

# The Adjustment of International Institutions to Global Power Shifts: A Framework for Analysis

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## Abstract

As powers such as China and India rise, and powers such as the US and the UK decline, international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund come under pressure to adapt to new power realities. In the wake of global power shifts, both emerging and established powers may challenge the institutional status quo. Contrary to what most power transition and power shift theories assume, challengers do not always draw on power bargaining to pursue institutional adjustment. In some issue areas, they do, but in others they employ alternative strategies including strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion and principled persuasion. In order to contribute to a better understanding of institutional adjustments to global power shifts, the introduction to this special issue theorizes these various strategies. First, we conceptualize power bargaining, strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion and principled persuasion as distinct strategies for institutional adjustment. Second, we elaborate on the conditions under which challengers choose particular strategies. Third, we specify the conditions under which challengers are able to achieve institutional adaptation through a particular strategy. Finally, we discuss broader implications for the future of the international order and the management of global power shifts.

## Policy Implications

- Efforts to manage global power shifts should not focus exclusively on challenges from rising powers but must take into account challenges from declining powers too. Not only China is challenging the current international order, but in some issue areas the US is acting as a challenger too. To manage global power shifts both challenges from rising *and* declining powers have to be taken seriously.
- In the wake of global power shifts, challengers of the institutional status quo need not always rely on power bargaining. Sometimes strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion or principled persuasion are not only better suited to attain institutional adjustment; they are also less conflictive. They thus allow maintaining (or creating) cooperative relations between emerging and established powers, which will often be in the interest of challengers.
- In the wake of global power shifts, defenders of the institutional status quo should not assume that challengers will engage in power bargaining. After all, policy responses that are adequate for addressing power bargaining are often counterproductive in dealing with strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion or principled persuasion. As the latter are less conflictive, they allow maintaining (or creating) cooperative relations between emerging and established powers, which will often be in the interest of defenders.
- The conditions of institutional adjustment differ from issue area to issue area and even from institution to institution. Policy advice on how to manage global power shifts should not brush over these differences. Chinese challenges to the global human rights regime cannot be treated the same as its challenges to the trade regime. And US challenges to the International Criminal Court (ICC) should not be treated the same as its challenges to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Oversimplified advice, if turned into policy, breeds policy failure.

## Power shifts and strategies for institutional adjustment<sup>1</sup>

Shifts in the global distribution of power put the international order and its underpinning international institutions under pressure to adjust (Gilpin, 1981; Organski, 1968). As powers such as China and India rise and powers such as the US or the UK decline, international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) come under pressure to adapt to new power realities (Ikenberry, 2011, 2018; Lesage and van de Graaf, 2015; Paul,

2016; Schweller and Pu, 2011; Vestergaard and Wade, 2015). In many cases, this pressure stems from emerging powers (Schweller, 1994). As a result of its rise, China has acquired more voting rights in the IMF (Lesage et al., 2015; Lipsky, 2017). But, in other cases, pressure comes from established powers (Zürn, 2018). The US has required from India, as a result of its rise, a more far-reaching commitment to the reduction of carbon emissions than originally stipulated under the Kyoto Protocol of the climate change regime.

The strategies through which challengers – whether emerging or established powers – try to bring about institutional adaptation to global power shifts vary. In some cases,

challengers engage in *power bargaining*, issuing threats to force defenders of the institutional status quo to compromise. For example, in 2012 China used threats that it would disengage from the IMF's attempt to contain the global financial crisis as a means to reach an agreement with the US on more even-handed IMF surveillance (Zangl et al., 2016). In other cases, emerging or established powers challenging the institutional status quo have engaged in *rhetorical coercion*. They use arguments based on existing institutions' lack of legitimacy to shame defenders of the status quo into accepting adjustments. Brazil's shaming of the US for its opposition to the 2001 revision of the WTO's regime of intellectual property protection with regard to essential drugs is an example (Daßler et al., 2019). In yet another set of cases, emerging or established powers engage in *strategic cooptation* to mount a challenge. They make material promises in order to buy the defenders' agreement to institutional adjustments that upgrade their common interests. This is what India did in 2008 when it offered to accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards in return for de facto recognition as a nuclear power under the nuclear non-proliferation (NPT) regime (Kruck and Zangl, 2019). Finally, emerging and established powers sometimes engage in *principled persuasion* to challenge the institutional status quo. They argue that institutional adjustments will lead to the improved legitimacy or efficiency of the institution to convince defenders that they have a joint interest in institutional adjustments. For instance, the US has tried (and is still trying) to convince its NATO partners to increase their military spending to a level of 2.0 per cent of their respective GDP for the benefit of the organization as a whole (Mattelaer, 2016).

Traditional power transition theories (PTTs; Allison, 2017; Gilpin, 1981; Layne, 1993; Modelski, 1987; Organski, 1968; Organski and Kugler, 1980), as well as more recent power shift theories (PSTs; Daßler et al., 2019; Hopewell, 2015; Ikenberry, 2011, 2018; Kruck and Zangl, 2019; Lesage and van de Graaf, 2015; Lipsky, 2017; Paul, 2016; Schirm, 2010; Schweller and Pu, 2011; Zangl et al., 2016; Zürn, 2018; see Chin, 2015 for an overview), largely ignore this variation. They simply assume that challengers of existing institutions always resort to power bargaining. They claim, for instance, that challengers' ability to issue credible threats (Zangl et al., 2016), their options outside of the institution in question (Lipsky, 2017) and the support they receive from regional powers (Schirm, 2010) are crucial conditions for institutional adjustment. However, the same conditions are less relevant if a challenger seeks institutional adjustments through rhetorical coercion, strategic cooptation or principled persuasion. Therefore, an adequate understanding of institutional change in the wake of global power shifts should take differences in challengers' strategies into account. To contribute to a better understanding of institutional adjustments of this kind, we ask three questions. What strategies are used by challengers of the institutional status quo to push defenders to accept institutional adjustments? What are the conditions under which challengers opt for a particular strategy? And under what conditions will challengers

succeed in bringing about adaptation by using a particular strategy?

To provide answers to these questions this special issue brings together scholars with a strong record of research on institutional change. The underlying rationale is that power-focused analysis of institutional adjustment to global power shifts could benefit from more general insights into processes of institutional change in international institutions. Our common assumption is that power shifts often create an impetus for institutional adjustment, but they do not automatically lead to institutional adaptation. In other words, institutional adjustments are not a mere reflection of shifts in the overall global distribution of power. Moreover, to explain the choices institutional challengers make during global power shifts the contributors to this special issue share an understanding of 'bounded rationality' that is also open to ideas and influences from social constructivist theories. At the same time, the contributors to this special issue bring in expertise on a wide variety of different international institutions – from the realms of security (Binder and Heupel, this issue), the economy (Viola, this issue) and the environment (Thompson, this issue); from inclusive multilateral institutions with broad memberships (Lipsky, this issue) to exclusive clubs (Stephen and Stephen, 2020; Viola, this issue); and from historical eras ranging from the 19th (Goddard, this issue) and early 20th (MacDonald, this issue) to the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Vabulas and Snidal, this issue). Finally, the contributors to this special issue draw on a variety of both qualitative (Fioretos, this issue) and quantitative methods (Tallberg and Verhaegen, this issue).

To study the strategies that challengers of the institutional status quo employ to seek institutional adjustments, we go beyond the focus of traditional PTTs on full-blown power transitions where an emerging power overtakes the so far dominant established power (Beckley, 2018; Brooks and Wohlforth, 2015/2016). We rather follow more recent PST contributions, which have studied shifts in the distribution of power that can, but need not, amount to a power transition (Kruck and Zangl, 2019; Lesage and van de Graaf, 2015; Lipsky, 2017; Schirm, 2010). Power shifts are distinctive in two respects. First, in terms of control over relevant resources, they involve the power gap between emerging and established powers shrinking significantly over a relatively condensed period of time.<sup>2</sup> Within less than a decade emerging powers come much closer to, or actually overtake, some of the established powers, but they do not necessarily overtake the dominant power. Second, power shifts may affect the overall distribution of power but, unlike power transitions, need not necessarily do so. They can be – and indeed often are – issue area specific, differing from one issue area to another.

In our analysis of challengers' strategies designed to achieve institutional adjustments, we also go beyond the focus of traditional PT theories on the global order as such (Gilpin, 1981; Modelski, 1987; Organski, 1968). Again we follow more recent PST contributions instead, which study the adjustment of issue-area-specific institutions such as the UNSC, WTO or IMF that underpin the international order

(Daßler et al., 2019; Hopewell, 2015; Lesage and van de Graaf, 2015; Schirm, 2010; Zangl et al., 2016). By institutional adaptation or institutional adjustment – we use these terms interchangeably – we mean reforms to institutions that are agreed between challengers and defenders of the institutional status quo and that reduce the power mismatch between the issue-area-specific global distribution of power and the status quo that prompted challengers to demand institutional change in the first place. Institutional adjustment is institutional change that meets – at least partially – the demands of dissatisfied emerging or established powers. It can imply changes to procedural or substantive norms; it may be formal or informal; and it can be internal or external to the institution in question (Hanrieder, 2014; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010; Vabulas and Snidal, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

In the remainder of this introduction, we develop an analytical framework which draws on a broad understanding of theories of bounded rationality and thus allows for the inclusion of concepts and variables from both rationalist and social constructivist theories. This framework is meant to give the contributions to this special issue some guidance and coherence. At the same time, some of the causal propositions we highlight in this introduction, especially those in the later parts on the success of different strategies, have also been informed by the findings of the contributions to this special issue. We, first, conceptualize the strategies that emerging or established challengers may use to make international institutions adjust to global power shifts. We also show that the contributions do indeed find that challengers of the status quo use a wide variety of strategies ranging from power bargaining, strategic cooptation and rhetorical coercion to principled persuasion in order to achieve their ends. We then elaborate on the ‘choice conditions’ under which challengers to the status quo opt for particular strategies. We specify the ‘success conditions’ under which challengers are actually able to achieve institutional adaptation through a particular strategy. Finally, we discuss the broader implications of the findings for the future of the international order and the management of global power shifts.

### The use of different strategies

Institutional adjustment to global power shifts hardly ever emerges spontaneously. Instead, challengers and defenders of the status quo typically engage in prolonged negotiations on the adjustment of international institutions to new power realities. The protracted negotiations about adjustments to the UNSC in the wake of shifting power realities provide an example of this process in operation, as do the negotiations over adjustments to IMF voting rights or the composition of the WTO core negotiation group (Hosli and Dörfler, 2015; Kahler, 2013; Lipsky, 2017; Lesage et al., 2015; Vestergaard and Wade, 2015; Zangl et al., 2016). But what strategies do challengers use to push defenders towards an acceptance of their case? Unlike the bulk of PTTs and PSTs,<sup>4</sup> we suggest that, besides power bargaining, they may also engage in rhetorical coercion, strategic cooptation or principled persuasion. Assuming that challengers and defenders of the

institutional status quo act as bounded rational actors, broadly conceived, we conceptualize these strategies by drawing on two distinctions from the literatures on international negotiations in general and negotiated institutional change more specifically:

1. We distinguish between *arguing* and *bargaining* as negotiation strategies (Elster, 1991; Müller, 2004). Negotiating parties who adopt an arguing strategy direct their efforts towards convincing others of the legitimacy of their own position and the lack of legitimacy of their opponents'. The parties may use arguments to directly persuade one another, thereby changing their respective positions (Deitelhoff, 2009; Müller, 2004; Risse, 2000), but they may also argue in order to convince critical audiences to change their views so that they can thus garner their support (Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Schimmelfennig, 2001). By contrast, parties who adopt a bargaining strategy rely on threats or promises (Lax and Sebenius, 1986; Rubinstein, 1982; Schelling, 1960). By issuing threats and making promises, they try, on the one hand, to identify the zone where their respective interests overlap, while at the same time forcing one another to accept an agreement that best serves each of their respective self-interests. In real-world negotiations, the parties may use a mix of bargaining and arguing; even so their strategies can usually be classified as having their focus either on the one or the other.
2. We also distinguish between *distributive* and *integrative* negotiation strategies (Odell, 2000; Scharpf, 1997). When making use of a distributive strategy, each negotiating party seeks to maximize its own interest through ‘value-claiming’ behavior, that is, they seek to get as big a piece of the pie as possible. They try primarily to inflict costs on their counter-party to force the latter to give in. In integrative strategies the negotiating parties seek to maximize their common interests through ‘value-creating’ behavior, namely, they seek to make the shared pie as large as possible (Odell, 2000). They primarily point to potential benefits in order to nudge one another into a mutually beneficial agreement. Yet, there is a tradeoff between the two strategies (Kydd and McManus, 2016; Lax and Sebenius, 1986). If negotiating parties use distributive strategies such as threatening to leave the negotiation table, they may increase the chances that a negotiated agreement will reflect their own interests, but, at the same time, they increase the risk that no agreement will be reached at all. If, by contrast, they adopt integrative strategies such as promising material benefits, they increase the chances that an agreement will be struck, but run the risk that it will serve the interests of the other negotiating parties better than their own. As a result of this tradeoff, real-world negotiations almost always evolve as a blend between distributive and integrative strategies: some concern for joint gains may also figure in distributive strategies, and distributional concerns are often present in integrative strategies. Nevertheless, negotiating parties’ strategies can be classified as

*predominantly* either distributive (inflicting costs) or integrative (promising benefits) (Lax and Sebenius, 1986; Odell, 2000).

Crossing the two distinctions we arrive at four strategies that challengers may draw on to achieve institutional adjustments in the face of global power shifts: power bargaining, rhetorical coercion, strategic cooptation and principled persuasion (see Table 1).

### Power bargaining: forcing defenders

In power bargaining, negotiating parties engage in distributive bargaining based on material threats to *force* their counterparts to compromise (Rubinstein, 1982; Schelling, 1960). With regard to institutional adjustments to global power shifts more specifically, challengers to the institutional status quo – whether emerging or established powers – issue threats to undermine the institution in question to try to force defenders of the status quo to accept their demands (Zangl et al., 2016). For that purpose, they may threaten to violate the institution's norms (non-compliance), to delay or block its decisions (sabotage), to resign from the organization (resignation; see von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019), to withdraw institutional support (disengagement) or to create competing institutions (counter-institutionalization). They may also build coalitions with other dissatisfied members of the institution to enhance their ability to undermine it and thus force defenders to agree to the desired adjustments.

As expected, the contributors to this special issue find several instances in which challengers of the institutional status quo rely on power bargaining. For example, Lipsky (this issue) identifies power bargaining tactics in Japan's post-Second World War attempts to improve its position within international institutions such as the UNSC, World Bank and IMF. In Viola's analysis (this issue) of US strategies for institutional adaptation in the face of its current hegemonic decline, the US is increasingly found to use 'exclusive multilateral institutions' such as the G7 as leverage in power bargaining to impose institutional adjustments on 'inclusive multilateral institutions' blocked by emerging powers. Vabulas and Snidal (this issue), meanwhile, show how the setting-up of informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) such as the BRICS, and subsequent reliance on them, can serve emerging powers as vehicles for power bargaining.

**Table 1.** Strategies of institutional adjustment

	Distributive	Integrative
Bargaining	<i>Power bargaining</i> (forcing defenders)	<i>Strategic cooptation</i> (buying defenders)
Arguing	<i>Rhetorical coercion</i> (shaming defenders)	<i>Principled persuasion</i> (convincing defenders)

Source: own elaboration.

### Strategic cooptation: buying defenders

However, instead of drawing on power bargaining, negotiating parties may also engage in more integrative bargaining strategies based on the exchange of material promises. Instead of using threats to maximize their own interests and force each other to compromise, as they would in distributive bargaining, negotiating parties exchange material promises so as to 'buy' their opponents into an agreement that maximizes their joint interests. They thus engage in strategic cooptation (Abbott et al., 2019; Dickson, 2000; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006; Selznick, 1964). In the context of shifts in the global distribution of power, challengers of the institutional status quo may promise to step up their support for the institution in return for privileges that bring them closer to the leadership of the institution (Kruck and Zangl, 2019; see Heldt and Mahrenbach, 2019). Thus, challengers try to buy defenders' acceptance of institutional adjustments rather than forcing it. Alone or with a coalition of like-minded states, they may pledge additional financial resources, they may offer more personnel, promise improved compliance or express their increased political commitment to a reformed institution.

Among the contributors to this special issue who find instances of strategic cooptation, Stephen and Stephen (this issue) describe how China tried to buy itself observer status in the exclusive club of the Arctic Council by promising practical and material support in return for the privilege of observer status. Thompson (this issue) retraces how in the last decade the EU and the US offered additional climate financing in exchange for emerging powers' acceptance of carbon reduction commitments under the global climate regime. Vabulas and Snidal (this issue) claim that some 'integrative' informal IGOs, such as the G20, are based on a mutually beneficial cooptation agreement whereby established powers gain legitimacy and expand their collective capabilities in return for giving emerging powers a stronger voice in the institution. And Fioretos (this issue) highlights how strategic cooptation was used by established powers to undermine more radical ambitions for reform among developing countries that called for a new international economic order in the 1970s.

### Rhetorical coercion: shaming defenders

After a global power shift, challengers of the institutional status quo also make use of rhetorical coercion to obtain defenders' agreement to institutional adaptation. In rhetorical coercion, negotiating parties generally engage in distributive strategies based on arguments intended to *shame* their opposite numbers and force them to compromise (Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Schimmelfennig, 2001). According to Krebs and Jackson (2007, p. 36) who invented the term, rhetorical coercion occurs when a 'claimant's opponents have been talked into a corner, compelled to endorse a stance, they would otherwise reject'. With regard to institutional adaptation to global power shifts this means, more specifically, that challengers argue that the institutional status quo is not legitimate because it violates (widely) shared causal or normative



beliefs. Primarily, however, challengers argue not in order to convince the defenders, but to inflict hypocrisy costs on them by highlighting disparities between the defenders' professed commitment to normative or causal beliefs and their actual behavior (Goddard, this issue). They use accusatory speech acts, especially shaming to try to compel defenders to accept institutional adjustments (Daßler et al., 2019). When they engage in rhetorical coercion, challengers often have particularly strong incentives to bring in, and mobilize support from, interested third parties such as global civil society activists and their transnational 'advocacy networks' (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), the bureaucracies of international organizations or members of the international community of states and their diplomatic channels. The resonance of the challengers' arguments among these audiences augments the hypocrisy costs defenders incur.

Stacie Goddard is one of several contributors to this special issue who finds instances of challengers engaging in rhetorical coercion. She shows that Japan did so in the late 19th century when it accused Western powers of hypocrisy for denying Japan the adjustment of the so-called 'unequal treaties' and thus recognition as a fully sovereign state. Similarly, Binder and Heupel (this issue) argue that, in the early 2000s, the G4 (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) used the same tactic in an attempt to gain permanent seats in the UNSC, arguing that withholding them would disregard their contributions to the Security Council and compromise its performance. Similarly, Fioretos (this issue) suggests that developing countries relied, *inter alia*, on rhetorical coercion to seek adjustments to the global economic order in the 1970s and 1980s. To mobilize public support not only in the developing world but also in developed countries for a new international economic order, they highlighted the dubious legitimacy of the existing order and the Bretton Woods institutions that underpinned it. Finally, MacDonald (this issue) shows that, during the Hague Conferences in 1899 and 1907, proponents of the Hague system referred, time and again, to public opinion in order to shame obstructive powers into agreement on deeper cooperation in matters of disarmament and arbitration.

### Principled persuasion: convincing defenders

However, in pursuit of institutional adjustments, challengers of the institutional status quo may alternatively rely on principled persuasion (Deitelhoff, 2009; Müller, 2004; Risse, 2000). When they do so, they engage in integrative arguing. They use normative or causal arguments to *convince* their opponents that their demands are justified, because they reflect shared normative and causal beliefs. With regard to power shifts and institutional adaptation more specifically, this means that challengers argue that institutional adjustments would lead to improved legitimacy or efficiency for the institution and entail mutual benefits for both challengers and defenders of the status quo (Goddard, this issue). They thus confront the defenders with an attractive vision of an adjusted institution that better reflects their shared beliefs. In contrast to the public accusations typical

of rhetorical coercion, challengers who rely on principled persuasion purport to educate defenders through convincing arguments: they act as if the defenders have been failing to live up to shared beliefs due to a lack of understanding, rather than out of parochial self-interest. When engaging in principled persuasion, they typically build coalitions with like-minded states or non-state authorities as this enhances the authority of their arguments. For example, causal arguments gain authority when supported by experts, and the authority of normative arguments can often be enhanced when they are supported by moral authorities such as religious leaders.

In line with our expectations, some contributions to this special issue show that challengers do draw on principled persuasion to convince defenders to accept institutional adjustments. For example, MacDonald (this issue) demonstrates that at the Hague Conferences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, proponents of the codification of certain customary norms of war used principled persuasion in trying to convince skeptical delegations that their proposed changes would correspond to the shared normative beliefs of all 'civilized' members of the 'international society'. Moreover, Stephen and Stephen (this issue) show that China relied on principled persuasion as well as strategic cooptation, when it argued that its inclusion in the Arctic Council as an observer would be in line with the institution's regional logic. China emphasized that it was – apart from the Council's members – the Arctic's nearest neighbor. Finally, Goddard (this issue) shows that Japan tried in the late 19th century to convince Western powers that it was an ordinary sovereign state, deserving equal treatment and, thus, an adjustment of the 'unequal treaties' that had been imposed on it.

In sum, the contributions to this special issue demonstrate that challengers of the institutional status quo not only draw on power bargaining strategies, but use strategies of rhetorical coercion, strategic cooptation and principled persuasion too. They also underscore that these strategies are not only used by emerging powers, but also by established powers that challenge the institutional status quo in the wake of global power shifts (see MacDonald, this issue; Thompson, this issue; Viola, this issue). Moreover, several contributions indicate that different strategies are often used in combination, either simultaneously or sequentially (Goddard, this issue; Lipsky, this issue; MacDonald, this issue; Vabulas and Snidal, this issue; Viola, this issue).

### The choice of different strategies

What are the conditions under which challengers of the institutional status quo opt for one strategy or another? When do they choose power bargaining, strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion or principled persuasion?

To begin with, we assume that challengers – whether emerging or established powers – make these choices as bounded rational actors (Jupille et al., 2013; Simon, 1997). The rationality assumption implies that they will opt for the strategy they expect to offer the best prospects of achieving beneficial institutional adjustments at the lowest possible costs.

However, as bounded rational actors, challengers' expectations will hardly ever be entirely accurate. Nonetheless, they will usually opt for the strategy which seems – according to their expectations – to offer the best prospects for achieving the required institutional adaptations. To explain challengers' choices, we thus need to single out the conditions that are conducive to particular strategies. We focus on the interest and power constellation in which challengers and defenders are involved, but interpret these two sets of conditions in ways that go beyond a strictly rational-materialist understanding and thus allow for the inclusion of ideas, concepts and variables from social constructivist theorizing.

### Interest constellation

In general, we assume that the interest constellation between challengers and defenders of the institutional status quo will condition their choice of strategy. More specifically, drawing on a distinction made in many PTT and PST contributions, we claim that the choice of strategy will be shaped by whether a challenger's outlook is that of a revolutionary, revisionist or reformist power and thus the degree of its alignment or disalignment with defenders' interests (Cooley et al., 2019; Organski, 1968; Schweller, 1994; Ward, 2017). However, unlike most PTTs and many PSTs, we do not ask whether challengers are revolutionary, revisionist or reformist powers in general, but focus on whether they take revolutionary, revisionist or reformist positions in the specific issue area in which they seek institutional adjustments. Revolutionary powers aim at a complete overhaul of existing institutions, thus effectively ruling out agreed institutional change. Revisionist and reformist powers, on the other hand, do seek institutional adjustments to existing institutions, but the degree of their alignment or disalignment with the interests of the defenders of the institutional status quo distinguishes reformist powers from revisionist ones (Schweller and Pu, 2011; Ward, 2017). Revisionist powers seek major adjustments to fundamental principles of existing institutions or even aim to alter their social purpose; reformist powers are basically in line with the principles and purpose of existing institutions and merely seek relatively minor institutional adjustments (Buzan, 2010: pp. 17–18).

We suggest that challengers with revisionist ambitions are likely to draw on distributive strategies such as power bargaining or rhetorical coercion. As their interests diverge fundamentally from those of the defenders of the status quo, institutional adaptation through integrative strategies such as strategic cooptation or principled persuasion seems almost impossible. By contrast, reformist challengers can be expected to opt for integrative strategies such as strategic cooptation or principled persuasion. As they have more common ground with the defenders, the distributive strategies of power bargaining or rhetorical coercion may well be unnecessary or even counterproductive.

A number of contributions to this special issue provide corroborating evidence for this conjecture. MacDonald (this issue) shows that challengers at the Hague Conferences relied on principled persuasion when their issue-specific

interests were largely in alignment with defenders' interests, but turned to rhetorical coercion when these interests diverged more fundamentally. Similarly, Fioretos (this issue) suggests that those developing countries that took the most revisionist – if not even revolutionary – stance towards the existing economic order relied on rhetorical coercion in their attempts to force established powers to accept a new international economic order. By contrast, developing countries with less revisionist demands largely preferred strategies of principled persuasion to pursue institutional adjustments or even proved receptive to offers of 'selective cooptation' by the US and other established powers. Stephen and Stephen (this issue) find that China was a reformist challenger in matters relating to the Arctic, seeking inclusion as an observer into the Arctic Council via the integrative strategies of strategic cooptation and principled persuasion. Thompson (this issue) shows that the US and the EU likewise acted as reformist challengers opting for strategic cooptation to nudge emerging powers into accepting emission reduction commitments under the international climate change regime. Finally, Viola (this issue) highlights the importance of interest convergence for US attempts to coopt 'like-minded states' into international institutions.

### Power constellation

Following common assumptions of PT and PS theories, we also assume that specific power constellations between challengers and defenders shape their choice of strategies. In fact, Lipsky (this issue) even states that the opportunities provided by the relative power of a challenger *vis-à-vis* a defender are more important for the former's choice of strategy than their interest alignment and thus the challenger's reformist or revisionist stance. Going beyond PT and PS theories, however, we suggest that the choice of strategy is contingent on whether challengers possess soft power resources in addition to their hard power. Hard power, of course, stems from a challenger's material resources such as a strong economy or a capable military (Waltz, 1979), soft power from the challenger's perceived authority among relevant audiences and its consequent ability to develop arguments that can convince these audiences (Nye, 1990, 2008; Ruggie, 1982). We argue that challengers that cannot combine their hard power with relevant soft power resources will be unable to engage in rhetorical coercion or principled persuasion and will thus pursue institutional adjustments through power bargaining or strategic cooptation. If, on the other hand, the challenger does have soft power resources available as well, it will be able to seek institutional adjustment through rhetorical coercion or principled persuasion.

A number of contributions to this special issue lend support to this conjecture. For instance, in her analysis of US efforts to push for a new international agreement on trade in services via the pursuit of exclusive multilateralism, Viola (this issue) suggests that as the US' major power resource in the relevant issue-area was 'sheer market power', the US opted for a combination of the hard-power based strategies of strategic

cooptation and power bargaining. By the same token, Stephen and Stephen (this issue) imply that, due to its limited soft power, China turned primarily to strategic cooptation in order to gain observer status in the Arctic Council. By contrast, Fioretos (this issue) attributes developing countries' use of rhetorical coercion and principled persuasion to their ability to wield soft power even when their hard power to push for a new international economic order was limited. Similarly, MacDonald (this issue) shows how Russia's soft power – civil society support – enabled it to draw on rhetorical coercion and principled persuasion in promoting the codification of the customs of war during the Hague Conferences. Goddard (this issue) demonstrates that Japan built up its soft power to pursue adjustments to the 'unequal treaties' through a combination of principled persuasion and rhetorical coercion.

Overall, the contributions support our conjectures that challengers opt for a particular strategy depending on whether, in the respective issue area, they are reformist or revisionist powers and whether they can draw on hard power only or on soft power too. To be sure, we do not claim that these conditions are the only ones that matter for challengers' choice of strategy. Conditions such as challengers' foreign policy traditions or their leaders' normative foreign policy orientations might be relevant too. But in line with our prior conjectures the contributions found challengers' reformist or revisionist stance *vis-à-vis* existing institutions and their hard or soft power endowment to be the most important conditions for their choices.

### The success of different strategies

What are the conditions under which challengers achieve institutional adaptation through a particular strategy? If we assumed fully rational actors, the answer would be straightforward: the conditions governing the success of a strategy would be the same as those governing its choice. As fully rational actors, challengers only pursue strategies that would ultimately achieve institutional adjustments. However, since we make the more plausible assumption that we are dealing with bounded rational actors, the failure of chosen strategies is possible since challengers' expectations of achieving institutional adaptation through a particular strategy are not always correct. This makes answers to the question as to the conditions under which challengers will achieve institutional adaptation more complicated. While acknowledging that numerous conditions may shape the success or failure of a chosen strategy, we discuss – based on our assessment of the contributions to this special issue – three sets of success conditions: the strategy employed by the challenger, the interest constellation, and, the power constellation between challengers and defenders.

#### Strategies

Traditional PTT as well as more recent PST contributions suggest – implicitly, if not explicitly – that institutional adjustments can only be achieved through power bargaining. The contributions to this special issue confirm that

challengers can, by means of power bargaining, force defenders of the institutional status quo to accept institutional adjustment. However, they also show not only that challengers can achieve their aims through other strategies, but that the 'success rate' of power bargaining is not even particularly good. In some cases, it leads only to limited institutional adjustment, as, for instance, Vabulas and Snidal (this issue) suggest with regard to BRICS' efforts to increase their voice and representation in international financial institutions such as the IMF. But power bargaining can also fail outright, as Lipsky (this issue) demonstrates in the case of Japan's attempt to force the International Whaling Commission (IWC) to lift its ban on commercial whaling.

Yet power bargaining is not the only strategy whose 'success rate' is mixed. Strategic cooptation can be successful, as Stephen and Stephen (this issue) show in the case of China's efforts to gain observer status in the Arctic Council. It may also result in failure, as Lipsky (this issue) testifies in the case of Japan's bid for a permanent seat in the UNSC. The same applies to rhetorical coercion, which was – as indicated by MacDonald's contribution (this issue) – successful in the case of the first Hague Conference in 1899, but largely failed to bring about institutional adjustment during the second in 1907. It failed again, as highlighted by Fioretos (this issue), when developing countries pushed for a new international economic order in the 1970s. Finally, principled persuasion too displays a mixed 'success rate'. Whereas Goddard (this issue) indicates that Japan's strategy of principled persuasion contributed to the adjustment of the 'unequal treaties' which disregarded Japan's sovereignty up to the mid-19th century, Lipsky (this issue) shows that Japan's initial persuasion attempts failed to convince the IWC that its 1982 ban on commercial whaling was inconsistent with its own constitutional principles.

The contributions to this special issue do not, therefore, find a simple relation between a particular type of strategy and the success or failure of an attempt at institutional adjustment. Nevertheless, some contributions suggest that smart combinations relying on both carrots and sticks (distributive and integrative strategies) are promising:

1. *Divide and conquer*: the contributions of Viola, Fioretos, and – to some extent also – Vabulas and Snidal point to a combination of strategic cooptation and power bargaining which can be used as an effective 'divide-and-conquer' strategy. In a first step, challengers divide and weaken the coalition of defenders by coopting some of them into their own coalition. Then, with the power of their enhanced coalition, they force the remaining defenders to accept their demands. This is how, according to Viola (this issue), the US managed to push its trade-in-services agenda in the WTO. And this is very similar to how, according to Fioretos (this issue), the US and its allies used 'case-by-case cooptation' to successfully defend the Bretton Woods institutions against developing countries' demands for a new international economic order.
2. *Resolve and restraint*: the contributions of Goddard and MacDonald indicate that a combination of rhetorical

coercion and principled persuasion can be effective too. Through this combination challengers may signal both their resolve and their restraint to defenders at the same time. Rhetorical coercion forces defenders to take the challengers' demands seriously; principled persuasion reassures defenders that they can trust challengers will not go on asking for ever more far-reaching institutional reforms. This, in Goddard's analysis (this issue), is why Japan was able to overcome the 'unequal treaties' in the late 19th century and become a full member of the international society of states.

### Interest constellation

Traditional PTT and more recent PST contributions assume that the more the interests of challenger and defender are in alignment, the better the prospects for institutional adjustments (Organski, 1968; Schweller and Pu, 2011; Ward, 2017). The contributions to this special issue suggest that the reality is more complex. While challengers with reformist ambitions might have better prospects than revisionist challengers, the relation between interest alignment and prospects of institutional adjustment does not seem to be linear. Paradoxically, not only is too little alignment bad for prospects, too much interest alignment with regard to the social purpose of the institution is too.

When revisionist powers seek institutional adjustment – which they are likely to do through power bargaining or rhetorical coercion – too little interest alignment is certainly bad for their prospects. The more interests diverge, the more difficult it is for challengers to succeed in power bargaining or rhetorical coercion in terms of forcing defenders into an agreement that they do not want. Examples from the contributions to this special issue include Japan's demands in the 1990s that the moratorium on commercial whaling be lifted (Lipsky, this issue), developing countries' 1970s demands for a new international economic order (Fioretos, this issue) and the demands for international disarmament during the second Hague Conference in 1907 (MacDonald, this issue). However, if reformist powers seek institutional adjustment – which they are likely to do through strategic cooptation or principled persuasion – too much interest alignment regarding the social purpose of the institution appears to be bad for institutional adjustment too. The more interests converge, the more defenders know that challengers are likely to accept the institutional status quo without adjustments. Binder and Heupel (this issue) hint at an example. The G4's striving for a permanent seat in the UNSC was complicated by the fact that defenders of the status quo could safely assume that Brazil, Germany, India and Japan would continue to support UN peace missions irrespective of whether the institutional adjustment they wanted took place or not.

A medium level of interest convergence/divergence between challengers and defenders of the institutional status quo seems to be best for the prospects of institutional adjustment. On the one hand, there is enough interest alignment to find common ground for institutional change. On the other hand, defenders have an incentive to accept an adjustment, because they cannot simply count on

challengers' continued acceptance of the status quo. Many contributions to this special issue find this to be the case. Noteworthy examples include Japan's demand in the 1980s for better representation at the World Bank (Lipsky, this issue), China's bid for observer status in the Arctic Council in the early 2000s (Stephen and Stephen, this issue) and current US demands for the liberalization of trade in services in the WTO (Viola, this issue).

### Power constellation

Both traditional PT and more recent PS theories would expect the power constellation between challengers and defenders of the institutional status quo to shape not only the former's choice of strategy, but also – and more importantly – the success of this strategy (Gilpin, 1981; Lipsky, 2017). In this view, it is crucial that challengers have the *critical* power necessary to make defenders accept institutional adjustments. While we agree with this general assumption, we highlight that it is not just the power constellation between the main challenger and the main defender that matters. What matters more, in fact, is that the challenger is able to form a coalition of states with the critical power to gain the defenders' acceptance of the required institutional adjustments (see Hopewell, 2015; Schirm, 2010).

Some contributions to this special issue corroborate this conjecture. For example, Fioretos (this issue) suggests that decreasing unity within their coalition harmed developing countries' pursuit of a new international economic order after some initial successes in the 1970s. At the same time, the coordination of major industrialized countries within the G7 helped their efforts to defend the Bretton Woods institutions against the developing countries' assault. In a similar vein, MacDonald (this issue) indicates that adaptation attempts at the first Hague Conference in 1899 were comparatively successful, because the challengers of the status quo managed to form a large and integrated coalition that isolated the (small and fragmented group of) defenders of the status quo. By contrast, the second Hague Conference of 1907 was much less successful, because challengers could not assemble a sufficiently strong coalition to put the – now larger and more integrated bloc of – defenders under enough pressure to accept their demands. Similarly, Stephen and Stephen (this issue) show that it helped China's bid for observer status in the Arctic Council that Iceland supported its case as an important ally from within the institution.

Going beyond existing PTTs and PSTs, the contributions to this special issue also lend support to our claim that the power required to achieve institutional adjustment depends on the strategy that challengers decide to employ. The nature and amount of power needed for successful power bargaining, for instance, differs from the power required to achieve institutional adaptation through rhetorical coercion, strategic cooptation or principled persuasion.

In order to use *power bargaining* successfully, challengers must have enough hard power to be able to credibly threaten to undermine the extant institution (Zangl et al., 2016; see Lipsky, 2017). Several contributions to this special issue



show that the availability of *outside options* – institutional alternatives to which challengers can shift – is of particular relevance. For example, Viola (this issue) indicates that the US attempt to push for revised WTO rules on trade in services gained momentum through its plurilateral Trade in Services Agreement with a group of ‘Really Good Friends of Services’. The option of creating a trade-in-service regime outside the WTO helped its bid for an improved regime within it. Moreover, Stephen and Stephen (this issue) suggest that China’s ability to potentially undermine the Arctic Council through competitive regime creation gave its demand for observer status more power, even though China never openly engaged in power bargaining. And, in reverse, Lipsy (this issue) argues that Japan’s attempt to gain a permanent seat in the UNSC through power bargaining suffered from a lack of outside options. Japan could not credibly threaten to shift to an alternative venue.

However, when challengers use *strategic cooptation* in pursuit of institutional adjustments to global power shifts, the credibility of threats to undermine the legacy institution seems less relevant. Challengers’ support merely has to be of *systemic relevance* – essential – to the institution in question (Kruck and Zangl, 2019). Their systemic relevance will enable them to ‘buy’ the institutional adjustments they want from the defenders. Stephen and Stephen (this issue) show that China’s systemic relevance to policies within the Arctic Circle helped its bid for observer status in the Arctic Council. Likewise, Vabulas and Snidal (this issue) suggest that the G7 countries accepted a G20 upgrade in response to the 2008 financial crisis, because, among other reasons, they considered increased contributions from emerging powers such as China and India essential for global financial stability.

When challengers of the institutional status quo engage in *rhetorical coercion*, their hard power resources are obviously much less important than their soft power (Daßler et al., 2019; Krebs and Jackson, 2007; Schimmelfennig, 2001). The prospects for institutional adjustment through rhetorical coercion depend on whether challengers’ arguments against the legitimacy of the institutional status quo are able to *mobilize critical audiences*. MacDonald (this issue) shows that during the Hague Conferences deft appeals to a mobilized civil society – and public opinion at large – helped the challengers to argue defenders of the institutional status quo into a corner, where they could no longer ignore demands for a codification of the customs of war. Similarly, Fioretos (this issue) indicates that developing countries’ demands for a new international economic order initially gained momentum because they appealed not only to policy-makers and economists in the developing world but also to diverse audiences within industrialized countries. Conversely, Binder and Heupel (this issue) suggest in their analysis of the ultimately unsuccessful UNSC reform that the G4’s inability to mobilize critical audiences – such as third-party states in the UN General Assembly – led to their failed attempt at rhetorical coercion.

Finally, if challengers rely on *principled persuasion* to achieve institutional adjustments to global power shifts, they need even more soft power than when they use rhetorical

coercion. They have to make arguments in favor of the legitimacy of institutional adjustments that are not only strong enough to convince critical audiences, but even to *persuade the defenders* of the institutional status quo themselves. Based on their survey of the elites in six countries with regard to their perceptions of the legitimacy of eight international institutions, Tallberg and Verhaegen (this issue) suggest that challengers arguing for institutional adjustments that would increase their own representation in the institution are likely to fail. Their own state’s representation in a particular institution (whether good or bad) has little impact, according to the survey, even on how the respective state’s elite perceives the legitimacy of the institution. The survey rather indicates that arguments in favor of good governance principles such as democracy have a much better chance of convincing defenders to accept institutional adjustments. At least, these are the principles against which political elites typically assess the legitimacy of international institutions. To some extent, these findings are corroborated by Binder and Heupel (this issue) in their study of the arguments used by the G4 to convince the UN General Assembly that they ‘deserved’ permanent seats in the UNSC. They failed to gain more support because they relied predominantly on performance-related arguments, that is, claims that the required reforms would improve the capacity of the UNSC to stabilize peace. These arguments could easily be refuted by process-related arguments based on good governance principles such as democracy.

### Analytical lessons and policy implications

Taken together, the contributions to this special issue show that, in the wake of shifts in the global distribution of power, challenges to the institutional status quo in a particular issue area stem not only from emerging powers, but often come from (declining) established powers too. Moreover, they also suggest that theories of bounded rational choice are useful to understand the adaptation of international institutions to global power shifts. Yet, they also indicate that opening up such theories to concepts and ideas from social constructivist theories can be fruitful. After all, the contributions to the special issue demonstrate (1) that challengers of the institutional status do not always draw on power bargaining to achieve institutional adjustments to shifts in the global distribution of power, but also rely on strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion and principled persuasion. Especially the latter two strategies go beyond a narrow understanding of material (bounded) rationality. Moreover, the contributions show (2) that challengers’ choice of strategy depends not only on whether they are, in the respective issue area, reformist or revisionist powers, but also on whether they can draw on hard power only or on soft power too. Thus, their choice of strategy is not just shaped by their (material) hard power resources, but also by soft power resources such as their normative authority among global civil society actors. Finally, the contributions indicate (3) that as a strategy of institutional adjustment, power bargaining is generally not more successful than

other strategies including strategic cooptation, rhetorical coercion and principled persuasion. And the success or failure of these strategies depends – among other things – on strategy-specific hard and soft power endowments on which the challengers of the institutional status quo can draw in the respective issue area. After all, the politics of institutional adjustment to shifts in the global distribution of power is not just a game of hard-power bargaining.

A key implication of these findings is that there is no general answer to the question of the future of the international order in the wake of the current global power shift. According to our findings, the future of the international order is likely to differ from issue area to issue area, perhaps even from institution to institution. The current debates on how the US and other established powers should deal with emerging powers, most importantly China (Beeson and Li, 2016), seem, therefore, to be fundamentally misplaced. Drawing on realist arguments, some of these analysts (e.g. Mearsheimer, 2014) suggest that the US needs to pursue the containment of China wherever possible, whereas others (e.g. Ikenberry, 2011, 2018), drawing on liberal ideas, advocate engagement with China and its integration into the leadership of international institutions. But with their respective general recipes for how the US and other established powers should cope with the rise of China, *both* perspectives ignore important issue-area-specific differences.

Realist containment policies may be adequate in issue areas where China pursues institutional adjustments through the distributive strategies of power bargaining or rhetorical coercion. But containment is likely to be counterproductive where China seeks institutional adjustment through integrative strategies such as strategic cooptation or principled persuasion. And the reverse might be true for liberal engagement policies. They may work in issue areas where China – or any other emerging power – seeks institutional change through an integrative strategy such as strategic cooptation or principled persuasion. But they may be misplaced when China draws on distributive strategies such as power bargaining or rhetorical coercion. In any case, the issue-area-specific strategies used by challengers to pursue institutional adjustment call for strategy-specific policy responses from the defenders of the institutional status quo rather than a uniform policy response across all issue areas. And these strategy-specific policy responses may apply not only to challenges stemming from emerging powers such as China, but also to challenges from established powers such as the US. After all, the latter may be just as consequential for the international order as the former.

## Notes

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2. We consider established powers as states that have ranked, in terms of their issue-area-specific power resources (such as GDP with regard to trade), for more than a decade among the most powerful states, but have entered a period of relative decline. And we see emerging powers as those states that have moved closer to, or have even overtaken, some of the established powers, in terms of issue-area-specific power resources.
3. Importantly, external institutional adaptation is a specific form of institutional shifting. Shifts to another institution can only be considered as institutional adjustment if they are agreed among challengers and defenders of the institutional status quo. The one-sided shift to competing institutions by challengers, namely, counter-institutionalization (Helfer, 2009; Chin, 2014, 2019; Alter and Meunier, 2009; Morse and Keohane, 2014; Zürn, 2018; Lipsky, 2017), is a case of institutional change, but not one of institutional adaptation.
4. For noteworthy exceptions, see Daßler et al., 2019; Hopewell, 2015; Kruck and Zangl, 2019.

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