Joint Bodies in Preferential Trade Agreements: Why Are Some Stronger Than Others?

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ABSTRACT

Many international agreements include joint bodies (JBs) that provide a stable institutional framework for government-to-government interactions during agreement implementation. Focusing on preferential trade agreements (PTAs), we find that 95 percent of all PTAs set up such JBs. Still, far from being uniform, these JBs vary significantly in their strength. To explain this variation, we argue that democracies establish stronger JBs due to higher levels of trust between democracies and the need to forge broader domestic coalitions. This relationship breaks down where PTAs bring together more states, thus increasing the functional case for stronger JBs. It also breaks down in asymmetric negotiations, as powerful states are less concerned with implementation. Drawing on an original dataset of 665 PTAs signed between 1948 and 2020, we find robust support for our argument. The findings speak to research on international cooperation, the design of international institutions, PTAs, and the political economy of trade.

Keywords: International cooperation; design of international institutions; domestic political economy; preferential trade agreements; joint bodies.

Introduction

The implementation of preferential trade agreements (PTAs) typically requires continuous governmental surveillance and action. When states conclude PTAs, they therefore nearly always include institutional provisions that facilitate periodic interactions among governments during implementation to sustain long-term cooperation. Specifically, they create what we term "joint bodies" (JBs). These JBs have varying designations such as "joint committee" or "free trade commission," but they always have been – and still are – an essential feature of PTAs. In one of the first PTAs signed after World War II, for example, Nicaragua and El Salvador included a *Comisión Mixta* meeting twice a year to study means of increasing their bilateral trade. Fast forward more than 50 years and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the European Union (EU) and Canada signed in 2016 set up not only a joint committee but numerous specialized (joint) sub-committees, dealing with issues as varied as trade in agriculture, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, services and investment, or sustainable development.

While the overwhelming majority of PTAs set up some form of JB for agreement implementation, we do find significant variation in their design, with some being much stronger than others. Illustratively, some meet regularly at different levels of seniority and with the possibility to take binding decisions. Among them are the JBs foreseen in PTAs between Korea and Peru (2011) and Canada and Colombia (2008). The Joint Commission created by the former agreement, for example, consists of the respective trade ministers and has the right to "adopt any amendments or modifications" to the agreement (Korea and Peru 2011: Art. 22.1). Others meet only rarely, generally at the level of low-ranking officials, and only with the possibility to make recommendations. The JB created by the Kazakhstan–Russia PTA (1992) is an example for such a weak institution. The puzzle tackled by our paper therefore is: what explains this variation in JB strength across PTAs?

In responding to this question, we focus on the distinction between democracies and autocracies and thus place regime type at the core of our argument. This is in line with Allee and Elsig's conclusion that, in general, "domestic politics has been underemphasized as an explanation for PTA design" (2017:541). We expect democracies to form stronger JBs in PTAs for two reasons. First, democracies enjoy higher levels of trust with each other, which makes them less concerned about constraining their sovereignty and enables them to gain flexibility during implementation. Second, democracies need to forge broader domestic coalitions to stay in power. This means that they enter negotiations with a more complex set of offensive and defensive interests that are harder to settle during the initial negotiation phase and, on top, these interests are more susceptible to change over time. For all these reasons, strong JBs promise greater benefits to democracies than autocracies.

The relationship between regime type and stronger JBs is moderated by two countervailing forces. First, the need for strong JBs increases with the number of parties to a PTA. Since in these cases forging decisions during implementation will be increasingly difficult, the functional argument for stronger JBs and concomitant reduction in transaction costs becomes more prevalent, thereby vitiating the effect of regime type. Second, power matters also for the creation of JBs. Where one PTA party is considerably bigger than the other, it will find it easier to already accommodate most of its preferences during the initial negotiations and express little interest in tying up administrative resources in the management of a PTA from which mainly the other side benefits. In these cases, therefore, we also expect the effect of regime type to be greatly mitigated.

We test our expectations on an original dataset of 665 PTAs concluded between 1948 and 2020. Our data collection is based on the recently released version 2.0 of the Design of Trade Agreements (DESTA) database, which was originally introduced by Dür, Baccini, and Elsig (2014). Going beyond this database, we have manually coded seven indicators of JB

strength, which enables us to systematically discern differences in the institutional provisions of PTAs for the first time. Our findings are highly robust and strongly support our argument.

Our paper makes several contributions to scholarly research on PTAs and international institutions, more generally. For one, the institutional provisions of PTAs have been almost entirely overlooked thus far by the large literature on PTA design. The existing literature spans design choices as varied as depth (Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse 2008; Dür et al. 2014), dispute settlement mechanisms (Jo and Namgung 2012; Allee and Elsig 2016), intellectual property rights (Mödlhamer 2020), digital trade provisions (Burri and Polanco 2020), and non-trade issues such as human rights (Spilker and Böhmelt 2013; Milewicz, Hollway, Peacock, and Snidal 2016), labor standards (Lechner 2016; Postnikov 2018), environmental protection (Morin, Dür, and Lechner 2018; Postnikov and Bastiaens 2020) or even template effects across PTAs (Allee and Elsig 2019). Given the importance of agreement implementation, which JBs facilitate, our paper fills a major lacuna in the literature on PTA design.

Second, our original conceptualization of JB strength, which brings together six indicators across three dimensions, is an addition to the broader literature on the design of international institutions (Abbott, Keohane, Moravcsik, Slaughter, and Snidal 2000; Vabulas and Snidal 2013; Koremenos 2016). This literature has put forward various conceptualization of institutional design, but a generic measure of the strength of institutional provisions in international agreements has so far been missing. This is an important omission as the strength of JBs can also say something about the extent to which functional or other concerns drive the design of international institutions. In developing this conceptualization, we often make analogies to Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs), which have attracted widespread scholarly attention (Volgy, Fausett, Grant, and Rodgers 2008; Hooghe and Marks 2015; Pevehouse, Nordstrom, McManus, and Jamison 2019). While JBs generally neither have

independent permanent staff nor distinct headquarters, we submit that they occupy a middle category between IGOs and "one-shot" agreements (Krasner 1982:187) that foresee no intergovernmental interactions to coordinate state action after ratification. Given that JBs are close affiliates of IGOs, insights from this vast literature can be transferred to JBs inasmuch as they are not predicated on the existence of permanent (supranational) secretariats. In return, research on JBs also promises to further our understanding of the creation and function of IGOs.

Finally, our paper speaks to an increasing number of contributions that put regime type at the center of their theoretical explanations for international phenomena as varied as democratic peace (Russett 1993; Dixon 1994), trade liberalization (Mansfield, Milner, and Rosendorff 2002; Copelovitch and Ohls 2012), the transparency of IGOs (Grigorescu 2015; Tallberg, Sommerer, and Squatrito 2016), accession to human rights institutions (Simmons 2009; Hafner-Burton, Mansfield, and Pevehouse 2015), the attraction of foreign direct investment (Jensen 2003) or peacekeeping operations (Duursma and Gledhill 2019). In contrast to most these studies, however, we explicitly – if informally – model the interaction between a domestic-level variable such as regime type with international-level variables such as membership size and power (for an exception, see Bättig and Bernauer 2009). Our contribution therefore suggests important scope conditions under which regime type matters.

Beyond making these contributions to scholarly debates, a newly emerging research agenda centered around JBs promises to have much broader, real-world relevance. First, the fact that JBs are regularly empowered to take binding decisions raises important questions about their legitimacy. While PTAs are ratified in line with each state's constitutional procedures, JB decisions can take effect without involving anybody outside the circle of representatives present at JB meetings. Even if these decisions are published, which is not always the case, the process by which they come about is rarely transparent. Second, JBs in

PTAs – but also in other types of international agreements – can raise the efficiency of international (trade) governance. Particularly at a time where global (trade) institutions are under attack from the forces of deglobalization, JBs could preserve an important residual capacity for states to coordinate actions and conduct negotiations at reduced transaction costs. We expand on these themes in the conclusion.

I. Conceptualization and measurement of JB strength

Given that JBs have not received focused attention in the literature before, we begin by fitting them into the existing spectrum of international institutions. We define JBs as international institutions set up through formal written agreement between at least two states that pursue specified objectives through periodic intergovernmental interactions in a, at least weakly, institutionalized framework. This definition excludes spontaneous exchanges of information or meetings limited to conflict (e.g., dispute settlement procedures or, more broadly, meetings "in case of conflict"). We also require a minimal degree of a stable institutional framework indicated by a distinctive designation such as "joint committee", "joint commission", "joint coordination group", "joint follow-up group" or the like. While "consultations" can also lead to periodic interactions, we exclude them because designations point to at least weakly institutionalized interactions and consultations per se are "so general that one cannot meaningfully assess compliance" (Abbott et al. 2000:414). Finally, we only include JBs institutionalizing government-to-government interactions and not, for example, interactions among parliamentarians (Rocabert, Schimmelfennig, Crasnic, and Winzen 2019), social partners, multinational enterprises, independent experts or NGOs (Tallberg, Sommerer, Squatrito, and Jönsson 2014; Westerwinter 2019).

How can the strength of JBs be conceptualized? We distinguish three dimensions: degree of institutionalization, delegation of authority, and frequency of interactions. The

degree of institutionalization can be taken as an indication of the weight and rate of JB actions. Delegation of authority highlights that JBs can also possess hard powers such as amending agreements or setting up further international institutional structures. The frequency of interactions is a softer, yet not less consequential, dimension of JB strength. Through the identification of problems, recommendation of appropriate actions, and socialization effects from regular interactions among national officials, JBs promise to shape international relations beyond a narrow perspective on (binding) decisions. Given our focus on regime type in our explanation of JB strength, we also include some *ad hoc* observations on why we would expect these indicators to capture differences between democracies and autocracies.

Degree of institutionalization

Our first indicator of institutionalization is the *level of meetings*. Distinguishing between heads of states or governments (HOGS) and ministers, Haftel and Thompson (2006:258–9) point out two implications of meeting levels. First, higher-level representatives will translate into fewer interactions since meetings are harder to schedule. This results in fewer opportunities to take decisions and shape international cooperation. Second, lower-level officials more often develop a sense of community with representatives from other states and are thus more compromising. This helps to transcend narrow state interests and facilitates cooperation. Why then are we taking higher levels as an indication of stronger JBs? We argue that ministers can provide "political guidance" (Gilpin 2001:223) and take more far-reaching decisions than mere technical experts. Moreover, lower levels will be generally included in the preparation of decisions notwithstanding the highest level at which they are formally taken at the end. We thus interpret higher levels as raising a JB's profile and allowing it to pursue a more ambitious agenda. Moreover, we measure the frequency of interactions separately below.

The second indicator of the degree of institutionalization is whether JBs have *rules of procedure* institutionalizing interstate bargaining (Keohane, Moravcsik, and Slaughter 2000:460). Rules of procedure have a profound impact on decision-making by structuring "the choices and information available to its members" (Hall and Taylor 1996:943) and "dynamics of diplomatic encounter" (Coleman 2013:168). International legal scholars also point out that they can become an important source of institutional evolution and adaptation in IGOs since they are easier to modify than constitutional-level rules (Peters 2016:39; see also Hawkins and Jacoby 2006:223). Rules of procedure spell out key aspects of decision making, such as how the agenda is established, whether decisions can also be taken by "written procedure" (i.e. in-between meetings), or regulates the exchange of confidential information that is not publicly available and should not be shared with unauthorized third parties (Berridge and Lloyd 2012:329). All of this serves to increase institutionalization, which makes JBs stronger and reduces transaction costs compared to forms of cooperation where the elements stipulated in rules of procedures need to be negotiated ad hoc.

Delegation of authority

Delegation is another central dimension of international institutions (e.g., Haftel and Thompson 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2015).[1] Delegation refers to the conditional grant of authority from states as principals to international institutions as agents (Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, and Tierney 2006). The authority is usually delegated to permanent secretariats with supranational officials, which JBs do not have. Yet, there are two perspectives why delegation still occurs. First, if we broaden the perspective to the domestic level, PTAs often generate contestation between the executive and the legislative branches of government, where

[1] Another major dimension is pooling, which focuses on the voting rule and surrender of the national veto by moving from unanimity to majoritarianism (Keohane and Hoffmann 1991:7; Moravcsik 1998:67). JBs do not witness pooling following this definition because decisions are generally taken by consensus.

legislatures will want to retain "as much control as possible" (Allee and Elsig 2017:544) over implementation. JBs delegate authority from the legislative to the executive branch when authorized to take actions without involving lawmakers again. Second, delegation also takes place within branches. JBs empower bureaucratic actors as "proximate" principals within the national foreign policy machinery that can exploit information asymmetries and enjoy "substantial autonomy" from ministers (Elsig 2011:500; see also Koremenos 2016:265).[2] Haftel and Thompson (2006:259) even conceive of ministers as agents of heads of states.

In the literature on national political systems, delegation is often limited to transfers of authority enabling agents to move policies away from the status quo (Epstein and O'Halloran 1999:275–6; Franchino 2007). This threshold is usually too demanding in IR. Therefore, scholars accept more limited transfers of authority as delegation such as issuing recommendations or even just providing a forum for negotiations (Abbott et al. 2000:416–7; Haftel and Thompson 2006:260–1). JBs fit squarely into this broader debate on international institutions, but we set the bar higher than merely providing a forum or issuing recommendations because all JBs reach this watermark. Instead, we suggest two indicators. First, whether a JB can take a *decision* in at least one instance. Second, whether JBs are empowered to set up specialized *sub-bodies* to help it fulfil its tasks. This enables JBs to autonomously increase the institutional foundations undergirding their decision-making capacities and regulate implementation in increasingly specific areas.

Frequency of interactions

Another, more subtle effect of JBs that is largely independent of the degree of institutionalization and authority formally delegated emanates from regular interactions

[2] Elsig's argument is particularly apt for our purposes because, as he notes, proximate principals are most relevant in member-driven IGOs, which JBs are given the general absence of supranational secretariats.

between official government representatives. Wallace and Singer (1970:246) saw in regular meetings "one of the most crucial innovations" brought about by IGOs. Vabulas and Snidal (2013:199) similarly underline that "[r]ecurrent face-to-face meetings … foster inter-personal familiarity, trust, and mutual confidence, which might be particularly important in subsequent crisis situations or uncharted issue areas." In the literature on intergovernmental networks, Keohane and Nye (1974:42) underline the importance of "direct bureaucratic contacts among governmental sub-units" for policy coordination and coalition building in world politics.

From a sociological institutionalist perspective, JBs are sites of socialization that facilitate social learning and norm convergence that facilitate the emergences of a "community" of states (Adler and Barnett 1998:31). Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis regards equal status of group members, common goals, intragroup cooperation, and support of authorities or law as necessary conditions for socialization (see also Forsyth 2018:467). All these conditions are nearly ideally provided for by JBs. Whether effects accrue through a rational or constructivist logic, intergovernmental contacts in JBs promises to be a key mechanism through which they impact international relations. We, therefore, first include the *frequency* of meetings of JBs. Second, we include whether they are *unilaterally convenable.* Since this does not make other parties a veto player for additional meetings, their rate can only go up.

II. Theoretical argument

In this section, we develop an original argument explaining JB strength. Given that PTAs need to be ratified on the national level and garner considerable public attention, domestic politics is an important determinant of PTA design (see, for example, Allee and Elsig 2017; Baccini, Dür, and Elsig 2015; Lechner 2016; for the theoretical foundation of much of this literature, see Grossman and Helpman 1994; Schattschneider 1935). In our theoretical argument, we link a domestic-level variable (regime type) with two international-level

variables: membership size and power. In short, we argue that while democracies are more likely to set up stronger JBs than autocracies, higher transaction costs associated with bigger membership size will moderate this effect. Similarly, power asymmetries moderate the impact of regime type on JB strength.

Regime type and JB strength

Our argument builds on the assumption that stronger JBs have benefits, but also costs for governments. This also explains why we empirically witness variation in JB design and not all governments simply include strong JBs in every PTA. In this section, we systematically survey the main benefits and costs associated with stronger JBs. In turn, we will highlight how the cost-benefit balance is skewed in favor of stronger JBs in democracies when compared to autocracies.

BENEFITS OF STRONGER JBS

To us, two benefits of stronger JBs stand out. Roughly, the two benefits correspond to the international and domestic level of politics. While the two benefits partially overlap, we believe that they capture largely independent implications of JBs that deserve to be singled out in the analysis. First, and on the international level, stronger JBs allow governments to leave certain issues unresolved in the initial negotiating phase. All international agreements are incomplete and drafting a contract accounting for every contingency would take indefinitely or even prove impossible.[3] To reduce negotiating costs, states can push contentious issues into implementation and conclude agreements with issues only partially resolved. This also allows governments to make ex-post adjustments to the terms drafted and

[3] This is because one source for incomplete agreements is the inability to foresee exogenous shocks (e.g., the outbreak of a deadly pandemic shutting down global trade flows for some time). This means that some light institutional framework for continued interactions should always be preferred, which could partly explain the high prevalence of JBs in PTAs. Anyway, since the ability to foretell the future is not predicated on regime type, we exclude this aspect from the discussion.

recalibrate the payoff each party receives to make cooperation sustainable in the longer term (Koremenos 2016:239). Stronger JBs promise better implementation of such incomplete or partial agreements by allowing governments to monitor compliance, voice legitimate grievances, request additional information, or demand more stringent affirmative action.

Second, and on a domestic level, the "political demands of domestic groups will be formed in the expectation of *implementation* of agreements" (Jo and Namgung 2012:1046; emphasis ours). Given the focus on trade liberalization, all (potential) exporters into one of the markets of the other PTA parties will have a vested interest in its faithful implementation. These groups will demand to crack open markets to which they have been promised effective access through the PTA to gain an advantage over (or keep a level playing field with) competitors in other countries and expand (or recapture) their global market share (Manger 2009; Dür 2010). At the same time, import-competing firms not benefitting from the expansion of global value chains (Baccini, Pinto, and Weymouth 2017; Baccini, Dür, and Elsig 2018) will press governments to keep protectionism as high as possible, for example by invoking flexibility provisions that allow for temporal deviations of commitments without risking a breakdown of longer-term cooperation (Baccini et al. 2015:766). Moreover, businesses make longer-term investment decisions conditional on the anticipated terms of third-country access and foreign competition in the domestic market, which activates domestic groups during implementation (Baccini and Dür 2012:61; Mansfield and Reinhardt 2008). Governments benefit from strong JBs by being able to respond to these domestic groups and maintaining a steady flow of material and/or informational resources through "ex post lobbying" (Maggi and Rodríguez-Clare 2007; see also De Bièvre and Dür 2005:1375).

COSTS OF STRONGER JBS

There are two primary costs to strong JBs that can be loosely viewed as the flipside of the benefits just outlined. First, and again playing out more on an international level, JBs allowing

governments to reciprocally monitor each other's compliance is a double-edged sword. It not only constrains the other PTA party, but also a government's own future policies (Hollyer and Rosendorff 2012:750). As has been foreshadowed in the discussions of the benefits of JBs, exceptionally a JB may also allow governments to interpret treaty provisions more flexibly than may have been initially intended, for example when states chart out a mutually acceptable deviation from PTA obligations arising from unforeseen exogeneous shocks. But, under normal circumstances, JBs will focus on the faithful implementation of agreement objectives and each side will insist that the respective other side keeps its promises and follows through on the legal obligations it incurred by signing the PTA. The stronger the JB, the stronger a state's policy scope will be curtailed, ceteris paribus.[4]

Second, at the domestic level the fact that JBs open up multiple avenues for agreement implementation decrease a government's ability to lock-in policies at the time of ratifying the PTA. Many of those policies may be reflected in the PTA itself and future governments could formally withdraw to become unbound from the legal obligation to implement its provisions in good faith. But there is a lower threshold to reach largely the same goal by refusing to negotiate – or negotiate exceptionally hard – and effectively blocking decisions in JBs, which generally require consensus among all PTA parties to take decisions. While this will also mean restricted access to the markets of the other PTA parties, this may be an acceptable price to pay for governments relying on protectionist domestic groups for their own political survival (Maggi and Rodriguez-Clare 1998). More importantly, strong JBs from this perspective increase uncertainty and make it harder for businesses to plan ahead for long-term investment decisions.

[4] One may argue that this effect arises from signing the PTA alone and does not depend on JBs. However, in the absence of stringent monitoring provisions, it will be easier to find ways around PTA obligations. Moreover, to the extent that JBs negotiate new elements into a PTA or specify existing ones, the available scope of policy action can decrease beyond what was originally included in the PTA.

DEMOCRACIES VS. AUTOCRACIES

The discussion so far shows that JBs produce both benefits and costs for the member states of an agreement. Since JBs only become active at the implementation stage of an agreement, the precise balance between benefits and costs only emerges after the agreement is signed. Still, member states will have to weigh the expected costs and benefits of JBs at the time of concluding the PTA. In the following, we highlight how this expected balance is conditional on regime type. For this purpose, we focus on two fundamental distinctions between democracies and autocracies: higher levels of trust among democracies and larger winning coalitions in democracies.

First, democracies enjoy higher levels of trust with each other because of shared democratic norms of transparency, the rule of law, and the inclusion of affected stakeholders, which contrasts starkly with decision-making in autocracies. That democracies trust each other more than a democracy trusts an autocracy, or two autocracies trust each other, and that this matters for their behavior, has already been noted in much earlier research. For example, Martin (2000:3) argues that shared norms allow democracies to trust each other's commitments and achieve "more stable and deeper patterns of international cooperation". These norms, in turn, also inform how democracies design international institutions such as IGOs when acting together (Grigorescu 2015; Tallberg et al. 2016). Research on the democratic peace, moreover, notes that democracies operate under norms of compromise and cooperation that avoid military showdowns, whereas autocracies "live in an atmosphere of mistrust and fear" (Maoz and Russett 1993:625). Finally, with respect to international institutions, autocracies are not "more likely to join IGOs with each other than with democracies" (Russett, Oneal, and Davis 1998:459).

Trust also matters greatly for the expected balance of costs and benefits of JBs. Greater trust makes it easier for states to mutually accept greater constraints on their policies. Stronger JBs facilitate monitoring of one's own policies by the other state, which will be more

acceptable if one trusts the other state and does not fear that it abuses this tool. For example, if autocracies can call meetings unilaterally, democracies may fear that they serve "political stunts" more than substantive discussions. Democracies will also generally not be interested in high-level meetings with autocracies. More fundamentally, democracies may not even trust information autocracies provide through JBs, thereby ultimately defeating their primary purpose and inhibiting their ability to take decisions. As a result, the lower the trust between two states, the less inclined they will be to delegate tasks to JBs. This is in line with some earlier research that found that trust "rather than distrust leads states to create international institutions" (Rathbun 2011:5).

Second, democracies and autocracies differ in the size of the coalition necessary to sustain a government's grip on power. In fact, political regimes can be distinguished based on the size of the winning coalition, which is larger in democracies than autocracies, with the latter relying on a more clearly circumscribed basis of support for their political survival (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith, Morrow, and Siverson 2003). This means that democracies enter negotiations with a more complex set of offensive and defensive interests that will be harder to reconcile. This makes negotiations more difficult, particularly if the other party is also a democracy with its own need to balance a broad set of competing demands. In order to conclude such PTAs and keep negotiating costs within reasonable bounds, democratic governments face greater incentives to push some contentious issues into the implementation phase. In these situations, strong JBs promise to keep transaction costs low(er) during the continuous negotiations that will need to take place after the PTA has been ratified. If the other PTA party is an autocracy, the preference constellation of at least one party will be considerably less complex and finding a stable equilibrium of mutual concessions during the actual negotiation phase will be more likely, which in turn lowers the need for strong JBs during implementation.

Moreover, in democracies policy-making is divided among domestic groups that are susceptible to change over time (Martin 1992:782). The composition of the winning coalition is thus more fluid and democratic governments rely on the ability to "build new coalitions" for their long-term survival (Milner and Kubota 2005:115). More importantly, these dynamic changes are largely beyond the control of democratic governments and it is not in their own long-term interest to render themselves incapable of responding to shifting policy demands, even if (temporarily) ceding control to an opposing political force. Strong JBs give democratic governments the chance to re-calibrate PTAs and maximize, within the limits set by the PTA itself, benefits for those groups on whose support they primarily rely for their hold on power. Autocracies, by contrast, have no electoral incentive to accommodate different domestic groups during implementation but rely on a stable basis of political support. The overriding concern in autocracies, therefore, is to cater to these privileged groups and lock-in their dominant position in domestic politics.

In short, both because of trust and larger and more fluid winning coalitions, we expect democracies to derive greater benefits and lower costs from strong JBs when signing agreements with other democracies. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H_1: PTAs among democracies have stronger JBs.

Membership size and JB strength

We expect the effect of regime type on JB strength to be conditional on membership size due to a greater functional need to lower transaction costs in agreements with many members. Transactions costs include the *ex-ante* costs of negotiating and drafting agreements that are as self-enforcing as possible. Still, there will always be *ex-post* costs stemming from upholding governance structures and the continuous negotiation to recalibrate future misalignments.

Moreover, while these two types of costs occur sequentially, they both have to be addressed at the time of drafting the initial agreement (Williamson 1985:20–1). An increased membership translates into higher transaction costs in two ways. First, the greater number of states increases the costs of negotiating and drafting agreements since every additional party brings its own sets of competing interests to the table that need to be accommodated in the final agreement. Second, international cooperation among a greater number of states is difficult to sustain if states have incentives to defect, which is typically the case for PTAs where states are tempted to freeride on the implementation of other states while maintaining trade barriers themselves.

To overcome the higher transaction costs from expanded membership, states set up international institutions (Abbott and Snidal 2004:58; Mansfield and Pevehouse 2013:594; Koremenos 2016:53, 272). Specifically, JBs help states lower transaction costs along both these lines. As has been argued above, stronger JBs allow states to push controversial issues into the implementation phase, which helps them drive down negotiating costs and unlock the benefits from PTAs earlier. Moreover, during implementation itself stronger JBs lower transaction costs by ensuring a steady flow of information through regular interactions which facilitates monitoring, a structured decision-making process towards mutually agreed objectives, and removing the need for negotiated compromises to be ratified domestically. While these benefits also accrue in a bilateral setting, they are particularly valuable when more than two parties are involved.

It follows that even plurilateral agreements including autocracies require strong JBs to overcome higher transaction costs. Democracies will still be hesitant to establish strong JBs with autocracies, but the desire for efficient agreement implementation will put limits on the extent to which democratic governments can follow through on this instinct. Put differently, we expect weak JBs especially in bilateral agreements that contain at least one autocracy. Formulated as a hypothesis:

H_2: The positive impact of democracy on the strength of JBs in PTAs only exists for agreements with few member states.

Power asymmetries and JB strength

While preferences for international negotiations will be formed at the domestic level, the extent to which these preferences can be translated into outcomes is determined by the balance of power between agreement parties. Generally, strong international institutions are preferred by weaker parties since they offer them "insurance" against the whims of great-power politics. Similarly, their sovereignty costs from signing up to stronger international institutions are lower since their chances of defining international outcomes alone are minimal. By contrast, stronger states are more concerned with restricting their sovereignty. This disparity can be overcome by drafting precise agreements with low levels of delegation to third parties such as supranational secretariats or independent courts, which allows weak and strong states to "regularize their asymmetric relations" through "administrative bodies" (Abbott and Snidal 2000:447–448). This captures the benefits associated with JBs well as delegation to external parties is sidestepped by creating intergovernmental bodies.

JBs per se, therefore, do not generally reduce sovereignty but allow states to negotiate implementation in a stable institutional framework at reduced transaction costs. In analogy to dispute settlement mechanisms, negotiations in JBs are pure interstate negotiations where power asymmetries define distributive outcomes (Tallberg and Smith 2014; see also Sattler and Bernauer 2011). Stronger JBs thus provide flexibility during implementation and promise to favor the stronger party, particularly when its vital domestic interests are at stake (Stone 2013:125). Why, then, do we argue that more powerful states prefer *weaker* JBs and follow the "conventional wisdom" (Allee and Elsig 2016:97)?

First, powerful states have a panoply of different alternative mechanisms to achieve their preferred outcomes, making them less dependent on stronger JBs. Second, JBs help fill in gaps that have been left out in PTA negotiations. But in highly asymmetric negotiations there will be fewer such gaps because the bigger party will have managed to accommodate its preferences already in the PTA, which reduces the need for continuous negotiations. Third, given the other party's smaller size, the more powerful party will anticipate lower demand from domestic groups during agreement implementation since they are less affected by the PTA. If the stronger party operates at least under a soft constraint of limited administrative resources, it will not want to use them on marginal trading partners, even if they are also democracies. This explains our final hypothesis, which reads:

H_3: The greater power asymmetry in a PTA, the weaker the positive impact of democracy on the strength of JBs.

III. Research design

Our sample of agreements includes 665 PTAs taken from the Design of Trade Agreements (DESTA) dataset (Dür et al. 2014, as updated in version 2.0 of the dataset). We are using PTAs as our unit of analysis rather than dyad-year or PTA-country-year since the PTA is identical for all parties to an agreement and the design of PTAs remains constant over time. Moreover, we treat the EU as a unitary actor since its member states have surrendered their autonomy to independently define trade policy to lever their combined weight in international negotiations and achieve better outcomes for them as a collective group (Lechner 2016:853).

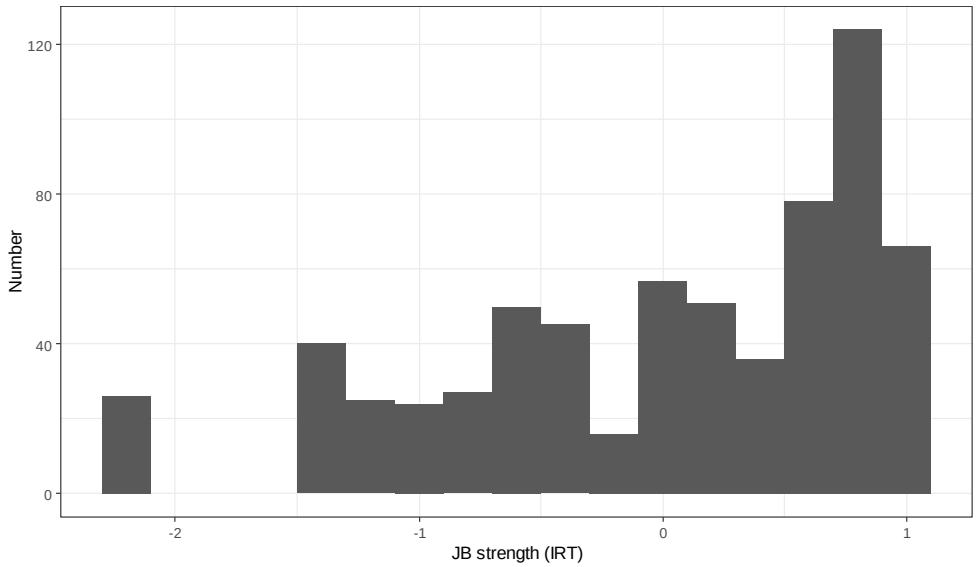
To measure our dependent variable, namely the strength of JBs in PTAs, we rely on seven indicators. These are the six indicators outlined in section one plus one additional indicator capturing whether a PTA sets up a JB at all. The overwhelming majority of

agreements are coded 1, meaning a JB has been created. Only 26 PTAs (4 percent) have no JB whatsoever. Our second indicator takes a value of 1 if we found a formulation that meetings take place among ministers, cabinet members, senior officials or the like, and 0 otherwise. Third, we include a binary variable taking the value of 1 if there is an explicit reference that JBs operate under rules of procedure. Fourth, we code whether there is any indication that JBs were foreseen not only to submit recommendations but take decisions. This can be indicated, for example, by an expression such as the JB being empowered to take decisions "in the cases provided for in this agreement." If we found no such indication, we coded this indicator 0. Fifth, we coded whether JBs are empowered to set up additional JBs, such as specialized sub-committees. If that is the case, we accord this variable a value of 1 and 0 otherwise. Sixth, we coded the frequency of meetings, with the variable taking a value of 1 when JBs meet at least annually and 0 otherwise. Seventh, and finally, we coded whether JB meetings can be convened unilaterally ("at the request of either party") – in which case this variable is 1. If more than one state is necessary to initiate a meeting, this variable is coded 0.

The indicators were independently coded by two student coders. In case of disagreement between the two coders, the final value was determined with the help of a referee (one of the co-authors of this paper). The student coders first trained on a sample training set, where individual coding decisions were extensively discussed. We only proceeded to the actual coding process once having grown confident that the codes of both coders would be accurate. This impression is supported by Krippendorff's alpha, which is 0.83 and thus very high. In Tables A1 and A2 in the online appendix, we provide a frequency table and a correlation matrix for these indicators, which show that none of them is dominant (with the exception of the existence of a joint body, which is nearly omnipresent) and that the indicators are relatively independent of each other (the highest pairwise correlation is 0.52).

We then relied on a variant of item response theory (IRT), namely maximum likelihood factor analysis for dichotomous data, as implemented in the "mirt" package in R (Chalmers 2012), to arrive at our main dependent variable: *JB strength (IRT)*. This variable is highly and positively correlated with a simple, unweighted index aggregating the seven indicators (r=0.96). In robustness checks, we use both this additive index and a further variable that uses standard factor analysis without this changing our results (see below). Figure 1 shows the distribution of *JB strength (IRT)*. As can be seen, a relatively large number of agreements take a high value, but there are also PTAs with very weak JBs in our dataset.

Figure 1: Distribution of *JB strength (IRT)*

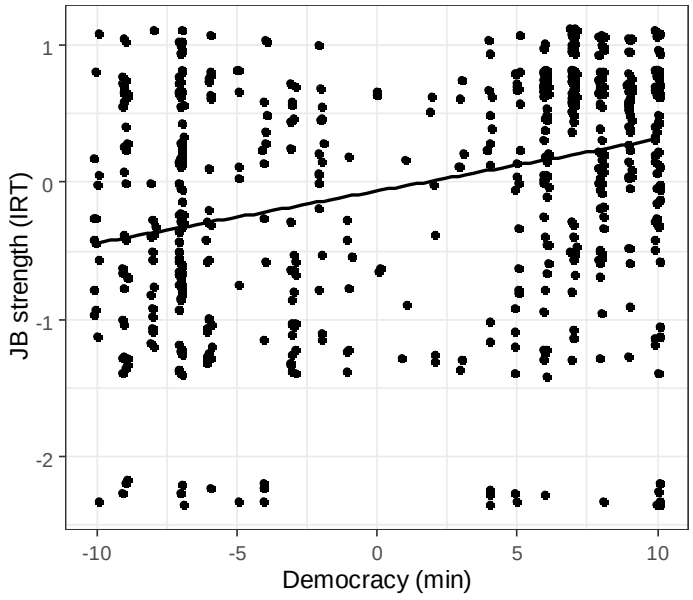


Predictors

To capture the level of democracy across PTA members, we use the Polity2 variable from the Polity V dataset (Marshall and Gurr 2020). By focusing on executive recruitment, constraints, and possibilities for political participation, this measure captures well both the idea of trust and size of the winning coalition. It ranges from -10 (fully autocratic) to +10 (fully democratic). In line with our argument, which stresses not only the monadic but also the k-

adic effects of regime type, we adopt the weakest-link assumption (Koremenos 2016:375) and use the lowest polity score across all PTA members (*Democracy (min)*). For this and the other variables below, we maximize the number of observations by filling in missings using adjacent values in the time series. We have values across the full range of the variable in our dataset, even though there are more agreements that only include democracies than there are agreements that also have autocracies as members (just under 30 percent of all agreements include at least one member state with a polity score of -6 or less). As we are interested in the relationship between democracy and the strength of JBs, Figure 2 presents a bivariate scatterplot of that relationship. As expected in H1, *Democracy (min)* and *JB strength (IRT)* are positively correlated. An increase in the value of *Democracy (min)* from its minimum to its maximum is associated with an increase in *JB strength (IRT)* by about 0.8 points on an overall range of just over 3 points. In robustness checks (see below), we use a democracy measure from Freedom House (2020) that combines values for political and civil rights (and reverses the scores), and the electoral democracy measure from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, et al. 2020).

Figure 2: *Democracy (min)* and *JB strength (IRT)*



The variable *Number MS* captures the number of member states of a PTA. We take the natural log of this variable, which relies on data from the DESTA dataset (Dür et al. 2014), to account for outliers. Before taking the log, we subtract 1 to have a variable that takes on the value of 0 for bilateral agreements, which facilitates interpretation of the results when interacting this variable with *Democracy (min)*. Nearly two thirds of agreements are bilateral, and 15 percent have more than ten member states.

Finally, we measure power asymmetry within a PTA relying on the difference in gross domestic product (GDP) in current US$ between the largest and the smallest member state of a PTA (*GDP (diff.)*) (World Bank 2020a).[5] We complement this variable in the models below with a variable that captures the minimum value of GDP in an agreement (*GDP (min)*). This allows us to distinguish between agreements between only large and agreements between only small economies (both of which have low values for *GDP (diff.)*). This variable is measured in millions of US$. In trade negotiations, relative market size is "the best first approximation" of bargaining power (Steinberg 2002:347; see also Hirschman 1945; Shadlen 2008). Put simply, the bigger a country's market size, the greater the benefits for the weaker party to gain access and reap economies of scale (Chase 2009:15) and, consequently, the more concessions it will be prepared to make to unlock these benefits. In robustness checks, we rely on the GDP ratio between the largest and smallest member state of a PTA (GDP ratio). Moreover, we use GDP data from the Penn World Table (Feenstra, Inklaar, and Timmer 2015), without this changing the results (see below).

Control variables

We add several control variables to our models. For one, we control for the level of development among agreement parties. Bernauer, Kalbhenn, Koubi, and Spilker (2013:483)

[5] We take the natural logarithm of this variable to deal with outliers.

argue that treaty-specific bodies can help developing countries with capacity building and policy guidance, which could be another function provided by JBs. We use data on gross domestic product per capita (*GDPpc*) in current US$ from the World Bank's World Development Indicators to measure this variable (World Bank 2020b). We derive two variables from this source. On the one hand, we calculate the difference between the member country with the highest and the member country with the lowest GDPpc (*GDPpc (diff.)*). On the other hand, we enter the minimum value across all member states of a PTA in the models below (*GDPpc (min)*). We divide this variable by 1,000 to bring the coefficients for this variable in the same range as the ones for the other variables. The two variables together capture whether an agreement is signed between rich, rich and poor, or only poor countries. In robustness checks, we substitute these two variables with a categorical variable contained in DESTA that distinguishes between North-North, North-South, and South-South agreements.

Strong JBs may also be included in a PTA if at least one member state lacks the administrative capacity to implement its provisions. While this is already partly captured by the GDPpc variables, we add a measure of corruption as a further indicator. Higher corruption can be seen as an indicator of lower state capacity. To measure this variable, we rely on the political corruption index included in the Varieties of Democracy dataset (Coppedge *et al.* 2020). We take the maximum value to arrive at a measure for the PTA as a whole (*Corruption (max)*).

Furthermore, we control for the depth of cooperation agreed upon in a PTA, which is defined as the "extent to which [an international agreement] requires states to depart from what they would have done in its absence" (Downs et al. 1996: 383). In PTAs, the depth of an agreement is indicated by issues such as steep tariff cuts, extensive service liberalization, or a significant reduction in non-tariff barriers to trade. Deeper agreements imply a greater implementation effort and hence make strong JBs more likely. We rely on the depth index contained in the DESTA dataset (Dür et al. 2014) to measure this variable (*Depth*). The

measure ranges from 0 (very shallow) to 7 (very deep), depending on whether it is a full or partial trade agreement, and whether it contains (substantive) provisions concerning services, procurement, intellectual property rights, investments, standards, and competition policy. The median depth in our dataset is 2. Finally, we control for the decade in which an agreement was signed, as countries' propensity to include strong JBs in PTAs may vary over time for reasons exogenous to our argument.

In robustness checks, we add some further control variables. First, we add a categorical variable that captures the region in which the member states of the PTA are located (either one of five continents or intercontinental for agreements with member countries from several continents). Second, we see whether the results are different when controlling for dispute settlement provisions, which have received considerable attention in the literature (Kono 2007; Tallberg and Smith 2014; e.g., Allee and Elsig 2016). Dispute settlement and JBs perform partly overlapping functions in that they aim to resolve conflict between agreement parties. For this, we add a variable that captures whether a PTA contains a dispute settlement provision (*Dispute settlement*). The data again are from the DESTA project.

Third, we add a categorical variable that is coded 1 for all agreements with the EU as a member entity (*EU*). Fourth, we control for customs unions and common markets, as they require a very different institutional set-up than more standard PTAs (*Customs union*). Even if these have a supranational secretariat, we treat the body bringing together national representatives from the member states as the JB (for a similar coding procedure, see Laurens and Morin 2019:554). Finally, in one model we include year fixed effects instead of the decade variable to control for temporal effects. Table A3 in the online appendix contains descriptive statistics for all numeric predictors and control variables.

IV. Empirical analysis

We first present the main results from our analyses, before showing that these results are highly robust to changes in operationalization and the addition of further control variables. Given that our dependent variable is continuous, we rely on ordinary least squares regression. We start with a model that only includes main effects, which allows us to test H1. In subsequent models, we then introduce the two interaction terms that allow us to test H2 and H3, before presenting a full model. Doing so ensures that our results are not driven by the inclusion or exclusion of specific interaction terms.

With respect to causal identification, we face some of the same challenges as other observational research. The danger of reverse causality between our dependent variable and our main predictors, however, is rather low. It seems far-fetched to argue that the strength of JBs affects regime type in the member countries of a PTA at the time of negotiating an agreement (so before the JB even exists). Similarly, to a large extent the number of member states of a PTA is set already before the start of negotiations and thus precedes any discussion of the strength of JBs. What we do face is potential selection bias, as democracies are more likely to sign PTAs in the first place (Mansfield et al. 2002). However, this means that we may underestimate the effect of democracy on the strength of JBs. Our estimates hence likely are conservative.

Main results

Model 1 in Table 1, which does not include interaction terms, offers support for H1. As expected, the coefficient for *Democracy (min)* is positive and statistically significant, meaning that (ceteris paribus) more democratic countries sign agreements that foresee stronger joint bodies. The coefficient of 0.02 means that an increase in *Democracy (min)* from its minimum to its maximum is associated with an increase in *JB strength (IRT)* by just less than half a

point. This corresponds to 14 percent of the observed range for the dependent variable (which goes from -2.26 to 1.03), after controlling for all other variables in the model.

Table 1: Baseline models

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Democracy (min)	0.02***	0.03***	0.20***	0.14***
	(0.005)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.05)
Number MS (log)	0.17***	0.18***	0.18***	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
GDP (diff., log)	-0.04**	-0.03**	-0.04**	-0.04**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Democracy (min) x Number MS (log)		-0.01***		-0.01**
		(0.003)		(0.004)
Democracy (min) x GDP (diff., log)			-0.01***	-0.004**
			(0.002)	(0.002)
GDP (min)	0.15	0.18	0.18	0.19*
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
GDPpc (diff., log)	0.04*	0.03	0.04*	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPpc (min)	-0.01**	-0.02**	-0.01*	-0.01**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Corruption (max)	-0.24	-0.34**	-0.19	-0.28*
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Depth	0.14***	0.14***	0.15***	0.15***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	0.07	0.04	0.11	0.08
	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.37)
Observations	569	569	569	569
Adjusted R^2	0.36	0.38	0.38	0.38

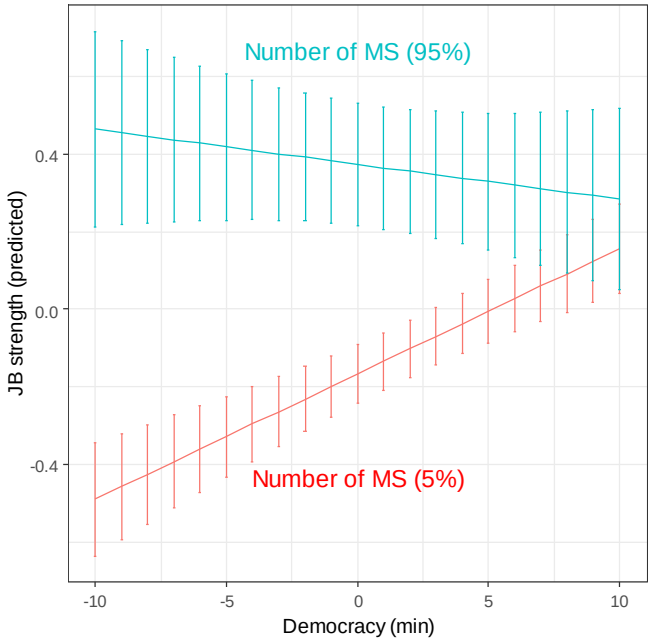
Note: The models are estimated using linear regression. For presentational purposes, the coefficients for the decades are omitted. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Among the other variables in the model, we find a positive and statistically significant coefficient for *Number MS (log)*. Agreements with a greater number of members thus come with stronger joint bodies than bilateral agreements. The coefficient for *GDP (diff., log)* is

negative and also statistically significant. As power asymmetry increases, therefore, the JBs included in PTAs tend to be weaker. At the same time, as countries at different levels of development (as captured by *GDPpc (diff., log)*) sign agreements, they tend to include stronger JBs. The coefficient for *Depth* is positive and statistically significant. The substantive effect of this variable is very large. A move from a very shallow agreement (where *Depth* equals 0) to a very deep agreement (where *Depth* equals 7) is associated with an increase in the dependent variable by about one point or nearly 30 percent of the range of the dependent variable.

In Model 2, we add an interaction between *Democracy (min)* and *Number MS (log)* to the model just presented. This allows us to test H2, which expects that *Democracy (min)* should mainly affect agreements with fewer members. The coefficient for this interaction is negative and statistically significant. To ease interpretation, we show the substantive effect of this interaction in Figure 3. The figure shows that while agreements with many member states (at the 95th percentile) contain strong joint bodies independent of the democracy scores of the participating countries, bilateral agreements contain stronger joint bodies for more democratic countries. This evidence supports H2. The predicted increase for a bilateral agreement across the range of *Democracy (min)* amounts to 0.65 points or around 20 percent of the total range of the dependent variable.

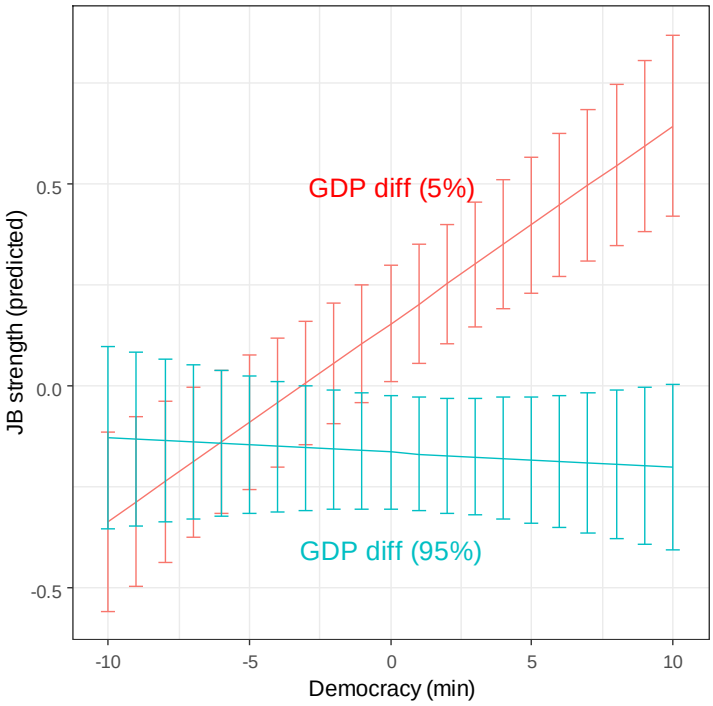
Figure 3: The interaction between *Democracy (min)* and *Number MS (log)*



Note: The figure shows the predicted effects of the interaction term in Model 2. The whiskers indicate the 95% confidence intervals.

In Model 3, we test H3. For this purpose, we include an interaction between *Democracy (min)* and *GDP (diff.)* in Model 1. The coefficient for this interaction is negative and statistically significant. Figure 4 offers an illustration of this effect. As can be seen, for PTAs that bring together very asymmetric member states (we show this again for the 95th percentile in our dataset), *JB strength* is independent of *Democracy (min)*. However, *JB strength* strongly increases as *Democracy (min)* increases for PTAs with member countries of approximately the same economic size (we take here the 5th percentile in our dataset). In line with H3, therefore, we find evidence that powerful countries tend to avoid creating strong JBs in the agreements they form part of. The findings for both H2 and H3 are confirmed in Model 4 in Table 1, which includes both interaction terms at the same time. Overall, all of these results are consistent with our expectations.

Figure 4: The interaction between *Democracy (min)* and *GDP (diff.)*



Note: The figure shows the predicted effects of the interaction term in Model 3. The whiskers indicate the 95% confidence intervals.

Robustness checks

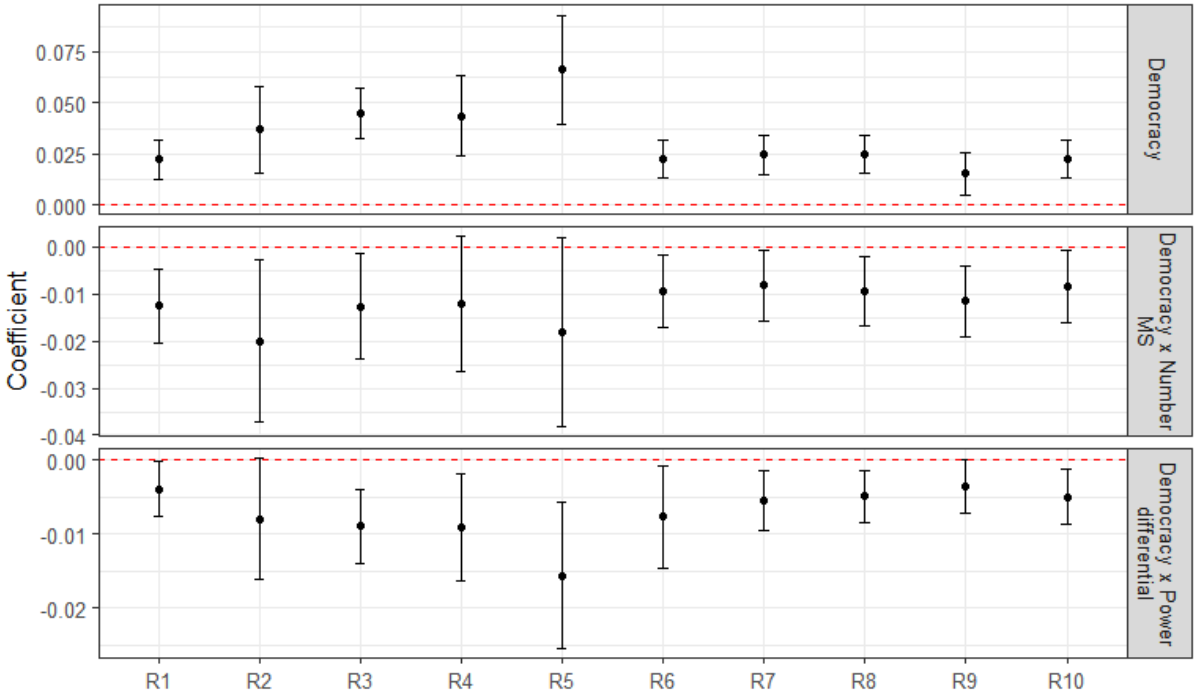
To see how robust our results are, we implemented a series of tests. We ran each of these tests as variations of models 1 (only main effects) and 4 (which includes both interaction terms at the same time). For one, we estimated the models with two different variants of the dependent variable, namely one relying on factor analysis (R1) and the other a simple additive index of the seven indicators (R2). Second, we substituted our measure of democracy with three alternative measures: a dichotomous version of the variable from the Polity dataset, distinguishing between democracies (values of 6 or higher) and other regimes (R3), the Freedom House measure of democracy (R4), and the electoral democracy measure from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (R5). Third, we checked how robust our operationalization of power differential is by substituting *GDP (diff.)* with the ratio between the GDP of the largest and smallest member states (R6). Moreover, we used data for GDP and GDP per capita from

the Penn World Table (R7) and included a categorical variable distinguishing between North-North, North-South, and South-South agreements instead of the two measures of GDPpc (R8). Fifth, we added several more control variables to our models: for the region in which the member states of a PTA are located (the continents or intercontinental), for the presence of dispute settlement provisions in an agreement, for EU agreements, and for customs unions (R9). Finally, we substituted year fixed effects for the decades variable (R10).

The results (see Figure 5) show that our results are highly robust to these different specifications of the models (note that this figure only allows for an analysis of statistical significance, the size of the coefficients varies independent of effect size because partly the scales of the dependent variable and the predictors change).[6] Across all models, the coefficient for *Democracy (min)* is positive and statistically significant at the 95 percent level (top row of the figure). Similarly, the coefficient for the interaction *Democracy (min)* and *Number MS (log)* is negative across all models (middle row of the figure). However, it only reaches the 90% level of statistical significance in R4 and R5, where we rely on the Freedom House and Varieties of Democracy measures, respectively. Finally, across nine of the ten robustness checks we find the expected negative and statistically significant coefficient for the interaction between *Democracy (min)* and *GDP (diff.)*. The only exception is R2 (which relies on *JB strength (Index)* as dependent variable), where the coefficient remains negative and close to statistical significance. Overall, therefore, our results are highly robust.

[6] Full details for these models are available in Tables A4-A7 in the Appendix.

Figure 5: Robustness checks



Note: The top row is based on variations of Model 1; the middle and bottom rows on variations of Model 4. The models are estimated using linear regression. The points are the estimated coefficients and the vertical bars indicate the 95% confidence intervals. For presentational purposes, we only show the predictors related to our hypotheses; all other results are available in the Appendix.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have put a spotlight on the institutional framework of PTAs. JBs regularize government-to-government interactions and expedite the efficient implementation of commonly agreed objectives between two or more states. As we have found in the course of our research, JBs are an almost universal feature of PTAs. Still, our research also highlighted that there is substantial variation in terms of their strength. To explain this variation, we have put regime type at the center of our argument. Democracies form stronger JBs because of higher levels of trust and the need to forge broader domestic coalitions. Moreover, we have argued that membership size and power asymmetry moderate this relationship. Based on a novel dataset and multivariate statistical analyses, we find robust support for our theoretically

informed expectations. Our paper, therefore, is the first time that JB strength is measured across hundreds of PTAs and explained within one stringent theoretical framework.

We see three major extensions of the line of research that we hope to start with this paper. First, more research on how JBs operate is paramount. As we have shown in this paper, JBs are often empowered to take far-reaching decisions binding on all PTA parties. These decisions specifically – but also JB actions, more broadly – are bound to affect domestic groups differently and impact the distribution of costs and benefits flowing from PTAs. Despite their importance, how decision-making is structured and who has access to JBs is today very poorly understood. Do certain groups such as exporters enjoy privileged access over importers and consumers? Is it easier for multinational corporations to influence JBs, possibly by lobbying PTA parties on all sides simultaneously, than for small- and medium-sized companies? What is the role of subject experts when JB decisions are prepared and to what extent are NGOs involved? Which channels do members of parliament have to ensure their constituents' interests are not overlooked? Answers to these questions have a profound impact on the legitimacy of JBs and clearly require more scholarly attention going forward.

Second, we have focused on JBs in PTAs in this paper. In this area, we have found JBs to be a nearly ubiquitous feature. However, JBs are an important design feature in international agreements far beyond trade. In 1960, for example, the United States and Japan signed an agreement on the status of US armed forces in Japan, which included a joint committee empowered to establish "auxiliary organs and administrative services as may be required" (United States and Japan 1960:Art. 25). If JBs are included in a core area such as security, they can feature in *every* policy area. There is clearly more to be written about JBs in international agreements more broadly and why they are more prominent in some areas (trade) than others (presumably security). Our conceptualization of JB strength and theoretical framework to explain it provide an appropriate starting point for further theoretical refinement.

Third, and finally, JBs pose intriguing questions on their systemic effects on global governance. If one added up all contacts and decisions in JBs and compared that picture to the number of exchanges and decisions within IGOs, we would not be surprised if the former outweighed the latter by a substantial margin. Unfortunately, neither of the two figures are as of yet available. But given the importance of some international agreements and the fringe position of some IGOs, JBs do not necessarily exert a smaller impact on world politics than IGOs, even if receiving next to no scholarly attention. Moreover, these two channels quite possibly overlap, with the same officials meeting in the framework of JBs also meeting within IGOs. The combined effect of these interactions could (and in some instances almost certainly will) have a significant impact on international affairs. Similarly, where IGOs are under attack from anti-globalization forces and see their activities reduced as a result (Copelovitch and Pevehouse 2019), JBs can provide an important alternative venue through which state actions can be coordinated. In short, JBs – to our mind – are the most glaringly overlooked aspect of international relations today and deserve greater scholarly attention in the future.

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Online appendix

Table A1: Frequency table for indicators in dependent variable

Indicator	No	Yes
Joint body	26	639
Rules of procedure	197	442
Level	347	292
Decisions can be taken	116	523
Meets yearly or more	230	409
Convened unilaterally	299	340
Sub-bodies can be created	192	447

Table A2: Correlation matrix for indicators in dependent variable

	Rules of procedure	Level	Decisions can be taken	Meets yearly or more	Convened unilaterally	Sub-bodies can be created
Rules of procedure	1	0.16	0.47	0.23	0.14	0.48
Level	0.16	1	0.26	0.11	-0.13	0.20
Decisions can be taken	0.47	0.26	1	0.25	0.20	0.52
Meets yearly or more	0.23	0.11	0.25	1	0.28	0.38
Convened unilaterally	0.14	-0.13	0.20	0.28	1	0.23
Sub-bodies can be created	0.48	0.20	0.52	0.38	0.23	1

Table A3: Descriptive statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Pctl(75)	Max
JB strength (IRT)	665	0.0001	0.85	-2.26	-0.59	0.73	1.03
JB strength (FA)	665	-0.00	0.90	-2.29	-0.43	0.71	0.80
JB strength (Index)	665	4.65	1.90	0	3	6	7
Democracy (min)	642	1.88	7.06	-10.00	-6.00	8.00	10.00
Democracy (min, di)	642	5.08	5.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	10.00
Democracy (min FH)	596	6.16	3.55	0.00	3.00	9.00	12.00
Democracy (min VoD)	648	4.52	2.66	0.13	2.00	7.05	9.20
Number MS (log)	665	0.78	1.13	0	0	1.6	4
GDP (difference, log)	598	26.03	2.63	13.53	24.32	27.65	30.59
GDP (min)	639	0.19	1.09	0.0000	0.004	0.05	17.81
GDP ratio	639	-1.43	1.63	-5.00	-2.34	-0.09	-0.0000
GDP (diff., log Penn)	581	12.93	2.27	5.31	11.50	14.57	16.83
GDP (minPenn)	627	0.30	1.45	0.0001	0.01	0.13	19.10
GDPpc (diff., log)	598	8.38	1.88	0.24	7.15	10.01	12.04
GDPpc (min)	639	5.25	8.93	0.04	0.90	4.52	56.97
GDPpc (diff., log Penn)	581	-4.88	1.33	-10.58	-5.70	-3.84	-1.50
GDPpc (min Penn)	627	0.01	0.01	0.0003	0.003	0.01	0.06
Corruption (max)	648	0.58	0.27	0.01	0.40	0.80	0.97
Depth	625	2.89	2.28	0.00	1.00	5.00	7.00
Dispute settlement	628	0.86	0.35	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
EU	665	0.14	0.35	0	0	0	1
Customs union	660	0.07	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00

Table A4: Robustness checks (I)

	R1-1	R2-1	R3-1	R4-1	R5-1
Democracy (min)	0.02***	0.04***			
	(0.005)	(0.01)			
Number MS (log)	0.19***	0.32***	0.16***	0.15***	0.16***
	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
GDP (diff., log)	-0.04***	-0.10***	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.04***
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDP (min)	0.12	0.37	0.14	0.12	0.12
	(0.12)	(0.26)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
GDPpc (diff., log)	0.05**	0.11**	0.04**	0.04*	0.04**
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPpc (min)	-0.02**	-0.03*	-0.01**	-0.02***	-0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Corruption (max)	-0.28*	-0.49	-0.12	-0.38**	-0.11
	(0.17)	(0.36)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Depth	0.15***	0.29***	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
1970s	0.73***	1.68***	0.67***		0.68***
	(0.17)	(0.38)	(0.16)		(0.16)
1980s	-0.13	-0.39	-0.16	-0.78***	-0.12
	(0.17)	(0.37)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
1990s	0.21	0.48	0.16	-0.42***	0.16
	(0.15)	(0.32)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
2000s	0.36**	0.79**	0.24	-0.28*	0.28*
	(0.16)	(0.36)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
2010s	0.27	0.72*	0.18	-0.32*	0.23
	(0.19)	(0.43)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)
Democracy (min, di)			0.04***		
			(0.01)		
Democracy (min FH)				0.04***	
				(0.01)	
Democracy (min VoD)					0.07***
					(0.01)
Constant	0.05	5.01***	-0.28	0.51	-0.22
	(0.40)	(0.87)	(0.38)	(0.43)	(0.39)
Observations	569	569	569	531	571
Adjusted R^2	0.38	0.33	0.39	0.35	0.36

Note: The models are estimated using linear regression. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table A5: Robustness checks (II)

	R6-1	R7-1	R8-1	R9-1	R10-1
Democracy (min)	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.01)	(0.005)
Number MS (log)	0.17***	0.16***	0.19***	0.11**	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
GDPpc (diff., log)	0.03			0.05**	0.04
	(0.02)			(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPpc (min)	-0.01**			-0.01	-0.01*
	(0.01)			(0.01)	(0.01)
GDP (diff., log)			-0.03*	-0.02	-0.04***
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDP (min)			0.11	0.18	0.17
			(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
Corruption (max)	-0.20	-0.17	-0.20	-0.09	-0.28*
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Depth	0.13***	0.14***	0.14***	0.12***	0.13***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
1960s		0.92***			
		(0.33)			
1970s	0.64***	1.61***	0.70***	0.70***	
	(0.16)	(0.32)	(0.16)	(0.16)	
1980s	-0.19	0.69**	-0.19	-0.13	
	(0.16)	(0.32)	(0.16)	(0.16)	
1990s	0.13	1.04***	0.14	0.07	
	(0.14)	(0.31)	(0.15)	(0.14)	
2000s	0.20	1.11***	0.23	0.14	
	(0.15)	(0.31)	(0.16)	(0.16)	
2010s	0.14	1.04***	0.15	0.12	
	(0.18)	(0.33)	(0.18)	(0.18)	
GDP ratio	-0.05**				
	(0.02)				
GDP (min Penn)		0.11			
		(0.10)			
GDP (diff., log Penn)		-0.03**			

		(0.02)			
GDPpc (min Penn)		-10.15**			
		(4.95)			
GDPpc (diff., log Penn)		0.04			
		(0.03)			
North-South			0.29*		
			(0.15)		
South-South			0.29*		
			(0.17)		
Dispute settlement				0.22**	
				(0.09)	
EU				-0.09	
				(0.14)	
Customs union				0.12	
				(0.14)	
Americas				-0.07	
				(0.15)	
Asia				-0.18	
				(0.16)	
Europe				0.33**	
				(0.16)	
Intercontinental				0.05	
				(0.16)	
Oceania				-1.89***	
				(0.36)	
Constant	-0.85***	-0.79**	-0.13	-0.61	0.45
	(0.21)	(0.40)	(0.44)	(0.41)	(0.48)
Observations	569	568	569	565	569
Adjusted R^2	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.42	0.40

Note: The models are estimated using linear regression. For presentational purposes, the coefficients for the year fixed effects are omitted. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table A6: Robustness checks (III)

	R1-2	R2-2	R3-2	R4-2	R5-2
Democracy (min)	0.13***	0.26**			
	(0.05)	(0.11)			
Number MS (log)	0.21***	0.36***	0.23***	0.22***	0.25***
	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
GDP (diff., log)	-0.04**	-0.10***	0.01	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDP (min)	0.17	0.45*	0.18*	0.18	0.17
	(0.12)	(0.26)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
GDPpc (diff., log)	0.05**	0.10**	0.04*	0.03	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPpc (min)	-0.02**	-0.02*	-0.01*	-0.01**	-0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Corruption (max)	-0.34**	-0.57	-0.16	-0.40**	-0.16
	(0.17)	(0.37)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Depth	0.16***	0.30***	0.14***	0.13***	0.14***
	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
1970s	0.72***	1.64***	0.65***		0.67***
	(0.17)	(0.37)	(0.16)		(0.16)
1980s	-0.16	-0.45	-0.19	-0.84***	-0.14
	(0.17)	(0.37)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
1990s	0.21	0.46	0.14	-0.45***	0.12
	(0.15)	(0.33)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.15)
2000s	0.32*	0.69*	0.17	-0.34**	0.21
	(0.17)	(0.37)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
2010s	0.22	0.61	0.09	-0.41**	0.15
	(0.20)	(0.43)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)
Democracy (min) x Number MS (log)	-0.01***	-0.02**			
	(0.004)	(0.01)			
Democracy (min) x GDP (diff., log)	-0.004**	-0.01*			
	(0.002)	(0.004)			
Democracy (min, di)			0.29***		
			(0.07)		
Democracy (min, di) x Number MS (log)			-0.01**		
			(0.01)		
Democracy (min, di) x GDP (diff., log)			-0.01***		
			(0.003)		

Democracy (min FH)				0.29***	
				(0.09)	
Democracy (min FH) x Number MS (log)				-0.01*	
				(0.01)	
Democracy (min FH) x GDP (diff., log)				-0.01**	
				(0.004)	
Democracy (min VoD)					0.49***
					(0.13)
Democracy (min VoD) x Number MS (log)					-0.02*
					(0.01)
Democracy (min VoD) x GDP (diff., log)					-0.02***
					(0.01)
Constant	0.05	5.02***	-1.23***	-0.82	-1.78***
	(0.39)	(0.86)	(0.43)	(0.65)	(0.61)
Observations	569	569	569	531	571
Adjusted R^2	0.41	0.35	0.42	0.37	0.38

Note: The models are estimated using linear regression. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table A7: Robustness checks (IV)

	R6-2	R7-2	R8-2	R9-2	R10-2
Democracy (min)	0.02***	0.10***	0.16***	0.12**	0.16***
	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Number MS (log)	0.17***	0.18***	0.20***	0.10**	0.20***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
GDPpc (diff., log)	0.03			0.05**	0.03
	(0.02)			(0.02)	(0.02)
GDPpc (min)	-0.01**			-0.01	-0.01*
	(0.01)			(0.01)	(0.01)
GDP (diff., log)			-0.03*	-0.02	-0.04**
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
GDP (min)			0.16	0.19*	0.21*
			(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Corruption (max)	-0.27*	-0.18	-0.24*	-0.14	-0.31*
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.17)
Depth	0.14***	0.16***	0.14***	0.13***	0.14***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
1960s		0.76**			
		(0.32)			
1970s	0.68***	1.49***	0.67***	0.66***	
	(0.16)	(0.32)	(0.16)	(0.16)	
1980s	-0.18	0.51	-0.23	-0.15	
	(0.16)	(0.32)	(0.16)	(0.16)	
1990s	0.17	0.85***	0.11	0.08	
	(0.14)	(0.31)	(0.15)	(0.14)	
2000s	0.22	0.89***	0.16	0.12	
	(0.15)	(0.31)	(0.16)	(0.16)	
2010s	0.15	0.80**	0.07	0.10	
	(0.18)	(0.33)	(0.18)	(0.19)	
GDP ratio	-0.03				
	(0.02)				
GDP (min Penn)		0.12			
		(0.10)			
GDP (diff., log Penn)		-0.03*			
		(0.02)			
GDPpc (min Penn)		-8.98*			
		(4.89)			

GDPpc (diff., log Penn)		0.03			
		(0.03)			
North-South			0.28*		
			(0.14)		
South-South			0.28*		
			(0.16)		
Dispute settlement				0.19**	
				(0.09)	
EU				0.05	
				(0.14)	
Customs union				0.14	
				(0.14)	
Americas				-0.09	
				(0.15)	
Asia				-0.17	
				(0.16)	
Europe				0.27	
				(0.17)	
Intercontinental				-0.03	
				(0.16)	
Oceania				-2.01***	
				(0.36)	
Democracy (min) x Number MS (log)	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01**	-0.01***	-0.01**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Democracy (min) x GDP ratio	-0.01**				
	(0.004)				
Democracy (min) x GDP (diff., log Penn)		-0.01***			
		(0.002)			
Democracy (min) x GDP (diff., log)			-0.005***	-0.004*	-0.01***
			(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Constant	-0.80***	-0.77**	-0.12	-0.50	0.41
	(0.21)	(0.39)	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.47)
Observations	569	568	569	565	569
Adjusted R^2	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.45	0.42

Note: The models are estimated using linear regression. For presentational purposes, the coefficients for the year fixed effects are omitted. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.