

“Not So Different After All”: Governance and Behavioral Dynamics in the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

by Stefan Gänzle, Jarle Trondal, and Nadja S.B. Kühn, University of Agder

It is remarkable how little we know about the executive arms or secretariats of international organizations outside of Europe. While there exists a rich literature on the European Commission and the much smaller General Secretariat of the Council, the international public administration (IPA) of non-European international organizations remains scholarly in the dark. This holds true for the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) too, which is one of the most important regional intergovernmental organizations for political and economic integration in Africa. Drawing on a novel data-set, this essay contributes an analysis on governance patterns among the high-level staff of ECOWAS. Two findings are highlighted by this study: First, the intergovernmental behavioral logic inside the ECOWAS Commission is profoundly balanced by a blend of supranational, departmental, and epistemic dynamics. Thus, IPAs embedded in intergovernmental international organizations may indeed go beyond mere intergovernmentalism—not only in the case of the EU, but also in other regional organizations. Second, civil servants of the ECOWAS Commission are strongly committed to impartiality, nonpartisanship, and the importance of expert concerns and considerations as well as the concerns of their own policy sector. These findings challenge one leading school in this literature suggesting that (socialization) processes outside IPAs are the crucial predictors of the role perceptions of staff. In contrast, our study suggests that behavioral logics within IPAs are strongly shaped by organizational factors inside IPAs as well.

Introduction

In recent years, scholars of public administration have increasingly turned to the role assumed by the executive arms of international organizations. These secretariats are often referred to as international public administrations (IPAs) (Bauer et al. 2017; Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson, and Veggeland 2010). IPAs are bureaucracies that are organizationally separate from other, intergovernmental branches or institutions of their respective organizations, such as a general assembly (i.e., meetings of heads of state and governments or sectorial councils of ministers of member states) or a parliamentary assembly. IPAs enjoy some degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the constituent member states, as well as the other institutions, though they may in practice be presumed to implement legislated mandates by the intergovernmental bodies.¹ With respect to organizational architecture, they are 1) vertically specialized, normally headed by

1. In the case of ECOWAS, Article 20 of the ECOWAS Treaty (para. 1) stipulates that “[. . .] staff of the Community shall owe their loyalty entirely and be accountable only to the Community. In this respect, they shall neither seek nor accept instructions from any government or any national or international authority external to the Community. They shall refrain from any activity or any conduct incompatible with their status as international civil servants.”

an administrative leader, 2) horizontally specialized internally (e.g., portfolios such as finances, economic development etc.) and externally vis-à-vis other institutions (e.g., the authority of heads of state and government or council of ministers), and 3) are mostly staffed with permanent personnel, recruited on the principle of meritocracy and made liable to institutional loyalty, sometimes supplemented with a more flexible set of contracted temporary staff. Albeit occasionally challenged by political logics of hiring, the autonomy of an IPA results partly from recruitment rules by which the hiring procedure is formally shielded from member states' influence or affirmation (see Murdoch, Trondal, and Gänzle 2014 for the European External Action Service) and partly from organizational independence vis-à-vis the council (Egeberg and Trondal 2018).

Studies suggest that the autonomy of IPAs pose accountability challenges to the Westphalian state order based on domestic administrative sovereignty (Gouretitch 2003; Kegley and Raymond 2002, 192; March and Olsen 1998; Reinalda 2009; Rosenau 1997). As a consequence of increasing institutionalization (March and Olsen 1998), IPAs may contribute to autonomous agency and shift actor-hood in global public governance (Barnett and Finnemore 2004) and thereby profoundly (re)shape the conduct of global politics (Keohane et al. 2009). Moreover, recent research confirms that IPAs not only have significant impact on the design and conduct of world politics (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009) but also affect power distributions across various levels of governance (Egeberg and Trondal 2009), eventually transforming domestic public governance processes (Keohane et al. 2009). Yet, although a rich body of comparative studies on the internal dynamics of IPAs has put forth ever new empirical observations (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Checkel 2007; Gould and Kelman 1970; Hardt 2016; Hawkins et al. 2006; Knill and Bauer 2016; Mouritzen 1990; Rochester 1986), the causal dynamics remain to be clarified and documented concerning in-house governance patterns in general and thus the behavioral logics of staff in particular. Our goal is to disclose the extent to which rival behavioral logics—supranational, departmental, epistemic, and intergovernmental—are present in IPAs, as well as suggest how they may be explained by in-house organizational factors (see Table 1).

We will do this by using the ECOWAS as our case at point. We have selected the ECOWAS Commission for several reasons: First, it is part of one of the older systems of regional integration in Africa, dating back to the early 1970s—at that time still a secretariat. Second, the entire ensemble of ECOWAS is highly relevant as not only one of the most important regional economic communities (RECs) but also one of the paramount security actors in Africa, helping end the Sierra Leone Civil War, which was possibly one of the most violent conflicts of the 1990s in Africa, and in supporting peaceful regime change in Gambia in 2017–18, to mention two examples. Third, we have been granted privileged access by the commission president of that time to reach out to ECOWAS Commission officials by means of surveys and interviews (see section on methodology). Thus, the ambition of our paper is twofold: Firstly, to empirically map the blend of behavioral logics evoked by ECOWAS high-level staff. More specifically we ask, to what extent do these ECOWAS officials supplement an inherent intergovernmental behavioral logic with a blend of supranational, departmental, and epistemic behavioral logics? Secondly, we illuminate how these behavioral logics reflect the organizational design of the ECOWAS Commission. By doing so, the paper applies an organizational theory approach to public governance. We will argue that behavioral logics within IPAs are systematically shaped by organizational factors inside IPAs, thus confronting one leading school in this literature suggesting that (socialization) processes outside IPAs are strong causal factors of the role perceptions of staff, such as national norms, grounded in prior experiences in national ministries, loyalty to national parties, or alternatively, previous experience with one's country of authority (see Hooghe 2005).

Moreover, this study serves as a robustness-check on existing IPA literature by gauging the extent to which behavioral dynamics of ECOWAS' Commission staff resemble those inside other IPAs (e.g., Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009; Bauer et al. 2017;

Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson, and Veggeland 2010). It remedies a biased case selection in most IPA-studies, which has left IPAs of non-European international organizations largely in the scholarly dark. These are ignored as unimportant, or sometimes deemed fundamentally different for cultural reasons, or simply seen as inaccessible black boxes with only little delegated authority. Our study not only addresses such misconception but also fills a void by drawing from a new data-set gathered from high-level staff of the ECOWAS Commission in 2016 and 2017. The paper thus supplements an overly Western or OECD-biased case selection in IPA-studies, with strong emphasis on the study of the European Commission (see e.g., Kassim et al. 2013). As an executive branch of a regional organization, the European Commission is *sui generis* or “unique” by being formally separated from member state influence and having a remarkable role in the policy-making process (both as initiator and guardian of EU legislation and law). In other instances of regional integration—including the one presented here—similar levels of organizational independence are clearly not in place (Bossuyt 2016, 9). Consequently, such IPAs, including our case of the ECOWAS Commission, should be considered more as a hard case for enjoying similarly high levels of autonomy and influence as the European Commission that transcends the intergovernmental order. Although ECOWAS is primarily intergovernmental, it contains supranational bodies, in particular, the ECOWAS Commission (Hulse 2014; Lokulo-Sodipe and Osuntogun 2013). Our central argument is to disclose the extent to which rival behavioral logics—supranational, departmental, epistemic, and intergovernmental—may ultimately appear parallel to the ECOWAS Commission. Africa-based IPAs, which are often multilateral, continental, and donor-driven, may actually be a breeding ground for professional and permanent staff that share many features that we commonly see in technocracies.

Two findings from our original survey stand out: First, the commission operates through a blend of supranational, departmental, and epistemic dynamics which balance the intergovernmental, behavioral logic. Essentially, our data suggests that ECOWAS Commission officials are most inclined to adopt a departmental mindset,² which reflects in-house organizational structures. These findings also support recent studies showing that IPAs act fairly independently of the international organization in which they are embedded (Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson, and Veggeland 2010). Moreover, this finding is *grosso modo* (approximately) in line with those of other IPAs, thus showing that IPAs embedded in intergovernmental international organizations are essentially supranational and go beyond mere intergovernmentalism. Secondly, the blend of behavioral logics among commission staff systematically reflect the organizational design of the ECOWAS Commission. Civil servants of the ECOWAS Commission are strongly committed to impartiality and nonpartisanship and agree that professional or expert concerns and considerations, as well as their own policy sector affairs, are important in daily work.

The essay proceeds as follows: After briefly sketching out the state of contemporary IPA research, the subsequent two sections briefly present the contours of an organizational theory approach to analyze the level of (perceived) autonomy of ECOWAS Commission officials. Our mixed-method approach draws from both a survey and semi-structured interviews conducted among commission staff. Thereafter, the constitutional and organizational architecture of the ECOWAS Commission is briefly outlined. The following section then analyzes the main survey findings. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main arguments and outlines future research agendas.

An Organizational Theory Approach

There are hardly any studies of the administration of the ECOWAS Commission to date—a fact that somewhat echoes the overall lack of empirical research on ECOWAS (Bossuyt 2016, 13). In a nutshell, the literature on ECOWAS and its institutions including the commission

2. We are careful in our statement as we cannot rely on comparable evidence from national ministries in ECOWAS member states.

tends to be institutionally descriptive and does not analyze or offer data on actual decision-making behavior or processes (Akonor 2011; Sender 2016; for an exception Hooghe et al. 2017). As a consequence, our knowledge base of the anatomy of these organizations and how they ultimately function remains poor (Haarstrup 2013, 788). Hartmann even goes so far as to complain that “[a]ccess to basic documents or essential data is very difficult. . . . Some core decisions are never published in the Official Journal of ECOWAS. . . . There is no information on the closed-door negotiations among the heads of state and no memoirs by retired Presidents. Few local researchers have access to policy makers. . . . There is no cumulative wisdom [one, *the authors*] can build on” (2013, 7). Only a few studies have hitherto exclusively embraced ECOWAS as a single case study. Most analyses concentrate on specific activities of ECOWAS, such as its peacekeeping missions (e.g., Coleman 2007), specific policy fields—such as monetary cooperation (in the framework of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, also known by its French acronym UEMOA)—and ECOWAS as a case for comparative regionalism (Cernicky 2008; Plenk 2014).³

Supplementing existing studies of IPAs in international relations (e.g., Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Beyers 2010; Checkel 2007; Herrmann et al. 2004; Finnemore 1993), our study advances an organizational theory approach in the study of IPAs in general and the ECOWAS Commission in particular (Egeberg 2003; Egeberg and Trondal 2018; Trondal 2007). This is necessary to gain additional tools for unpacking institutional black boxes. By doing so, we place analytical prominence on the effects of organizational factors on public governance processes and human behavior. Organizational rules and procedures offer codified and normative structures for incumbents. To understand the process whereby actors adopt certain patterns of behavior over others, one has to unpack the normative structures embedded in these organizational principles and the underlying logic of action. One core supposition supporting an organizational approach is bound rationality and the computational limitations of actors (March 2008). Formal organizations provide cognitive scripts and normative shortcuts, as well as categories that simplify and guide actors’ choices of behavior and roles (Simon 1957). Organizations socially construct and provide frames for storing experiences, cognitive maps categorizing complex information, procedures for reducing transaction costs, regulative norms that add cues for appropriate behavior, as well as physical boundaries and temporal rhythms that guide actors’ perceptions of relevance with respect to administrative behavior (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; March 2010; March and Olsen 1998). Organizations also discriminate between those conflicts that should be attended to and those that should rather be de-emphasized (Egeberg 2006). By organizing civil servants into permanent bureaucracies inside international organizations, a system of rule followers and role players is established, which is relatively independent of the domestic branch of the executive government (March and Olsen 1998, 952). One way of empirically illuminating an organizational approach among international civil servants is to see if their behavioral logics are profoundly and systematically biased and influenced by the IPA.

Table 1 highlights the different ways IPAs might bias the behavior of staff. Moreover, Table 1 suggests that intergovernmental behavior is a credible alternative in most IPAs. Most importantly, it suggests three supplementary behavioral logics. These logics build partly on findings in contemporary IPA studies (Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson, and Veggeland 2010) but are also inspired by generic organization theory advocating that organizational members are multiple selves and tend to act on a complex set of decision premises (e.g., March and Olsen 1998; Simon 1957). Accordingly, it would be short-sighted to assume that ECOWAS’ bureaucrats have been reduced to nothing more than simple delegates and humble servants of their respective member states (Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Ege and Bauer 2013).

3. Concerning literature covering public administration aspects of ECOWAS, some papers on its structural reforms during the 1990s and 2000s, such as the revision of the ECOWAS Treaty (Lavergne 1997; Mair and Peters-Berries 2001) or the more recent 2006 reforms of the Secretariat/Commission (ECOWAS 2006; Lokulo-Sodipe and Osuntogun 2013), have been found.

An organizational approach expects ECOWAS staff to act relatively more on the premise of departmental, supranational, and epistemic logics than on the premise of an intergovernmental behavioral logic. As suggested by early contingency theory (Thomson 1967, 44), integration research (Pentland 1973, 196), and more recent institutionalist scholarship (Olsen 2007, 13), complex organizations tend to combine and integrate a multidimensional set of organizational components and decision-making dynamics. From an organizational theory approach, IPAs should be no exception. Moreover, the independence of ECOWAS would imply in reality that the three aforementioned logics balance, if not dominate over the intergovernmental one (Trondal, Marcussen, Larsson, and Veggeland 2010, 15). Role perceptions are generalized recipes for action, as well as normative systems of self-reference that provide spontaneous codes for behavior and feelings of allegiance to organized communities (Mayntz 1999, 83). Ultimately, such perceptions may guide the actual behavior of actors, because roles provide “conceptions of reality, standards of assessment, affective ties, and endowments, and . . . a capacity for purposeful action” (March and Olsen 1995, 30). It is important to recall that these four logics are ideal-types and, in practice, are often mixed. We also note that our study has individuals as units of analysis, or rather, high level officials in the ECOWAS Commission. Each of the behavioral logics are empirically measured, partly by the background of the civil servants and partly by their behavioral patterns. The main background attributes refer to (in addition to age and gender) their nationality, their past careers, as well as their future career plans. Their behavioral patterns are measured by their task profiles (Table 3), contact patterns (Table 4), the main concerns and considerations emphasized (Figure 1), whose arguments are paid attention to when making decisions (Table 5), the origins of commission proposals (Table 6), patterns of conflicts (Figure 2), patterns of coordination (Figure 3), and finally what models of the ECOWAS Commission are deemed preferable and likely (Figure 4). Together these variables serve as a comprehensive set of proxies for the four behavioral logics outlined in the following.

Table 1. Four Behavioral Logics

	Role Perceptions			
	Intergovernmental	Supranational	Departmental	Epistemic
Role Ideal	State Identity	International Organization Identity	Civil Servant Identity	Expert Identity
Role Base	Territorial Base	Community Base	Organizational Base	Knowledge Base
Driving Force	‘What is my state’s interest?’	‘What is the common good?’	‘What is procedurally correct?’	‘What is scientifically correct?’

Source: Compiled by the authors.

According to an intergovernmental behavioral logic, an official is guided by a loyalty toward his or her home government. An official is likely to nurture domestic and national contacts and concerns over international ones. They have a preference for national interests and enjoy close contact with their home base. Fundamentally, to be a civil servant in an international organization is considered to be a frontline worker for a national government. From that perspective, the civil servant may be conceived as a Trojan horse within the international bureaucracy. Such a member state-based role perception clearly stands in sharp contrast to a supranational role perception. An intergovernmental civil servant typically originates from member states, foresee a future career in member states, have a nonpermanent position, see the ECOWAS Commission as a neutral secretariat and mediator between the member states, and politically accountable vis-à-vis the member states.

A supranational (or cosmopolitan) behavioral logic focuses on actors’ feelings of loyalty and allegiance to the international bureaucracy as a whole and to the international organization. A supranational role implies a shift of loyalty (Haas 1958, 16) and a sense of community (Deutsch 1957, 5–6) that is integral and endogenous to actors’ self-perceptions. A supranational

role perception denotes that a shared system of rules, norms, principles, and codes of conduct is induced, internalized, and taken for granted by actors. This is where actors acquire a collective interest and a positional organizational personality inside the international bureaucracy, which are “insulated from the politics of national interest” (Okolo 1985, 138) and distinct from the roles previously internalized (Searing 1991, 1249; Simon 1957, 278). They personally identify with the international bureaucracy in which they are employed. A supranationally minded civil servant would typically originate from international organizations, foresee a future career at the international level, enjoy a permanent position, and see the ECOWAS Commission as an independent government vis-à-vis member states.

A departmental behavioral logic is eventually related to the idea of civil servants as Weberian-type officials. Whereas international organizations ultimately establish “rules for the world” (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), international bureaucracies generate action capacity at the international level (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009). Accordingly, civil servants of IPAs would primarily be intelligent, generalist professionals who advise their principal(s). A classical Weberian civil servant is guided by formal rules and procedures in everyday decision-making, being party-politically neutral. They attach identity toward their ECOWAS unit and division and abide by administrative rules and proper procedures. This is the Westminster model that sees officials as permanent and loyal to shifting cabinets. The departmental officials share the belief that there is a concrete distinction to be made between activities that are inherently controversial (political) and those that are noncontroversial (nonpolitical). The departmental civil servant would typically be permanently hired, prefer and focus attention toward noncontroversial policy domains, and would see the ECOWAS Commission as primarily a policy initiator and implementer.

Finally, an epistemic behavioral logic implies that ECOWAS Commission officials enjoy high professional discretion, influenced primarily by their own expertise and external professional reference groups. It is assumed they prepare dossiers, argue and negotiate on the basis of their professional competence, legitimizing authority by using scientific references (Marcussen 2010). Their role perceptions are expected to be guided by considerations of scientific and professional norms and the power of the better argument. Thus, their behavioral patterns are primarily directed toward expertise, educational background, as well as external professional networks (e.g., Göra 2017). This is the expert official who is institutionally loosely coupled to shifting cabinets (Haas 1992), denoting the high-flying and mobile technocrat. ECOWAS officials influenced by an epistemic logic would typically be loosely coupled to the ECOWAS Commission, be a temporarily employed expert, and mainly direct their contacts and attention toward internal and external professional peers.

Methods and Data

Drawing on a mixed method approach, our study aspires to break new ground by combining findings from a survey conducted inside the ECOWAS Commission in 2016 and from a series of semi-structured interviews with fifteen civil servants and statutory appointees in autumn 2017 (see table 2 below).⁴ Clearly, our analysis relies upon this data collected from the ECOWAS Commission officials.

Around two-thirds of our surveyed administrative staff were from the salaried level of P4⁵ and higher. In this way, we hope to include those actively involved in the policy process. To our knowledge, we present the first study drawing on substantial data gathered by means of survey techniques inside the ECOWAS Commission. In October 2015, our project was officially

4. The semi-structured interviews included five ECOWAS Commissioners as well as high-level senior personnel (six persons), junior staff (two), and members of the ECOWAS Parliament administration (two). In addition, two interviews were conducted with representatives from the donor countries and organizations. The questions followed by and large our questionnaire.

5. The ECOWAS salary scale for civil servants follows the line of the UN. Whereas the UN salary scales for the professional and higher categories is based on five professional grades (P1 to P5), ECOWAS has added a P6 category. Directors fall under a separate category.

endorsed by the then Commission President Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo and Vice-President Toga McIntosh in order to authorize the interviews. Further, it was strategically supported by two liaison partners inside the commission, who administered the survey and distributed the questionnaires to the top-level civil servants. We did two distribution rounds of questionnaires, with the second serving as a reminder. During the first round, we harvested thirty-six questionnaires (January to March 2016) with a response rate of 16 percent.⁶ This included officials at P4 and P5 levels, as well as two directors, and was complemented by a second wave (June to July 2016), which generated an additional six responses. Our liaison partner reported that "it has been very difficult to get colleagues from ECOWAS Commission to fill the questionnaire" (authors' e-mail communication with ECOWAS official, 25 July 2016). Still, with a response rate close to 20 percent of HQ-based ECOWAS officials, we are confident the findings represent the attitudes of higher-level civil servants inside the ECOWAS Commission. As a matter of fact, survey studies of IPAs often tend to yield relatively low response rates. The most comprehensive IPA survey ever conducted to our knowledge (see Connolly and Kassim 2016) received a total response rate of 18 percent. As we promised anonymity to the surveyed commission officials, we assume no significant biases in terms of social desirability. Two caveats should be mentioned: First, we cannot exclude that our respondents represent the most committed members of the commission, and thus the less intergovernmental-minded ones, who were particularly eager to answer our survey and thus bias the results. Second, our survey has individuals as the unit of analysis. Yet, we assume that individuals prepare, make, and implement decisions and thus are valid indicators of organizational behavior. In addition, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews during field research at the ECOWAS Commission headquarters in Abuja in October 2017. The purpose of these interviews was to complement the findings drawn from the survey exercise and to further the explanatory capability of our work by including the perspectives of the top leadership of the ECOWAS Commission. To that end, seventeen interviews were conducted and transcribed that included five ECOWAS commissioners and six senior personnel, two junior staff, two members of the ECOWAS Parliament administration, and two representatives from the donor community.

ECOWAS and Regional Integration in West Africa

ECOWAS was established on 25 May 1975, and its founding treaty—the Treaty of Lagos—was signed by fifteen member states.⁷ The institutionalization of regional integration in West Africa had been preceded by close cooperation among some of its member states, in particular Togo and Nigeria. With a population of approximately 300 million citizens, ECOWAS spans one of the most populated regions and is the second-largest regional economic association in Africa. Although first and foremost concerned with matters of economic integration—pursuing the ultimate goal of currency union—ECOWAS has gained considerable clout both as a proponent of free trade and labor migration as well as a security actor in the region. During the 1990s and 2000s, after a spate of controversies inside the community, ECOWAS eventually engaged on a track leading to several regional peace-keeping interventions (see Coleman 2007, 73–115). ECOWAS' primary stated objective remained to promote "economic integration and the realization of the objectives of the African Economic Community" (ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 2, para. 1) in all fields of economic activity including labor and capital. In order to achieve these goals, ECOWAS' member states have not only established "Community Institutions [. . .] with relevant and adequate powers" but are also convinced "that the integration of the Member States into a viable regional Community may demand the partial and gradual pooling of national sovereignties to the Community *within the context of a collective political will*"

6. The staff category breakdown at the ECOWAS Commission based in the Abuja headquarters at the time: Directors: 27; P5: 73; and P4: 41; total: 141.

7. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde (joined in 1976), Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo. Mauritania withdrew from ECOWAS in 2000.

(Preamble to ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 1; emphasis added).

Without enjoying *de facto* an exclusive competence for policy initiation,⁸ the ECOWAS Commission is responsible for providing policy drafts to both the assembly and the council and executing decisions and regulations adopted by the ECOWAS member states. Institutional reforms agreed by the assembly, i.e. the heads of state and government of ECOWAS, in 2006 have also sought to strengthen the applicability of community legal acts within the member. Consequently, the commission assumes a significant role in policy shaping and agenda setting. In addition, it is responsible for “community development programs and projects, as well as regulating multinational enterprises of the region” (ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 19, para. 3). The commission (which consumes 75 percent of the total budget) is financially rather independent, as ECOWAS’ annual budget relies on its self-financing mechanism (a 0.5 percent levy on the value of all goods imported into the region) (ECOWAS Commission 2016, 5; Hulse 2014, 559). The revenues from the levy, however, have fluctuated significantly in recent years and led to a number of adjustments inside the commission, including periodic hiring freezes (Interview 5, 6, 9, 13). In addition, ECOWAS receives support from donor countries from outside West Africa (Interview 9, 14).

Complaints by member states *vis-à-vis* the commission’s activism or specific actions and policies can be largely associated with conflicts over diverging expectations concerning the ECOWAS Commission’s overall role in regional integration. Due to widespread perceptions of ineffectiveness, ECOWAS’ founding treaty was thoroughly revised in 1993, subsequently launching a process with the aim of gradually turning “ECOWAS into a supranational institution” (Lokulo-Sodipe and Osuntogun 2013, 392). The Executive Secretariat was eventually reformed in 2006 with greater decision-making and implementation powers, thus turning it into a (if not *the*) core executive of ECOWAS. Established at the head of the executive arm of ECOWAS was the commission, formerly the Executive Secretariat. Normally, the commission president is appointed by the authority, the meeting of heads of state and government, for a nonrenewable term of four years (with the exception of the 2016–18 commission, see footnote 7). The ECOWAS Treaty requires that the president “shall be a person of proven competence and integrity, with a global vision of political and economic problems and regional integration” (ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 18, para. 3) and can only be “removed from office by the Authority upon its own initiative or on the recommendation of the Council of Ministers” (ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 18, para. 1). The ECOWAS president is assisted by a vice-president and thirteen commissioners elected for a period of four nonrenewable years. The vice-president and commissioners are appointed by the Council of Ministers “following the evaluation of the three candidates nominated by their respective Member States to whom the posts have been allocated” (ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 18, para. 4). With a view to the recruitment of professional ECOWAS staff, “due regard shall be had, subject to ensuring the highest standards of efficiency and technical competence, to maintaining equitable geographical distribution of posts among nationals of all Member States” (ECOWAS Treaty 1993, Article 18, para. 5). However, since 2008 ECOWAS has been affected by a hiring freeze.

Table 2 outlines the commission grade distribution for the total staffing. In terms of its administrative personnel, the ECOWAS Commission was comprised of 727 staff, as of 30 June 2016, 66 percent of the total number of staff in ECOWAS institutions overall. At the director level, the D1 and D2 level numbers twenty-five and fifteen officials respectively. As for the professional staff, there are 341 which includes forty-one and seventy-three officials at the P4 and P5 levels respectively (covered in this study).

8. As a result of the 2006 reforms of the community institutions, the powers of the commission have been enhanced. The commission is acknowledged as being “responsible for the smooth running and for protecting the general interest of the Community” (ECOWAS 2006, Article 12). With a view to “the smooth running” and the protection of community interests, “the Commission proposes to the Council and the Authority all recommendations that it deems useful for promoting and developing the Community. It also makes proposals on the basis of which they can decide on the major policy orientations of member states” (Ibid.).

Table 2. ECOWAS Commission Staff, by Grade Distribution

Staff Categories	Absolute Numbers
Statutory appointees (president, vice-president, commissioners and financial controller)	16
Directors	40
Other professional (P1–P6)	301
Local staff	307
Total	727

Source: ECOWAS Financial Controller’s 2016 Interim Report

The commission presents a permanent administrative body responsible for the daily management of the organization and is specialized according to the principles of purpose and process. Such specialization is conducive to the evocation of departmental and epistemic behavioral logics among staff. In November 2016, approximately two-thirds of staff at the ECOWAS Commission—including its agencies—had permanent contracts (ECOWAS (n.d.) Commission Staff List, 16 November 2016). Each of its thirteen departments are supervised by one commissioner. However, the office of the financial controller⁹ of ECOWAS Institutions is independent, reporting directly to the chairman of ECOWAS’ Council of Ministers. The departments include the following: 1) Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources, 2) Education, Science and Culture, 3) Energy and Mines, 4) Finance, 5) General Administration and Conference, 6) Human Resources Management, 7) Industry and Private Sector Promotion, 8) Infrastructure, 9) Macro Economic Policy and Economic Research, 10) Political Affairs Peace and Security, 11) Social Affairs and Gender, 12) Telecommunication and Information Technology, and 13) Trade, Custom and Free Movement.

Who Are They? Behavioral Logics among ECOWAS Commission Officials

This section briefly presents the key survey findings. Of the respondents (N=41), 86 percent are male and 14 percent are female, which slightly distorts the overall gender ratio of 73 percent male to 27 percent female (ECOWAS 2016, 9; own calculation). The surveyed staff are generally middle-aged, with the majority between forty-five and fifty-nine years of age (63 percent), 32 percent between thirty and forty-four years of age, and 5 percent above sixty years of age. Nearly half of the respondents have an educational background in economics and business, while only 2 percent have an educational background in law. Ninety-five percent of the respondents have a master’s degree or higher (e.g., PhD). Seventy-eight percent have studied abroad, contributing to some intercultural competence of anglophones and francophones. Several interviewees have confirmed that a linguistic divide, in particular between anglophones and francophones, still exists, albeit less than in previous years (Interview 2, 5).

Almost two-thirds of our respondents (63 percent) were categorized as P4 officials or above. ECOWAS institutions abide by the same recruitment rules for permanent staff, with the commission absorbing most of the hiring at P1–P3 (nonmanagerial) positions. A Management Succession Committee, which consists of the heads of institutions or their representatives, is responsible for recruitment into P5 and director positions, which are managerial positions. Country quotas are no longer in use in order to attract and retain stronger and more suitable candidates. Only at the level of shortlists are concerns for gender and geographical distribution taken into consideration (Interview 1). Member states may still try to push for their candidates at all levels of recruitment (Interview 11). One important characteristic for IPAs is the existence of a significant number of permanent positions. Sixty-six percent are permanently employed, while the remaining 34 percent have temporary or contracted positions. The survey includes respondents from ten of the thirteen departments. A total of 61 percent surveyed staff have worked in the ECOWAS

9. The financial controller reports directly to the chairman of ECOWAS’ Council of Ministers although his office is located at the ECOWAS Commission.

Commission for seven years or more. Interunit mobility is fairly low, with 74 percent reporting having worked for one department only (Interview 3). This may hamper administrative integration and the development of common visions and practices inside the commission. One commissioner maintained, “I think we should exchange more between Heads of Departments. Having among ourselves meetings [. . .] to work together, to see where we are interacting together and how we can do it better” (Interview 13).

In summary, the typical respondent is a highly educated male with significant experiences both from previous and current workplaces. Almost 50 percent of the respondents have economic or business administration as their educational backgrounds, which corresponds to the findings of a major survey conducted amongst the officials of the European Commission (Kassim et al. 2013).

High-level ECOWAS Commission officials mainly originate from the member states’ administrations. Prior to entering positions in the ECOWAS Commission, a majority of the respondents report being professionally affiliated with a domestic government ministry, agency, or directorate. As for career prospects, a majority of our surveyed staff indicate the opportunity to rise through the ranks as the central motivation, but commitment to Pan-African integration, and job stability are deemed important, too. Yet, a frequent complaint by ECOWAS employees is the difficulty of climbing the ranks (Interviews 4, 9). Similar to typically meritocratic administrative systems, all respondents consider merit and expertise as pivotal to how they were recruited. Seniority and nationality are considered to be of additional importance by 17 and 12 percent respectively. Only 2 percent believe that party political leaning is relevant when recruiting staff. Hence, it is fair to assume, recruitment to the ECOWAS Commission is chiefly influenced by notions of meritocracy. When asked about future work preferences, a majority of our surveyed staff indicate they would like to continue to work with other international organizations or with ECOWAS. Moreover, 93 percent of respondents perceive their current employment at the ECOWAS Commission as beneficial for future career prospects. Such findings indicate a departmental behavioral logic. Moreover, past careers and future career plans are perceived rather differently. Whereas most ECOWAS staff originate from member state administrations, most also foresee their future careers at the international level.

ECOWAS staff thus tend to stay a long time in one department. The following tables aim to unpack the self-perceived, behavioral implications of working in the ECOWAS Commission. As illustrated in Table 3, staff report that the commission combines multiple tasks, and the staff do not merely pursue technical duties, such as providing scientific, technical, and legal advice. They also fulfil duties that may ultimately translate into political influence, for instance, by drafting policy proposals and facilitating compromises inside and between ECOWAS, its member states, other institutions, and partners. Thus, the commission can be characterized as a compound organization, with respect to its task profile, and not merely as a neutral secretariat exclusively occupied with executing technical tasks from an intergovernmental approach.

Table 3. Percentage of Officials Reporting They Spend *Much* or *Very Much* Time on Specific Tasks

Providing scientific, technical and/or legal advice	78
Providing background information to the leadership of the ECOWAS Commission	73
Meeting/contacting people on behalf of superiors	73
Drafting policy proposals for the Commission	71
Facilitating compromises between ECOWAS member states	63
Facilitating compromises between ECOWAS departments	44
Facilitating compromises between different ECOWAS institutions	36
Giving political advice to leadership of the ECOWAS Commission	31
Mean N	40

* This table combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: very much (value 1), much (value 2), neutral (value 3), little (value 4), very little/none (value 5).

An organizational approach assumes that organizational boundaries affect human behavior. Table 4 supports this by displaying that the vast majority of contact happens within one's own department, illuminating a departmental behavioral logic. All respondents indicate that they often or very often are in contact with colleagues from their own department, with 83 percent reporting frequent contact with the administrative leadership, while other ECOWAS and national government institutions are less frequently contacted.

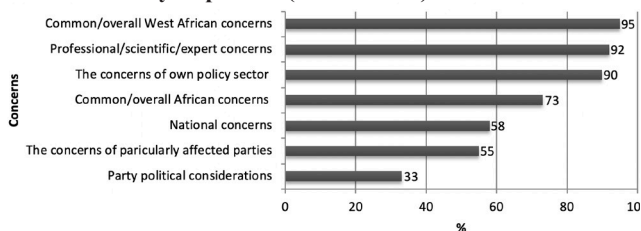
Table 4. Percentage of Officials Reporting They *Often* or *Very Often* are in Contact with the Following

Colleagues from own department	100
Administrative leadership of own department	83
Other ECOWAS Commission departments	63
National government institutions	63
The Commissioner(s) of ECOWAS	45
University/research institute	41
European Union	39
Industry/business	38
Other international organizations	33
African Union	30
Interest groups	27
Regional Economic Community (REC) in Africa	26
United Nations	22
Mean N	38

*This table combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: very often (value 1), often (value 2), sometimes (value 3), seldom (value 4), never (value 5).

The next question asked about the considerations and concerns that commission officials emphasize while doing their daily work. Figure 1 shows three main patterns. First, staff highlight a wide variety of considerations and concerns beyond those of the member states. This suggests that a blend of behavioral logics is at play. Second, the commission does not lean strongly toward party-political concerns, which indicates its low partisan role. Third, staff tend to balance supranational, departmental, and epistemic concerns, with 95 percent indicating that West African concerns are the guiding principles in their work at the commission. Furthermore, more than 90 percent agree or strongly agree that professional concerns and considerations, and the concerns of one's own policy sector are very important. Again, this is in line with existing literature on IPAs that finds that international civil servants are more inclined to adopt supranational or departmental mindsets, rather than national or intergovernmental ones (e.g., Checkel 2007; Trondal 2016)

Figure 1. Percentage of Officials that *Agree* or *Strongly Agree* the Following Considerations and Concerns are Very Important (mean N = 40)



*This figure combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: strongly agree (value 1), agree (value 2), neither agree nor disagree (value 3), disagree (value 4), strongly disagree (value 5).

Following the above observations, Table 5 reports the type of arguments that commission staff perceive as important while doing their daily work. Commission staff are sensitive to multiple arguments but assign most weight to those from co-workers or superiors from within the ECOWAS Commission, and especially their own units. This observation has been confirmed by our interviews (Interviews 5, 9, 18)—to the extent of being perceived from the outside as “working in silos” (Interview 14). It supports the organization theory argument as outlined above and illuminates departmental behavioral logic. Furthermore, when asked about their role perception (Representatives of the ECOWAS Commission, their own department/unit, one’s own country or independent expert), the respondents indicate that they clearly view themselves as representatives of the ECOWAS Commission as a whole, as well as departmental or unit representatives. Only 13 percent view themselves as representatives of their respective national governments. In sum, these observations reflect the impact of organizational specialization on behavior and loyalties, and the strength of the departmental behavioral logic rather than an intergovernmental one.

Table 5. Percentage of Officials that Agree or Strongly Agree the Arguments from the Following are of High Importance

Colleagues in own department	100
Own head of unit/director	100
Commissioner(s) of ECOWAS	98
ECOWAS Commission as a whole	90
Heads of unit/directors in other departments	88
Colleagues within other departments	83
National government institutions	76
African Union	75
United Nations	69
Industry/business	68
Other international organizations	64
Other RECs	64
European Union	58
Interest groups	55
University/research institute	53
Mean N	39

Table 6 indicates that officials perceive the sectorial/portfolio and ideological profile of the commissioner in charge are mirrored in commission proposals. Again, nationality is perceived as the least influential factor by far. Our survey data also shows that 69 percent report that their portfolios attract a lot of attention in the current political and public debates. This is of importance because politicization often implicates increased political scrutiny and control over administrative personnel (Egeberg and Trondal 2009).

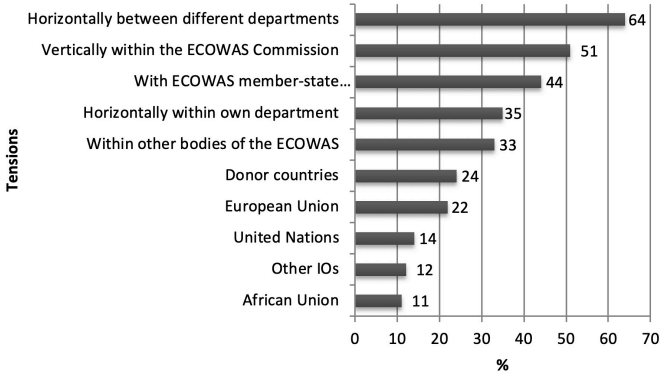
Table 6. Percentage of Officials that Agree or Strongly Agree the Commission Proposals Reflect each of the Following

The sectorial/portfolio profile of the commissioner in charge	57
The ideological profile of the commissioner in charge	55
The ideological profile of the commission president	46
The national profile of the commissioner in charge	18
Mean N	37

*This table combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: strongly agree (value 1), agree (value 2), neither agree nor disagree (value 3), disagree (value 4), strongly disagree (value 5).

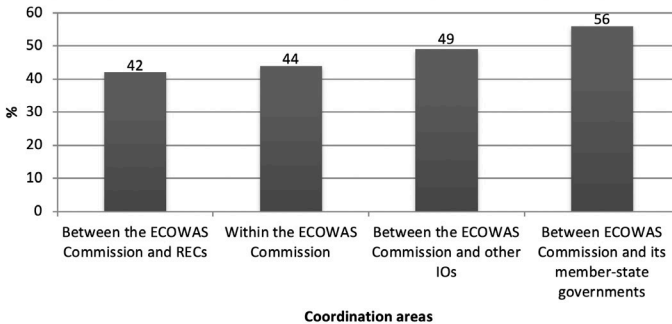
Decision-making patterns in organizations may also be measured by patterns and degrees of in-house conflicts. Figure 2 shows that more than half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that tensions may arise within and between the ECOWAS Commission, member states, and other organizations. Reflecting the organizational design of the ECOWAS Commission, most tensions are perceived to arise horizontally and vertically within the commission. Thus, conflict patterns tend to follow organizational boundaries, in which the staff operate according to a departmental behavioral logic. Moreover, these observations are consistent with observations of the low level of interhouse mobility of staff and strong departmental and sectoral behavioral logics. Moreover, these findings may encompass challenges for the heads of the commission and departments to get the house in order. Studies show that decision-making in bureaucratic organizations tend to be, more or less, well coordinated (e.g., Christensen and Lægread 2011). Moreover, good governance is often seen as properly coordinated. Figure 3 suggests that coordination generally is perceived as fairly good, both within the ECOWAS Commission and between the ECOWAS Commission and external bodies. As such, the house of the ECOWAS Commission is perceived as in order by our respondents.

Figure 2. Percentage of Officials that Report the Tensions Often or Almost Always Occur within or between the Following (mean N = 34)



*This figure combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: almost always (value 1), often (value 2), neutral (value 3), seldom (value 4), never (value 5).

Figure 3. Percentage of Officials that Agree or Strongly Agree the Coordination is Efficient and Effective in each of the Following Areas (mean N = 41)

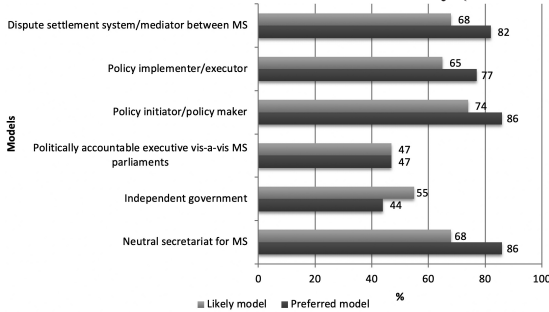


*This figure combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: strongly agree (value 1), agree (value 2), neither agree nor disagree (value 3), disagree (value 4), strongly disagree (value 5).

Finally, respondents were asked about their future visions for ECOWAS. They were asked to indicate what models of the ECOWAS Commission are preferable, as well as most likely. As demonstrated by Figure 4, these visions tend to coincide. The scenario of turning the ECOWAS Commission into an independent government in the future is the least likely, and

least wanted, model aspired for by high-level officials of the ECOWAS Commission. A second observation is that officials prefer both a neutral and an active secretariat that engages in policy initiatives and implementation. This latter observation might reflect both inconclusive ambitions as to the future of the ECOWAS Commission, as well as the conceptual ambiguity of terms like independent government and neutral secretariat. This finding demonstrates that officials do not automatically aspire for supranational leadership, and that a pragmatic approach toward future pathways of integration generally prevail.

Figure 4. Percentage of Officials that Either Agreed or Strongly Agreed the Following Models of the ECOWAS Commission were Preferable/Likely (mean N = 34)



*This figure combines values 1 and 2 on the following five-point scale: strongly agree (value 1), agree (value 2), neither agree nor disagree (value 3), disagree (value 4), strongly disagree (value 5).

Conclusion

The study finds evidence that the ECOWAS Commission is (perceived to be) relatively independent, both with its behavioral profile among administrative staff and in the recruitment of personnel. From this, a blend of supranational, departmental, and epistemic behavioral logics balance against an intergovernmental logic inside the ECOWAS Commission. Commissioners and staff are more inclined to adopt a departmental mindset than an intergovernmental one. Whereas many ECOWAS Commission staff—in sharp contrast to European Commission officials—seem to originate from the administrations of ECOWAS member states, most foresee continuing their future careers at the international level, preferably with ECOWAS. Second, the civil servants of the ECOWAS Commission are strongly committed to impartiality and nonpartisanship. They agree that professional/expert concerns and considerations, as well as their own policy sector affairs, are important in daily work. These governance patterns in the ECOWAS Commission, as reported by the staff, are approximately in line with those of other IPAs. Moreover, the data thus confirms that behavioral patterns, and thus governance processes, in the ECOWAS Commission are profoundly shaped by the internal organizational architecture of IPAs. This finding ultimately challenges one leading school in this literature that suggests that the (socialization) processes outside IPAs are strong predictors of the role perceptions of staff (Hooghe 2005).

The prevalence of the departmental logic reflects organizational factors inside the ECOWAS Commission. The data presented suggests that the organizational structures in which ECOWAS officials are embedded systematically favor certain behavioral patterns more than others. Moreover, we have found a remarkably low level of horizontal staff mobility. Staff are hired, mostly permanently, to particular positions and tend to remain inside the department to which they have been recruited. This observation reflects few incentives for and traditions of interdepartmental (not to speak of inter-institutional) mobility. Additionally, a lack of horizontal mobility is exacerbated by a lack of opportunities to climb the ranks, which may reduce morale and lead to a silo-mentality (Interview 14). The findings, in sum, support expectations drawn from organizational theory since behavioral logics are patterned by the internal organizational architecture of the ECOWAS Commission. Organizational roles and rules tend to mobilize biases in the decision-making behavior evoked by international civil servants at the

ECOWAS Commission. As such, this study serves on the one hand as a robustness-check on the existing IPA literature by gauging the extent to which behavioral dynamics of ECOWAS Commission staff resemble those inside other IPAs. On the other, and perhaps more importantly, it provides evidence that the ECOWAS Commission is not so different after all from other IPAs encouraging future research to engage in more exploratory but also comparative work on IPA outside the European context.

INTERVIEWS

1. Interview with parliament official 1, Florence, November 12, 2016.
2. Interview with commissioner 1, Abuja, October 9, 2017.
3. Interview with head 1, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
4. Interview with head 2, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
5. Interview with head 3, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
6. Interview with programme officer 1, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
7. Interview with director 1, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
8. Interview with commissioner 2, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
9. Interview with programme officer 2, Abuja, October 11, 2017.
10. Interview with commissioner 3, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
11. Interview with commissioner 4, Abuja, October 10, 2017.
12. Interview with director 2, Abuja, October 11, 2017.
13. Interview with commissioner 5, Abuja, October 11, 2017.
14. Interview with head 4, Abuja, October 12, 2017.
15. Interview with embassy, Abuja, October 12, 2017.
16. Interview with EU Delegation, Abuja, October 12, 2017.
17. Interview with parliament official 1, Abuja, October 13, 2017.
18. Interview with parliament official 2, Abuja, October 13, 2017.

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