How Organizational Overlap Shapes Delegation: The Case of African Regional Economic Organizations

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Abstract

How does organizational overlap shape the delegation of competences to independent agents in international organizations (IOs)? IOs have become ubiquitous in international politics, reflected in the growth of both their institutional authority and overlap between them. Even though these two developments have evolved concurrently and there are good reasons to believe that they are related, extant research examines them largely in isolation. This paper is the first to provide a systematic investigation of their relationship. Theoretically, postulating that the presence of multiple, overlapping, IOs reduces the need to delegate power to any single IO, and that overlap increases the opportunities to forum shop, we argue that 1) from the perspective of an individual IO, extensive overlap with one's peers should result in lower levels of delegation; and 2) from the vantage point of IO-pairs, greater overlap will be accompanied by polarization in their levels of delegation. These expectations are tested in the context of regional economic organizations (REOs) in Africa, a continent that has perhaps the highest number of REOs in the world and that exhibits substantial variation in the delegation such IOs enjoy and in the overlap between them. Using a novel and comprehensive data set covering twenty-four African REOs from 1970 to 2020 on their levels of delegation and overlap, controlling for alternative explanations and using a variety of model specifications, we find robust empirical support for our theoretical framework.

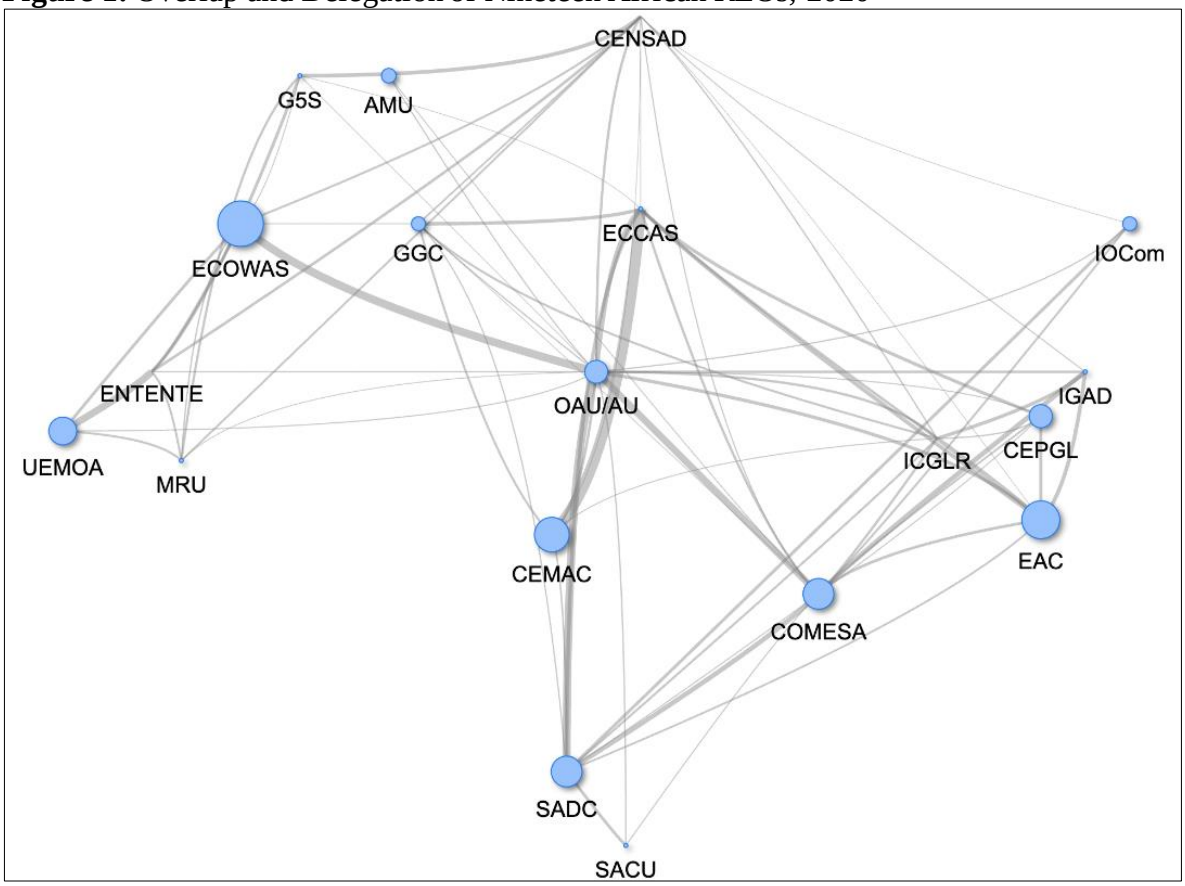
I. Introduction

How does organizational overlap shape the delegation of competences to independent agents in international organizations (IOs)? In this paper, we draw on regional economic organization (REOs) in Africa to examine the overlap-delegation nexus. The African continent has perhaps the highest number of REOs in the world, no less than nineteen today. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of these organizations for the year 2020 and shows that there is substantial variation in the authority that member states have delegated to these REOs. Indicated by the size of the blue nodes, it is apparent, for example, that such REOs as ECOWAS, CEMAC, and EAC enjoy more delegation than the AU and IGAD, and, even more so, than MRU, CENSAD, and ICGLR.[1]

Figure 1 below also depicts the extent to which any REO-pair overlaps in terms of membership and policy competency, revealed by the existence and thickness of the grey connecting lines. Thus, for example, the rather thick lines connecting ECOWAS and the AU as well as CEMAC and the ECCAS suggest that several African states are members in each party to these pairs and that they have similar policy competencies. That some lines are thin, e.g., the one that connects CENSAD and IGAD, or completely absent, e.g., between SACU and EAC, indicate that not all African REOs overlap to a similar extent. Taking note of the ubiquity of delegation to IOs as well as overlap among them, this study examines the implications of the former for the latter phenomenon.

[1] The full names of, as well as additional information on, all REOs mentioned in the paper are available in the Online Appendix. We elaborate on the concepts, operationalization, and measurement of REO, delegation and overlap in subsequent parts of the paper.

Figure 1: Overlap and Delegation of Nineteen African REOs, 2020



Note: The size of the nodes indicates the level of delegation of each REO; the thickness of the connecting lines reflects the degree of overlap between any two REOs.

Theoretically, we treat IOs as institutional mechanisms to lower the transaction costs of cooperation among states and argue that overlap among them dampens member states' incentives for delegation for two reasons. First, organizational overlap weakens the functional incentives for delegation by providing a functional equivalent. That is, states who are members in several IOs that address similar issue-areas may be able to advance their cooperative objectives without delegating much authority to any given IO since the observation of cooperation partners in different forums may also reduce transaction costs and mitigate uncertainty – functions also fulfilled by independent agents. Second, overlap undermines member states' political commitment to overlapping IOs, and thus to empowering them through delegation, by creating opportunities for forum shopping. When

member states deliberately establish overlapping IOs, or fail to eliminate such overlap once recognized, they are also less likely to constrain their sovereignty through delegation.

Two observable implications emanate from this member state incentives logic. From the perspective of an individual IO, extensive overlap with one's peers should result, on average, in lower levels of delegation, compared to those IOs that operate in relative isolation. From the vantage point of IO-pairs, we conjecture that greater overlap will be accompanied by divergence, or polarization, in their levels of delegation. Specifically, we expect member states to channel more resources to some IOs at the expense of others, such that the former will benefit from increasing delegated authority, while the latter's levels will stagnate.

Empirically, we provide the first systematic analysis of the relationship between IO overlap and delegation by drawing on the largely neglected empirical domain of regional economic organizations (REOs) in Africa. To do this, we coded most, if not all, African REOs on their levels of delegation and overlap from the 1960s to 2020, producing a novel and comprehensive sample of these IOs' structure, functions, and relationships. This effort provides a first complete picture of a 'regional organizational complex.' Using these newly produced data and controlling for a battery of alternative explanations, we find strong empirical support for the theoretical expectations: African REOs that exhibit higher overlap with their counterparts tend to have lower levels of delegation and pairs of REOs that overlap extensively tend to have more divergent levels of delegation.

This study makes several notable contributions to our understanding of IOs and their consequences for global governance. To begin with, it sheds new light on the sources of delegation to IOs. States delegate when they conditionally empower independent agents to act on their behalf (Hawkins et al. 2006, 7), by, for example, granting courts the authority to adjudicate disputes, empowering secretariats to provide expert advice or propose policy, and

enabling parliamentary institutions to participate in decision-making (Alter 2014; Bradley and Kelley 2008; Lake 2007; Schimmelfennig et al. 2020). Delegation constrains national sovereignty and, therefore, has been a core concern of scholarship on the institutional design of IOs (Abbott and Snidal 1998, 9; Haftel and Thompson 2006; Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001, 255). It is also consequential for the process and outcomes of international cooperation. Extensive delegation is associated with higher levels of decision-making productivity in IOs (Sommerer et al. 2022), sustained progress towards fulfilling IO mandates (Gray 2018), and a lower likelihood of IO death and replacement (Debre and Dijkstra 2021).

Despite the growing scholarly interest in the determinants of delegation to IOs, the extant literature tends to treat IOs as self-contained units whose extent of delegation is shaped primarily by characteristics of the IOs in question or the nature of the states that create them. Extant research highlights *inter alia* the degree of economic interdependence (Haftel 2013; Moravcsik 1998), the number and heterogeneity of member states (Herbst 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2015; Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001), the scope of an IO's policy portfolio (Haftel 2013; Hooghe, Lenz and Marks 2019), and the complexity of underlying cooperation problems (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001; Koremenos 2016) as key drivers of IO delegation. Beyond functionalism, established arguments emphasize the dynamics of domestic politics (Acharya and Johnston 2007, 259) and shared identity (Acharya 2000; Hooghe, Lenz and Marks 2019). These studies neglect the organizational environment in which IOs operate and treat them largely in isolation. However, the growing density of international institutions and the concomitant increase in their interaction calls into question the premise that IOs can be adequately analyzed as silos.

This study also advances the burgeoning literatures on institutional interplay, institutional choice, and regime complexity, which provides solid foundation to the idea that interactions between international institutions "influence each other's development and

effectiveness" (Gehring and Oberthür 2009, 125; see also Alter and Meunier 2009; Brosig 2011; Hofmann 2009, 2019; Jupille, Mattli and Snidal 2013; Raustiala and Victor 2004). These studies analyze individual IOs as part of an institutional network, but they have failed to examine the consequences of these interactions for IO delegation. Moreover, whereas much of the literature on global governance complexity focuses on conceptual issues, often accompanied by illustrative case studies that frequently draw on prominent 'Western' IOs, this paper joins a handful of studies that examine the *consequences* of IO complexity with systematic data and quantitative methods (Haftel and Hofmann 2019; Haftel and Lenz 2022; Pratt 2018; Reinsberg and Westerwinter 2023).

Beyond correcting for the Western-centric bias in the literature, examining IOs in Africa has three additional advantages. First, the African continent is well-bounded geographically and temporally. With respect to the latter, the decolonization process means that independent African states emerged only in the late 1950s and 1960s, which provides us with a clear starting point for the analysis. Second, African state leaders have generally been wary of constraining their national sovereignty (Herbst 2007; Söderbaum 2004), rendering Africa a hard case for explaining the delegation of competences to IOs. Third, as we have seen, African states have formed, designed, sustained, and dissolved numerous REOs with varying levels of authority and overlap between them. If organizational overlap has consequences for important political outcomes, it is therefore likely to be visible there.

The empirical analysis indeed corroborates the expectation that the institutional environment affects individual IOs embedded in it. The findings bear, in particular, on the debate with respect to the consequences of IO overlap for international cooperation. Much of the initial wave of studies on regime complexity conjectured that overlap results in turf wars, inefficient duplication, and rule conflict that leads to lower levels of compliance (Alter and Meunier 2009; Drezner 2009; Hofmann 2019; Raustiala and Victor 2004). Several recent

studies challenge this presumption and claim that overlap ultimately strengthens international cooperation, as overlapping institutions mutually reinforce each other and manage interface conflicts successfully by engaging in interinstitutional coordination and deference (Faude and Groβe-Kreul 2020; Gehring and Faude 2014; Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn 2020; Pratt 2018). Our core findings support the more sceptical perspective about the consequences of IO overlap: overlap inhibits delegation to IOs and may thus also undermine successful international cooperation. Since overlap is also associated with a greater divergence in levels of delegation between IO pairs, it is specifically those IOs with low levels of delegation that are likely to face the most severe constraints in building their authority.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section theorizes the effects of organizational overlap on delegation and develops our two core hypotheses. The third section describes our estimation strategy and the operationalization of key dependent and independent variables. It also provides an overview of the landscape of REOs, with a focus on their levels of delegation and overlap. The fourth section presents and discusses the results of the statistical analysis. The final section concludes and elaborates further on the theoretical implications of our findings.

II. Theorizing the Effects of Organizational Overlap on Delegation

How does organizational overlap shape the delegation of authority to IOs? We start from the functionalist premise that the empowerment of international institutions constitutes a rational response to collective action problems among states. Since delegation requires – often unanimous – treaty reform, we assume that delegation is the product of conscious institutional design by member state principals in response to the institutional incentives and constraints they confront. Consequently, we develop our theoretical argument by examining

how member states' preferences for delegation change in a situation of organizational overlap, compared to the conventional 'IOs-as-silos' scenario. We argue that organizational overlap dampens member states' incentives for delegation, but it does so unevenly across IOs. Throughout, we provide empirical illustrations from African REOs.

The Baseline: Delegation as a Functional Response to Collective Action Problems

Delegation provides a rational response by states to informational, distributional and enforcement problems in international cooperation. Informational problems are related to uncertainty about the preferences and behaviour of other member states (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001, 778-79). Successful international cooperation requires that states are able to discern what their partners want (information on preferences) and whether they keep their commitments (information on behaviour). International institutions may seek to provide such information. Arrow (1974, 53-56) emphasizes the value of organizations in acquiring information and the challenge of structuring it. Delegated agents are useful in generating and disseminating information that would be expensive for a state to produce (Bradley and Kelley 2008; Koremenos 2008; Pollack 2003). This generates incentives to empower independent agents: independent secretariats may prepare policy proposals, manage decision-making and monitor member state behaviour; independent courts may enforce contracts and settle disputes among member states (Hawkins et al. 2006; Pollack 2003); and independent expert bodies may provide unbiased information about underlying technical, scientific and political issues, and assist in enforcing policy (Tallberg et al. 2014, 754-55).

Distributional problems relate to the allocation of gains "along the Pareto frontier" (Krasner 1991) of efficient cooperative bargains. It emerges when multiple efficient equilibria exist, and member states have divergent preferences over their favoured cooperation point. Under such conditions, transaction costs are high and member states may fail to find a mutually agreeable outcome altogether. Independent agents, such as secretariats

or parliamentary institutions, may help states to solve distributional problems by eliciting member states preferences, structuring the agenda, and proposing compromises.

Finally, enforcement problems refer to the extent to which member states have incentives to cheat on a given commitment. They emerge both "when actors find (current) unilateral cooperation so enticing that they sacrifice long-term cooperation" (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal, 776) as well as when the complexity of cooperative rules induces divergent interpretations over their meaning among members. Independent agents can be useful in structuring incentives such that member states are less likely to cheat. Independent courts or tribunals may provide information on member state compliance, enhance the costs of non-compliance and authoritatively settle divergent interpretations of a contract (Hawkins et al. 2006, 18; Kono 2007; Koremenos 2008, 168-69).

The institutionalist literature suggests that the severity of such problems determines the transaction costs of international cooperation, and thus the functionalist demand for delegation. Scholars have employed such reasoning in theorizing regional cooperation in Africa. The colonial powers established joint services in several parts of Africa that were intended to reduce the transaction costs *inter alia* of postal and air transport services. After independence, these service organizations became the foundation for several African IOs, such as the EAC or the OCAM (Sebalu 1972).

There was also much discussion about regional cooperation in Africa more broadly. At its inception, regionalism in Africa was the result of member states' fears that postcolonial political units were too small to avert continued colonial domination. The rules of the 1963 OAU were designed *inter alia* to stabilize arbitrary borders drawn during the colonial period and to enforce such rules through a set of transparent mechanisms to settle disputes that would enhance the reputational costs of questioning colonial borders, including through the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation, and Arbitration (Nweke 1987). The transformation

of the OAU to the AU in 2002 marked a renewed attempt to reduce the transaction costs of cooperation by improving on the information-provision and enforcement functions of the organization (Abegunrin 2009, ch. 7). Today, several African REOs have introduced independent institutional structures to improve their ability to mediate in conflicts (Aeby and Pring 2023; see also Haftel and Hofmann 2019).

Yet, these analyses assume that individual IOs are designed in isolation; they fail to consider how member states' incentives for delegation change as a result of organizational overlap. We first consider the general, 'monadic' case, before turning to the specific, 'dyadic' case.

Incentives for Delegation and Organizational Overlap

We argue that organizational overlap *dampens* member states' incentives for delegation to an IO for two reasons: (1) overlap weakens the functional demand for delegation due to the availability of functional equivalents (2) while undermining member states' political will to delegate due to opportunities for forum shopping. We discuss each of these considerations in turn, before outlining why we expect this logic to operate unevenly across IOs.

First, organizational overlap may constitute a *functional equivalent* to delegation, thereby reducing the functional incentives for states to delegate to an IO. As noted, informational constraints may inhibit successful cooperation, and the empowerment of delegated agents is one way to generate and disseminate information on state preferences and behaviour. In fact, when institutional alternatives are absent, that is, in the single IO scenario, establishing delegated institutions is the main way to reduce transaction costs (Jupille, Mattli and Snidal 2013). In a situation of organizational overlap, however, the wider organizational environment itself provides relevant information, reducing the functional need for delegated agents to do so. Through regular interaction in overlapping organizations, member states

multiply opportunities for mutual communication and learning about each other's preferences and behaviour, which in turn facilitates strategies of reciprocity (Keohane 1984; Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal 2001). As Copelovitch and Putnam (2014, 487) cogently put it, "By providing additional sites for observing the actions of prospective partners, institutional context can mitigate uncertainty about behavior." Over time, member states build a reputation about their preferences on certain bargaining issues, their negotiation behaviour as well as their compliance with negotiated rules, and this facilitates cooperation in the next round of interactions. Regular interaction in overlapping organizations thus has effects comparable to the long shadow of the future in the single IO scenario: by rendering member state interaction more frequent, it generates reputational effects that facilitate cooperation by making it easier to punish defection and solve distributional conflict (Oye 1985; Axelrod 1984). When this happens, the functional incentives for member states to delegate decrease.

For example, the three East African states Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya interact regularly not only in the EAC, but also in COMESA, in the AU and, with the exception of Tanzania, in IGAD. Such iterative interaction in different organizational settings may generate as much information on states' preferences and behaviour as may an "isolated" secretariat or dispute settlement mechanism in any one of these IOs by itself. Thus, organizational overlap serves as a substitute for delegation in solving collective action problems and reducing transaction costs. It follows from this idea that when the overlap between IOs grows and, therefore, the environment thus becomes richer in cooperation-enhancing information, member states face incentives to maintain IOs at existing levels of delegation. While individual IOs in Africa have seen phases of higher and lower relevance, the network of institutions has become denser over time and is, for several decades now, an established institutional fact. Thus, member states may find it more sensible to derive information about other member states' cooperative behaviour by observing them in a variety

of institutional settings rather than by having this information supplied to them by delegated agents in any single IO.

Second, organizational overlap generates opportunities for member states to forum shop that are unavailable in scarcely populated organizational spaces, undermining member states' *political commitment* to any single IO and thus their willingness to empower it through delegation (Busch 2007; Helfer 2009; Hofmann 2019). This may occur when member states shift their focus to overlapping IOs with similar mandates, or even create new, rivalling IOs from scratch (Morse and Keohane 2014; Pratt 2021). Organizational overlap provides member states with opportunities to escape the functionalist pressures for delegation by changing venue; member states are unlikely to be incentivized by efficiency considerations for delegating to a specific IO when that IO becomes less of a political priority. Once alternative venues for cooperation exist, member state's commitment to the efficiency of any single IO tends to be smaller. Member states may even create IOs anew to undermine another IO's political standing. Thus, functional incentives will not have the same positive impact on delegation in a situation of organizational overlap since member states are likely to be less sensitive to efficiency considerations when broader strategic objectives shift basic political commitments.

This is a common theme in scholarship on African REOs, where member states navigate dense organizational webs swiftly, with altering commitments to individual IOs. As Shaw (2012, 845) summarizes dryly: "because of overlapping memberships and mandates […], micro- and macro-regionalisms have typically lacked […] commitment." Relative member state indifference to certain IOs in Africa is commonly seen as a consequence of organizational overlap. Bondo Museka (2020) describes, for example, how ICGLR suffers from the fact that many of its member states prioritize their membership in overlapping IOs over that in the ICGLR. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Zambia, for

example, prioritize SADC over the ICGLR, while Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and others favour the East African Community (Bondo Museka 2020, 205). Political commitment to the ICGLR is low as a result, and this has meant that the ICGLR has remained at low levels of delegation since its creation in 2004 – in marked contrast to several of the overlapping IOs, such as SADC and the EAC.

Africanist scholars observe a similar dynamic with respect to the AU and its relationship to sub-continental REOs. As Franke (2013, 87) notes, the "overlap among Africa's organizations tends to dissipate collective efforts towards the common goal of the African Union." These priorities imply that the AU has found it more difficult than many smaller REOs to solve collective action problems that stem from the increasing complexity of decision-making in a growing organization. Accordingly, Powell (2005, 55) states: "member states may be resistant to grant greater decision-making authority to the AU, in part because regional organisations provide an alternative forum to exercise influence." As a result, delegation is more widespread in some sub-regional IOs compared to the AU.[2]

This logic – organizational overlap dampens member states' incentives to delegate to an IO – implies that variation in organizational overlap should systematically shape variation in delegation. This does not necessarily mean that delegation decreases in absolute terms in response to decreasing overlap – institutions are sticky after all. Instead, we expect member states to confront lower functional and political demand for delegation in IOs that overlap extensively with others. As a result, those IOs are likely, on average, to feature lower levels of delegation. Thus:

H_1: For a given IO, a higher level of overlap is associated with a lower level of delegation.

[2] This is a more general phenomenon, as Charalambides (2005, 23) remarks: "the biggest impact of overlapping membership […] is the extent to which it impedes this transfer of sovereignty […] to regional institutions."

The 'monadic' effect of organizational overlap on delegation is likely to operate unevenly across overlapping IOs as member states' incentives for delegation in situations of overlap vary between high- and low-delegation IOs; IOs with higher initial delegation will be relatively less affected by the presence of functional equivalents and the negative consequences of forum shopping opportunities for states when compared to their low-delegation counterparts, for three reasons. First, the benefits of organizational overlap tend to be larger for states when overlapping IOs *vary* in their institutional design because high- and low-delegation IOs have distinct advantages. IOs with extensive delegation tend to be better at enhancing the credibility of commitments as well as solving distributional and enforcement problems, whereas IOs with little delegation enable sovereignty-protecting forms of cooperation and facilitate more flexible member state engagement (Snidal and Vabulas 2013; Abbott and Faude 2021). Especially the latter characteristics are attractive in Africa, where member states regularly use IOs for "regime-boosting" purposes that promote absolute state sovereignty (Söderbaum 2004, 426). It follows that institutional differentiation rather than redundancy is likely to maximize the value of organizational overlap for states and the resulting opportunities for forum shopping (Morse and Keohane 2014, 388; Jo and Namgung 2012, 1049).

Second, delegation generates sunk costs (Pierson 2004) and these are higher in IOs with relatively more delegation because states have already invested more financial and political resources into setting up independent agents (Wallander 2000; Haftel and Hofmann 2017). Sunk costs are also more difficult for member states to re-capture in such IOs since delegated agents accumulate significant political resources through delegation that they may employ "to resist member-state efforts to exercise greater control over their activities" (Pierson 1996, 142; see also Vaubel 2006). Therefore, states are likely to be more willing to follow functional incentives in IOs that already feature some delegation than those that do

not. Third, high-authority IOs are more likely to provide the delegated institutions that overlapping IOs can later draw on. As noted, this lowers incentives for low-authority IOs to solve those problems through delegation.

This differential structure of delegation incentives implies that member states are likely to be further delegation especially in those IOs that already feature some delegation and to constrain those that do not. Since formal power is sticky, this does not necessitate that IOs will see their delegated power wane. More likely, their delegation levels will remain stagnant, while those of the more authoritative IOs will further increase over time. The result is a larger delegation differential between IOs that overlap extensively. This is the 'dyadic' polarization effect:

> *H_2: A higher level of overlap between a given pair of IOs is associated with greater difference in their level of delegation.*

III. Sample, Data, and Research Design

The hypotheses we wish to test have different units of analysis. Whereas H_1 addresses the absolute level of delegation in an IO, requiring a monadic setup, H_2 engages the difference in the level of delegation between any pair of IOs, requiring a dyadic setup. In both cases, delegation is an institutional trait of the organization rather than of any particular country. The dependent, independent, and control variables, described in more detail below, are thus defined and measured at the IO level. Summary statistics and bivariate correlations for all variables are reported in the Online Appendix.

The dependent variables, *Delegation* and *Delta Delegation*, are continuous and range from zero to one. We therefore estimate all models with ordinary least squares (OLS). These models also include IO or IO-dyad fixed effects and year dummies to account for

unobservable heterogeneity across units and time. In addition, all models include robust standard errors clustered by IO or IO-dyad. Finally, the models include a lagged dependent variable to eliminate autocorrelation in the residuals and to model the dynamic data-generating processes,[3] and all independent variables are lagged one year to reduce the risk of reversed causality.[4] In the rest of this section, we first describe the operationalization and measurement of the dependent and independent variables. We then justify and explain the empirical scope of the analysis, i.e., African REOs, elaborate on the sample and data collection, and illustrate the variation on organizational overlap and delegation within our sample. Finally, we discuss the control variables.

Dependent Variables: Delegation and Delta Delegation

We utilize Hooghe et al.'s (2017, 21-22) conceptualization and measurement of delegation, defined as "a conditional grant of authority by member states to an independent body." Delegation is a key dimension of IO authority and it may involve a general secretariat that can set the agenda for decision making, an executive that has the competence to take day-to-day decisions, or a standing court that can sanction non-compliant states. Based on this definition, Hooghe et al. (2017) devised a variable that takes into account the transfer of agenda-setting or decision-making authority to four corporate bodies – a council, a secretariat, an assembly, and consultative bodies – with respect to six decision areas: accession, suspension, constitutional reform, budgetary allocation, financial non-compliance, and policy making. The aggregate measure, labelled *Delegation* and used to test the first hypothesis, is an additive index of several weighted indexes standardized to range from zero,

[3] While the 'Nickel bias' poses a threat to the estimation of the effect in dynamic models, our relatively long timeframe significantly reduces this risk.

[4] As a robustness check, we also run the analysis with three and five-year lags. Furthermore, to ensure that our results are not driven by any particular IOs, we rerun the models with a bootstrapping estimation method. The results, reported in the Appendix, remain largely intact.

for no delegation, to one, for a high level of delegation. *Delta Delegation*, utilized to assess the second hypotheses, is the difference, in absolute value, in the level of delegation between two IOs. It also varies from zero, for no difference in the level of delegation, to one, for the maximum possible difference.

Independent Variables

Our core theoretical expectation is that organizational overlap differentially undermines the functional incentives for delegation that spring from the collective action problems in IOs, which increases, in turn, with more members and a larger policy scope. Thus, the theory posits three variables: policy scope, membership size and organizational overlap.

We measure policy scope as the *Number of Policies* in which an IO is engaged in a given year from a list of twenty-five policies, following the coding scheme developed by Hooghe et al. (2017). The coding is based on eight legal, financial and organizational indicators, including legal documents (a protocol, a convention or an annex), budgetary information, and the creation or elimination of an institution (e.g., a commission, working group, directorate in the secretariat or a high-profile position) that is responsible for a specific policy. We measure membership size as the *Number of Members* that an IO has in a given year. We assembled this information ourselves on the basis of an IOs' official documents and website, as well as secondary literature.

Following our theory, we measure organizational overlap as the extent to which two IOs overlap in their membership and policy scope. Treating (1) overlap in membership and (2) overlap in policy scope as individually necessary and jointly sufficient for organizational overlap to exist accords with the standard conceptualization of overlap in the existing literature on regime complexity (Hofmann 2009). Only when both conditions are present simultaneously can we expect relevant interactions between IOs – such as cooperation,

deference, or competition – to take place; otherwise, IOs co-exist without "interference", as is the case with the AMU and the SADC, which have overlapping policies, or the World Trade Organization and the European Organization for Nuclear Research, which share members. Thusly conceived, we expect organizational overlap to undermine the incentives for delegation. To assess the plausibility of this approach, we run models that include overlapping policy competencies and only overlapping membership separately. These two variables, presented in models reported in the Appendix, are statistically insignificant. This 'placebo test' corroborates our conceptualization of IO overlap.

In constructing a measure of overlap for a given IO, labeled *Monadic MEPOS* (**ME**mbership and **P**olicy **O**verlap **S**core), we follow Haftel and Lenz (2022) who first calculate the 'directed' overlap between a given IO and all other IOs in the sample. That is, they divide the number of overlapping members by the number of this IO's members in a given year and do the same for the number of policies. They then multiply the two fractions to receive a value between zero and one, labeled Directed MEPOS, with higher values indicating greater overlap. *Monadic MEPOS* is the average of this value across all IOs in the sample. *Dyadic MEPOS*, utilized in the dyadic analysis, is the product of the number of overlapping members divided by the total number of members and the number of overlapping policies divided by the total number of policies for any two IOs (Haftel and Lenz 2022).[5] It also ranges from zero to one. As discussed next, we used Hooghe et al. (2017) data as well, if they were available, and coded the remaining IOs and years ourselves.

The Landscape of African REOs: Sample, Data, and Trends

[5] Hooghe et al. (2017) distinguish between 'core' and 'flanking' policies, the former is more central to the IO's mandate. To assess the sensitivity of our analysis to this distinction, we substitute monadic and dyadic *MEPOS* with monadic and dyadic *MEPOS Core*, which measure overlap only with respect to core policies in some models. The results, reported in the Appendix, are not affected by this change.

Testing the relationships between institutional overlap and authority requires a comprehensive sample of IOs. This is especially crucial to produce an accurate picture of the degree of overlap between one IO and all other IOs in a given geographical area or policy domain (or domains). In particular, an incomplete sample of organizations is likely to underestimate the degree of overlap for each IO and for a regime complex as a whole (see Haftel and Lenz 2022, 332). This problem is likely to be further exacerbated if available samples select on the value of the dependent variable. This condition holds for most datasets that provide comprehensive data on the authority of IOs. The most ambitious study, conducted by Hooghe et al. (2017), resulted in a sophisticated coding of about eighty IOs worldwide, out of about five hundred (Pevehouse et al. 2020). Yet, this dataset focuses on "IOs that have standing in international politics" (Hooghe et al. 2017, 16), by which they mean the most authoritative IOs existing today. Thus, while this sample is a good starting point, it is very incomplete, non-random, and potentially susceptible to selection bias. As pointed out in the introduction, we address this challenge by restricting the empirical analysis to a well-defined subset of IOs: African REOs. Coding most, if not all, IOs that fit this category, defined in greater detail next, allows us to conduct a meaningful empirical analysis of the relationships between IO overlap and delegation.

To assemble the sample of REOs, we started with the COW data set and definition of IGOs (Pevehouse et al. 2020) and included all the organizations that have exclusive African membership in the post-colonial era. We thus excluded global IOs or intra-regional IOs with African members, as well as emanations and agencies of other, global or regional, IOs. We then consulted additional sources on African IOs (Sohn 1972; Mays 2015; Mays and DeLancey 2002; Byiers 2017) and refined the list, such that we include all and only IOs that meet our criteria. Narrowing down the sample to *economic* IOs – defined as those IOs that the promotion of economic policy cooperation among their members is one of their primary

(but not necessarily exclusive) goals – increases the probability that we 'compare apples to apples' and that the overlap with respect to policies is meaningful.[6]

With these criteria in hand, we identified twenty-four REOs from 1959 to 2020, listed in the Online Appendix (Table OA1). We note that some of these REOs, such as OCAM and CEAO, were dissolved and no longer exist. In addition, some REOs have evolved over time and changed their names, a rather common occurrence in Africa. Thus, PTA and UDEAC were renamed COMESA and CEMAC, respectively, in 1994. In most cases, we treat such renaming as different 'incarnations' of the same REO. One exception is the EAC that was dissolved in the middle 1970s and was re-established in quite a different form in the 1990s. We therefore code them as two separate REOs (EAC I and EAC II). All in all, we believe our sample of REOs is very comprehensive and conducive to a compelling empirical analysis.

Next, we coded these REOs on their delegation, membership and policy scope. Hooghe et al. (2017) already coded eleven REOs on delegation up to 2010 and on policy competency up to 2017. We have extended their coding to 2020. We then coded the remaining REOs according to the protocols developed by Hooghe et al. (2017). To do this, we obtained founding and amendment agreements for these organizations in several languages, which served as the basis of our coding. We complemented these primary documents with several online catalogues and secondary literature. While coding some REOs that existed in the 1960s and 1970s and are now defunct proved to be a challenge, we were

[6] We define 'economic' broadly to include such issues as trade, development, finance, agriculture and fisheries, and macroeconomic policies. Also, other common types of African IOs deal with transboundary water resources (commonly river basins) and specific commodities. We have coded several such IOs but exclude them from the analysis herein. With respect to the former, states may be members in several regional water organizations (RWO), but each IO commonly deals with one specific resource. Hence, an instance in which several states are members in two or more RWOs is unlikely to result in a consequential policy overlap. Similarly, there is no real policy overlap between a regional commodity organization (RCO) that addresses, say, oil or rice, and an RCOs that deal with sugar or nutmeg.

able to find enough information on and code all REOs in our sample.[7] Nevertheless, given the embryonic stage of the African state system and REOs in the 1960s, we restrict the analysis to the 1970-2020 time-period. We also present models confined to the post-Cold War era (1990-2020), which possibly reflects a qualitatively different international environment.[8]

Figure 2 displays temporal trends in the average values on our key variables and their components for the sample (in contrast to Figure 1, which presented variation across IOs in a given point in time). We note, first, that the number of REOs has grown twofold – from nine to nineteen – over fifty years. Thus, the African web of this type of organizations has become much denser over time. With respect to the dependent variable, the average level of delegation rises incrementally until the late 1990s, jumps dramatically in the early 2000s and level off afterwards. From 1995 to 2005, they increase twofold (from ~0.12 to ~0.24). This is partly explained by the greater authority delegated to the AU in the early 2000s. However, despite intentions to designate the AU as Africa's flagship IO, several sub-regional REOs have also witnessed growing levels of authority during this period (e.g., EAC, ECOWAS and CEMAC).

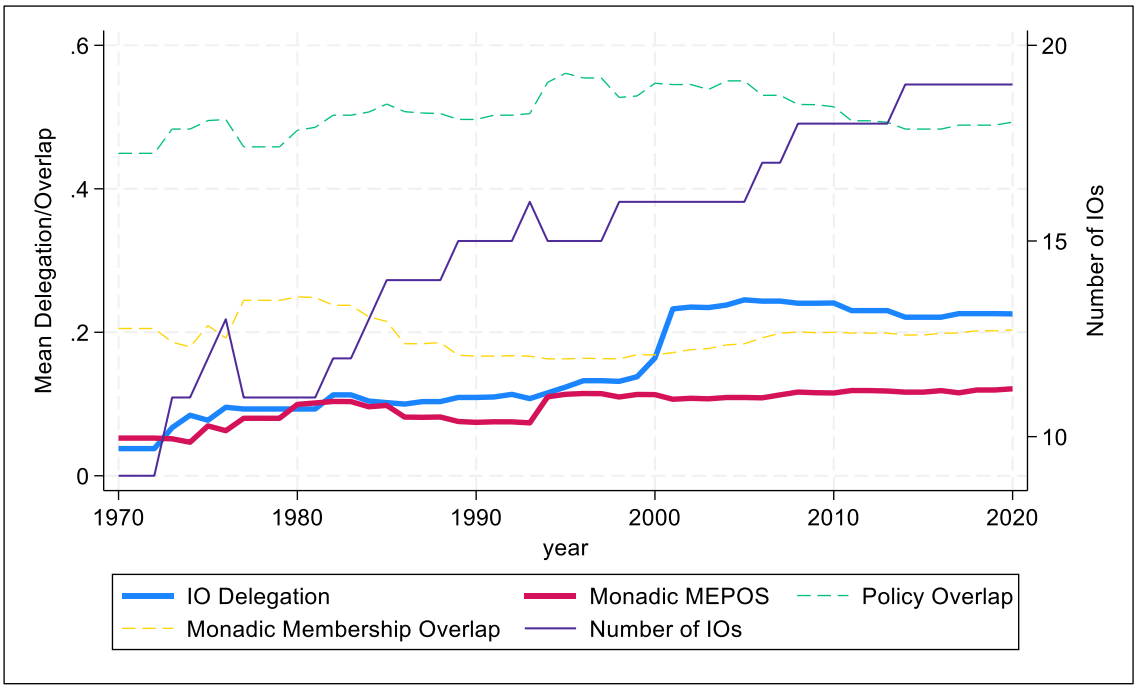
Turning to overlap, it appears that its value has increased incrementally from about 0.05 in the early 1970s to about 0.12 in 2020. Separate policy and membership overlap measures remain pretty stable over the years, but the former (hovering around 0.5) is much higher than the latter (hovering around 0.2). presumably, overlap in policy competency contributes more to the combined overlap measure. Considering that the average levels of separate components of MEPOS did not increase over the years, the increase of the combined

[7] For one REO, CEAO, we were not able to find enough reliable information on its predecessors: the West African Customs Union (UDAO, 1959-1965) and the Customs Union of Western African States (UDEAO, 1966-1973). We therefore did not code it for these years.

[8] We present models for the Cold War period in the Appendix. These models do not perform very well, perhaps due to the small number of observations. We cannot control for such a time dummy in the general models because they already include year fixed-effects.

measure may be attributed to the growing number of REOs. One should keep in mind, though, that newly established REOs commonly overlap incompletely with existing REOs, either on membership or policy competency, thereby offsetting somewhat the impact of growth in the number of organizations. Indeed, the sum (rather than average) of monadic overlap values for all existing IOs increases more than fourfold: from 0.47 in 1970 to 2.30 in 2020.

Figure 2: Annual trends in the delegation, overlap, and number of African IOs, 1970-2020



Control Variables

The degree of organizational overlap is certainly not the only factor that may determine the level of delegation. We control for a comprehensive set of other factors that pertain to member-states' needs and incentives, on the one hand, and internal and external constraints, on the other. We control for these factors to reduce the risk of spurious relationships between overlap and delegation.[9]

[9] We controlled for several factors, not presented in the analysis, which turned statistically insignificant and had no noticeable effects on our findings and conclusions. These include the number of years an REO exists, the

As already mentioned, conventional functionalist arguments indicate that, IO overlap aside, the demand for delegation increases with growing policy scope and membership. Keeping in mind that these two variables serve as building blocks of our theoretical framework and measure of overlap, these variables, described in the previous section, are included in all models. We also present one 'baseline' model that includes these two variables but excludes MEPOS.

Next, theories of regional integration emphasize economic interdependence, and especially trade relations, as an important driver of delegation (Mattli 1999; Haftel 2013). We control for this factor with *Trade Share*, which is the ratio of intra-REO trade to the organization's total trade multiplied by one-hundred. We calculate values for this variable with the COW Trade Data Set V4.0 (Barbieri and Keshk 2016). Unfortunately, this data set ends in 2014. To reduce the number of missing observations, we complement it with data from UNCTAD, which calculates trade share values for fourteen REOs included in our sample.[10]

Power asymmetry within the REO is another commonly cited explanation for institutional authority, even if the nature of its effect is in dispute. Some studies suggest that powerful states prefer weak REOs such that their ability to advance their interests is not excessively constrained (Smith 2000). Alternative accounts focus on the importance of hegemonic powers as suppliers of regional institutions (Mattli 1999). We do not take a strong view on this matter but nevertheless control for this potential confounder with the so-called

average level of GDP growth, and the average level of economic openness. Another potentially important factor is the extent of funding provided to African REOs by external donors, such as the European Union and individual European and North American countries. Unfortunately, systematic data on the extent of such funding is sparse and is not conducive to a meaningful statistical analysis. Moreover, according to Stapel and Söderbaum (2020), who examined this issue, external funding to African REOs was almost non-existent before the 2000s, and since then almost half of financial support was granted to the AU, an REO that enjoys only intermediate levels of authority. These relationships call for further research.

[10] https://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/. Reassuringly, the correlation between the two data series is 0.90. Excluding the UNCTAD data from the analysis does change the results.

concentration ratio (Smith 2000; Haftel 2013). The value of this variable, labeled *Concentration*, increases as asymmetry between member states' economic size grows and is bounded between 0 and 1. It is measured with GDP data in constant 2010 US$ taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI).[11]

Turning to domestic factors, more economically advanced countries may derive greater gains from economic cooperation as well as have the means to sustain powerful REOs (Mattli 1999; Gray 2014). We control for this possibility with *Mean GDPpc*, measured with the average GDP per capita (logged) of all REO members. This variable is calculated with data from the WDI as well. Second, democratic countries are known to delegate greater political power to international institutions compared to other types of political regimes (Pevehouse and Russett 2006). We account for this factor with *Mean Polyarchy*, which is the annual mean of the member states' score on a measure that takes into account key aspects of democracy, based on the Variety of Democracies (V-Dem) data set (Coppedge et al. 2019).

Heterogeneity of member states with respect to domestic economic and political characteristics may matter as well. Countries that have different attributes may find it more difficult to agree on shared institutional rules and to delegate authority. We gauge the impact of such diversity in several manners. Parallel to the two variables discussed above, we account for heterogeneity in member states' regime type and level of development. The former, *STD Polyarchy*, is the standard deviation of the Polyarchy measure. The latter, *STD GDPpc*, is the logged standard deviation of the member states' level of development. For the sake of parsimony, the Polyarchy and GDPpc variables are included in separate models.

Another aspect of heterogeneity pertains to the legacy of colonialism. Possibly, states that share such a legacy may have more in common and may find it easier to form and

[11] https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators.

empower REOs. This issue may be especially important in Africa, a continent in which colonial rule and competition have left a strong mark. Thus, some REOs identify themselves as 'Francophone' or 'Anglophone.' We control for this factor with *Colonial Homogeneity*. To construct this variable, we begin by identifying the dominant colonial power in terms of the number of member states in the REO. We then compute the percentage of states sharing this colonial legacy out of the entire membership.

Next, the ability and willingness to invest REOs with authority may hinge on the security situation within and across national borders. We account for such conditions with two variables. First, allegedly, states that suffer from civil wars and other forms of domestic unrest have to turn their attention and scarce resources to these problems rather than invest in regional cooperative endeavors, such as REOs. We measure this variable, labeled *Civil War*, with the number of internal armed conflicts erupted in any of the REO's member, based on the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. Version 21.1 (Gleditsch et al. 2002, Pettersson et al. 2021). Along similar lines, member states that find themselves embroiled in armed conflict may be loath to grant an REO much authority. We control for this possibility with *MID,* which is coded one if there was at least one militarized inter-state dispute between two or more REO members, and zero otherwise. Data come from the Dyadic MID dataset Version 4.02 (Maoz et al. 2019)

All the control variables described so far appear in the monadic analysis. To adapt them to the dyadic analysis, which accounts for the difference in the level of delegation, we calculate the absolute difference of the control variables as well. This approach is based on the logic that factors that explain delegation for a given REO should also explain the difference on this dyadic measure. For example, insofar as the number of policy competencies is associated with greater delegation, an REO that engages in more policy areas should score higher on delegation than an REO that tackles fewer policy areas. Thus, the

dyadic models include the following control variables: *Delta Number of Policy Competencies, Delta REO Trade Share, Delta GPDpc, Delta Mean Polyarchy, Delta STD GDPpc, Delta STD Polyarchy, Delta Concentration, Delta MIDs, Delta Civil Wars, Delta Colonial Homogeneity,* and *Delta Number of Members*. With this in mind, we turn to the results of the statistical analysis.

IV. Results

We start by reporting results from our monadic analysis, before turning to the dyadic analysis. Table 1 report the results of four models accounting for the relationships between *Monadic MEPOS* and *Delegation*. Model 1 in Table 1 is our baseline model and Model 2 adds the main independent variable. Model 3 substitutes *GDPpc* and *STD GDPpc* with *Polyarchy* and *STD Polyarchy* and Models 4 repeats Model 2 for the post-Cold War period. Table 2 presents parallel models for *Dyadic MEPOS* and *Delta Delegation*. We note that the R^2 in all models except the ones restricted to the Cold War era is very high: above 0.90 in the monadic setup and above 0.80 in the dyadic setup, suggesting, reassuringly, that these model specifications are doing a very good job accounting for the variation on dependent variables.

The findings provide strong support for our theoretical framework. In line with H_1, REO overlap is negative and statistically significant at a ninety-five percent level of confidence. Thus, REOs that experience greater overlap with their peers tend to have lower levels of delegated authority, presumably due to a reduced severity of common collective action problems and opportunities for forum shopping. As the various models indicate, these results remain intact when restricting the sample to the post-Cold era or changing the sets of control variables. Substantively, based on Model 2 in Table 1, a one unit increase in the value of *Monadic MEPOS* results in a decrease of about a quarter of a unit in the value of *Delegation* (this value increases to forty percent for the post-Cold War era).

Thus, for example, we should expect that moving from the minimum value of zero to the maximum value of 0.21 on *Monadic MEPOS* will result in a fall of about 0.05 in the value of *Delegation* (which ranges from zero to 0.62 in the sample). This is consistent with African REOs that have below average levels of IO overlap and high, and increasingly so, levels of delegation, e.g., ECOWAS that scores around 0.06 on *Monadic MEPOS* and has witnessed an increase of more than 0.5 on delegation (from 0.09 in the late 1970s to 0.62 in the late 2010s). In contrast, MRU (which is nested within ECOWAS), with an average *Monadic MEPOS* more than twice as high (around 0.16 in the 2000), has a low and static level of delegation: 0.06 for almost five decades.

The results reported in Table 2 offer robust support for H_2. Here, the estimates of *MEPOS Dyad* are positive and statistically significant in all three models. That is, pairs of REOs that have higher overlap tend to experience greater difference in their levels of delegation. Allegedly, as one REO enjoys greater authority, its counterpart remains institutionally feeble. Substantively, based on Model 2 in Table 2, a one unit increase in the value of *Dyadic MEPOS* results in a decrease of about ten percentage point in the value of *Delta Delegation*. Thus, moving from the minimum value of zero to the maximum value of 0.41 on *Dyadic MEPOS* will result in a rise of close to 0.05 in the value of *Delta Delegation*. The CEMAC-ECCAS dyad, which scores highest on overlap in the sample, nicely illustrates this result. While the former has benefited from a steady increase of delegation, reaching 0.47 in the 2010s, the latter's value stagnated at 0.06 for its entire existence. Presumably, the members of CEMAC (which is nested in the ECCAS) preferred to invest their limited resources in this REO to the detriment of the ECCAS. Compare this to the CEMAC-COMESA pair, which scores zero on *Dyadic MEPOS*. Both REOs, which do not have overlapping membership (even if they have rather similar policy competencies) have seen a rise in their level of delegation over time.

Table 1: The Sources of *Delegation* in African REOs, 1970-2020

	(1) MEPOS Excluded	(2) GDP per Capita Variables	(3) Polyarchy Variables	(4) Post-Cold War Period
Number of Policy Competencies	0.00269**	0.00318**	0.00322**	0.00470**
	(2.39)	(2.70)	(2.53)	(2.31)
Number of Members	0.000788	0.000673	-0.000187	0.000865
	(0.94)	(0.79)	(-0.21)	(1.25)
Monadic MEPOS		-0.228**	-0.148**	-0.414***
		(-2.47)	(-2.16)	(-3.00)
REO Trade Share	-0.00256**	-0.00307***	-0.00316***	-0.00341**
	(-2.44)	(-2.95)	(-2.97)	(-2.33)
Mean GPDpc (LN)	-0.00180	-0.0106		-0.0305**
	(-0.28)	(-1.39)		(-2.26)
STD GDPpc (LN)	-0.00310	-0.000914		0.0133*
	(-0.74)	(-0.21)		(1.83)
Mean Polyarchy			0.0623	
			(1.64)	
STD Polyarchy			-0.0226	
			(-0.41)	
Concentration	0.00651	0.00854	-0.00496	0.0123
	(0.44)	(0.52)	(-0.31)	(0.90)
MID	-0.00611*	-0.00689**	-0.00417	-0.00939*
	(-1.98)	(-2.11)	(-1.39)	(-1.94)
Civil Wars	-0.00135	-0.00140	-0.000459	-0.000306
	(-0.93)	(-0.95)	(-0.32)	(-0.24)
Colonial Homogeneity	0.0347	0.0322	0.0222	0.0552
	(0.97)	(0.92)	(0.91)	(1.33)
Lagged Delegation	0.900***	0.878***	0.878***	0.807***
	(34.19)	(31.55)	(33.90)	(22.03)
Constant	0.0252	0.109	0.00943	0.157*
	(0.43)	(1.58)	(0.34)	(2.07)
N	668	662	662	483
R^2	0.939	0.940	0.940	0.912

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 2: The Sources of *Delta Delegation* in African REOs, 1970-2020

	(1) MEPOS Excluded	(2) GDP per Capita Variables	(3) Polyarchy Variables	(4) Post-Cold War Period
Delta Number of Policy Competencies	0.000729*	0.000909**	0.000835**	0.00106**
	(1.82)	(2.36)	(2.20)	(2.19)
Delta Number of Members	-0.000142	-0.000196	-0.000218	-0.000205
	(-0.34)	(-0.46)	(-0.50)	(-0.43)
Dyadic MEPOS		0.115**	0.110**	0.155**
		(2.21)	(2.13)	(2.27)
Delta REO Trade Share	-0.00138***	-0.00133***	-0.00133***	-0.00165***
	(-3.20)	(-3.05)	(-3.04)	(-3.30)
Delta Mean GPDpc (LN)	-0.00146	0.000980		-0.00911
	(-0.19)	(0.12)		(-0.68)
Delta STD GDPpc (LN)	-0.00866**	-0.00887**		-0.00325
	(-2.36)	(-2.38)		(-0.52)
Delta Mean Polyarchy			-0.0177	
			(-1.07)	
Delta STD Polyarchy			0.0167	
			(0.83)	
Delta Concentration	0.0214***	0.0213***	0.0231***	0.0204**
	(2.72)	(2.66)	(2.93)	(2.26)
Delta MID	-0.00343*	-0.00350*	-0.00331*	-0.00467**
	(-1.93)	(-1.93)	(-1.79)	(-2.18)
Delta Civil Wars	-0.000851	-0.000970*	-0.00102*	-0.000258
	(-1.60)	(-1.75)	(-1.78)	(-0.42)
Delta Colonial Homogeneity	-0.0158*	-0.0128	-0.0146	-0.0177**
	(-1.83)	(-1.43)	(-1.59)	(-2.05)
Delta Lagged Delegation	0.879***	0.877***	0.877***	0.846***
	(79.54)	(78.10)	(77.83)	(73.74)
Constant	0.0419***	0.0361***	0.0353***	0.0433***
	(5.49)	(4.75)	(4.89)	(4.71)
N	4,500	4,500	4,500	3,665
R^2	0.848	0.848	0.848	0.819

t statistics in parentheses
* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Turning to control variables, as expected, the number of policy competencies, or the difference thereof, is positive and statistically significant in all models. The number of members, on the other hand, switches signs across models and is statistically insignificant. Thus, REOs with responsibilities in more issue-areas generate demand for greater delegation, as the functional logic expects. The same does not hold for growing membership, at least in Africa. Possibly, additional members also complicate efforts to delegate power to IOs as reaching agreement on such matters becomes more difficult.

Surprisingly, the estimates of *Trade Share* are negative and statistically significant in all models. In contrast to conventional integration theory, it appears that higher levels of regional interdependence result in lower levels of delegation. One possible explanation for this finding is that African REOs are less concerned with intra-regional trade, which tends to be miniscule compared to Africa's trade with the rest of the world, and more focused on other economic policy areas, such as development and finance as well as non-economic matters, such as security (Haftel and Hofmann 2017). This question requires further attention in future research.

The regional distribution of power appears to have no effect on the level of delegation. Nevertheless, *Delta Concentration* is positive and statistically significant in all models in Table 2, indicating that greater difference on this measure is associated with a greater gap in the respective levels of delegation. The average level of economic development has a negative coefficient, but it is statistically significant only for the sample restricted for the post-Cold era. The mean level of democracy has a positive coefficient that falls just short of statistical significance. These results suggest, weakly, that REOs created by less developed, but more democratic, African countries, tend to enjoy higher levels of delegation. The dyadic differences on these two domestic variables are statistically insignificant in all models, however. We also find limited support for the role of

heterogeneity: *STD GDPpc*, *STD Polyarchy*, and *Colonial Homogeneity* are statistically insignificant in all models in Table 1. In contrast, *Delta STD GDPpc* and *Delta Colonial Homogeneity* are consistently negative and reach statistical significance in several models.

The effect of armed conflict on delegation is mixed. Unsurprisingly, we find that states embroiled in militarized interstate disputes are more hesitant to delegate authority to their REOs. There appears to be no parallel effect of civil wars, however: the coefficients are negative but statistically insignificant. Interestingly, both Delta MID and Delta Civil Wars are negative and (weakly) statistically significant in most models in Table 2. This result suggests that a greater difference between a given pair of REOs on these variables is associated with more similar levels of delegation, a finding that warrants further examination.

Finally, the lagged dependent variables are highly statistically significant, which is to be expected given the temporal stickiness of the delegation measure. Importantly for our purposes here, the effects of the overlap measures are robust to the inclusion of this variable, as well as fixed effects, year dummies, and a host of potential confounding factors. Thus, REO overlap exerts the hypothesized dampening and polarization effects.

V. Conclusion

This paper investigates the relationships between organizational overlap and IO delegation, two important phenomena in the current landscape of world politics that have been studied largely in isolation. Drawing on REOs in Africa, a region with a high density of economic organizations, we argue that organizational overlap differentially constrains IO delegation. Our analysis shows that (1) IOs that overlap extensively with others tend to have lower levels of delegation than those that do not, while (2) pairs of IOs with a high degree of overlap tend to exhibit greater divergence in their levels of delegation. We interpret this result as following

an incentive-based logic according to which, in situations of organizational overlap, member states have both fewer functional incentives to delegate due to the availability of functional equivalents in reducing the transaction costs of cooperation and reduced political will to delegate due to opportunities for forum shopping.

Our findings have two important theoretical implications. First, they bolster recent analyses of IOs that emphasize the organizational environment as an important determinant of IO design and behaviour (Abbott, Green and Keohane 2016; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2020; Morin 2020). Yet, instead of focusing on structural characteristics of populations, our analysis emphasizes specific relationships between IOs in a shared governance space. Our analysis also aligns with recent studies that see IO design as contextual and dependent on the wider institutional status quo (Copelovitch and Putnam 2014; Jupille, Mattli and Snidal 2013; Reinsberg and Westerwinter 2023) and extends these to understand to a particular class of design elements related to delegation. Moreover, our findings complement existing studies emphasizing 'endogenous' determinants of IO delegation. They suggest that alongside the effects of IO and member state characteristics on IO delegation, one can identify an environmental logic that emanates from interactions between overlapping IOs.

Second, they bear on the debate among scholars of regime complexity about the consequences of overlap. While some scholars hold that overlap undermines international cooperation and allows states to evade their commitments, others argue that overlapping IOs can reinforce each other and specialize in mutually beneficial arrangements. Unfortunately, scant empirical evidence has been brought to bear on this question. Our analysis supports the more negative view of regime complexity. In so far as delegation is associated with the attainment of an IO's goal, greater overlap appears to weaken an IO's ability to act upon and successfully advance its stated objectives. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the great deal of overlap in the African continent is accompanied by the widely held perception

that many REOs are ineffective and contribute little to the betterment of economic and political conditions in this region. Frequent calls to 'rationalize' overlapping organizations in Africa is motivated by the dynamics we theorize and demonstrate empirically in this paper.

Third, the paper also carries implications for the debate about the sources of backlash against IOs and the liberal international order more broadly. Recent research shows that cultural and economic polarization is an important driver of globalization backlash, including resistance against IOs, in many 'Western' societies (Walter 2021). At the same time, established IOs come under pressure from non-Western rising powers that wish to see IOs rest on a different set of fundamental values, including non-intervention and the preservation of national sovereignty (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021). We complement this emphasis on political dynamics by highlighting how IOs come under stress through an institutional dynamic that originates in the growing overlap between IOs. As organizational overlap grows, states are less willing to delegate. The sources of pressure on IOs in the current period are more diverse than previously thought.

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