

Getting Ready to Negotiate in International Organizations? On the Importance of the Domestic Construction of National Positions

by Diana Panke, University of Freiburg

The rise of globalization in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries went hand in hand with an increase in state cooperation with international organizations (IOs). This paper sheds light on the capacity requirements of states to participate actively and effectively in multilateral negotiations across a broad range of policy areas. By drawing on more than one hundred interviews, it explores the procedures and capacities states employ to develop national positions and to do so quickly for a broad range of issues on the international agenda. Findings show significant variation between states, as some formulate national positions for each item on the negotiation table swiftly, while others have to be very selective and, consequently, often lack national positions completely. This paper analyzes the effects of this variation on the active and the effective participation of states in IO negotiations.

Introduction: Globalization and the Rise of Interstate Cooperation in IOs

Globalization is by no means a new phenomenon, as cross-border interactions have created complex economic, societal, and political interdependencies over centuries (Baylis, Smith, and Owens, 2011; Keohane, 1984, 1989). Yet, in the last one hundred years, technological changes in transportation and communication have intensified cross-border interactions and interdependencies (Keohane, 2001; Krasner, 1991). Accordingly, the number of regimes and international organizations (IOs) multiplied after World War II compared with earlier decades. Today, states cooperate across a wide range of policy areas in more than 7,000 intergovernmental IOs and regimes (Union of International Associations, 2005/2006: 2966). Students of international relations have focused extensively on the emergence of cooperation (e.g., Adler, 1992; Axelrod, 1984; Axelrod and Keohane, 1986; Keohane, 1984; Oye, 1986) as well as on the dynamics and outcomes of cooperation (Berton, Kimura, and Zartman, 1999; Drahos, 2003; Fearon, 1998; Martin, 1992; Plantey, 2007; Zartman and Rubin, 2009). At the same time, it is often overlooked that active participation in the increasing number of IOs and regimes is capacity-intensive for the states concerned, since they need a well-staffed and functioning domestic apparatus to formulate national interests and a well-staffed and well-functioning diplomatic corps to act on behalf of these national positions. Also, the very fact that some states might grapple with capacity shortages more strongly than others is not usually stressed in the research.¹ Thus, this article sheds light not only on the capacities necessary for the participation of states in negotiations beyond the nation-state but also explores the effects of capacity shortages on the prospects of states to actively and effectively engage in international cooperation. Successful negotiations depend on many additional variables, including the distribution of positions among the states, the ability to use a broad array of different negotiation strategies, the ability to enter coalitions or use group membership

1. Some studies focusing on the foreign policy of individual small states observe that these countries often opt for selective engagement in international relations (e.g., Hey, 2003; Goetschel, 1998; Ingebritsen, Neumann, Gstoechl, and Beyer, 2006).

as leverage, as well as incentives to become active (on the state level this includes active civil societies or the general importance placed on UN and international affairs and on the individual level it includes, for example, the personality of diplomats). This article does not seek to explain negotiation success per se, but analyzes the effect of domestic coordination on the prospects for active and effective participation in international negotiations under *ceteris paribus* conditions.

In negotiations beyond the nation-state it is essential for the diplomat at the negotiation table to know what the national position is in order to make the voice of one's country heard. Based on more than one hundred interviews with diplomats from UN member states,² this article begins by exploring the procedures and capacities of states to develop national positions and to do so quickly for a broad range of issues on the international agenda. The findings show there are considerable variations among states. Some swiftly formulate national positions for each item on the negotiation table of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), while others are very selective and, consequently, often lack national positions completely. Most strikingly, states with limited financial means, staff shortages in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and bottlenecks of administrative capacities back home, as well as slim diplomatic missions on the ground, such as Kiribati or the Central African Republic, are in the worst position to quickly develop national positions on a wide range of items on the multilateral agenda. By contrast, states such as the U.S., Japan, or Germany, are well equipped to formulate national positions on each and every draft since the MFAs and missions are not only well-staffed but also have very effective working-routines in place.

In a second step, the paper analyzes the effects of variation in capacity among 193 sovereign states on their ability to participate actively and effectively in multilateral negotiations. In doing so, it clarifies a set of expectations on how different types of capacities influence the behavior of states in negotiations within IOs and regimes. These are subsequently put to an empirical plausibility probe by combining interview insights with regression analysis. The major findings are that states are more active the better their country's capital is at swiftly formulating national positions on a broad range of issues. By contrast, states with limited financial means, limited staff in ministries, and ineffective government apparatuses are absent most often from multilateral negotiations—although they are formally members. Moreover, active and effective participation are linked. Not being present to make one's country's voice heard hinders the chances of states with difficulties in quickly formulating national positions across a broad range of items to shape the content of international norms.

Domestic Preference-Formation

Official national positions are essential for international negotiations. If a delegate does not know what position her state holds, she cannot actively voice her country's national interest in negotiations beyond the nation-state. Accordingly, various diplomats reported that due to a lack of national positions "some colleagues come along and they may sit there and not have much to say" (interview UNmission#10, 15-11-10, similarly UNmission#36, 07-03-11, UNmission#48, 09-03-11).

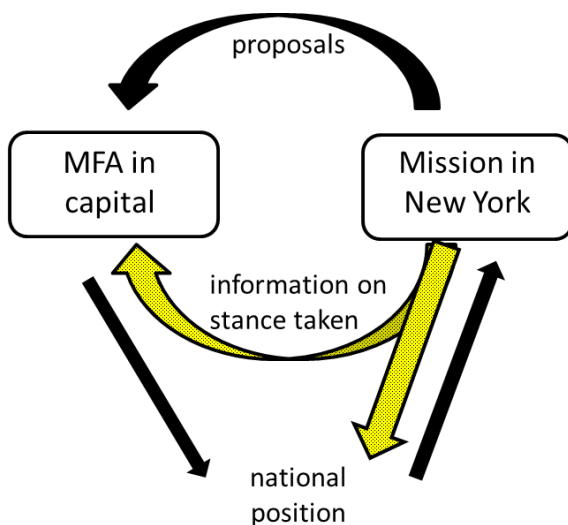
As second-image approaches of international relations point out, national positions are not just out there but rather they need to be constructed in the domestic realm (Moravcsik, 1997; Panke and Risse, 2006; Putnam, 1988). Formally, the MFA is the institution usually responsible for the domestic formulation of national positions.³ However, there is considerable variation in the actual practices according to which states de facto develop national positions

2. The UN is selected because it is the IO with the most encompassing membership, entailing states with a broad range of capacity differences. Moreover, it covers a wide range of policy areas (disarmament and international security, economic, development and financial issues, social, cultural and humanitarian matters, special political issues, decolonization, administrative, budgetary and legal issues).

3. If issues are very important, the head of government usually has the final say over national interests. In instances where issues are less salient, the MFA may also coordinate with relevant line ministries in developing the national position.

and according to which they adapt⁴ them to changing negotiation dynamics. Interviews conducted between 2010 and 2012 with more than one hundred diplomats from large and small countries from all geographical areas of the world reveal there are basically two ideal models for how national positions are constructed: In capital-based coordination systems, it is the MFA who develops national positions (dark arrows, Figure 1) and in mission-based coordination systems it is the diplomats dealing with the negotiation in question who—in effect—formulate a major share of national positions (light arrows, Figure 1).

Figure 1: Two Ideal Types of Coordination Systems



Capital-Based Coordination Systems

In capital-based coordination systems, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is the central actor. It is not only formally responsible for discerning and formulating national positions, which usually encompasses ascertaining major aims, red lines, speaking points, and often includes indications about the diplomat's leeway on the issue concerned. The MFA also exercises its competencies concerning the writing and adaptation of instructions in practice. This does not, however, render the diplomatic missions on the ground passive. The diplomats can and do provide input on the issue at hand, on related and past negotiations, on the distribution of preferences among other states, and they sometimes make proposals for the formulation of the initial national position or its update during the course of negotiations to the MFA (black curved arrow in Figure 1).⁵ However, in the end it is the MFA in the capital and not the diplomats on the ground that takes the decision over the content of the national

4. Changes in national positions may become necessary when negotiations take an unexpected turn and the agenda items discussed in an IO at a given point are not covered by an initial position anymore.

5. E.g., "We don't formulate any policy in the mission at all although we advise back to [the capital, insertion by the author] on what we think is a sensible course of action. And the timing, I mean there's on-going research on their level, you'd have to ask them how they formulate, but on our side it's very quick. We receive a resolution in draft form, go through it ourselves and highlight the areas we think look good and send it back to [the capital, insertion by the author] with our advice. We have a turnaround of 24 hours, a maximum a week to get their input on it" (interview UNmission#71, 22-03-11). Also, "In cases where they [the colleagues in the capital, insertion by the author] do not have the capacity, they rely on the input from the New York missions, recommendations are put to them from the UN missions. And then they act on that. They might have some ideas, but for better background and context, they rely on input from the missions" (interview UNmission#61, 11-03-11). In capital-based systems, missions are in contact with their respective MFAs during negotiations, reporting on negotiation dynamics and—possibly also asking for updated instructions: "Usually it's a long standing negotiation, the technical delegates in time become colleagues and contacts and they are doing a lot of scientific and technical exchanges. If one of them can convince that their policy position is based on correct science or needs to be changed, they feed that into the government situation" (UNmission#25, 03-12-10).

position: “The final decision is going to be MFA. We have input in providing advice, proper policy that we need to take. It is not necessary that the ministry takes the position we propose to them” (interview UNmission#68, 18-03-11).⁶

Only once the diplomats in the missions in New York receive their instruction from the MFA or get authorization to go ahead with a proposal⁷ can they officially speak up for their country in international negotiations (black arrow, Figure 1). Otherwise, the diplomats on the ground do not actively participate: “The MFA sends instructions to New York. We cannot do anything without instructions” (interview UNmission#57, 11-03-11, similarly UNmission#36, 07-03-11).⁸

Mission-Based Coordination Systems

Similar to capital-based systems, in mission-based coordination systems the MFAs or governments are also officially responsible for the formulation of national interests. In practice however, the missions on the ground have much greater influence over national positions. In mission-based coordination systems, the MFAs concentrate de facto only on selected issues of high political importance (e.g., interviews UNmission#14, 24-11-10, UNmission#24, 02-12-10, UNmission#160, 15-03-12).⁹ Resulting from this prioritization, the MFAs do not deliver national positions for many of the items on the negotiation agenda in the IO or regime, which creates a window of opportunity for the diplomatic missions on the ground (yellow arrows, figure 1). In instances where the capital remains inactive, the delegations can in effect decide to stay silent or they can decide on the content of the national position and act accordingly in multilateral negotiations (interviews UNmission#13, 23-11-10, UNmission#14, 24-11-10, UNmission#31, 16-12-10, UNmission#65, 14-03-11, UNmission#2, 03-06-10, UNmission#10, 15-11-10, UNmission#11, 16-11-10).¹⁰ The diplomats in the mission might notify the MFA in the capital of which stance they are taking, but unlike capital-based systems the missions are usually not obliged to ask for clearance prior to their engagement in multilateral negotiations.¹¹

6. Other diplomats explained, “Of course the instructions will be at the end of the day formulated way back in [the capital, insertion by the author] by the MFA, but they are very much based on the recommendations of the delegation in New York and of the ambassador in question, the input from there” (interview UNmission#102, 27-06-11). Also, “The MFA plays a key role, decisions are always coming from the MFA. There is widespread coordination, though MFA makes the final decisions. Sometimes there are some highly political decisions, you will find that those decisions emitting from the office of the Prime Minister” (interview UNmission#79, 31-03-11).

7. Some countries rely on rules of silent-procedures: “As a general rule it will always be the MFA in [the capital, insertion author] that gives the instructions to New York. They ask for instruction, and we give it. But depending also on who is in charge of the case, you know this person might have been there for years and might actually know this area better than the person in [the capital, insertion by the author]. And then the person in New York will write an email saying that the Permanent Mission will do so and so . . . and if we don't hear from you this is what we are going to do. In some cases they would say they suggest to do so and so, but ask for specific instruction, and we would write back the instruction. Especially when it comes to new positions on issues, then the Permanent Missions would very seldom formulate themselves” (interview UNmission#101, 24-06-11).

8. Moreover, if a MFA is slow in formulating a national position, instructions arrive in the mission only after the negotiations have already started, as a consequence of which delegations face a situation where their hands are tied for some time and in which they can only participate actively with a delay (interviews UNmission#91, 01-04-11, UNmission#107, 20-07-11).

9. “Sometimes when minor question or the substance is very important we receive instruction but it's not always the case because we ambassadors, we know our instructions in general so we know what to do. But in some special cases, yes we have precise instructions” (interview UNmission#13, 23-11-10).

10. E.g., “There're no instructions from your capital. You just do what you think you have to do. You have your general instructions and you know what your position is and you do it. You check with your ambassador and your ambassador checks with his officers and basically it's decided in New York what to do in each case” (interview UNmission#26, 04-12-10). Similarly, “an ambassador will have instructions on many subjects and will be able to make his own decisions on tactics or details within set lines, but the autonomy of ambassadors of the south is much greater” (UNmission#23, 02-12-10). Moreover, “The U.S. would get very detailed instructions, pretty much like a script, where if somebody responds this, you say that, somebody does this, you do that. We don't have those detailed instructions. We have more leeway in the sense that we have main objectives that we are told to do, and we must move within those objectives (..) There is quite a degree of flexibility compared to bigger missions, yes” (UNmission#66, 16-03-11). “I think if there are no instructions found then at least as a representative of your country you will not go wrong if you align yourself with a certain group” (UNmission#154, 26-01-12).

11. E.g., “There're delegates who put their hand up and they're speaking because they just had a bright idea at the moment and they had no instructions except for do what you think is best” (interview UNmission#25, 03-12-10). The same holds true for the adaptation of positions during the course of negotiations should debates develop in unexpected directions and focus on items that are not covered at all by the national positions. Unlike in the capital-based systems, the missions in New York do not have tied hands if the capital does not do its share of the coordination work but can step in and develop and adjust positions by themselves (e.g., interviews UNmission#6, 21-10-10, UNmission#10, 15-11-10, UNmission#44, 08-03-11, UNmission#106, 19-07-11).

The Empirical Pattern and its Explanation

Empirically, practices for developing coordination on negotiation positions differ widely and can be placed on a continuum between the capital-based and the mission-based formulation of national positions. At one extreme, most of the bigger, better-resourced countries have capital-based coordination systems. Examples include the United States of America (US), Germany (DE), France (FR), the United Kingdom (UK), Japan (JP), Canada (CA), China (CN), South Africa (ZY), India (IN), and Brazil (BR).¹ These countries have very active MFAs which usually develop national positions swiftly for a broad range of issues on the basis of which diplomats on location can actively participate in negotiations.² In these systems, diplomats do not make their country's voice heard in multilateral negotiations without having obtained clearance to do so from the capital.

At the other extreme of the continuum countries, such as Kiribati (KI), Ecuador (EC), Bangladesh (BD), Albania (AL), Guatemala (GT), Lao People's Democratic Republic (LA), Yemen (YE), Seychelles (SC), Malawi (MW), Mozambique (MZ), Indonesia (ID), Jamaica (JM), Trinidad and Tobago (TT), the Philippines (PH), El Salvador (SV), Tuvalu (TV), the Republic of Timor-Leste (TL), and Uganda (UG), and many of the smaller, less-developed countries strongly resemble mission-based systems.³ In these countries, the MFA (or the foreign affairs branch of the government) is not very active and develops national positions only in regard to a very selective range of usually new agenda items. Without receiving instructions, ambassadors and diplomats have de facto freedom to act on their own (or to follow alliance partners or follow the country's stance in related issues). Nevertheless, they are not active in all negotiations because the missions themselves face constraints on capacity (interviews UNmission#2, 03-06-10, UNmission#7, 22-10-10).

In-between countries such as Denmark (DK), New Zealand (NZ), Norway (NO), Finland (FI), Belgium (BE), Singapore (SG), Croatia (HR), Ireland (IE), Poland (PL), the Netherlands (NL), and Italy (IT), are much closer to the capital-based ideal type of coordination than to the mission-based ideal-type.⁴ In these states, the MFA is relatively active but does not usually cover all the items on the agenda of an IO or regime. In the rather rare instances in which instructions are missing, ambassadors and diplomats have the leeway to act without instructions from their capitals but only within limited margins based on general policy guidelines and often on the basis of clearance requests that work as silent procedures or in exceptional instances (e.g., issues of very low priority). In these systems, not only the

1. Interviews UNmission#71, 22-03-11, UNmission#75, 25-03-11, UNmission#7, 22-10-10, UNmission#3, 08-09-10, UNmission#59, 11-03-11, UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#39, 07-03-11, UNmission#45, 08-03-11, UNmission#46, 08-03-11, UNmission#50, 09-03-11, UNmission#127, 29-11-11, UNmission#140, 01-12-11, UNmission#142, 01-12-11, UNmission#151, 08-12-11, UNmission#154, 26-01-12

2. E.g., "We certainly have a lot of back and forth with the Ministry, usually we keep them apprised of all resolutions when they do come in and then we work along that prioritization system and decide we are going to engage on a resolution that has come out. Then we go to those informal meeting usually from instructions that have come to us from capital. And the ministry has gone and carried out its consultations with divisions within the ministry, as well as with other ministries, should that be necessary. So, we have quite a bit of support I would say from headquarters" (UNmission#3, 08-09-10).

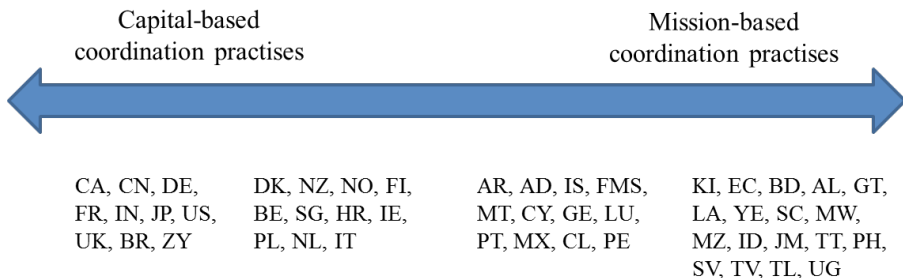
3. E.g., interviews UNmission#6, 21-10-10, UNmission#25, 03-12-10, UNmission#119, 23-09-11, UNmission#145, 02-12-11, UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#154, 26-01-12, UNmission#32, 16-12-10, UNmission#33, 21-12-10, UNmission#44, 08-03-11, UNmission#69, 22-03-11, UNmission#68, 18-03-11, UNmission#96, 12-04-11, UNmission#117, 06-09-11, UNmission#120, 29-09-11, UNmission#121, 14-10-11, UNmission#125, 28-11-11, UNmission#160, 15-03-12, UNmission#164, 19-03-12, UNmission#165, 19-03-12. "Especially among the small countries from Africa, it's difficult to expect they get their instructions from the capitals" (interview UNmission#50, 09-03-11). "Yes in case the people back home do not adequately or on time when you normally align yourself with positions of the region. Like if instructions are not clear it's safe to say well then we are going to take an alignment with for instance East African communities. So if we wouldn't get any instructions then it's safe to say "OK we'll align ourselves with that position," and if by the end of the negotiations we still haven't received any instructions then we just go by that" (interview UNmission#154, 26-01-12).

4. E.g., interviews UNmission#9, 04-11-10, UNmission#10, 15-11-10, UNmission#25, 03-12-10, UNmission#58, 11-03-11, UNmission#29, 10-12-10, UNmission#38, 07-03-11, UNmission#48, 09-03-11, UNmission#50, 09-03-11, UNmission#51, 09-03-11, UNmission#67, 17-03-11, UNmission#94, 06-04-11, UNmission#101, 24-06-11, UNmission#102, 27-06-11, UNmission#104, 14-07-11, UNmission#106, 19-07-11.

MFA but also the missions are relatively active and seek to systematically provide detailed recommendations on possible positions to the capital (interviews UNmission#5, 05-10-10).¹²

Finally, Argentina (AR), Andorra (AD), Iceland (IS), Micronesia (FMS), Malta (MT), Cyprus (CY), Georgia (GE), Luxembourg (LU), Portugal (PT), Mexico (MX), Chile (CL), and Peru (PE) are also systems with mixed practices, which are however more closely located at the mission-based rather than the capital side of the continuum.¹³ The diplomats on the ground act on their own only if an issue is relatively important but the capital did not send instructions as such (e.g., concerning items that have been reoccurring on the negotiation agenda over the years).

Figure 2: How States Develop Negotiation Positions: The Empirical Pattern



As Figure 2 illustrates, states differ in how they formulate national positions for multilateral negotiations. The further a country is located on the left side of Figure 2, the more active MFAs are in developing specific instructions (ideal and fallback positions, red lines, expertise and arguments related to the specific item on the international agenda). At the same time, MFAs cover a decreasing number of items on the international negotiation agenda, which are often also more general in character (outlining the broad stance of the government on the policy area as such), the further we move to the right of the spectrum. The further a state is located on the right side of the continuum, the more limited the number of instructions arriving from the capital in time for the beginning of multilateral negotiations or at all. Thus, the activities of the diplomatic missions change with regard to the domestic preference-formation process to some extent as well. Toward the left side of the continuum, diplomats tend to mainly provide information on the distribution of preferences among other states and on other insights they obtained on location and possibly make proposals for national positions and updates to

12. “Of course the instructions will be at the end of the day formulated way back in [country made anonymous by the author] by the MFA, but they are very much based on the recommendations of the delegation in New York and of the ambassador in question, the input from there” (interview UNmission#102, 27-06-11). E.g., “Before each General Assembly, the Mission in collaboration with the Ministry, works out what we call an ‘instruction for the [country made anonymous by the author] delegation for the 65th General Assembly.’ And that is a 50–60 pages document that deals with all the issues in the UN that [country name made anonymous by the author] feels are important. That is everything from development to human right, to reform of the Security Council, institutional issues, reform issues—all those kind of things. That instruction is our bible, that spells out [country name made anonymous by the author] position on all political issues for the 65th General Assembly. That is what we have in our back pocket, so we can always refer to that. But of course when we go into negotiations, if things get increasingly complicated or they take a turn that was not expected or there is an EU split, then we would have to refer back to capital to get their go-ahead. Those communications with capital are often, what you would call, “self-instructions,” where we, let’s say it was me, consult my ambassador to get a feel of what our position should be and then him and me, or just me, would write back to capital saying that, unless the ministry objects, then it is the intention of the mission to do A, B, or C. That is often because, when you are on the ground in the actual negotiations, you often find that you are more an expert than your colleague is back in capital and they have difficulties in giving you instructions, because they do not have the overall picture. Therefore, we lay out a line, that the Mission and [country name made anonymous by the author] would follow, and unless we get objections from capital, that is what we do” (interview UNmission#5, 05-10-10).

13. E.g., interviews UNmission#1, 23-03-10, UNmission#4, 28-09-10, UNmission#24, 02-12-10, UNmission#26, 04-12-10, UNmission#27, 06-12-10, UNmission#30 13-12-10, UNmission#31, 16-12-10, UNmission#35, 07-03-11, UNmission#113, 29-09-11, UNmission#118, 23-09-11, UNmission#128, 29-11-11, UNmission#129, 29-11-11.

them to the MFAs. By contrast, the diplomats toward the right side of the continuum tend to act more autonomously in the negotiations themselves. The further we move to the left side of the figure, diplomats on the ground have increasing leeway in terms of which position (if any) they may pursue in negotiations in the absence of concrete instructions from the capital due to the lower number of national positions developed by the MFAs.

Why do states differ in their practices of how to develop negotiation positions, despite the fact that formally it is the capital that should formulate national interests? Interviews repeatedly point to capacities. If a state has less financial resources, then fewer staff working in the MFAs result in a less-effective government apparatus. Therefore, the state is unable to cover all the items on the international agenda at once and the capital needs to be more selective.

States with limited budgets¹⁴ tend to grapple with shortcomings in experts in the ministries and tend to not buy additional legal or technical knowledge, if lacking, for a specific item in the ministry itself.¹⁵ As a consequence, in mission-based systems the capitals formulate negotiation positions for a more limited number of issues than the MFAs in capital-based systems (interviews UNmission#7, 22-10-10, UNmission#14, 24-11-10, UNmission#48, 09-03-11).¹⁶

Moreover, states with inefficient government apparatuses are slower in producing policy guidelines and can—with only a given number of staff—only cover a more limited number of items than comparable states with higher levels of government effectiveness.¹⁷ Inefficient ministries reduce the speed and scope of states for developing stances in regard to items on the multilateral negotiation agenda of an IO or regime (interviews UNmission#25, 03-12-10, UNmission#27, 06-12-10, UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#59, 11-03-11, UNmission#67, 17-03-11).¹⁸ Because of bottlenecks in government capacity, MFAs need to engage in prioritization and develop national negotiation positions only for a limited number of priority issues. By contrast, states with capital-based coordination systems tend to have more capacities in government and since the government apparatus works more efficiently,

14. This paper uses a country's gross domestic product (GDP) as proxy for budgets. Among the UN member states, the average GDP is 214.56 billion USD, which is distributed with great disparity among the states. The five countries with the biggest GDPs are the US (11,533.23 billion USD), Japan (4,409.088 billion USD), Germany (2,580.661 billion USD), China (2,151.853 billion USD), and the UK (2,030.029 billion USD), while the five smallest ones are Tuvalu (0.021 billion USD), Nauru (0.022 billion USD), Kiribati (0.058 billion USD), Sao Tome and Principe (0.109 billion USD), and the Marshall Islands (0.130 billion USD). The data on GDP (in current USD) between 1999 and 2008 stems from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/downloads/Download-GDPcurrent-USD-countries.xls> (accessed in January 2011). There is no large-N data available for staff in MFAs in the countries but available only on the staff in national missions in New York (see footnote 26). As expected, the budget and the staff a state can afford to place in diplomatic missions are highly correlated (0.7893).

15. Asked whether the MFA has enough experts, an official from a country with a mission-based system replied, "I would say no. In our case, there is only one person back home working on our issues, not even full time" (interview UNmission#66, 16-03-11). Similarly, "I mean one of these foreign ministries are half a dozen people. And, if you deploy some of your staff not just for UN meetings but for other environmental meetings around the world, then you're actually depleting the environment section which might be two people" (interview UNmission#25, 03-12-10), also interviews UNmission#77, 28-03-11, UNmission#107, 20-07-11, UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#59, 11-03-11, UNmission#71, 22-03-11, UNmission#75, 25-03-11, UNmission#3, 08-09-10, UNmission#96, 12-04-11).

16. In line with this, a diplomat from a capital-based coordination state reported that the MFA is well-staffed and usually formulates national positions swiftly: "We tend to have a pretty good relationship with colleagues in [the capital, insertion author]. If you follow a specific resolution for a number of years you get to know the colleagues you're dealing with (...) it's pretty easy to get them to respond, sometimes there are delays but if you call them up and talk to them that's the best way to get instructions" (interview UNmission#71, 22-03-11). A member of a mission-based system reported, "Some try to specialize here and there. So we did have capacity constraints in terms of people but we tried to work on that to try and cover the most important things that we want and that's what you call prioritization" (UNmission#3, 08-09-10).

17. Government effectiveness is an indicator covering perceptions about the quality of public and civil services, the quality of policy formulation and implementation and the credibility of the government to provide high quality services and policies. Data for the variable ranges from -2.5 (lowest) to +2.5 (highest), covers the period from 1998–2009 and stem from (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 2009) (http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_countries.asp latest access August 2010). For example, Canada has a government effectiveness score of +1.77, Germany of +1.49 and the UK of +1.48, the US +1.39, while others have considerable lower scores, such as Timor-Leste (-1.13), Yemen (-1.12), or Lao People's Democratic Republic (-1.03).

18. "I think for most missions, except those with highest numbers of staff and extremely efficient MFA, for most missions there is usually a delay [in the development of national positions, insertion by author]" (interview UNmission#96, 12-04-11). Another official stated, "Obviously, if the government is ineffective, they're really not going to care about some little resolution that in the UN and taking a position on it, quite frankly" (interview UNmission#7, 22-10-10).

the MFAs are in a better position to formulate instructions for a broader range of items on the international negotiation agenda.¹⁹

Unfortunately, states with limited budgets and ill-equipped MFAs tend to lack the financial means to maintain big diplomatic missions on the ground as well.²⁰ As a consequence, the diplomats in mission-based systems are not adequately staffed to systematically compensate for the deficiencies in the capital by formulating national positions for all the items that the MFAs did not cover (e.g., interviews UNmission#10, 15-11-10, UNmission#23, 02-12-10).²¹

In sum, states are increasingly likely to have capital-based coordination practices in place the bigger their budgets are and, linked to this, the more staff they can employ in MFAs. In addition, states are more likely to have capital-based practices in place the more efficiently the government apparatus works in the development of policies. By contrast, smaller states with limited budgets and slim ministries that are also grappling with low levels of government effectiveness are increasingly likely to resemble mission-based coordination systems. Thus, Kiribati (KI), Ecuador (EC), Bangladesh (BD), Albania (AL), Guatemala (GT), Lao People's Democratic Republic (LA), Yemen (YE), Seychelles (SC), Malawi (MW), Mozambique (MZ), Indonesia (ID), Jamaica (JM), Trinidad and Tobago (TT), the Philippines (PH), El Salvador (SV), Tuvalu (TV), the Republic of Timor-Leste (TL), and Uganda (UG) all have mission-based coordination practices in place, while the de facto role that the MFA plays in the formulation of national positions is much stronger in the United States of America (US), Germany (DE), France (FR), the United Kingdom (UK), Japan (JP), Canada (CA), China (CN), South Africa (ZY), India (IN), and Brazil (BR), which operate on the basis of capital-based coordination practices.

Comparing Mission- and Capital-Based Coordination System

In capital-based systems, MFAs develop national positions usually for the bulk or even all the agenda points and pass them on to the respective diplomats in the form of instructions. The diplomats then take them to the negotiation table in IOs or regimes. The negotiation positions usually define ideal points and red lines, which specify or restrict the leeway of a diplomat regarding the issue at stake in a multilateral negotiation. Also, instructions often include technical, legal, or other reasons for certain positions, which the diplomats can draw on to effectively make their country's voice heard in negotiations (interviews UNmission#92, 01-04-11, UNmission#106, 19-07-11, UNmission#132, 30-11-11).²² In states that resemble mission-based systems on the other hand, MFAs cover only a very limited number of items and do not develop national negotiation positions for the whole range or even the majority of items on the international negotiation agenda. Thus, the diplomats on the ground, who are usually generalists and not experts—especially in small missions—face considerably more situations where they lack the background information and technical or

19. Diplomats from states with capital-based systems also emphasize that without a national position their country is unable to actively participate in multilateral negotiations (e.g., interview UNmission#57, 11-03-11). Diplomats from mission-based systems stress that non-delivery of instructions by the MFA is not conducive to their country's activity level (e.g., interview UNmission#44, 08-03-44).

20. On average, a diplomatic mission in New York has 12.44 staff members. The USA (126), Russia (88), China (72) and Germany (63) have the biggest missions, while Kiribati has no delegates in New York at all. Others such as Somalia, Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, or Nauru have just one staff member. Data on the number of diplomats stems from the UN bluebook (Executive Office of the Secretary-General, 2010).

21. E.g., "Exactly but there are some topics, even a country like ours does not have anyone dealing with at some. (.) You must say this is not a priority, we have seven diplomats, we have seven agencies, ministers back home, we are really not interested in something that does not affect us as a country or as a region or on an ideological level like human rights or something. It doesn't affect us at all so we have no standpoint at all" (interview UNmission#134, 30-11-11).

22. E.g., "The U.S. would get very detailed instructions, pretty much like a script, where if somebody responds this, you say that, somebody does this, you do that. We don't have those detailed instructions. We have more leeway in the sense that we have main objectives that we are told to do, and we must move within those objectives (.) There is quite a degree of flexibility compared to bigger missions" (interview UNmission#66, 16-03-11); "the big countries have always more detailed (.) instructions" (interview UNmission#15, 24-11-10).

legal expertise.²³ This in turn is likely to hinder their ability to exert influence via persuasion in multilateral negotiation settings.²⁴

In case the negotiation dynamics render old instructions obsolete, a diplomat needs to request adaptations of positions (or perhaps even completely new ones) from the MFA in capital-based coordination systems. This can be time-consuming and it can reduce the ability of a diplomat to actively engage in ongoing multilateral negotiations for a certain period of time. By contrast, in mission-based systems, diplomats can be considerably more flexible and spontaneous in multilateral negotiations: “It also happens that some delegations are very active in New York because they don’t have instructions, I believe. So they have a very, a great latitude to decide which position they are going to take because of the structure back home being so deficient, people here in New York basically can tell what they’re going to do” (interview UNmission#142, 01-12-11).²⁵ Greater leeway can be an advantage for diplomats, as they will not find themselves in situations in which they have to remain silent and unable to promote their country’s position in negotiations until the position update or clearance from the MFA back home arrives.

However, there is a downside as well. Since the MFAs do not often develop national positions at all in mission-based coordination systems, the workload de facto shifts to the diplomatic missions on the ground. While this gives individual diplomats flexibility, it also puts considerable requirements on their capacities, especially if the workload in the IO or regime is high, as many items are negotiated in parallel (as it is usually the case in IOs). In order to formulate national positions themselves, the missions need to have the necessary financial resources and staff to cover all the items on the international negotiation agenda, as well as technical and legal expertise. Thus, effective participation in negotiations of diplomats from mission-based systems requires not only enough staff to physically attend the negotiations. Also important are financial means and administrative support to accumulate knowledge on the subject-matter and the legal norms involved, as well as insights about the potential costs and benefits of different substantive takes on an issue (interviews UNmission#51, 09-03-11, UNmission#59, 11-03-11). Yet states with MFAs that do not cover a broad range of agenda items tend to be very selective in the first place, because they lack the capacity to develop national positions for all the issues at stake in an IO or regime. If financial means as well as staff and administrative capacities are in short supply back home, then it is very likely that the missions abroad are also grappling with limited staff, financial, and administrative capacities: “There’s a lack of resources on the New York end and (..) chances are if they’re poorly resourced in New York, then they’re often poorly resourced in the capital. It’s a kind of vicious cycle of under-resourcedness” (interview UNmission#10, 15-11-10, also UNmission#25, 03-

23. E.g., “And for us we are just generalists, we are not specialists. I mean, as a diplomat you were a generalist per se. But then if you are facing that negotiating team with all these experts you are baffled, often you are baffled and you are often intimidated. Intimidated because you don’t have the same knowledge that they have and therefore you are in a much weaker position. A much weaker position, no doubt” (interview UNmission#154, 26-01-12). “The other issue would be clearly, in negotiations, and this is true for a lot of countries frankly, we don’t necessarily have positions on every issue. On some of them we honestly don’t care either way and we can let it go. Maybe a lot of countries are like that. So if you had to participate in negotiations, you’ve got that problem. Because of resource constraints we generally would not be real experts, and you know, if you’re covering disarmaments, you have to really know the subjects. And I’d say that most small states, have generalists, not specialists, so they go into committees or particular negotiations on a resolution knowing broadly what their position is on the issue, but when it comes down to debating a particular point, you would probably be a bit lacking there” (interview UNmission#7, 22-10-10). “In small countries you’d have many good qualified generalists and a few highly qualified specialists” (interview UNmission#14, 24-11-10). “The bigger your mission, the more specialized your people are” (interview UNmission#26, 04-12-10).

24. Officials from mission-based systems also report that even the limited number of instructions coming from the capital is not always well backed up by profound expertise, which reduces the effectiveness of the diplomats’ arguments in negotiations (e.g., interview UNmission#165, 19-03-12).

25. “South Africa for example, you know that they [the diplomats in the missions, insertion by the author] will always have to go back [to the MFA in the capital to obtain updated instructions, insertion by the author] because they have a very organized structure. But there are some countries, especially if the issue is not so important, they can decide on their own” (interview UNmission#7, 22-10-10).

12-10).²⁶ Thus, although in mission-based coordination systems diplomats on-location would often have great leeway in their choice of which position to pursue, they tend to lack the resources to systematically compensate for capacity shortcomings back home, because they cannot develop positions for all the agenda items and have to be very selective.²⁷

Compared to mission-based systems, the MFAs in capital-based systems tend to be better equipped with staff and financial and administrative capacities. They are also considerably more active and formulate national positions for a much broader range of agenda items (interviews UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#59, 11-03-11, UNmission#71, 22-03-11, UNmission#75, 25-03-11, UNmission#3, 08-09-10, UNmission#96, 12-04-11, UNmission#107, 20-07-11). In addition, the missions of these states tend to grapple less often and less severely with capacity shortcomings than the embassies of mission-based coordination systems (interviews UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#26, 04-12-10, UNmission#15, 24-11-10). Thus, the diplomats on the ground are in a better position to provide additional information to the MFAs in the capitals, which improves the development of national positions back home even further (interviews UNmission#105, 19-07-11, UNmission#29, 10-12-10). While mission-based systems face a vicious cycle of lacking capacities in the capitals and the missions, capital-based systems are better off capacity-wise and tend to have mutually positively reinforcing missions and MFAs. As a result, states with capital-based coordination systems can be expected to engage more actively over a broad range of different items on the international negotiation agenda.

From Preference-Formation to Active and Effective Participation in IO Negotiations

Based on the above discussion, we expect states with capital-based coordination systems to participate more actively in international negotiations, while states with mission-based coordination systems should be absent more often. Likewise, diplomats from capital-based systems are more likely to be better equipped with good instructions that outline ideal points, fall back options, red lines, and possible technical or legal arguments than their colleagues from mission-based systems. Therefore, we would expect that the former are more influential when it comes to persuading other states and shaping the outcomes of multilateral negotiations.

This section does not seek to comprehensively explain participation and success differences between states in multilateral negotiations but instead follows the x-centered research design and illustrates the difference that the coordination-system makes for the active and effective participation of states.

Active and Effective Participation

In the final stage of negotiations, states take decisions, usually by some form of voting. Thus, participation in the final decision-taking stage is the litmus test for states' active engagement in negotiations, as the incentives to be present and participate in casting a vote to express national interests should be the greatest. In order to analyze whether the domestic coordination practices make a difference for active participation, this section examines the extent that

26. "The number of people in the ministry is small (...) I've had this discussion with other small states. You don't have so many experts in every issue under the international agenda, you can imagine so sometimes you have to discuss these things more in depth but perhaps others will have specialized people in the ministries" (interview UNmission#24, 02-12-10). Similarly, "I think that that's a resource constraint, and frankly, they have a very very selective range of issues and that is it—they just don't show-up for the rest" (interview UNmission#7, 22-10-10).

27. E.g., "So you have to prioritize and sometimes and even within that prioritization, critical things get left behind. It doesn't happen very frequently because when you prioritize you try to take in the most important issues and even after you prioritize you have to look at the quality of how you're able to cover the issue which is also another problem, something I complain about all the time" (interview UNmission#162, 16-03-12). Similarly, "So we did have capacity constraints in terms of people but we tried to work on that to try and cover the most important things that we want and that's what you call prioritization" (interview UNmission#2, 03-06-10). Also, "Prioritization helps as well. If you are a small country, we have seven diplomats here, we can't cover everything but we have neighbors here who have only one member. Marshall Islands for example, they have one person. He can't cover everything, so he must say 'priority for my country is climate change or whatever. I don't care about Sudan or responsibility to protect, I don't care about anything else. I don't care about plus 20 development because I can't cover it and there's no one at home in my ministry who does.' If you are the UK or France or Germany, you're interested in everything and you have 20, 30, 50 diplomats here. Not to mention some which have 400" (interview UNmission#134, 30-11-11).

financial means (see footnote 20), staff in national missions as a proxy for the staff in MFAs back home (see footnote 26), and government effectiveness (see footnote 23), (which are higher in capital-based and lower in mission-based systems), influence the likelihood of states being present (pressing yes, no, or abstention buttons) or being absent during voting in an IO.²⁸

Since the UN General Assembly (UNGA) is the international institution with the broadest membership in the world, encompassing today a total of 193 states with broad variation in financial means and government effectiveness, it represents a good testing ground. In UNGA, states vote on all the resolutions that prove controversial, while the items in which disagreement was fully resolved are de facto adopted by consensus. The dataset covers all 994 voted resolutions over the period from 1999/2000 to 2009/2010 in which membership was relatively stable.²⁹ The dependent variable is the average absence-rate in voting in General Assembly sessions 54 (1999/2000) to 64 (2009/2010) for the OLS regression analysis (N=192) and the total number of absence counts for all voting instances in this period for the binominal logistic analysis (1=absence; 0=presence). Budgets and staff are highly correlated³⁰ and are tested in separate models to avoid problems with multicollinearity.

Table 1: Regression Analysis—Absenteeism

	model 1 (OLS)	model 2 (OLS)	model 3 (OLS)	model 4 (binom. logit)	model 5 (binom. logit)	model 6 (binom. logit)
Budgets	-0.000		-0.003*	-0.000***		-0.000***
(in billion USD)	(0.001)		(0.001)	(0.000)		(0.000)
Staff in Mission		-0.263**			-0.148***	
(proxy for staff in MFA)		(0.076)			(0.002)	
Government Effectiveness	-7.183***	-6.249***		-0.712***	-0.744***	
	(1.152)	(1.117)		(0.011)	(0.010)	
Constant	11.214***	14.479	12.090***	-2.085***	-1.115***	-1.699***
	(1.118)	(1.434)	(1.202)	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.008)
Observations	190	190	192	184481	184481	186465
Adjusted R ²	18.13	22.98	1.62			
LL				-58673.06	-55073.84	-61394.74
AIC				117352	110154	122793

As expected, Table 1 illustrates that financial capacities, staff capacities, and government effectiveness influence the activity-pattern of states in multilateral negotiations and do so robustly across the models. Altogether, an increase in budgets and staff capacities reduces the absenteeism of countries in UNGA decision taking. In other words, states that are best equipped with these capacities are most likely to participate actively in the crucial voting stage of multilateral negotiations. Likewise, states are increasingly absent from the final stage of multilateral negotiations the less effective their government apparatuses are. Interviews with diplomats shed light on the underlying causal mechanism for these robust and significant correlations. As expected, the likelihood that an MFA has developed national positions influences the level at which countries participate actively in the voting stage of multilateral negotiations. Diplomats explain that budgets are important and positively affect the participation-rates of countries in multilateral negotiations but they do so indirectly, as financial capacities influence the number of qualified staff in missions and MFAs.³¹ In

28. This section uses capacities as proxies for the coordination systems, as there is no large-N data available on how each of the UN member states develops its national positions.

29. The data is computed on the basis of the UNGA session reports, available from <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/gares1.htm> (latest access 10-05-2011).

30. The fewer financial capacities are available in a state, the slimmer its diplomatic mission.

31. E.g., interviews UNmission#9, 04-11-10, UNmission#11, 16-11-10, UNmission#47, 09-03-11, UNmission#27, 06-12-10, UNmission#3, 08-09-10, UNmission#14, 24-11-10.

addition, interviewees report that delegations from countries with big MFAs receive positions for a wide range of items, without delays that prevent the diplomats from casting votes (interviews UNmission#37, 07-03-11, UNmission#59, 11-03-11, UNmission#71, 22-03-11, UNmission#75, 25-03-11, UNmission#3, 08-09-10). By contrast, less well-staffed MFAs are more selective and develop a fewer number of national positions: “The Third Committee has over 60 resolutions; we have an interest in many. We cover as many as we can. We don’t cover as many of them as we would like to, or with as much depth. So we have to be very light footed. We have a small team back in our capital that gives us instructions so we have to really choose when we would like instructions because the team has a limited capacity” (interview UNmission#65, 14-03-11, similarly UNmission#14, 24-11-10, UNmission#109, 21-07-11, UNmission#96, 12-04-11). As a consequence, countries lacking national positions on a wide range of resolutions tend to be absent more often and participate less in multilateral negotiations (e.g., interview UNmission#3, 08-09-10): “If you don’t have instruction and you’re not sure how to vote, you can also decide not to be there, because you didn’t have the instruction from back home, because lack of preparedness you didn’t have the right instruction, or if it came it came too late. And that has to do with capacity because people with more capacity will certainly give instructions on all issues, on time, so that you’re able to do the full thing” (interview UNmission#11, 16-11-10).³²

States with capital-based coordination systems can develop specific instructions for a broader range of items on the international agenda and tend to back them up with legal and technical expertise, while states with mission-based systems need to be more selective and tend to develop broad general policy positions rather than specific instructions. Consequently, these states have national positions for fewer issues and their location-based diplomats participate, on average, less actively. Active and effective participation are linked. If a diplomat does not voice her country’s interest, she cannot influence the content of the outcome of the multilateral negotiations. Yes-votes are an expression of congruence between a national position and a policy outcome. It is striking that absenteeism and yes-votes are strongly negatively correlated (-0.6894), indicating that active participation is conducive to the ability of diplomats to reduce a mismatch between national positions and negotiation outcomes. Moreover, zooming into negotiation dynamics more closely, case studies show that participants who actively use a broad variety of different negotiation strategies and who have compelling arguments to back up their positions have greater chances of exerting influence than actors who are largely passive or only come in at the very final stage of negotiations and who tend to have more limited legal and technical expertise to back up their arguments (e.g., Panke, 2013; Moravcsik, 1998; Plantey, 2007). In line with this, diplomats who were asked for the recipe for success in multilateral negotiations repeatedly flagged not only the necessity of getting support from their capitals but also staff capacities and the willingness of individual diplomats to engage actively in the negotiations. This encompasses not only the actual attendance of the meetings, coffee breaks, and working lunches but also includes talking to as many people as possible in order to make an impact in the final negotiation outcome (interviews UNmission#65, 14-03-11, UNmission#102, 27-06-11, UNmission#106, 19-07-11, UNmission#107, 20-07-11, UNmission#118, 23-09-11, UNmission#119, 23-09-11, UNmission#120, 29-09-11).³³

32. An official explained in respect to states with inefficient bureaucracies: “They don’t know what their position is so they don’t participate; it happens a lot” (UNmission#7, 22-10-10).

33. E.g., “It is a long term influencing, knowing beforehand what you’re aiming at and then starting the discussions soon with each and every (...) well in advance and listen to their opinion, and start by selling your own opinions” (UNmission#16, 25-11-10). Another diplomat explained, “Be as vocal as possible in the group dynamics. My PR always says this. You want to always be in a room when they pick a small group, when they pick out a small group of negotiators, because often this happens, often they pick a select group of 10–15 countries, key players from key countries always give a position and always make sure that your position is a valid position that you are not just speaking for the sake of taking the floor and hearing your own voice. Make sure that it is backed, you back up your national position that you argue well you present this argument well. You show yourself and make yourself visible within the NAM and within the sub-region, and that way you ensure when they do the closed-door negotiations you are invited, you are in the room, and you are part of the decision-making clique” (UNmission#60, 11-03-11).

Conclusions

Going hand in hand with globalization, cooperation beyond the nation-state has mushroomed over the last century. The number of items on the international agenda is vast, the range of issues broad, the workload high, and time pressures often severe. Active and effective participation in multilateral negotiations places enormous demands on member states' capacities in various IOs and regimes, and some states are better equipped to face these requirements than others.

While often overlooked, this paper sheds light on the various capacities relevant for domestic preference-formation. It formulates two ideal models of how states develop national positions for international negotiations. In capital-based systems, the MFA formally and de facto plays a dominant role in formulating often very detailed and well backed up instructions for a broad range of items, which define the leeway the diplomats have and provide them with negotiation tools. Mission-based systems are less hierarchical. In these coordination systems MFAs are less active in practice and provide—often rather general—national positions only for a limited number of items and also often with a delay. In the absence of guidelines from the capital, the diplomats on the ground can step in and de facto formulate national positions themselves and act on them.

Which coordination system states resemble empirically depends on the available financial, staff, and government capacities. States that are well equipped in all respects have capital-based practices in place in which the MFA does the lion's share of work for the construction of national interests. By contrast, states with small budgets, slim ministries, and an ineffective political apparatus closely resemble mission-based systems. Their MFAs simply lack the means to cover all the items on the negotiation agenda, which in practice shifts policy-formulation work to the diplomats on the ground for all items for which the capital did not deliver instructions.

A state's coordination system influences its conduct in multilateral negotiations. States with mission-based systems tend to be less active and, on average, also less influential, because the diplomats on the ground cannot systematically compensate for capacity shortcomings in the capitals. Due to a lack of national positions, states with mission-based systems are less active overall in negotiations in IOs and regimes. Being silent or even completely absent in turn hinders the chances a diplomat can leave a mark and influence international norms. By contrast, states with capital-based coordination systems are in a better position to make the most of their membership in IOs or regimes. Diplomats are not only present and equipped with instructions—usually national positions developed in capital-based systems also specify ideal and fallback outcomes, red-lines, and technical and legal arguments the diplomats can draw on to effectively influence the course of negotiations (Panke, 2013).

Most IOs and regimes are based on the principle of sovereign equality, according to which each state has equal rights in multilateral negotiations. Yet, some states are better equipped to actively engage and effectively operate in these arenas than others. Although it is difficult, not the least because of the zero-sum game characteristic of domestic resource allocation, in order to catch up and move from the mission-side toward the capital-side of preference-formation, states would need to redirect more of their available resources into MFAs and diplomatic missions.

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