its appropriateness will maintain it. The analysis of institutional resilience and decay after the withdrawal of the US from 1945 through 2020 corroborated to my theoretical expectations. First, the presence of powerful states and the absence of continued relevance of the hegemon impact an institution's resilience after hegemonic withdrawal. Moreover, high institutionalization and institutions relating to human rights are associated with institutional resilience after hegemonic exit.

Where does this leave us with regards to the future of the international institutional order? On the one hand, the results give reason for less pessimism than proponents of the realist camp who claim from a hegemonic stability perspective that multilateral cooperation is doomed in the absence of a hegemon (Layne, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019a). In contrast to realist approaches, my findings suggest that the diffusion of power is not a bad thing per se for the international order, but powerful alternative leaders have a positive effect on institutional resilience. In fact, institutional decay is more likely when the hegemon retained superior issue-specific power. On the other hand, my results also give reason to question the liberal optimism that many institutionalists share on the future of the institutional order (Ikenberry, 2015, 2018a, 2018b, 2019). While those institutions that enjoy high capacities and legitimacy are more likely to be

resilient, the trajectory of multilateral institutions is also affected by the hegemon's behavior towards the institution after exit as well as alternative leaders.

However, alternative leaders might not always favor the (liberal) substance of institutions. When alternative leaders leave the substantive values of multilateral institutions unaltered, we might indeed witness a "transition within the order" (Ikenberry, 2012b, 2018b). For instance, after the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement on climate change as well as the WHO, China and European powers took over collective leadership and reaffirmed their commitment to these institutions. However, potential alternative leaders in the West currently undergo an illiberal backlash and the liberal outlook of rising powers, first and foremost China, is also anything but certain. In consequence, if they even step in at all, multilateral cooperation might nevertheless be hampered by increasing preference divergence – or be converted to illiberal purposes. For instance, while the EU filled earlier funding gaps in the UNFPA, after the US withdrawal under the Trump Administration, the liberal consensus was weakened due to conservative, Eastern European member states. And in the UN Human Rights Council, China strives for filling the vacuum after US withdrawal and redefining the very meaning of universal human rights. Thus, under less propitious conditions, a "transition of the order" (Gilpin, 1981) away from liberal norms and multilateral procedures to a different, less liberal kind of international order is a real possibility.

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