

Disengagement from International Organisations:
The Role of Domestic Politics

Anna Novoselova

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Vorsitz: Prof. Dr. Miranda Schreurs

Prüfer*innen der Dissertation:

1. Prof. Dr. Eugénia da Conceição-Heldt
2. Prof. Dr. Klaus Dingwerth

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Abstract:

This dissertation explores the complex dynamics of state participation in international organisations (IOs). Membership in IOs tends to be regarded as a binary variable: a state is either a member or not. Moving beyond such simplification, this study offers a new, more nuanced view of state involvement in IOs by introducing the concept of disengagement. The two main objectives of this study are 1) to introduce the concept of disengagement by exploring available paths through which disengagement can occur and in doing so, pinpoint a stage located between full participation and formal withdrawal, and 2) to examine what causes disengagement. Capturing state-IOs relations where a state remains a member of an IO, while not adhering to the obligations imposed on it, not utilising its rights as a member or while pursuing its goals via another institution, disengagement occurs through withdrawal of resources and/or the change of venue. Maintaining a link between the international and domestic levels, this study argues that disengagement from IOs is a product of the state's domestic politics. Deploying the two-level game framework and applying the method of process tracing, this dissertation examines the US policy towards the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Educational, Scientifics and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and contends that the US disengagement from these IOs was brought about by the divergence in preferences of domestic political institutions and competition among relevant interest groups. By distinguishing between the executive and legislative branches of the government and analysing strategies and resources available to relevant interest groups, this dissertation makes a conclusion: if disengagement from an IO is favoured by a government branch dominating in policy-making towards this IO and/or an interest group with the broadest access to the government, state IO policy is more likely to reflect this preference.

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List of abbreviations

AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AJC	American Jewish Committee
APN	Americans for Peace Now
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATIS	Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions
AU	Americans for UNESCO
BWC	Better World Campaign
BWF	Better World Fund
CCITT	Comité Consultatif International Télégraphique et Téléphonique/International Telegraph and Telephone Consultative Committee
ccTLD	Country Code Top-Level Domain
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CERN	Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire/European Council for Nuclear Research
CORE	Council of Registrars
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DARPA	Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency
DNC	Democratic National Committee
DNS	Domain Name System
EC	European Commission
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
EVL	Exit, Voice, Loyalty
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FCNL	Friends Committee on National Legislation
FNC	Federal Networking Council
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GIP	Global Internet Project
gTLD	Generic Top-Level Domain
HI	Historical Institutionalism

IAB	Internet Architecture Board
IAHC	International Ad Hoc Committee
IANA	Internet Assigned Numbers Authority
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDT	International Discount Telecommunications
IEA	International Energy Agency
IETF	Internet Engineering Task Force
IFWP	International Forum on the White Paper
IGO	Intergovernmental Organisation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	International Organisation
IP	Internet Protocol
IR	International Relations
IRENA	International Renewable Energy Association
ISI	Information Sciences Institute
ISOC	Internet Society
ITAA	Information Technology Association of America
ITAG	IANA Transition Advisors Group
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
LIO	Liberal International Order
MCI	Microwave Communications, Inc.
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MS	Member State
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NBAA	National Business Aviation Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSF	National Science Foundation
NSI	Network Solutions, Inc.
NTIA	National Telecommunications and Information Administration

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ORSC	Open Root Server Confederation
PA	Principal-Agent
PAB	Policy Advisory Board
PAC	Political Action Committee
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
POC	Policy Oversight Committee
PTA	Preferential Trade Agreement
SAIC	Science Applications International Corporation
SRI	Stanford Research Institute
TIA	Telecommunications Industry Association
TLD	Top-Level Domain
TNA	Transnational Actor
TRADP	Tumen River Area Development Programme
UN	United Nations
UNA-USA	United Nations Association of the United States of America
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
UPU	Universal Postal Union
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organisation
WSIS	World Summit on the Information Society
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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1. Introduction

1.1. Puzzle

International organisations (IOs) have a number of tactics at their disposal to restrict member states (MS) when they do not comply with the rules and obligations imposed on them by the IOs' statutes. Among them are rejection of credentials, limitation of speaking rights, and denial of access to meetings (Mathias and Trengove, 2016). It is, however, puzzling when states deliberately change the level of their engagement in IOs by choosing not to benefit from their rights as members, not to adhere to obligations imposed on them, or to simply pursue their goals via other institutions. Past few decades provide numerous examples of such dynamics between states and IOs. Venezuela has not been participating in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) since 2007 while remaining its member (Reuters, 2018). The Russian State Duma did not send its delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from 2016 to 2019, and did not contribute or contributed only partially to the organisation's budget (Drzemczewski, 2020). The US unprecedentedly blocked the reappointment of its own nationals on the World Trade Organisation Appellate Body (Payosova et al., 2018), lost its voting rights at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as a result of withdrawal of financial contributions, and bypassed the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) by establishing Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to govern the domain name system (DNS). These are some examples of what this research conceives of as '*disengagement*'.

By examining the cases of the US disengagement from UNESCO in 2011-2016, and the ITU in 1997-1998, this dissertation explores the concept by looking at paths through which it occurs and factors leading to it. Following international relations (IR) scholars maintaining that state preferences towards the international arena are shaped domestically (Moravcsik, 1997; Weiss and Wallace, 2021; Grigorescu, 2020), this dissertation is framed in terms of the two-level game framework. In other words, disengagement from IOs is considered to stem from the preferences of the government branch dominating in policy-making towards IOs and preferences of the most influential interest groups. This dissertation offers a more nuanced understanding of the states' involvement in IOs and expands the application of the two-level game approach into the realm of policy-making regarding IOs.

In order to understand the presented puzzle, it is necessary to consider broader topics of membership in IOs, the level of engagement in them, and IOs' vitality. It is common to treat

membership as a binary variable: a state¹ is either a member of an IO or not. This is demonstrated by numerous studies investigating why states join and leave IOs (e.g., Abbott and Snidal, 1998 and von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a respectively). This dissertation, however, suggests to understand membership in IOs as a spectrum of the level of engagement, where engagement can take different values. The lowest level is withdrawal – a state officially ceases its participation in an IO. Full engagement means that a state regularly pays its assessed contributions to the budget of an IO, participates in programmes and projects conducted by the organisation, and has a representation in the IO that also attends meetings of the organisation’s governing bodies. Growing engagement can be seen when a state increases its funding and/or raises the level and number of officials sent to represent their governments in IOs (see Liu, 2018; Ruipeng, 2020). Finally, there is *disengagement* – a value that depicts a set-up when a state remains a legal member of an IO (that is, where no official notice of withdrawal is filed) while not utilising the rights granted to it, abstaining from some or all obligations imposed on it as a member, or switching to an alternative venue – an institution/regime/arrangement with a similar mandate – to pursue a specific policy issue or to fully replace the *status quo* institution. This dissertation seeks to conceptualise state disengagement from IOs and examine what factors lead to it.

It should be noted that this spectrum of engagement applies to the IOs member states and does not account for other ways of participation, for example, members with observer status. Full member states may take part in all activities of an organisation enjoying a full set of rights and obligations prescribed to them by the founding document of the IO. On the other hand, associate and affiliate members tend to be included in the governing bodies without being able to vote, and partial members only participate in selected organ(s) or programme(s) of an organisation while not being its full member (Droesse, 2020; Schermers and Blokker, 2011). While it appears valid to assume that non-full members can also demonstrate various level of engagement, different criteria need to be assigned to each level. One cannot argue that an affiliate state lowered its engagement in an IO because it did not vote. In other words, levels of engagement should be measured against the rights and obligations assigned to the states according to the type of their membership. This study focuses on the full members. Hence, the

¹ Noteworthy is that IOs are no longer preserved only for states and their governments. The past 30 years brought new actors to the international area, specifically, IOs. The so-called transnational actors (TNAs) include nongovernmental organisations, foundations, businesses and business associations, social movements etc. (Tallberg et al., 2013). However, given the choice of the theoretical approach to study the puzzle of disengagement, the focus is on states only.

benchmark for evaluating the level of engagement is a set of rules regulating what states can and must do in an IO as full members.

1.2. Research Question and Argument

Based on the puzzle, two central issues arise, namely how one can identify a case of disengagement and what drives it. Hence, the following research question will be the focal point of this dissertation:

How and under what conditions do states disengage from international organisations?

As this dissertation only focuses on how states disengage from IOs, there are multiple issues that will not be analysed. The concept of disengagement is studied through the lens of state-level policies towards international cooperation. That is, while disengagement has great implications for the functioning of IOs (see Section 1.4), the primary goal of this dissertation is to understand what causes states to disengage from IOs and which paths can be used by a state to disengage. Therefore, the effects that disengagement might have on IOs, their effectiveness, or life span are not the focus of this study. Nor is a potential impact that disengagement of one state can have on other fully engaged states and their stance towards a given IO. In addition, the question about whether a state that disengaged can return to full participation or withdraw completely, and the question about under what conditions one of the scenarios is more or less likely to happen are not accounted for. While they are valuable questions that are able to contribute to the research on international cooperation, answering them requires additional theoretical and conceptual tools and empirical data which are beyond the scope of this research.

The only question that is considered in this study is how and why states disengage. The two main goals, therefore, are 1) to introduce the concept of disengagement by exploring available paths through which disengagement can occur and in doing so, pinpoint a stage located between full participation and formal withdrawal, and 2) to examine what causes disengagement.

Drawing on the literature on regime complexity and state influence in IOs, this dissertation argues that there are two paths to disengagement: 1) withdrawal of human and/or financial resources, and 2) change of venue in pursuit of more favourable conditions than those offered by an IO from which a state disengages. In short, states enjoy various formal and informal channels of influence in IOs such as financial contributions, voting, and appointment of country's own nationals to the key positions (Heldt, 2017a; Johnson, 2011; Novosad and Werker, 2019). A state disengages when it chooses not to use one or all of these channels. On

the other hand, regime complexity allows states to choose a venue in which to pursue their interests and goals in a more effective way. The presence of this choice makes it easier for states to avoid or abandon IOs that do not correspond to their priorities (Alter and Meunier 2009). Moreover, utilisation of regime complexes (via regime shifting or forum shopping) contests authority and decreases the relevance of the *status quo* institution (Zürn 2018). Hence, a state disengages from an IO when it chooses to pursue its goals or govern an issue through a different venue.

By looking at two cases, specifically, the US policy towards the ITU regarding DNS and UNESCO regarding the admission of Palestine as a full member, this dissertation demonstrates the paths of disengagement and evaluates the hypotheses derived from the two-level game literature. Each case represents a different path of disengagement and offers a comprehensive analysis of the role that domestic actors and institutions played in state's decision to disengage from an IO. A more detailed discussion of case selection is provided in the respective section (1.5.2).

The first case study focuses on the US policy towards the ITU and traces how disengagement from the organisation occurred and what role was played by the domestic actors. In the mid-1990s, DNS was on the rise with more and more domain names being registered every year. The system, however, was not governed by any specific actor or institution. Rather, it was managed by an informal technical community residing mainly in the US and receiving the majority of its funding from the government. Once the importance and relevance of DNS became evident to multiple interested groups, organisations, and governments, the competition for being able to define authority to govern DNS emerged. The ITU attempted to use this opportunity to re-assure its relevance regarding technological developments on the international arena. The organisation became a part of the Ad Hoc Committee established in order to decide how DNS should be managed and was assigned a rather significant role in DNS management. However, this was not accepted by some actors based in the US. The US government was a focal point of the policy-making process. It also consisted of multiple rounds of interactions among the US and foreign governments, the technical community, businesses, and other interest groups. The process unfolded over several years and peaked in 1997 and 1998. As a result, authority over DNS was granted to a newly established ICANN while the ITU was side-lined and disempowered in the internet governance domain.

The second case study examines the US-UNESCO relations. By focusing on the domestic level, it demonstrates how the executive and legislative branches of the government, as well as

relevant interest groups, shaped the US policy towards UNESCO. When in October 2011 Palestine was admitted to the organisation as a full member, the US immediately ceased its financial contributions. This move was dictated by the US legislation passed in 1990 and 1994 and hence, it was non-negotiable to keep paying US' assessed contributions to UNESCO. However, the domestic discussion continued after the initial withdrawal when the executive branch of the government started seeking to restore the payments by getting a national security waiver on the legislative restrictions from Congress. The domestic process was characterised by the involvement of multiple interest groups and intense deliberations between the executive and legislative branches of the government which played a great role in the final outcome.

Both cases provide space for exploring the concept of disengagement and allow for embedding it in a certain theoretical discussion about the relations between states and IOs. In order to answer the question about factors behind disengagement, this dissertation borrows from the literature that connects domestic and international politics. Framing the cases in terms of a two-level game allows to trace how domestic processes and actors brought the US to disengage from the abovementioned organisations. The two-level game framework theorises policy issues using concepts such as divided government, veto players, interest groups etc. Following this, the main argument of this dissertation emphasises the role of domestic political institutions and interest groups when policy towards IOs is formed. I contend that there are two factors driving disengagement. First, disengagement stems from the influence exerted on policy-makers by the relevant domestic groups and, more specifically, the groups with the broadest access to the government. Second, disengagement occurs when it fits preferences of a government branch that dominates decision-making regarding policy towards IOs.

The following sections justify the choice of the particular theory and elaborate on how the study on disengagement contributes to a broader literature connecting domestic politics and states' behaviour on the international arena. In short, disengagement is conceptually close to withdrawal, studies of which suggest that the domestic level plays a role in states' decision regarding their membership status in IOs. Moreover, it is generally accepted that in studies on global governance and multilateralism, the domestic level is an important factor (da Conceição-Heldt, 2011; Grigorescu, 2020; Milner and Tingley, 2015; Roger 2020). Finally, the concept of disengagement itself is analytically connected to the domestic level as the paths of disengagement provide a rich soil to frame the concept in the two-level framework terms.

1.3. State of the Art

This section lays out the foundation on which this dissertation is built. Given the novelty of the concept of disengagement, it is necessary to position it in a broader discussion about the membership in IOs and draw conclusions that can be beneficial for studying disengagement. Additionally, a brief overview of the literature regarding the empirical part of the study will provide a basis for the discussion about the relevance and empirical contribution of this dissertation.

1.3.1. Withdrawal from international organisations

The question that this dissertation is concerned with can be put under a broader body of literature dedicated to membership in international organisations. Under this umbrella, several groups of works can be identified. Among them are strands of literature on why states join and participate in IOs (Abbott and Snidal, 1998; Koremenos et al., 2001; Shanks et al., 1996), how participation in them affects those states (Allee and Scalera, 2012), and why and how states loose or renounce their membership in IOs. The latter is of a particular interest and holds empirical and theoretical value to this project as it is conceptually close to the concept of disengagement. It includes such topics as suspension of membership and expulsion from IOs (Blocher et al., 2016; Magliveras, 1999; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019b), as well as withdrawal from IOs (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a). Both suspension and expulsion are enforced on states by the rules of IOs while withdrawal is a decision that states make themselves. Hence, the literature on withdrawal from IOs will be a starting point for the research at hand. It will also be used to identify different factors of withdrawal and disengagement.

The notion of withdrawal from IOs is present in the IR literature, although it has been introduced relatively recently. Conversely, legal scholars have engaged with the topic already in the 20th century. In 1935, Burns (1935) discussed the provision for withdrawal in the Covenant of the League of Nations which was later followed by Magliveras's work (1991). It provided a profound account of how withdrawal clauses of the Covenant had been designed and how they could be interpreted. In 1948, Kelsen (1948: 29) raised the question of whether membership in the United Nations can be "terminated voluntarily by withdrawal from the Organisation". This was followed by Feinberg's (1963) and Akehurst's (1979) contributions to the topic. The former explored the right to withdraw and concluded that it only existed when it had been recognised within an IO (Feinberg, 1963). Building on this argument, Akehurst (1979) studied examples of attempts to withdraw from IOs undertaken by various states and argued for the illegality of the withdrawal unless the right to do so had been specifically mentioned in the

founding treaty or given by the parties to IOs. Seeking to answer the same question but with regard to the European level, Hill (1982) maintained that the creation of European Economic Community (EEC) entailed “a permanent transfer of certain sovereign powers from the member states to the EEC” (Hill, 1982: 356) and hence, the founding treaty did not provide the right to withdraw. Singh (1958) expressed an opposite opinion proclaiming an implied right stemming from states’ sovereignty and allowing them to exit an IO. Later, Herbst (2005) and Athanassiou (2009) contributed to the literature with a discussion of the possibility of withdrawal from the European Union and Economic and Monetary Union. This research is complemented by more recent studies. Brölmann and her co-authors (2018) look at what happens after a state decides to withdraw. Specifically, they seek to investigate three dimensions of the issue: the rights and duties of members who are leaving, the legal position of individuals following their state’s exit, and the role of withdrawal from IOs in the future of multilateralism. This study is a part of a Forum specifically dedicated to the issue of state exit from IOs with various contributors discussing specific cases of withdrawal (Odermatt, 2018; Worster, 2018), ways they affect various dimensions of multilateral relations among states (for example, Silvereke’s (2018) paper on legal effects of member state withdrawal from the European Union on new free trade agreements), and other issues.

Unlike international law scholars, IR students have engaged with the issue of withdrawal rather recently (Helfer, 2005). The current situation on the international arena incited IR scholars to pay more attention to the issue of state withdrawal from IOs, which resulted in an increase in the numbers of academic studies related to this topic. One of the attempts to include withdrawal in the IR field and bring a theoretical dimension to the topic was undertaken by Helfer who sought to “introduce the omitted variable of exit into the political science literature and explore sequences for theories of international cooperation and compliance” (Helfer, 2005: 1610-1611). The author criticised the prisoner’s dilemma², the most popular model among IR scholars when explaining the cooperation among states, and called for the inclusion of withdrawal as an option into the model. Building on this, Koremenos and Nau (2010) bridged legal and IR perspectives in their study on the international treaties design and, specifically, withdrawal clauses. They introduced a rational design framework to the ‘law community’ emphasising the framework’s appropriateness with regard to the issue at hand. The empirical results provided by the authors proved and reinforced the argument about the rationality of the exit clauses’ design and their purpose – overcoming cooperation dilemmas. Cowell (2018)

² Prisoner’s dilemma is an example where rational actors choose not to cooperate even if they would benefit from doing so.

sought to evaluate what role an exit clause (its presence or absence) plays in regional human rights organisations. Building on the constructivist literature, the author suggested a framework to understand the effects that exit clauses can have on the compliance with tribunal decisions. By far the most extensive and systematic account of withdrawal from international organisations provided by IR scholars was given in the paper “Hello, Goodbye: When do states withdraw from International organisations” by Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019a). In it, the authors, deriving their argument from the literature on why states join IOs, identified three groups of reasons for state withdrawal from an IO: domestic factors, characteristics of IOs themselves, and geo-politics.

A separate stream within the IR literature is represented by the works employing the exit-voice-loyalty (EVL) framework introduced by Albert Hirschman (1970). Even though it has been mainly used in comparative politics, EVL was proven to be quite helpful in dealing with IR topics, specifically, the ones regarding the relations between states and IOs they participate in (Boehme, 2018). Slapin (2009) uses exit and voice model to study exit in terms of its ability to play a role of a leverage that a state can use for its own benefit. Using a case study of European integration, he argues that the exit option is not always a valid source of leverage. Rather, only when a state can threaten credibly to withdraw from an IO, this leverage will be effective. Moreover, a state choosing to employ this leverage has to make clear that it is capable of bearing all sorts of costs following its withdrawal. Otherwise, the level of its bargaining power will be rather low. Although Lipsky (2017) does not focus on state withdrawal *per se*, the author concludes that the competition among international institutions defines whether a state can use a possibility to withdraw while bargaining. In particular, attractive outside options make the state’s threats to exit more credible while when alternative options are unavailable or less attractive, the threats to exit cannot be utilised. Following the tradition of looking at exit as a leverage, Heldt (2017a) considers the exit option as a way for states to influence negotiation processes. The author looks at the international level and considers exit in the context of new powers’ hard strategies to influence global trade governance rules.

Lavelle (2007) applies EVL frameworks to the case of the US exit from the League of Nations and draws attention to the differences between the possibilities for exit from an IO in the past (in the beginning of the era of IOs) and now. Specifically, she emphasises the decrease in the dramatic exits that the US and some European states carried out in the 1920s and 1930s. In the modern world, states would rather choose to threaten to exit or employ other tactics to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with IOs. Guzman’s (2013) paper is a valuable follow-up for

Lavelle's observations as it provides reasons³ for why a complete exit from an IO might not be quite practical and effective. Noteworthy is that both authors admit that there are contemporary cases when states decide to nevertheless exercise their right to withdraw. Boehme (2018) takes a closer look at the EVL framework itself and evaluates its applicability to IOs. The author also touches upon states' choice between leaving an IO and staying in it. However, unlike Guzman (2013), Boehme (2018) stays within Hirschman's framework and draws her argument on the basis of his three concepts. Specifically, even though Boehme lists some of the reasons already argued for by Guzman, she claims that high level of loyalty is the most important reason for exit to be rather unlikely. Using the case of the International Criminal Court (ICC), she emphasises that the object of loyalty (an actor to which loyalty is directed) can be different from the actor that is blamed for the deterioration in organisational performance which forces a state to exit. In the case of the ICC, "rather than faulting the Court for lack of progress in cases, states constantly faulted other states for their failure to execute arrest warrants" (Boehme, 2018: 439). This is why exit from the ICC is rather unlikely: states stay loyal to the Court and the values embedded in it while understanding that its fallacies stem from the sources different from the Court as an IO itself. Another valuable addition made by Boehme to the EVL framework is the re-evaluation of the role of voice which, when used in IOs, might not necessarily lead to changes in organisational behaviour and fix deficiencies. Another extensive application of the EVL framework can be found in a monograph by Bartolini (2005). The author combines EVL which is centered more on the individual behaviour and choices, and Rokkan's theory of configuration of actors and resources in organisations such as state, to study the process of European integration. Vollaard (2014) builds on Bartolini's argument to show that withdrawal is a less likely outcome when actors are dissatisfied with European institutions. Rather, Eurosceptic dissatisfaction tends to lead to partial exits (opt-outs, low compliance) within the EU. Partial exit is also discussed in the paper by Jachtenfuchs and Kasack (2017) where the authors refer to exit from specific policies when building an analytical framework for studying the conflict between sub-unit autonomy and collective problem-solving. In terms of the factors of disintegration, Jones (2018) argues that the main driver of disintegrative processes is inequality of opportunity leading to the rise in conflict and decrease in efficiency. Overcoming the criticism highlighting that previous theories of integration cannot be simply

³ Guzman (2013) lists the following reasons: (a) exit may not be permitted as a legal matter; (b) exit might be costly for a willing-to-exit state in terms of its reputation on the international arena; (c) exit does not necessarily mean that a state will be able to fully distance from the effects an IO imposes; (d) with the exit a state loses control over an IO; (e) when leaving an IO, a state misses out on the benefits an IO might have had.

reversed to study disintegration (Gänzle et al., 2020; Webber, 2014), the author suggests a model that captures both (Jones 2018).

Apart from a more systematic analysis of withdrawals from IOs, there are various rather descriptive articles and monographs concerned with particular cases of state withdrawals. They usually are not theory-driven and, hence, only present conclusions on how and why withdrawal happens, and what consequences it might have on a case-by-case basis. Among these studies are Beigbeder's (1979) and Masters's (1996) investigation of the US withdrawal from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and Jacobson's work on UNESCO (1984). The exception is a more systematic study undertaken by Imber (1989) regarding the US exit from the ILO, UNESCO, and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) where he introduces a concept of politicisation as a reason for all three cases of withdrawal.

1.3.2. Factors of withdrawal

From the available IR literature, several arguments that can offer explanations of state withdrawal from IOs can be identified.

The first possible explanation is organisational performance. Based on a widely accepted assumption that Hirschmann's (1970) framework is applicable for various IR matters, scholars suggest that "decreasing organisational performance" (Boehme, 2018: 422) can lead to withdrawal. However, considering that usually IOs' goals are rather ambiguous, authors argue for the inclusion of internal processes of an organisation such as the ability to mobilise resources and increase efficiency of the internal workflow into the framework. Since states join IOs for functionalist reasons, when these are not delivered, states might decide to withdraw (Magliveras, 2011; Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a).

Alternatively, withdrawal can depend on the power constellation among member states. Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019a) argue that a substantial shift of state's preferences vis-à-vis other member states can place the former in a non-beneficial position which, in turn, might lead to its withdrawal. Besides, they also argue for the significant influence of the biggest economic power in an IO. That is, withdrawal of a leading state might create a domino effect and encourage others to leave as well. In the same vein, Börzel and Zürn (2021) suggest that withdrawal is a form of contestation inherent to states that exert little influence within an international institution and reject the exercise of liberal authority (liberal intrusiveness). In short, if a state considers liberal intrusiveness to be negative but cannot change the *status quo* due to its lack of power, it will likely withdraw. Similarly, states that are dissatisfied with the IOs policies and cannot change them can be incentivised to leave (Daßler and Heinkelmann-

Wild 2021). The same outcome is likely to occur when a state perceives the rules defining its position within an institution as too disadvantageous while having more attractive alternatives (Stone 2011).

Another argument brings in the domestic level and explains withdrawal from the perspective of MS' domestic politics. The rationale behind this argument stems from the two-level game approach submitting that domestic politics and international relations are interconnected and, thus, influence each other. Therefore, changes in domestic politics can lead to state withdrawal from an IO. More specifically, Walter (2018) argues that state's decision to leave an IO can be based on a strong popular mandate (mass-based disintegration) while von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019a) add nationalist representation, changes in the government and a low level of democracy to the list of potential domestic reasons for state withdrawal from IOs. However, the research's findings show that domestic reasons for withdrawal, of which nationalism is a part, are rather rare. In this regard, Copelovitch and Pevehouse (2019) provide a valuable contribution bringing in a typology aimed at assisting in thinking about the effects on international cooperation and IOs of populism (directed within countries), nationalism (directed at the international arena), or combination of both. Three out of these four types are of interest for this project. One of them represents a case where nationalist attitude is strong but populism is not present. The second one refers to the reverse constellation (weak nationalism and strong populism). Finally, the third type includes both strong nationalism and populism. Countries belonging to the third type are expected to withdraw while first two types are less likely to lead to the ceasing of state membership in IOs. When states decide to leave, nationalist-populist governments tend to frame withdrawal in terms of national sovereignty of their state (Copelovitch and Pevehouse, 2019). Specifically, they argue that IOs infringe state sovereignty and hence, either their influence has to be contained or the state will reconsider its membership in international institutions (Hirschmann 2020).

In sum, there are several factors driving state withdrawal from IOs that concern internal working of IOs, power balance among member states, and characteristics of individual states that decide to exit. Although the study by von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019a) suggests that the domestic-level explanation of withdrawal has little empirical support, the authors operationalise this argument only through the level of democracy, nationalist representation, and a change in government. While there is research exploring in more detail the nationalism and populism argument (Copelovitch and Pevehouse, 2019; Hirschmann, 2020), the literature can also benefit from the inclusion of more aspects of the domestic level (e.g., actors with vested interests or power balance between different parts of the government).

1.3.3. The ITU, US, and DNS

The literature concerning DNS and the process of defining authority over it, in which both the ITU and US were involved in different capacities, is rather broad. While there are a lot of studies about this period and all of them demonstrate different approaches to the topic, the majority discusses DNS governance in the context of internet governance in general. Goldsmith and Wu (2008) include DNS in their discussion on the internet's challenge to the concept of nation-state which, they conclude, ended in the victory of the latter. Similar to the internet in general, DNS is perceived as a subject to political and economic battles of national governments and their network ideologies. Adopting a social constructivist approach, Paré (2003) suggests that power relations between various actors played a role in forming the policies and institutions that emerged from the attempts to alter DNS management.

Another body of studies covering the topic of DNS governance are those included in a broader discussion about what forms of governance, if at all, are appropriate for the internet (Balleste, 2015; Bygrave and Bing, 2009; Drezner, 2004; Mathiason, 2008). By far the most extensive and detailed account of the process that defined authority over DNS is given in Mueller's (2002) monograph titled "Ruling the Root: Internet Governance and the Taming of Cyberspace". The author investigates in great detail how DNS got to be governed by ICANN. Mueller frames the process as one of institutionalisation in which contending parties with different levels of bargaining power work out rules and practices that allow them to manage the technology in a less costly way while also making it more reliable.

The studies focusing on DNS rarely give an extensive account of the role of the ITU. Similarly, research about the ITU tends to only briefly discuss the period when it was being decided how DNS should be governed. In the recent book on the history of the organisation (Balbi and Fickers, 2020), a great account of the organisation's development over the years is given. In her chapter on the ITU's response to the emergence of the internet, Schafer (2020) covers the issue of DNS but only hints at the influence of "powerful financial interests" (Schafer, 2020: 335) on the decision to grant authority over DNS to ICANN without exploring this statement in a more detailed and systematic way. Similarly, Hills (2007) mentions how the ITU got bypassed by the US in the domain of DNS management but yet again, no causal inferences as to why it happened are made. Rather, the focus is on how the industrialised countries attempted to bring about change in the ITU.

1.3.4. UNESCO and the US

The literature on UNESCO is rather rich with scholars investigating the organisation in general (Singh, 2011), its politicisation (Graham, 2006; Hüfner and Naumann, 1986; Bertacchini et al., 2016), fragmentation (Meskell, 2015), organisational structure (Seeger, 2015), and authority (Hooghe et al., 2017). Some scholars cover the issue of the US withdrawal from UNESCO in 1984 (Imber, 1989; Jacobson, 1984; Weiler, 1986). However, there are not many studies addressing in one way or another the more recent issue of withdrawal of financial contributions to the organisation by the US. Hüfner (2016, 2017) asks what was and could be done to mitigate detrimental consequences of the loss of a significant part of UNESCO's budget caused by the withdrawal of funds by the US and Israel. However, his answer is aimed at the organisational level and the author only briefly touches on the constraining effect of the domestic situation in the US on UNESCO's strategy of dealing with the budget cuts (Hüfner, 2016). Drawing on the organisational and government crisis response literature, Eckhard, Patz, and Schmidt (2019) focus on the aftermath of UNESCO's budgetary cuts. Specifically, the authors contend that the budgetary crisis leads to significant organisational reforms when both the bureaucracy and member states perceive the cut-off as crisis, and when they act on it quickly and synchronised. It is evident that the reduction of UNESCO's budget had serious consequences that are investigated to a certain extent by IR scholars. Nevertheless, it stays underexplored what led to the budgetary crisis and how individual states' domestic politics affected the working of UNESCO. Offering a legal view, Eden (2013) deconstructs the issue of the Palestinian statehood in the United Nations (UN) and discusses briefly how the admission of Palestine to UNESCO triggered the withdrawal of American funds. Yet, no deeper insight into the black box of the US' decision to disengage from the organisation is offered.

1.3.5. Research gap

The current stage in IOs history is associated with high-profile cases of state withdrawals. Such instances as Brexit and Trump's "withdrawal doctrine"⁴ demonstrate the prominence and relevance of the topic of state withdrawal from IOs. Moreover, although "considerable increase in the phenomenon of institutional exits" is described as a rather recent development (Brölmann et al., 2018: 12), the evidence of the existence of this phenomenon can be found way before Great Britain decided to leave the EU and Trump became President. For example, the USSR

⁴ During Trump's presidency, the US left the Trans-Pacific Partnership, Paris Climate Agreement, UNESCO, and started a formal process of leaving the World Health Organisation (WHO).

left WHO in 1950, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia withdrew from UNESCO between 1954 and 1963, Indonesia exit the UN in the 1965 (Wessel, 2016).

Nevertheless, several scholars underline that despite these prominent exit cases and the attention they attract, state withdrawal from IOs is still relatively rare and, in most cases, states tend to stay (Debre and Dijkstra, 2021; Gray, 2018; Magliveras, 2011). Exit from an IO is a rather disadvantageous move. It bears economic and political costs. Moreover, due to the lock-in effects, these costs increase over time (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020). While states that decide to withdraw can anticipate and mitigate economic costs, political costs are less controllable and more damaging (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2018; Magliveras, 2011). In addition, when exiting, states undermine their ability to lead and deliberately abstain from benefiting from an IO's issue-linkage potential. By withdrawing from an IO, states lose an arena for gathering information, defending their interests, and bargaining (even on the issues that are not directly related to the mandates of organisations states withdraw from) (Vabulas, 2017). That is not to say that exit is always damaging – in certain cases, it can be advantageous. When a possibility that sanctions will be imposed is high, a state might choose to withdraw from an organisation on its own terms rather than being a subject of punishment (sanctions or even expulsion) hurting its image internationally and domestically (Magliveras, 2011). Withdrawal or threats to withdraw might also be beneficial when used as a leverage by a state against an IO, although only states with significant bargaining power can be credible in their threats (Lipsky, 2017; Slapin, 2009). Finally, if a state is dissatisfied with an IO, exit might be better than staying in the cases when alternative means of cooperation will bring comparable benefits (Lipsky, 2017).

Yet, the fact that withdrawal is still rather an exception does not mean that international cooperation is thriving. A more pessimistic approach is to argue that multilateralism is threatened and the liberal international order (LIO) is in decline (Daßler and Heinkelmann-Wild, 2021; Hirschmann, 2020; Ikenberry, 2018; Keohane, 2020). A more optimistic one is to frame the challenges as “ongoing transformation from within” (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2020: 1086). Both, however, admit that challenges exist. Moreover, in the International Organization special issue, a common pattern was to argue that the LIO has been contested among states and citizens from the very beginning (Finnemore et al., 2021). Relying only on the quantifiable parameters such as the existence of IOs themselves, their mandates, and membership (see Pevehouse et al., 2020) can lead to the wrong impression of how healthy international cooperation is (Gray, 2020). Hence, the concept of disengagement appears fit to address the discrepancy between the ways to evaluate international cooperation through IOs and its actual state.

The extensive research on withdrawal only focuses on legal withdrawal. That is, it looks at cases when states cease their membership in an IO, or, more precisely, “when a member state voluntarily removes itself from all contractual obligations and legally terminates its membership” (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a: 338). What this literature does not capture or leaves out of the analysis are cases when a state lowers its participation in an IO in different ways while formally remaining its member. Although the European integration literature captures similar patterns and highlights the non-homogeneity in the level of state involvement in multilateralism, it is naturally only interested in European institutions. It is evident that there is a stage in membership in IOs apart from full participation and complete withdrawal. While there are scholars that refer to lowering of state participation (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a), “withdrawal of institutional support” (Kruck and Zangl, 2020: 8), or “not entailing an all-out exit, [...] developments” (Hanrieder, 2014: 329), they do not elaborate or elaborate very little on what constitutes these phenomena. Hence, we know little about what happens when states find themselves at this stage, why and how it happens. In addition, even when some conceptualisation of this kind of states-IOs dynamic is present, its framing is constraining. For example, various studies refer to states’ actions such as lowering the budget of an IO or switching to another institution: Hanrieder (2014) discusses withholding of the US contributions to the WHO, and Morse and Keohane (2014) refer to the creation of the International Renewable Energy Association (IRENA) by a group of states, while contesting the International Energy Agency (IEA). While these examples demonstrate the empirical prevalence of the phenomenon, their embeddedness in a specific literature (in this case, historical institutionalism (HI) and regime complexity, respectively) prevents us from understanding its overall scale. By introducing the concept of disengagement, this dissertation seeks to fill in this gap and contribute to our understanding of international cooperation and challenges that it faces. It offers a blanket notion that unites certain tactics employed by states towards IOs and provides a more nuanced perspective when studying the involvement of states in IOs, their performance, and institutional changes they may experience.

Against this backdrop, this dissertation introduces and operationalises the concept of disengagement. Borrowing from the conceptually close literature on withdrawal, it will provide a systematic and theory-driven examination of states’ decision- and policy-making that results in their disengagement from IOs. It will be shown how domestic politics, notably the executive and legislative branches of the government, as well as various interest groups, lead to disengagement. A detailed and in-depth explanation will be provided that will introduce a new

analytical tool to evaluate the level of states' involvement in multilateral institutions and shed light on the role of domestic politics in the shaping of policies towards IOs.

In terms of the empirical material, the gap in a more detailed understanding of the processes leading to the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO is evident. While several studies engage with the context surrounding the cases of disengagement from these organisations, little is known about what the essence of US' policies towards the ITU and UNESCO was and what role domestic actors played in it. Hence, the dissertation's empirical contribution stems from opening-up of the black box of policy-making towards IOs and providing of a detail account of how and why the US disengaged from the ITU and UNESCO.

1.4. Relevance and contribution of the research

The research question around which this dissertation evolves is highly relevant as it contributes to the scientific discussion about state membership in IOs and investigates a real-world political phenomenon. Lehnert, Miller, and Wonka (2007: 21-22) define theoretical relevance as “the analytical value a research question adds to the scientific discourse of the subdiscipline [...] it addresses”. This dissertation meets this requirement in the following way. On the one hand, it introduces a new tool for assessing states' participation in international cooperation, specifically, IOs; on the other, by offering a two-level framework explanation of disengagement, it contributes to the literature that engages with the domestic politics argument while studying state policies towards IOs (Heldt and Mahrenbach, 2020; Lavelle, 2011a; Minnich, 2005; Shanks et al., 1996, von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a).

By introducing the concept of disengagement, this dissertation contributes to the analysis of the complex relationship between states and IOs. Moreover, it provides a tool to assess the state of international cooperation in a more nuanced way. The omission of disengagement as a parameter has significant implications with regard to how one evaluates states' involvement in international cooperation in general, and IOs in particular. It creates a rather unrealistic image of a system where all member states (those that are not in the process of withdrawing) actively participate in all IOs. This, however, does not always reflect the real state of affairs. Similar to the concepts of differentiated integration/disintegration (Leruth et al., 2019; Leuffen et al., 2013) and partial exit (Jachtenfuchs and Kasack, 2017) that are usually applied in the European context, disengagement captures heterogeneity in the states' participation in IOs. The proposed concept enhances analytical accuracy of the research on international cooperation and captures the complex nature of state involvement in IOs.

Disengagement can have significant implications for the legitimacy and performance of IOs. If, for example, a core state disengages through withdrawal of contributions to the budget, an organisation can be left paralysed and sensitive to a power shift due to the occurred power vacuum (Lipsky, 2017). As a form of contestation (Börzel and Zürn, 2021), disengagement can undermine the legitimacy (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019) and authority (Hirschmann, 2020) of an IO. Hence, this study is also relevant to the literature on IOs' vitality and survival (Debre and Dijkstra, 2021; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020; Gray, 2018) and, given the IOs chosen for the case studies, to works examining challenges posed to the UN system (Acharya and Plesch, 2020; Lyon et al., 2020; Malone and Day, 2020).

This dissertation also offers an empirical contribution. This research examines systematically the ITU's involvement in the issue of DNS and the role that domestic politics played in the US' ultimate decision not to grant authority over DNS to the Union but to create a new institution instead. Whilst there are many working papers, articles, and books exploring the same process, they focus on the technical aspects and general timeline. The role of the ITU and domestic politics stay underexplored. The same applies to the case of the US disengagement from UNESCO. While there are some sporadic accounts of why the US withdrew its contributions in 2011, some of which include brief mentioning of an alleged role of Congress or some interest groups (Beattie, 2015; Ruebner 2013), no systematic research has been done into how this issue developed over years and what role domestic politics played in it.

Unlike theoretical relevance, political, or social relevance speaks to non-peers. That is, research is socially relevant if its findings bring value to readers who are not academically engaged with the discourse in which this research is embedded (Lehnert et al., 2007). The social relevance of this dissertation concerns several aspects. It informs readers about the sources of certain state policies and the connection that exists between domestic and international politics. Although indirectly, people are affected by both, which is visible in the cases of US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO.

In the case of the ITU, policy was centred around the question of who would have the authority to manage the domain name system. DNS is a system used by a wide range of actors from big corporations to individual citizens all over the world and can have significant political and economic implications. In terms of the political domain, DNS provides countries with their individual country-code domain, e.g., .de for Germany and .fr for France. A country's domain name is essentially an aspect of its national identity and its strategic asset, which can make the assignment of country-code domains a politically sensitive issue (Christou and Simpson, 2009).

The same can be applied to the economic domain. A domain name is a part of a personal or corporate identity. Hence, it is important how and by whom DNS is managed: who establishes the price for domain names, what mechanisms they offer to protect one's domain name from being used by somebody else, and how the DNS authority solves disputes over trademark rights, personal names etc. (Mueller, 2002). For example, cybersquatting is a widespread practice of registering a domain name clearly related to a specific trademark in anticipation to sell it for a profit when the trademark owner eventually decides to register a domain name for it. The question of who (an intergovernmental organisation (IGO), private entity, or government) and how (what rules apply) governs DNS is undoubtedly important and hence, it is necessary to understand how their authority came into being.

In the second case that this dissertation investigates, a specific policy of the US government towards UNESCO had a great effect domestically. The organisation's programmes had significant direct and indirect implications for the US interests. UNESCO's literacy and extremism prevention programmes in Afghanistan and Iraq are examples of the indirect benefit for the US security interests, while the World Heritage is a case where the IO had a direct and visible impact on the domestic economy. Namely, the inclusion of a site in the World Heritage list led to a decrease in the levels of poverty and increase in jobs and revenues due to the more active tourism (Interviewees #13, 15).

The IOs are opening to more and more non-state actors (Tallberg et al., 2013) and face increasing politicisation⁵ (de Vries et al., 2021; Heldt, 2020; Zürn et al., 2012) at the same time. They are expected to serve the interests of not only member states but also of individuals and communities of these states. That is, IOs have to acquire 'people-based' legitimacy (Dingwerth et al., 2019). Hence, the opening-up of a black box of decision-making about IOs policy of a state, namely, outlining how these policies are shaped and who and to what extent participates in the process, allows constituents and other relevant actors to make informed decisions when choosing their representatives or inquiring policy changes. Additionally, IOs are frequently accused of inefficiency and bias (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2021, Gutner and Thompson, 2010, Hooghe et al., 2019, Schmidtke, 2019). However, the rhetoric presented by politicians and actual reasons for a specific policy towards an IO may differ (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a). This is another reason to look into actual decision-making processes and trace what led to specific outcomes.

⁵ Politicisation refers to "the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the field or sphere of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political" (Zürn, 2018: 139). While politicisation usually implies resistance against IOs, it can also lead to mobilization for them and their increasing visibility (Ibid.).

Finally, the introduced concept of disengagement provides a conceptual umbrella for cases where states do not pay to IOs, do not send their delegates, or decide to pursue their goals via different venues (in other words, when they lower their engagement in the organisations). This can be a useful addition to the vocabulary of academics, journalists, and politicians because it offers a more detailed perspective on the state of international cooperation and provides an instrument to assess state participation in it in a more nuanced manner.

1.5. Methods

This dissertation deploys qualitative methods. Specifically, the comparative case studies – intensive analysis of a case with a goal of understanding a larger class of cases (Seawright and Gerring, 2008) – are complemented with a theory-testing within-case process tracing. The combination of two methods enables a researcher to generalise and extend the findings provided by process tracing beyond a particular case (Beach, 2017; George and Bennett, 2005). By using the method of structured and focused comparison and conducting a within-case detailed analysis of the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO, this dissertation contributes to the group of quantitative studies concerned with the general dynamics of membership in IOs (see Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2020; Shanks et al., 1996; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a) and investigates in more detail how each step of the causal process unfolds in actual cases (Beach, 2017).

The method of structured focused comparison facilitates a systematic comparison across the cases. The examination of cases revolves around a specific set of questions and focuses on certain aspects of each case. The questions guiding the analysis of the collected data stem from the theoretical approach chosen in the dissertation. Similarly, the comparison is focused on the aspects relevant for the research objective and the theoretical framework (George and Bennett, 2005). In other words, not all aspects of each case study are analysed. Rather, the focus is on the aspects that are in line with the two-level game approach.

The analysis of state disengagement is conducted as follows. In the first step, hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework are suggested. Specifically, they are based on the two-level game framework. In the second step, the analysis of the case studies is conducted. It is guided by the questions derived from the chosen theoretical framework and structured following the theorised causal mechanism. Finally, the results are assessed and the theoretical assumptions made in the beginning are evaluated. This chapter seeks to introduce the research methods that are used in order to answer the research question. First, process tracing is

introduced. Second, case selection is explained. The chapter is concluded with a description of the data collection process.

1.5.1. Process tracing

In order to conduct a detailed analysis, process tracing is used for each case study. Process tracing is defined as “the use of evidence from within a case to make inferences about causal explanations of that case” (Bennet and Checkel, 2015: 4). The focus of process tracing is not on the causes and outcomes, but rather on the hypothesised mechanisms that link them (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). The method is highly instrumental in investigating whether causal mechanisms are supported by the observable manifestations which they are expected to generate. A researcher looks at the intermediate steps of a process in order to examine whether they led to the outcome at hand and how the process played out in a real-world case (Bennet and Checkel, 2015). The intermediate steps (parts) of the causal mechanisms are comprised of entities (individuals, groups, states, or structures) engaging in activities which, in turn, serve as transmitters of causal forces (Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

Process tracing can be deployed with different research purposes in mind. Theory-building process tracing relies on an inductive approach starting from empirical material and then, proceeding with the formation of a hypothetical causal mechanism. Explaining-outcome process tracing seeks to offer a comprehensive explanation of a specific historical outcome (Beach, 2017; Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Process tracing can also be used to assess hypotheses about the causes of an outcome (Mahoney, 2012). This variant is referred to as theory-testing process tracing and deployed in the dissertation. Given the specific orientation of the theory-testing process tracing, the parts of the mechanism are theoretically predicted (Checkel, 2008). While a certain link between X and Y is expected based on the theoretical framework, the main ambition is to open up the black box and examine how exactly the parts of the mechanism produce the outcome. In order to conduct an analysis based on the theory-testing process tracing, research should first build a probable causal mechanism relying on the expectations derived from a chosen theoretical approach (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Questions should be asked regarding which actors could do what and when, in which way they could interact with each other etc. (Bennett and Checkel, 2015). The chosen theory also informs about the context necessary for the mechanism to function properly. The so-called scope (contextual) conditions are defined as relevant parameters “in which a set of initial conditions leads [...] to an outcome [...] via a specified casual mechanism” (Falleti and Lynch, 2009: 1152). Afterwards, the causal mechanism is operationalised by developing predictions regarding case-specific empirical

evidence that have to be present for the theory to be deemed valid. Finally, the data is collected to evaluate whether the expected evidence was present for each intermediate step of the mechanism. The presence of the specified evidence allows us to make a conclusion that the casual mechanism played out as was theorised (Beach, 2017; Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

An additional step might be the inclusion of other cases into the research. If the same mechanism linking X and Y is present in other cases, the cautious inference can be made that the causal mechanism can also be present in other positive (typical) cases – cases where the cause, the outcome, and scope conditions are present (Beach, 2017).

In this dissertation, the causal mechanism is constructed based on the two propositions derived from the two-level game framework literature and connects the independent and dependent variables. The mechanism brings the hypotheses together as they are expected to operate simultaneously. The first part involves the formation and voice of preferences by relevant actors (branches of the government and interest groups). The second part is that on the one hand, branches of the government enter negotiations to try to amend a policy proposal in a way that it is closer to their preferences, and on the other – relevant interest groups try to exert influence on the government in general or the branch that they expect to have the final say. The third part describes the governmental response to the interest groups' attempts to affect the policy-making process. The fourth part is that the executive and the legislature reach a common ground either via accommodating each other's preferences or by exercising their veto power in order to reject the agenda-setter's proposal and make policy that is in line with the preferences of the veto player. Finally, policy that favours disengagement from an IO is formed and announced on the state level, which, in turn, leads to the final outcome – state disengagement from this IO (a more detailed discussion of each part of the causal mechanism is presented in Section 3.5).

By conducting process tracing, I examine whether the theorised causal mechanism is present and operates as expected in each case study (case selection is explained in the next section). A large amount of data is collected (see Section 1.5.3) in order to seek evidence for all intermediate steps of the mechanism. The theory-guided analysis of the cases gives space for theory-testing and allows to investigate causal paths leading to the outcome (disengagement) and their observable manifestations (Beach, 2017; George and Bennett, 2005). The analysis of both cases is structured in the same way. First, a brief description of the context of disengagement in each case is given and mapping of relevant actors is carried out with the focus on the data contributing to the further analysis of their role in the final outcome. Next, a

two-level explanation of each case of disengagement is provided. It follows the causal mechanism between the independent and dependent variables presented in the theoretical chapter of the dissertation. Each case study ends with a brief interim conclusion.

1.5.2. Case selection

This dissertation relies on qualitative analysis of two cases to answer the research question. A small-n study was chosen over a large-n one because of the lack of relevant datasets, impossibility of collecting data for a new dataset, and the goal to shed light on a more detailed causal process leading to disengagement (see Leuffen, 2007). It is rather challenging to obtain a comprehensive dataset on state disengagement from IOs. It is a new concept, and datasets such as the Correlates of War Intergovernmental Organizations only collect data on members, associate members, and observer states (see Pevehouse et al., 2020). In other words, a binary understanding of membership is deployed. Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas (2019a) point at the existence of cases where “state engages in less significant departures such as no longer participating in the IGO’s work or meetings, withdrawing from IGO projects or conferences, withholding IGO contributions, or lowering the diplomatic rank of meeting attendees” (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a: 339) but only provide one example – Venezuela (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019c). Due to time and resource constraints, the decision against the collection of a large-n dataset had to be made. However, the existing research indicates the presence of disengagement as a phenomenon. Gray’s (2018) research on the vitality of IOs concludes that among economic organisations only around 50% are ‘alive’. That is, they hold at least one meeting a year and make progress towards their mandate. About 10% are effectively dead and the rest are the so-called zombie organisations. The latter maintain semi-regular activity but make close to no progress in terms of achieving their mandate. The former, despite having formal secretariats and bureaucracies, never meet and stay rather inactive. The dead IOs exist in name alone, their MS do not contribute financially and send smaller delegations of lesser import to the meetings. This essentially describes a situation where not one but the majority of the states disengage from an IO. In the same vein, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2020) suggests to differentiate between different mechanisms of IOs’ death, one of which is death through desuetude. Some IOs do not have to be terminated to die. Rather, states can stop sending money or personnel to an organisation which leads to its inactivity and existence only on paper. Of 218 IOs that are categorised as ‘dead’, 22% faded away through desuetude. While Gray’s (2018) research only looks at seventy economic organisations and Eilstrup-Sangiovanni’s (2020) dataset includes 561 IOs, both studies provide a useful outlook on the presence of disengagement as a form of state involvement in IOs.

Two cases of disengagement were selected and studied from the perspective of the chosen theoretical framework. There is one case study for each value that the dependent variable can take. The case of UNESCO and the case of the ITU appear fit to facilitate the analysis of the concept of disengagement. Each case represents a specific path of disengagement, namely withdrawal of resources and change of venue respectively. The case selection offers no variation in terms of the presence/absence of the outcome. Although it tends to attract much criticism regarding selection bias (Geddes, 2003; Ulriksen and Dadalauri, 2016), research design with no variation in the dependent variable is not inherently problematic (George and Bennett, 2005) and studies with no-variance designs are not necessarily illegitimate (Collier and Mahoney, 1996). Moreover, such approach is common to process tracing because for this method, case selection does not revolve around the necessity to control for other causes. Rather, the goal is to select cases that enable a certain level of generalisation regarding the presence of the mechanisms in causally similar cases (Beach and Pedersen, 2018). Beach (2017) draws on an extensive selection of scholars deploying the method and argue that it is not mandatory to use evidence of changes across cases to draw conclusions. Rather, the author suggests, one uses within-case observable empirics signalling the working of a causal mechanism in order to infer whether the causal mechanism was present in the case. Hence, mechanistic rather than difference-making evidence is produced in process-tracing analyses (Beach and Pedersen, 2018). Naturally, no-variance approach has certain trade-offs which will be discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Taking into consideration the absence of a formalised dataset on disengagement, preliminary research was undertaken. After conducting a brief examination of other cases such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), and United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), the cases of disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO were chosen as they present typical, or positive cases. In these cases, three components of a mechanism are present, namely the cause, the outcome, and causally relevant conditions for the mechanism to play out as expected. Positive cases are ideal for testing theories as they allow to focus on what actually happened and how the mechanism connected the cause and the outcome (Beach, 2017; Beach and Pedersen, 2018). Selecting negative cases (the cause and outcome are absent) defeats this purpose as it is illogical to try to trace a mechanism in a case where it is known from the beginning that it is not there (Beach, 2017).

The cases of disengagement by the US were chosen for several reasons. The US is a key player in and the biggest contributor to IOs. Disengagement of a state with such resources, reputation, and power certainly has implications for IOs and their ability to fulfill their mandate.

However, it can also influence the behaviour of other states (Vabulas, 2017). By setting a precedent, the US disengagement can contribute to the further deterioration (Hirschmann, 2020; Ikenberry, 2018) or re-modelling (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann, 2020) of the LIO. In addition, it can create space for countries like China and Russia to try to assert their interests in IOs and adapt them to their vision of multilateral institutions' purposes. Finally, the cases of the US disengagement demonstrate that American foreign policy has been critical or reluctant about IOs not only during Trump's presidency (see Nye, 2020). While these cases definitely highlight the thesis about a certain level of Republican anti-IO sentiment (Rathbun, 2011; Rubenzer, 2017), they also shed some light on what might motivate Democrat-led administrations to constrain their multilateral approach to international politics. The combination of these factors justifies the case selection and enables the cases of the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO to serve as a first step towards exploring this concept and its contribution to studies of international cooperation and multilateralism.

1.5.3. Data collection

The method of theory-testing process tracing requires a large amount of data (George and Bennett, 2005; Tansey, 2007) that is collected according to the structured, focused comparison approach. That is, the data collection is standardised and guided by a set of questions derived from the theoretical expectations. This ensures that comparison is systematic and the results of each case study are comparable (George and Bennett, 2005). Data is based on the research of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include various official statements made and speeches delivered by the US officials, executives of the IOs in question, and representatives of the relevant interest groups. Congressional hearings and written testimonies submitted to the congressional committees proved to be highly instrumental in researching both cases studies in the dissertation. While it was relatively easy to access documents related to the US government as most of them are archived and accessible online, it was challenging to retrieve data concerning interest groups and their stance towards a particular issue. This is due to two reasons. First, some of the relevant groups no longer exist (this is mostly the case for the case of US disengagement from the ITU), hence, their websites are taken down. Second, interest groups tend to keep the most recent statements, memos, and reports on their website. Given that the case of US disengagement from the ITU occurred almost 25 years ago and the case of disengagement from UNESCO – 10 years ago, it was necessary to turn to web archives and specifically, the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. Although this instrument is not perfect and very often links are not functional, significant number of older versions of relevant websites and necessary publications were found.

As for the international organisations studied in the dissertation, the data related to UNESCO was more transparent and easier to navigate. All the necessary documents, publications, and statement were retrieved from the UNESCO Digital Library. The ITU, on the other hand, does not always publish its documents. While some of them are available online, there are documents (e.g., Council records) that can only be accessed by ITU members (MS, Sector Members, Associates, and Academia). Since the Technical University of Munich under which auspices this dissertation is written is not part of the network, necessary documents and meeting summaries had to be found elsewhere. Thanks to an Interviewee, clearance for research-related usage of some materials was granted and they were sent to me.

As was mentioned before, both cases' time frames affected the level of accessibility of the data. This was especially evident in the case of US disengagement from the ITU. Thus, when examining preferences of relevant actors, I sometimes had to rely only on news articles interviewing or quoting these actors. Some of the articles were searched by using the LexisNexis database, others – by accessing the newspapers' websites directly. Among them were The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Wired, and Foreign Policy.

Various types of secondary sources including academic articles and books were used for solidifying both the theoretical and the empirical parts of the dissertation. Another important source was publications by the General Accountability Office (GAO) and Congressional Research Service (CRS). Given their goal to inform policy-makers in the US Congress about policy issues, these reports tend to give comprehensive and thorough overviews which proved useful when collecting the data on the context and basics of the case studies examined in the dissertation.

Finally, the empirical research is complemented by various semi-structured interviews with relevant actors conducted online⁶. A semi-structured form of interviewing was chosen as it provided an opportunity to simultaneously focus on specific aspects related to the studied phenomenon and its theoretical underpinnings and allow interviewees to offer additional insights regarding the matters at hand (Galletta, 2013). The interviews were a particularly valuable source of information as they provided a more detailed look into the policy-making towards the ITU and UNESCO. When examining decision- and policy-making, one cannot rely exclusively on publicly available data and evidence as they tend to be incomplete and limited.

⁶ The research of case studies was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Travelling was either not allowed or restricted. Hence, all interviews were conducted online.

Hence, interviewing interest groups and policy experts is “a crucial complementary data collection strategy to [...] serve as a source of primary data on aspects of the political process normally not revealed in formal and publicly available data sources” (Beyers et al., 2014: 177). Moreover, interviews can provide especially valuable evidence for process-tracing research (Tansey, 2007), a method used in this dissertation. As the research focused on specific events and political decisions made regarding them, a population of potential interviewees was limited (Bleich and Pekkanen, 2013). Potential interviewees were identified during the preliminary research and mapping of relevant actors for each case. In order to gather a balanced set of information, representatives of interest groups, the executive, and legislative branches who were involved in the studied issues were contacted (see Table 1.1). The process of organising interviewees for the case study 1 “US disengagement from the ITU” and case study 2 “US disengagement from UNESCO” demonstrated several notable differences.

In the ITU case, out of 18 requests for an interview some of which were sent after a recommendation from another interviewee (“snow-ball sampling”), only four were not answered⁷. As a result, a total of 11 interviews with 12 interviewees were conducted. One interviewee preferred to answer my questions in a written form, other interviews were conducted online. The four unanswered requests account for two government officials and two business executives. In the UNESCO case, out of 35 requests for an interview only eight were answered. Three potential interviewees preferred not be interviewed referring to their lack of knowledge on the topic. However, they shared contacts of other people. As a result, six interviews were conducted.

	Executive branch	Legislative branch	Interest group	IO
US disengagement from the ITU	3	0	7	2
US disengagement from UNESCO	1	0	4	1

Table 1.1 Interviewees disaggregated according to the type of actors

This discrepancy can be explained by several factors. First, the sensitivity of the topic seems to play a great role. The case of UNESCO was embedded in a broader topic of the US policy towards Israel and Palestine. Although all potential interviewees were informed about the confidentiality policy that was followed when working with the data obtained through the interviews, the “resonance and reactivity” (Interviewee #16) of the topic could impede the willingness of some actors to disclose their account of the events. It should be mentioned that

⁷ Some of the requests were answered, however, interviews did not take place.

Beattie, who engaged with the topic of Congress and Middle East policy, reported similar experience when attempting to request an interview with a relevant interest group (Beattie 2015), who was also contacted (unsuccessfully) during the course of this research. Second, given the relative freshness of the UNESCO case, some of the contacted people still hold office or work for those still in office. This might have also contributed to the low response rate.

It should be noted that potential interviewees were contacted either via email or LinkedIn. Since both platforms provided positive and negative results (answered and unanswered requests), no conclusion can be made as to the effect of a specific means of communication in the overall response rate. Each interviewee was contacted with a tailored request for an interview containing an elaborate explanation of the topic of this dissertation and justification of why they could be a valuable source of information regarding one of the two cases. Additionally, a confidentiality note was sent along with the request. In it, it was specified that the interview was anonymised, the data received during was handed carefully and only by me, and, if an interviewee permitted to record the interview, the recording was used for note-taking purposes only.

Although virtual interviews are still seen not as effective as in-person ones (Mosley, 2013), with few exceptions, the content of the interviews was very helpful in understanding the dynamics among different stakeholders during the decision-making process. All 18 interviews are anonymised. Thus, no names, affiliations or tasks that a person was responsible for are mentioned. In order to maintain anonymity, each interviewee is numbered and referred to as Interviewee #1, 2, 3 etc. While a general interview guide was developed, it had to be adjusted to each interviewee in accordance to their role in the studied events. Each interview began with a short introduction to the research and its purpose. It then followed the structure of causal mechanism developed in the theoretical chapter. That is, in the beginning, the questions regarding the preferences of an actor that an interviewee represented were asked. Then, the focus was on the interest groups' access to and influence on the government. The interviews were ended with questions related to the response of the government and final policy outcome. Each interview lasted around one hour.

All the data gathered during the research was critically assessed and cross-checked. The case studies are based on the triangulated information, i.e., information retrieved from multiple sources (Salkind, 2010). Nevertheless, there are limitations. This dissertation seeks to answer the question concerning the formation of policy towards IOs. Hence, the focus is on the events and processes, parts of which tend to take place behind closed doors. The interactions taking

place between relevant actors are often not documented or reported on. Additionally, the sensitive nature of one of the case studies surely affected the availability of the data, especially, obtained through the interviews.

1.6. Overview

This dissertation is structured in the following way. Chapter 2 focuses on the empirical puzzle, namely, the concept of disengagement. It is operationalised based on the state influence in IOs and regime complexity literature. I engage in a discussion regarding various faces of power, as well as formal and informal channels through which power can be exercised, and suggest that one path of disengagement is withdrawal of financial and/or human resources. Afterwards, the main concepts of regime complexity are presented followed by the implications they have on states' strategic behaviour in IOs. Based on this, I propose the second path of disengagement – change of venue.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical approach used in the dissertation. The presentation of the general application of the two-level game framework in the IR studies is followed by the discussion regarding the adaptation of the framework to the concept of disengagement. Expanding the application of the two-level approach to IOs and, specifically, disengagement, I propose two hypotheses depicting the role of domestic actors and institutions on a state's decision to disengage from an IO. This is followed by the operationalisation of the independent variables 'government branch that dominates in policy-making towards an IO' and 'interest group that exerts more influence on the government'. The chapter concludes with the presentation and operationalisation of the hypothesised causal mechanism that links the independent and dependent variables.

Chapter 4 and 5 make up the empirical part of the dissertation. Guided by the method of structured and focused comparison, both chapters are organised in the same manner. After a short contextual introduction to an issue at hand, relevant domestic actors are mapped focusing especially on the aspects dictated by the operationalisation of the independent variables. Then, a two-level explanation of each case of disengagement is laid out following the parts of the causal mechanism. After the analysis, interim conclusions are made.

Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the main findings of the research. By distinguishing between the executive and legislative branches of the government and analysing strategies and resources available to relevant interest groups, this dissertation makes a conclusion: if disengagement from an IO is favoured by a government branch dominating in policy-making towards this IO

and/or an interest group with the broadest access to the government, state IO policy is more likely to reflect this preference. In addition, the chapter discusses possible alternative explanations for the two cases of disengagement, critically assesses the limitations of the study, and proposes avenues for future research.

2. State disengagement from international organisations

The research question which this dissertation seeks to answer is twofold. On the one hand, it aims at exploring the *causes of disengagement*, on the other – *paths through which states tend to disengage*. This chapter elaborates on the empirical puzzle investigated in the dissertation. Particularly, I draw on the state influence in IOs and regime-complexity literature in order to outline and operationalise pathways of disengagement. Operationalisation is an important step in any research as it provides a clear understanding of key concepts constituting a study and identifies what is included and not included in them (Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

2.1. Operationalisation of the dependent variable

The aim of this dissertation is to explain how and under what conditions states disengage from international organisations. The study, hence, focuses on the dependent variable ‘disengagement’. I define *disengagement* as a set-up where a state remains a legal member of an IO (that is, where no official notice of withdrawal is filed) while abstaining from some or all obligations imposed on it as a member or switches to an alternative venue – an institution/regime/arrangement with a similar mandate – to pursue a specific issue or fully replace the *status quo* institution. As a concept, disengagement describes a phenomenon that occurs within the domain of international cooperation and is materialised through various paths.

Before proceeding to a more detailed operationalisation of the dependent variable, some time should be spent on justifying the concept introduced in this study and its structure. There are two main structural principles for building a concept: necessary and sufficient conditions and family resemblance. The latter does not include necessary conditions as a part of a concept structure. The main requirement, hence, is to have enough resemblance to be part of the group. With regard to the concept of disengagement, it appears justified to use the structure of sufficient and necessary conditions. There are two conditions that are necessary for a case to be labelled ‘disengagement’, although none of them is sufficient by itself. Firstly, a state has to be a member of an IO (otherwise, one faces a case of withdrawal rather than disengagement). Secondly, a state has to embark on one of the pathways presented further in the chapter. The study adopts an ontological view of the concepts and focuses on what constitutes disengagement rather than exploring various causal connections within it (Goertz, 2006).

2.1.1. Disengagement through withdrawal of resources

The operationalisation of the dependent variable is based on two bodies of literature: state influence in IOs and regime complexity. The former relates to different types of power that a

state can possess and exercise in the context of IOs. The concept of power has been present in the lexicon of political scientists for a very long time. Its definition, however, is still rather contested (Barnett and Duvall, 2005; Nye, 2002; Reinsberg, 2017).

While power is different from influence conceptually (Cox and Jacobson, 1973), the two are closely connected (Baehr, 1977, Conceição-Heldt and Meunier, 2014). The traditional definition describes power as the capability stemming from political resources, material or otherwise, and usually converts into influence (Cox and Jacobson, 1973; Oatley and Yackee, 2004). Influence can be directed to other states and/or IOs themselves (in the former instance, an IO would become a channel of influence rather than its subject) (Reinsberg 2017). Actor A that possesses power can get Actor B to do something the latter would not have done (Dahl, 1957). Similarly, influence is an ability of an actor to effectively alter another actor's behaviour (Cox and Jacobson, 1973).

According to Barnett and Duvall (2005), the traditional definition of power is limited and needs to take into consideration how social structures and processes affect actor's ability to follow their preferences and interests. Against this backdrop, they introduce four types of power: compulsory, institutional, structural, and productive. Three types of power are of particular relevance for this dissertation. Compulsory power captures the actor-to-actor relationship where one of them shapes the circumstances or actions of another through coercion or coercive bargaining (Krasner, 2011). Institutional power, on the other hand, "exists in actors' indirect control over the conditions of action of socially distant others" (Barnett and Duvall, 2005: 48). The mechanism behind this indirect control lies in formal and informal rules mediating relations between actors within an international institution. By acting through these institutions, an actor can steer and constrain the actions of other actors. Finally, productive power concerns actor's influence on discourse and systems of knowledge (Barnett and Duvall, 2005; Novosad and Werker, 2019). Similar to institutional (Gifkins, 2021), compulsory and productive power can be exercised through formal and informal governance practices. While formal rules "represent standard operation procedures" (Stone, 2011: 13) of IOs, informal ones tend to accommodate interests of more powerful states by giving them control over specific outcomes (Stone, 2011).

Regarding the formal channels, influence can be exerted through financial contributions and weighted voting (Cox and Jacobson, 1973; Johnson, 2011). Essentially, "those who contribute more have more say" (Mayer and Napel, 2020: 239). IOs tend to be financed by assessed and voluntary contributions that can be earmarked, that is, with specific conditions of

how the money should be used. While the majority of IOs continue to receive mandatory payments, that are an inevitable part of membership in IOs, earmarked contributions are getting more and more common. Mandatory contributions are usually regulated by collective decisions (e.g., the General Assembly in the UN). Hence, it is rather challenging (even for powerful states) to convert them into influence (Graham, 2017a). Conversely, earmarked funds are used to wield influence and steer the policies of IOs. By earmarking their contributions, MS prioritise countries and projects that are more aligned with their interests while avoiding to fund activities that they do not support (Graham, 2017b). Unlike mandatory contributions (they are discussed in greater detail further in the section) earmarked ones can also provide less powerful states with a certain level of influence (Reinsberg, 2017).

Although the link between state influence and earmarked payments is more direct, mandatory contributions also can play a role in shaping state influence within an IO. It happens mainly through connection between the states' ability to vote and whether they have timely paid their assessed contributions because the failure to contribute to the regular budget of an organisation for a designated period of time (in the UN system, it is usually two years) leads to the loss of voting rights. In addition, violation to fulfil its obligations can lead to reputation costs (Guzman, 2002) which is an important aspect when talking about international cooperation (Brewster, 2013). The mandatory contributions also make difference in the weighted voting systems. Such systems can give states with the biggest share of the vote veto power (Oatley and Yackee, 2004; Swedberg, 1986), which is another important channel of influence. Formal or informal, veto power allows an actor to prevent a decision or policy from being accepted (Cox and Jacobson, 1973) or alter them in their preferred way (Stone, 2011).

In addition, some scholars suggest that appointment of a state's nationals to the top and key positions is also an instrument a country might use to exert its influence in an international institution (Heldt, 2017a; Kleine, 2013; Novosad and Werker, 2019; Parizek and Stephen, 2021). According to the principal-agent (PA) theory, the staffing rules are an important variable of IO autonomy. Serving both the interests of the IO and the interests of their national states, international bureaucrats, hence, serve as a channel through which principals control agents. In other words, control over staff nationality is likely to provide principals with greater control over IOs (Parizek, 2017). Additionally, it ensures states' capacity to exercise institutional and productive power (Novosad and Werker, 2019). A state might strategically seek to fill vacant posts in an IO in order to prevent another, usually competing state from doing this and hence, securing its institutional dominance (Graham, 2006). Attempts by emerging powers to increase their representation in numerous international institutions in order to counter the long-

established predominance of the nationals of Western countries exemplifies this thesis (Liu, 2018; Trofimov et al., 2020). In a similar way, states who are able to deploy a larger delegation to an IO possess more operational influence. That is, a bigger delegation has greater capacity to engage in day-to-day activities and influence them. Less financially powerful states can only afford small delegations that have to split their time and attention across different issues and responsibilities (Reinsberg, 2017).

Control over the staffing of IOs also relates to states' agenda-setting power which is conceptually close to Barnett and Duvall's productive power (Novosad and Werker, 2019). This type of power has been recognised as a key tool in politics (Milner, 1997). The ability to set the agenda is an important instrument for advancing country's strategic goals as it allows states to raise issues of their choice and interest among relevant actors in an IO (Livingston, 1992; Pollack 2003), as well as rule out those seen as damaging or less beneficial. This, in turn, makes states with agenda-setting power capable of influencing preferences of other states and stirring eventual policy outcomes in a preferred direction (Downes, 2011). As well summarised by Bachrach and Baratz (1962: 918):

“But power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences”.

Another way to yield influence within an IO is to engage in activities such as vote buying (Vreeland, 2019), side-payments (Schneider, 2011), and lobbying. Based either on persuasion (high quality arguments and information) or a carrot/stick approach, that is, pushing for a preferred norm in exchange of development aid, voting support on another issue or threats to withdraw this support, lobbying requires significant resources and capacity. Hence, more powerful countries tend to be more successful in lobbying a norm closer to their preferences, unless they are opposed by the collective lobbying efforts by other states, e.g., in the context of the UN General Assembly, it is often African group or G77 (Brazys and Panke, 2017).

Taking into consideration channels through which a state can exercise influence in an IO, it appears logically sound to conclude that when a member state loses its voting/veto rights (as a result of non-payments to the regular budget of an IO), withdraws personnel or does not appoint its representatives to an IO, it loses the channels through which it can exercise its power and effect the decision-making process, agenda-setting, and policy-making within the organisation. Hence, a possible first path through which disengagement can be carried out is withdrawal of resources – human and/or financial. A vivid example of this path of

disengagement is the boycott by the Soviet Union of all UN meetings amid the invasion of South Korea by North Korea. The Soviet representative to the UN was instructed not to attend any meetings (an individual case of the temporary withdrawal of personnel), including the Security Council, in protest against China's exclusion from its seat in the UN. The absence of a counterpart with veto power allowed President Harry Truman to get a Security Council resolution that authorised a military response to the North Korean attack passed (Urquhart, 2007).

This value of the dependent variable is easily observable. The withdrawal of resources can be identified firstly, by looking at the public statements made by the state officials identifying an intention to stop paying contributions to an IO, pull the nationals working there out or not send a delegation in the first place. This, in turn, can be then verified by consulting the payrolls (e.g., UNESCO, 2021a; US Department of State, 2015a) and human resources reports (e.g., ITU, 2018) published by the respective IO or the government of a disengaging state.

2.1.2. Disengagement through the change of venue

The second path of disengagement is the change of venue. This value of the dependent variable is derived from the literature on regime complexity. The underlying logic of this way of disengagement is as follows.

The international system is densely populated with numerous institutions, organisations, and arrangements, some of which might overlap and contradict each other. This applies to both their membership and issues they are dealing with. The concept seeking to describe and analyse this situation is 'regime complex' defined as an "array of partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions governing a particular issue-area" (Raustiala and Victor, 2004: 279). Regime complexes include all the institutions and/or agreements relevant for the respective issue area: they comprise functional and regional, private and public regimes.

Naturally, the existence of regime complexes has implications for how international cooperation is carried out and how actors who participate in it behave (Alter and Raustiala, 2018). The main consequence of overlapping institutions for states⁸ is that they can strategise. The lack of the hierarchical structure that regulates relations between overlapping institutions means that there is no institution of last resort to deal with an issue (Alter and Meunier, 2009). Hence, states can choose a venue which possesses the most beneficial characteristics, aligns

⁸ Since states are not the only actors on the international arena, regime complexes also effect, in different ways, interest groups and IOs themselves (Alter and Meunier, 2009).

with their preferences more, and allows states to fulfil them (Kellow, 2012). In other words, they engage in the so-called ‘forum shopping’ (Murphy and Kellow, 2013). The forum shopping literature emphasises an option of choice provided by the regime complexes. States that are not satisfied with the *status quo* can also engage in regime shifting. The respective literature looks at situations where actors “relocate rulemaking processes to international venues whose mandates and priorities favour their concerns and interests” (Helfer, 2009: 39).

Apart from forum-shopping and regime shifting, a state that seeks to advance its interests can create and empower a new organisation (Alter and Raustiala, 2018). By establishing an overlapping institution, a state challenges the current focal institution that is dominated by interests different from those of the challenger-state (Urpelainen and van de Graaf, 2015) and is resistant to embark on institutional change (Faude and Gehring, 2017). Contested multilateralism adds an aspect of competition among institutions and argues that when engaging in regime shifting or creating a completely new institution, states also seek to challenge and compete with the *status quo* institutions (Kruck and Zangl, 2020; Morse and Keohane, 2014). Zürn (2018) suggests to use counter-institutionalisation to highlight the act of challenging one institution by the means of the other. Counter-institutionalisation, thus, is considered as an institutional embodiment of voice⁹ – communication of dissatisfaction and request for change. Noteworthy is that when exploiting regime complexes to their own benefit (through regime shifting or forum shopping), states do not necessarily have to leave the *status quo* institution (Börzel and Zürn, 2021). They can reduce their contributions to the old institution while becoming more engaged with the new one and in doing so, decrease the relevance and challenge the authority of the former (Zürn, 2018).

Opposite to the perception that only powerful states can utilise regime complexes (Orsini et al., 2013), the recent research shows that the mechanisms of contestation are available to both established and rising powers. While the former try to overcome the blockage caused by the one-state-one-vote system dominated by the majority of less powerful states, the latter seek to re-design multilateralism privileging the most powerful states (Zürn, 2018).

The assessment of the effects of regime complexes on the international system varies. Some scholars argue that the effects of institutional overlaps and proliferation are positive. Specifically, they submit that regime complexes contribute to the enhanced legitimacy of global governance (Faude and Große-Kreul, 2020), solve cross-border problems in a more effective

⁹ A more elaborate account of Hirschman’s exit, voice, and loyalty framework is provided in Section 1.3.1. of the dissertation.

way (Keohane and Victor, 2011), lead to co-governance and division of labour (Gehring and Faude, 2014), and inter-institutional order (Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn, 2020). On the other hand, engaging in institutional choice leads to the disaggregation of resources and political will, as well as puts poorer and smaller countries who have less resources to ensure a proper diplomatic representation in a disadvantageous position which weakens and undermines international cooperation (Hale et al., 2013) and causes confrontation among institutions and undermine them (Drezner, 2009).

In sum, the regime complexity literature and its sub-strands argue that the growing number of international agreements concerned with the same subject-matter allows states to strategically choose a venue for action on the international arena. In addition, regime complexity makes it easier for states to avoid or abandon obligations that do not correspond to their political and economic priorities (Alter and Meunier, 2009). Following this argument, this dissertation suggests that change of venue can be one of the paths of disengagement. It is worth emphasising that disengagement is not tied to a regime complex. In other words, even in its absence, disengagement can occur through other paths. What is important, however, is that no matter what effects they have on international cooperation and global governance, often costly strategies (Faude and Parizek, 2021) that are available to states due to the existence of regime complexes, are a form of contestation undermining the already existing regime or institution (Reinsberg, 2017; Zürn, 2018). Whether the contestation happens through shifting from one institution to another or creating a completely new arrangement, it implies “conflict between the rules, institutionalised practices, or missions of two different institutions” (Keohane and Morse, 2015: 17). Hence, unlike disengagement through withdrawal of resources, disengagement through the change of venue does not have to entail depriving an IO of its financial and human resources. Rather, the focus is more on the non-material resources of IOs’ legitimacy (Hurd, 2019; Tallberg and Zürn, 2019) and authority (Zürn, 2018).

Disengagement through the change of venue is observed when a new institution is created to deal with an issue or subject area for which other organisations already exist. In addition, when a state engages in forum shopping and regime shifting within an already existing regime complex, looking at official statements and documents where a state outlines its policies towards a specific issue or an IO that governs it can prove instrumental.

As a final step, an important distinction should be clarified. Although two concepts might appear similar, disengagement is not the same as noncompliance. Firstly, disengagement is a concept connected to the notion of membership in IOs while (non)compliance tends to be

discussed in relation to treaties (Simmons, 2010), norms (Carraro, 2019; Checkel, 2001), regimes (Tallberg, 2002a), and policies of international institutions (Peritz, 2020; Reinsberg et al. 2021). Secondly, the distinction stems from the motivation underlying disengagement and noncompliance. This dissertation focuses on the state-level motivations driving disengagement while non-compliance can be unintentional. It can be caused by the ambiguity of a treaty, incapability of a state to comply or a simple time lag after the treaty is signed before some level of compliance with it can be visible (Chayes and Chayes, 1993). Additionally, overly ambitious requirements are likely to lead to noncompliance (Reinsberg et al., 2021). Nevertheless, (non)compliance can be driven by state-related factors such as the strength of domestic special interests (Ivanova et al., 2003), longevity of the regime in power, political openness (Joyce, 2006), and presence of divided government (Ivanova et al., 2003; Joyce, 2006).

The concept of disengagement includes state activities constituting noncompliance. That is, when a state does not abide by obligations that are imposed on it by the IO's statute, e.g., when it stops contributing to the regular budget of an IO. However, based on the suggested operationalisation, it also includes other steps such as not making use of its rights as a member (e.g., not participating in the meetings or not having a representation in an IO) or switching its focus to another institution. This distinction underlines that although two concepts overlap, they are not identical. In contrast to noncompliance which only evaluates states' behaviour in relation to the rules and norms existing on the international arena, disengagement expands the notion of membership in IOs and offers a more nuanced perspective on the level of state involvement in international cooperation.

3. The role of domestic politics: two-level game explanation

In order to explain the puzzle, this study draws on the two-level game framework and presents a respective explanation of state disengagement from IOs. First, the elaborate outline of Robert Putnam's (1988) article – the foundation of the framework – is provided. It is followed by the literature review of the two-level game approach and its applications presenting a more detailed and developed account of the key variables that constitute the two-level game framework and an overview of its possible applications to various policy fields. I will use a comprehensive review of two-level game studies in foreign policy analysis offered by da Conceição-Heldt and Mello (2017) as a guideline and update it with the research that is either more recent or expands the framework beyond the issues of trade and economic policy. Drawing on the first section, the connection between the domestic level and state disengagement from IOs is outlined, and the respective two-level game hypotheses that answer the research question are generated. Then, the independent variables that constitute the hypotheses are operationalised in order to ensure their reliable and accurate measurement. In the final section, the causal mechanism between the independent and dependent variables is constructed on the basis of the suggested hypotheses.

3.1. Two-level game framework in the IR literature

In this section, I introduce the two-level game framework in detail, and account for the main questions, propositions, terms, and actors that constitute this approach.

The two-level game framework argues against realist scholars treating states as unitary actors (see Waltz, 2010) and assumes that domestic factors and groups play a significant role in international politics and vice versa. In other words, it explains strategic interactions between the domestic and international levels and captures how these two levels influence each other (Morin and Paquin, 2018). The framework was developed by Robert Putnam. In his seminal work 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games' (Putnam, 1988), the author has solidified the role of domestic factors and their influence on international negotiations. Specifically, he introduced a metaphor of two levels where the Level 1 is the international level, and the Level 2 is the domestic one, and argued that:

“At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments” (Putnam, 1988: 434).

As it is seen, both levels are rather complex. Government leaders – ‘chief negotiators’ – are playing on both levels: they are involved in international negotiation processes during which chief negotiators have to find a common ground with their foreign colleagues. On the other hand, negotiation processes are highly dependent on the approval (ratification – formal, through a voting procedure, or informal, through public opinion) at the domestic level (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017). According to Putnam (1988), when talking about the Level 2, one should emphasise its political side, namely include “parties, social classes, interest groups, legislators, and even public opinion and elections” into the analysis (Putnam 1988: 432).

The core component of the two-level game framework is the concept of a ‘win-set’. It refers to a particular outcome agreed upon at the international level that can be ratified formally and informally on the domestic level (Putnam, 1988; Moravcsik, 1993). Win-sets can be broad or narrow – their size is defined by national preferences. Focusing on the size of the win set, Putnam (1988) formulates various expectations with regard to the likelihood of achieving certain negotiation results. Firstly, agreement becomes possible if the win-sets of both levels overlap; and the larger those win-sets are, the more likely it is that they will overlap. However, a small domestic (Level 2) win-set can be used strategically by a chief negotiator and thus, gives them more leverage on the international level. The logic of this is as follows: constraints at the domestic level give the chief negotiator a certain level of credibility when they inform their foreign counterparts that their hands are tied at the domestic level and therefore, it is impossible for them to accept an agreement that goes beyond the limits set by domestic constituents (Putnam, 1988). Nevertheless, a narrow win-set can be rather risky. This was demonstrated during the Doha Round of trade negotiations at the WTO when the pressure exerted by the protectionist groups on the negotiators was so strong that their win-sets failed to overlap excluding any possibility to reach an agreement (Morin and Paquin, 2018).

The scope of the win-set is determined by three factors. The first one has to do with the level of cohesion and mobilisation of the domestic level actors – companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other interest groups. Depending on whether these preferences are homogenous or heterogenous, the negotiator’s behaviour and strategy might change. The main goal of the negotiator, who has actors with homogenous preferences at the domestic level, is to match their expectations with the negotiable outcome. When domestic constituents have divergent preferences, the negotiator’s position is complicated by the necessity to manage discrepancies existing at the domestic level. In addition, the level of participation and issue politicisation affect the character of the win-set. First, a high participation rate in ratification process forces the chief negotiator to take account of them and thus, shape their negotiation

behaviour accordingly. Second, the politicisation of an issue can incite groups who are less concerned about the costs of no-agreement to be more active (Morin and Paquin, 2018; Putnam, 1989).

The size of win-sets also depends on the domestic political institutions. Apart from interest groups, the state legislature also participates in the ratification process. The executive and the legislature share power in foreign policy. For example, parliament has to approve (ratify) an international agreement submitted by the president. Such executive-legislative relations constrain the scope of the available win-set. Since the legislature cannot amend international agreements (an attempt to change it equals its rejection and therefore, calls for another round of negotiations), the chief negotiator has to anticipate which negotiation outcome will be endorsed by the legislature (Milner, 1997). In addition, Putnam (1988: 449) argues that the size of the win-set depends on the so-called “state strength” and “state autonomy”. That is, when main decision-makers are not dependent on their domestic constituents, they can offer a greater win-set which, in turn, can increase the likelihood of reaching an international agreement. On the other hand, autonomy from the domestic level actors can deprive the chief negotiator of their strong bargaining position. In other words, diplomats who represent a rather authoritarian regime cannot use domestic pressure as an argument for not accepting an unfavourable deal.

Another factor affecting the size of the win-set is the strategies of the chief negotiator. Firstly, the chief negotiator faces a tactical dilemma: the larger their win-set, the easier it is to achieve an agreement, but this also weakens negotiator’s bargaining position vis-à-vis their counterparts. In order to expand the size of the win-set, the chief negotiator can resort to side payments or to their own status. The higher the status of the negotiator, the higher the chances to achieve ratification at the domestic level and the more likely it is that they will offer more side payments (Putnam, 1988). On the other hand, strategies such as linking two different issues, engaging with more actors, and promoting external transparency, can reduce the win-set (Morin and Paquin, 2018). A narrower win-set is beneficial to the chief negotiator. It can strengthen their bargaining power on the international level. Specifically, it allows them to claim that a certain negotiations outcome is unlikely to be ratified back home and thus, obtain greater concessions from their foreign counterparts (da Conceição-Heldt, 2013a).

The two-level framework started as a theory focusing on the interactions between the domestic and international levels during international negotiations. However, since the publication of Putnam’s work, a substantive body of literature expanding the application of the

framework or elaborating upon it has emerged. As noted in Morin and Paquin (2018) most scholars who turn to the two-level game framework in their research are interested in economic negotiations (Bailey et al., 1997; da Conceição-Heldt, 2011), but there are also two-level game studies of policy fields such as security (Mello and Peters, 2018), climate policy (Hatch, 2007), European integration, and international institutions (Finke, 2013; Minnich, 2005). On the other hand, the framework itself has been enhanced by scholars looking more precisely at various aspects of the theory, namely, domestic political institutions (Ehrlich, 2009; Milner, 1997) and interest groups (de Bièvre and Eckhardt, 2011; Moravcsik, 1997).

As suggested in da Conceição-Heldt's (2013a) extensive overview on the usage of two-level games in trade cooperation research, the two-level game literature can be divided into two general groups: state-centred and society-centred approaches. Both groups seek to open the 'black box' of nation-states when explaining their foreign policy, but they focus on different variables and/or factors that determine foreign policy. Essentially, the focal point of the state-centred approach is the domestic institutional structure of the state (relations between the executive and legislative branches, the distribution of power between them etc.), whilst the society-centred approach looks at domestic interest groups and the competition among them. In the case of the state-centred approach, the logic is that a particular executive-legislative set-up determines which preferences are predominant in policy-making. The distribution of power is demonstrated through various stages of the decision-making process: agenda-setting, amendment, ratification or veto, use of referendums, and side payments (Milner, 1997). By looking at these aspects of the institutional structure and which branch possesses power in them, one can identify the sources of particular policy preferences and hence, explain the state's foreign policy. The society-centred approach, on the other hand, assumes that states are representative institutions. Hence, their policy is affected by a certain subset of individuals and private groups who exercise constant pressure on decision-makers in order to achieve goals they cannot achieve on the individual level. In doing so, they participate in the formation of state foreign policy (Moravcsik, 1997). While interest groups are predominantly concerned with the benefits the group that they represent can obtain from a certain foreign policy decision, state representatives are interested in promoting national interests (security, provision of public goods, welfare) of their country. On the other hand, elected officials also try to secure their re-election for which they need to account for the interests of the electorate and the party they belong to (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017; Frieden et al., 2015).

One of the most fundamental research connecting the institutional structure of a state with its foreign policy is presented in Helen Milner's "Interests, institutions, and information:

Domestic politics and international relations” (1997). Milner focuses *inter alia* on the interactions between the executive and legislative branches. She presents a model where divided government – “a situation where the political party controlling the executive is not the same as that in control of the legislature” which occurs when “the executive’s and the median legislator’s ideal points are far apart” (Milner 1997: 81) – defines the probability of reaching an agreement on the international level and affects the bargaining power of the chief negotiator. The model also includes information as a variable and explores the effects of its uneven distribution suggesting that asymmetric information can play in both directions: to make cooperation less likely or, under certain conditions, increase the probability of an agreement. Milner concludes that there are several key factors that determine how domestic set-up shapes foreign policy. First, institutions determine the likelihood and the terms of an international agreement. Second, the affect that institutions have only works in a combination with the actor’s preferences. The mechanism behind this conclusion is as follows: institutions define which actors dominate the foreign policy process and hence, which and whose preferences shape it. In other words, if the executive controls the power, their preferences will dominate and vice versa (Milner, 1997).

Developing an aspect of information, Milner and Rosendorff (1997) look at the impact that elections can have on trade negotiations. The authors present a game-theoretic model and compare it to the two-level game approach where information is perceived as complete. In contrast with the complete information scenario in which the chief negotiator anticipates the outcome of the elections and thus, can predict which agreement will pass the ratification process, in the game-theoretic model, elections tend to increase uncertainty – the executive does not know who will be the median legislator and what preferences they will have at the moment of the ratification process. Combined with a divided government, this makes international cooperation less likely. Tarar (2001) also engages with the issue of complete information and uncertainty. He starts with criticising the existing research on the so-called ‘Schelling conjecture’ – a situation when domestic constraints can be used by the chief negotiator to strengthen their bargaining positions – and argues that these studies do not account for scenarios where both counterparts in the negotiations face domestic constraints (see, for example, Iida, 1993). Under the conditions of complete information, the presence of constraints on both sides can be an advantage (Tarar, 2001), and chief negotiators might strategically impose constraints on themselves by granting domestic institutions a veto power in order to strengthen their (negotiators’) bargaining position (Mo, 1995). However, under one-sided uncertainty, the Schelling conjecture does not hold. In other words, “incomplete information can but does not

always completely eliminate the advantage of having a high constraint” (Tarar, 2001: 322). In the same vein, Hammond and Prins (2008) present a bargaining model which includes variance in the presence of veto institutions and/or unified and divided government, and conclude that Schelling’s assumption is incorrect under many conditions. Rather, the authors emphasise the existence of a broad universe of possible outcomes. Schelling conjecture is also tested in the climate policy field. Similar to Hammond and Prins (2008), Kroll and Shogren (2008) conclude that Schelling’s expectations with regard to domestic constraints and their effects can only be confirmed under certain conditions. Particularly, when a country is already in a strong bargaining position on the international level, domestic constraints do not work. Schelling’s conjecture holds only when the bargaining positions of a country is weak.

Another variable that scholars look at when focusing on domestic political institutions is veto players. In this regard, Tsebelis (1995) examines how an ability of a state to accept policy changes depends on the number of veto players. Veto players are “individual or collective actors whose agreement (by the majority rule for collective actors) is required for a change of status quo” (Tsebelis, 1995: 289). In the context of two-level games, veto players are the ones who have to ratify an agreement suggested by the chief negotiator. Depending on a state’s political system veto players can be either institutional or partisan. These two groups correspond to presidential and parliamentary systems respectively, and can have different effects on the likelihood of policy change. The correlation between these two variables is negative, that is the potential for policy change decreases when the number of veto players increases. In addition, different preferences and interests of veto players, as well as the level of internal cohesion – homogeneity of policy positions – of each veto player reduce a possibility of reaching an agreement. Tsebelis’s conclusions are corroborated in various quantitative studies. First, O’Reilly (2005) applies the veto players approach when exploring the ability of states to change tariffs and nontariff barriers. Mansfield, Milner, and Pevehouse (2007) look at 194 countries over almost 50 years and examine how domestic political factors, specifically the number of veto players, influence countries’ decision to join Preferential Trading Agreements (PTAs). Expanding the scope of the veto players argument to other policy fields, Choi (2010) examines its validity in regard to international conflict. His results support the negative correlation between the number of veto players and the likelihood of *status quo* change (in this context, legislative veto players and the likelihood of the beginning of a militarised interstate dispute). However, the author makes a distinction between the regime types. Notably, Choi (2010) finds that in autocratic regimes, the high number of veto players does not decrease the likelihood of the use of force. The veto players argument also holds when being applied to environmental

policy (Cao and Prakash, 2012) and states participation in intergovernmental organisations (Minnich, 2005).

Following the question about what defines country's peacefulness, Dieterich, Hummel, and Marschall (2015) are concerned with the power of veto players (specifically, parliaments) rather than their number. The authors expect that parliaments can limit the scope of the executive's security policy. For this outcome to occur, parliaments have to possess enough power in security policy decision-making (war powers), and public opinion should be against military engagement in a conflict. Testing this hypothesis in the case of the Iraq war, the authors find that countries where parliamentary war powers are high were less militarily involved in the war. The veto power is an ultimate instrument for parliaments to affect the executives' decision in regard to the use of force. However, only few parliaments across the world possess it (Dieterich, Hummel, and Marschall, 2015). At the same time, democracies introduce various ways of how parliaments can participate in the decision-making process: from differentiating which types of military operations can be subjected to parliamentary involvement to defining particular stages of decision-making which parliaments can engage into (Peters and Wagner, 2011). Even when they do not get to vote on the issue of military involvement, parliaments can engage in the post-deployment stage, for example, by controlling the resources during operations or the actors responsible for them (Dieterich et al., 2010). Another important aspect that can explain the position of the parliament regarding its countries' military affairs is the party composition of the parliament itself. It is expected that it is more difficult to deploy troops abroad when the government does not have a parliamentary majority. Even an intraparty conflict can affect decision-making. The ideological constellation of the parliament also matters: centre and centre-right parties are more likely to agree to send troops abroad (Mello and Peters, 2018). In the same vein, focusing on the partisan set-up, Heldt and Mahrenbach (2020) corroborate that the partisan position of the government affects state preferences towards IOs and their empowerment. In addition, when the government consists of multiple parties, the government's policy towards IOs is defined by the party with the ministerial portfolio.

A great number of studies focuses on the societal aspects of foreign policy. The main variable in this case is the influence of and competition between various interest groups. The logic of the connection between foreign policy and interest groups is well described by da Conceição-Heldt (2011) who establishes a link between parties and interest groups in the context of trade liberalisation. Since trade agreements have a significant impact on the import- and export sector of a country, it is important to take the role of interest groups in consideration. Political parties are dependent on the votes of their constituents and thus, they have an incentive

to shape their policies in accordance with the interests of the social groups they represent. Hence, if a party in the government has strong ties to a particular interest group, foreign policy is shaped according to the interests of this group. In addition, interest groups “shape the way problems are defined, resources are mobilised, options are framed and selected, legal actions are authorised, and policies are implemented” (Bryner, 2008: 320). While state representatives are interested in promoting national interests (security, provision of public goods, welfare) of their country and elected officials try to secure their re-election for which they need to account for the interests of the electorate and the party they belong to, interest groups are mainly concerned with the gains or losses a certain foreign policy decision can bring. They organise and act in order to gain benefits or protect their interests against potentially disadvantageous policies (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017; Frieden et al., 2015; Milner and Tingely, 2015). For example, when a state establishes strict economic sanctions on another state, relevant domestic groups stand to bare economic consequences. Therefore, they seek to mitigate losses through lobbying. As a result, policymakers implement a sanction regime which is less detrimental to domestic interest groups (McLean and Whang, 2014).

Similar to the state-centred approach, a significant number of studies explore how interest groups influence various aspects of economic and trade policies. For example, Frieden (1988) explains US foreign economic policy between 1914 and 1940 with the role of domestic socioeconomic and political groups. Specifically, he focuses on the rivalry between a coalition of banks and corporations interested in the US’s substantial involvement in world affairs, and economic groups oriented towards the domestic market and interested in “a relatively isolated America” (Frieden 1988: 60). The author concludes that US foreign policy was essentially a result of competing preferences that these two interest groups had. Dür (2007) follows the same logic, that is, that the preferences of societal actors mirror their expectations with regard to the advantages or disadvantages of free trade and protectionism. Basing his argument on this assumption, the author explains the EU’s trade policy focusing on the role of mobilised exporters. The main argument is that when exporters are being discriminated, they mobilise and push for their government to protect their positions in foreign markets which becomes visible in trade agreements. In Bardwell (2000), the situation is quite the opposite – interest groups prevented the US House of Representatives from supporting the 1997 fast-track legislation which would have accelerated the congressional review of trade agreements and thus, increased free trade. Specifically, the pressure was coming from labour unions who claimed that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (the vote on NAFTA was held in 1993) was

responsible for job losses in their districts. The role of labour groups in the formation of trade policy is also underlined in Engel and Jackson (1998) and Matschke and Sherlund (2006).

The role of interest groups is also visible in environmental and migration policymaking. Lai (2006) examines the interplay between free trade, environmental regulations, and lobby groups organised by both environmentalists and free traders, while Bailer and Weiler (2015) argue that the interests of domestic groups have effect on climate change negotiations. Additionally, both studies extend their arguments by looking at varying degrees of influence these groups can have. Lai (2006) explains the (in)capacity of interest groups to influence policy through the so-called 'lobbying efficiency'. In the same vein, Bailer and Weiler (2015) expect that the more organised and resourceful groups are, the more successful they are in their lobbying activity. For example, in the context of climate change negotiations, countries with powerful fossil fuel industries (which implies the existence of powerful lobbying groups) are likely to be less cooperative. In the field of migration policies, interest groups are expected to be more effective in shaping of the state's policy when they build coalitions with political parties (Menz, 2011). Generally, their role in the formation of migration policies is considered to be statistically significant (Facchini et al., 2011). On the other hand, Bryner (2008) argues that there are also external factors that define interest groups' ability to change policies. Although it is disputable whether environmental interest groups are efficient and can actually bring change to climate and environmental policy, the author underlines their role. He argues that their inability to influence policy is not due to their strategic failure but, rather, because of the structural environment, which is characterised by ideological and partisan conflicts, as well as parties that use environmental issues as a mobilisation tool (Bryner 2008).

Another category of works analysing foreign policy from the two-level game perspective is studies on the effects of domestic public opinion. This aspect is especially relevant for consolidate democracies where public opinion serves as a constraint for the government. However, unlike studies on interest groups or the legislative-executive relations, scholars that look at public opinion diverge in their assessment as to whether it can shape state foreign policy (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017). By looking at Irish and British public opinion regarding the Northern Ireland issue and how it influenced Anglo-Irish negotiations, Trumbore (1998) concludes that public opinion can contribute to the formation of the state's foreign policy only if it has direct power to ratify international agreements. In addition, if an issue over which the negotiations are taking place is not salient enough, public opinion will not serve as an effective constraint. Following these assumptions, Shamir and Shikaki (2005) explore the influence of public opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Two additional aspects brought up by the

authors are public opinion's susceptibility to framing – a paradigm which argues that “meaning is dependent upon context and expectations and can be shaped by manipulating these factors” (Shamir and Shikaki, 2005: 314), and public opinion's multifaceted nature. Both of them have substantial implications on how domestic public opinion and foreign policy-making interact. Firstly, by framing an issue at hand in a certain way, chief negotiators can manipulate public opinion in order to mitigate the constraints it imposes. Secondly, if public opinion is heterogeneous, leaders can strategise according to their own preferences and goals. They can signal their preference for a certain position. By doing this, they expand or limit their domestic win-set which, in turn, defines how strong their bargaining position is in the negotiations (Shamir and Shikaki, 2005). Similarly, Baum and Potter (2015) suggest that public opinion can be outplayed by the leaders who can engage in manipulating policy information available to the public. However, if there is a prominent partisan opposition and broadly accessible media, it is harder for the leaders to disregard the opinion of their domestic public. The importance of information in regard to public opinion is also emphasised by Shapiro and Page (1988). The authors submit that while the public is capable of forming rational policy preferences, the quality of public opinion is dependent on the availability of neutral and correct information. In some cases, however, public opinion can be completely ignored. For example, the British government disregarded its public's opposition to the use of force during the Suez crisis (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017). The same happened in 2003 when Poland joined the coalition in the Iraq War even though its domestic public was not supportive of that (Radziszewski and Wolfe, 2012).

A separate group of works using the two-level game framework is studies focusing on emerging countries. Traditionally, scholars examined the effect of various domestic factors in the context of western countries, specifically the US and EU. However, there is a number of studies seeking to fill this gap and contribute to the analysis of the interplay of the domestic and international levels by looking at Brazil (da Conceição-Heldt, 2013b), Russia (Blanchard, 2003), ASEAN states (Chiou, 2010), China (Weiss and Wallace, 2021), and rising powers in general (Lavenex et al., 2021). In a study on power transitions and the rise of the regulatory states, Lavenex, Serrano, and Büthe (2021) follow the tradition maintaining that preferences over foreign economic policy stem from domestic interests and institutions and explore how domestic institutions affect the development of the regulatory capacity and capability of emerging economies.

Blanchard (2003) explores the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP) in the context of domestic actors and their influence on the “successful initiation and constrained

implementation” (Blanchard, 2003: 70) of this agreement. Following Milner (1997), the author (Blanchard, 2003) emphasises the importance of the domestic structure and its influence on which actors participate in various stages of policy-making (initiation, ratification etc.). The focus of the study is on what the author labels ‘facilitating domestic structures’ – the capability of Russia’s and China’s domestic structures to empower subnational units to act as policy initiators, ratifiers, facilitators, and implementors. For Chiou (2010), domestic factors consist of political institutions and the ruling majority, and they explain why ASEAN states engaged successfully in ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) agreements and protocols.

In the article on Brazil’s bargaining positions in the trade negotiations in Doha, da Conceição-Heldt (2013b) combines societal- and state-centred approaches and suggests that three variables played a role: a heterogenous governing coalition with a high number of veto players, differences within the Workers’ Party (the most important left party and a party of the then-president Lula da Silva), and the preferences of interest groups. The author underlines the importance of a comprehensive analysis of domestic factors and argues that the veto players framework (state-centred approach) alone cannot capture the full picture because it disregards the role of interest groups – a substantial factor when examining various trade liberalisation issues. In the same vein, Betz and Hanif (2010) conceptualise India’s energy policy as a two-level game and conduct an elaborate review of domestic factors that shape India’s domestic win-set concluding that it is influenced by economic (an increasing role of foreign investors and the emergence of lobbying groups engaged with Western states) and institutional (a strong link between the parties, farmers, and poor consumers who make up a considerable part of the constituency) factors.

A recent study by Weiss and Wallace (2021) examines the effects of China’s increasing power and influence on the world politics and LIO. Challenging the misconception representing authoritarian regimes as monolithic and coherent, the authors submit that Chinese politics are subject to fluctuations in domestic coalitions and changes in the distribution of power on the international arena. Offering two factors, centrality and heterogeneity, they explain China’s varying international behaviour.

To sum up, the two-level framework offers a wide range of instruments to examine the foreign policy of states. One can focus either on the institutional structure and base their argument on the number of veto players, government set-up or executive-legislative relations, or look at the societal level and explore the role of interest groups. However, the most fruitful approach appears to be an approach that combines these factors and draws a more

comprehensive picture of the sources of foreign policy. The show-case of this approach is demonstrated in the study of American foreign policy by Milner and Tingley (2015) where they consider a broad spectre of domestic actors: Congress, interest groups, and the public.

Although the two-level game framework has been widely accepted by scholars as an instrument to study countries' foreign policies, its applications stay relatively limited. First, the predominant part of the studies is concentrated on Western countries – the US and EU-states. A relatively new and, hence, fairly small group of studies focusing on emerging economies and non-western countries can benefit from more research. Second, the scope of policy fields to which the framework is applied has grown significantly (now major studies focus not only on trade but also on security and climate policy) but there are still some policy fields that can gain from the framework, for example, the question of state membership in IOs. In the next sections, I will demonstrate how this can be done and outline a casual mechanism that drives this dissertation, namely, the one between domestic politics and state disengagement from IOs.

3.2. State membership in IOs as a two-level game

This dissertation seeks to explain state disengagement from IOs through the two-level game framework. One of the main assumptions made by the two-level game approach is that domestic politics and international relations intertwine. This is especially apparent in economic, environmental and security policies, as well as trade affairs (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017; Pahre, 2004). While it is evident how the framework can be applied to trade negotiations or decision-making on the use of force thanks to the existing literature, it has to be clarified how domestic factors can intervene in policy regarding state participation in IOs. Several scholars have already engaged with the domestic politics argument while studying states' policy towards IOs. Some of them concentrate on why states join IOs (Minnich, 2005; Shanks et al., 1996) and some – on why they withdraw (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a). Studies that explore membership in IOs through the two-level game lens argue that similar to other policy fields, IO membership bears electoral consequences. Therefore, leaders may choose a specific policy towards IO participation not only to engage in international cooperation, but also to meet the demands and fulfill interests of domestic actors (von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, 2019a).

This dissertation goes beyond the question of joining or leaving IOs. By focusing on the cases of disengagement and exploring what role various domestic actors and institutions played in them, it will further develop the two-level game framework and its application to IOs.

The two-level game approach is also well-suited for this dissertation's puzzle and can provide valuable explanatory tools to study state disengagement from IOs. First, parliaments tend to participate in decision-making with regard to the provision of resources (financial or human) to IOs because financing of IOs is a part of the budget which usually has to be approved by the parliament. Additionally, IOs tend to engage more and more with non-state actors including various businesses and NGOs (Tallberg et al., 2013, 2018). They are no longer accountable only to their member states. IOs need to respond to a more heterogeneous group of constituents (Dingwerth et al., 2019) who, in turn, may constitute interest groups on the domestic level. In other words, if an interest group can be affected by a particular policy of the state towards an IO, this group is expected to seek to shape this policy in a way that is more beneficial for it. While the government has its own preferences regarding an IO, they can be amplified by domestic interest groups (Urpelainen and van de Graaf, 2015). Additionally, public opinion can be in favour of or against international cooperation. This may affect whether foreign policy is more internationalist or protectionist (Milner and Tingley, 2015). The increasing politicisation (Zürn et al., 2012) of and growing popular backlash against international cooperation (De Vries et al., 2021) have significant effects on state policies towards IOs. Specifically, domestic opposition hinders integration or leads to withdrawal (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016).

It is clear that disengagement is embedded conceptually in both international and domestic politics and hence, can be studied from the two-level game perspective. The relevance of the framework is highlighted further when applied to the cases of disengagement studied in this dissertation.

The relationship between the ITU and US exemplifies a strong connection existing between an IO, the state and its domestic interest groups. Specifically, American domestic groups were included in US delegations to the organisation and its governing bodies, and acted either as part of the delegation or on their own behalf, as sector members. Moreover, the Department of State – the principle adviser to the President on foreign policy issues and the lead agency in policy-making regarding telecommunications – was legally obliged to communicate with and collect input from the private sector with regard to international telecommunications policy matters. Noteworthy is that private-sector actors acted both as advisors and direct participants in the policy development processes. Communication with representatives of the private sector, including industry associations such as the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS), the Telecommunications Industry Association (TIA), and companies like AT&T, was conducted through a specific advisory committee

established by State Department (GAO, 1998). Additionally, interest groups, who act as policy maximizers seeking to transmit information and preferences to policymakers in the government (Brunell, 2005), enjoy a rather extensive access to Congress which is open to them by design (Lavelle, 2011a). The public opinion regarding them and the role they play in politics, however, tends to be rather critical (Nownes, 2013).

On the other hand, the government, as well as the distribution of power and preferences within it appears to also have effect on the state's IOs policy. The power over foreign policy is shared between the executive (the President and the Department of State) and legislative (Congress) branches. The US Constitution grants some powers such as control over the military exclusively to the President, and some, e.g., the regulation of foreign commerce or declaration of war, to Congress. Although sometimes the executive can send US forces into combat without the congressional authorisation (Masters, 2017). The check and balances in the American system ensure congressional participation in world politics, "both as an actor that provides funds and as a forum where a range of interests assemble, deliberate, and influence policy across a range of global issues" (Lavelle, 2011a: 17). In addition, Congress might participate in appointing delegates to IOs.

Generally, IOs tend to depend on funding provided by their member states. The payment of US assessed contributions to IOs is a two-step process in which both the executive and legislative branches take part (Lavelle, 2011b). Members of Congress have the so-called "power of the purse", i.e., they authorise and appropriate US funding to the UN and UN-system organisations, programmes, and funds which is usually done through the Foreign Relations Authorization Act. In addition, Congress can oversee UN funding by holding committee hearings and commissioning investigations of UN activities and bodies funded by the US (Blanchfield, 2018). The American contributions to the UN and other IOs are a part of the budget process. The budget of the US government is a prerogative of Congress as it is in charge of authorising the budget proposed by the White House. The preparations for the budget proposal submission start with governmental agencies working on their budget drafts. Then, they submit them to the White House, where the President generates the final budget request and submits it to Congress. The budget process in Congress includes various activities, the most notable of which are Appropriations committee's hearings. Eventually Congress passes appropriations bills which integrate the preferences of the President and Congress regarding governmental spending. During the budget process, the President can employ various means in order to communicate their position regarding the budget to Congress and try to influence Congress' decision. Apart from lobbying members of Congress and trying to appeal to the

public, the President may execute veto power, either by threatening to veto or vetoing the legislation authorised by Congress. The Presidential veto, however, can be bypassed by two-thirds vote of both the House of Representatives and Senate (Saturno et al., 2016).

According to Milner (1997), the power distribution between the executive and the legislature is defined by which elements of the legislative process each branch controls. Naturally, the more control one of them has, the more effectively it can design and implement policies corresponding to its preferences, which is especially relevant in the cases of divided government. First, agenda-setting power refers to the ability to propose issues for consideration and solutions for dealing with these issues. Essentially, actor with the agenda-setting power sets the terms of the debate. In doing so, they can prioritise favourable issues and omit unfavourable ones. The agenda-setting power tends to be allocated to the executive. The amendment power grants actors an ability to change anything that the agenda-setter proposed in a way that the proposal becomes more aligned with the preferences of the actor possessing the amending power. The veto power can be enjoyed by both branches depending on the allocation of the agenda-setting power. When the executive chooses issues for consideration, it is up to the legislature to ratify/veto them. Both can resort to side payments, that is, offer compensation in exchange for concessions. In other words, actors can agree to give up an issue if their counterparts do the same for another issue (Milner, 1997).

In the case of funding for IOs, agenda-setting power is operationalised through the Presidential budget request in which the executive proposes how much money should be spent on IOs. As Congress can change the amount of money allocated to IOs, it possesses amendment power. For example, Congress that is more critical of IOs can reduce the amount of money spent on them. It also has the final say in terms of authorising the legislation. Whilst the President can decide not to sign the budget bill accepted by Congress, this decision can be overridden.

Taking into account these connections between domestic political actors and institutions and state disengagement, two hypotheses are deduced from the two-level game approach. They are centered around two domestic factors that play a role in foreign policy: interest groups and domestic political institutions, specifically, the executive and legislative branches of the government. In order to investigate what effect interest groups and two branches of the government have on state's policy towards IOs including a decision to disengage, the following hypotheses are formed:

H₁: *If the government branch which dominates in policy-making towards an IO favours disengagement, the state will be more likely to conduct a policy reflecting this preference.*

H₂: *If the interest group that exerts more influence on the government favours disengagement, the state policy towards an IO will be more likely to reflect this preference.*

By exploring the causal mechanism between the dependent and independent variables in the suggested two-level game framework hypotheses, it is identified how exactly interest groups and domestic political institutions affect state disengagement from IOs.

In this dissertation, the casual mechanism is tested by investigating decision- and policy-making towards IOs. In other words, once the relevant interest groups and political institutions (the executive and legislative branches are narrowed down to specific officials and committees relevant for a particular case) are pinpointed, their preferences should be presented and analysed. It is assumed that the preferences of domestic actors do not appear in vacuum and are motivated by certain factors such as ideology, policy goals etc. For example, the performance of IOs or decisions they made can contribute to the formation of actors' preferences. Therefore, these organisations have to be examined closely. In this dissertation, the case studies, thus, investigate not only the domestic politics of disengagement but also the IOs (namely, the ITU and UNESCO) from which the state disengages. This, however, does not mean an in-depth study of what and how an IO does; these issues are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, two chosen IOs are studied with regard to the context they provided to the occurrence of state disengagement.

In the following sections, the independent variables are operationalised in order to ensure their accurate measurement across cases and the causal mechanism between the dependent and independent variables is derived from the hypotheses presented earlier.

3.3. Operationalisation of the independent variables

In this section, I will operationalise the independent variables. There are two propositions each of which is based on an independent variable. First hypothesis is an institutional power distribution one and contains the independent variable 'government branch dominating policy-making towards an IO'. Second – is a societal actors hypothesis and is based on the independent variable 'interest group exerting more influence'.

3.3.1 Government branch dominating policy-making

The institutional political actors that are expected to play a role in state disengagement from IOs are the executive and the legislature. Depending on the form of government, the executive refers either to the cabinet led by the prime minister or the president. Although both the cabinet and the president are supported by various departments, it is justifiable to consider the executive branch as a unitary entity. In the organisational hierarchy, the minister or the president exercises a certain level of superiority and all decisions have to be approved by them in order to be taken further (Milner, 1997). The executive can also delegate the authority over a policy issue to a certain department, in which case this department will be the “spokesperson” on policy matters. Therefore, the positions of different departments will be taken into consideration and the final conclusion regarding interests and preferences of the executive branch will be derived accordingly.

Although the legislature is also treated as a unitary actor, this dissertation takes into consideration that the legislative branch has its own internal politics and parties tend to have confronting preferences. The crucial point for the research question of this dissertation and the proposed hypotheses is whether the legislative branch votes for or against policy suggested by the executive. It is, however, important to understand how the legislative branch arrived to its final policy decision in order to fully understand the dynamic of policy-making towards IOs.

There has been research on the relations between US foreign policy and ideological clusters common for the US. With some exceptions (Busby et al., 2012; Kertzer et al., 2021), the general view is that there is a partisan divide regarding a wide range of issues including foreign policy (Gries, 2014; Jeong and Quirk, 2019; Kupchan and Trubowitz, 2007). As summarised by Kupchan and Trubowitz (2007: 76), “On the most basic questions of U.S. grand strategy – the sources and purposes of U.S. power, the use of force, the role of international institutions – representatives of the two parties are on different planets”. In international trade, the right wing tends to prefer free trade, while the left-wing groups favour using trade barriers. Foreign aid is more likely to be promoted by liberals than conservatives. Multilateral aid organisations such as the IMF fit into the same argument receiving more support from liberals (Milner and Tingley, 2015) while conservatives tend to abstain from multilateralism (Rathbun, 2011). As for the institutions of international cooperation, the ideological divide is as evident. International organisations, treaties, and conventions tend to be seen by some conservatives as cession of American sovereignty to the UN, “an international body that conservatives love to hate” (Boren, 2014: xvi). Democrats and Republicans are divided regarding both the utility of

the UN as an instrument of international cooperation and what policies it might pursue to be more relevant for US foreign policy and national interests (Rubenzer, 2017).

Finally, in order to investigate which branch of the government can lead to the ultimate decision to disengage, it is necessary to identify the dominating power. This will be especially important when divided government is present. In other words, in a situation when the legislator and the executive have divergent preferences (this usually occurs when the executive and the legislative are controlled by different parties (Milner, 1997)), it is crucial to know which branch makes the final policy decision. The decision is expected to reflect this branch's preferences (Milner and Rosendorff, 1997). The dominating branch will be identified through the analysis of the power distribution between the two branches in the field of foreign policy and pinpointing veto players – actors whose authorisation is required in order for a policy decision to be accepted (Minnich, 2005). In this dissertation, the focus is on the institutional – those defined by the constitution – veto players (Tsebelis, 1995).

3.3.2. Interest group exerting more influence

The previous sections have discussed in greater detail a role that interest groups play in the formation of a state's foreign policy. However, it is necessary to specify what this dissertation means by an "interest group". Some authors are rather strict with regard to who can be labelled as interest groups and who cannot. For example, Holyoke's (2018) definition of "interest group" is rather exclusive and perceives an interest group as a private organisation which unites people who share the same interest. According to this definition, individual corporations are not interest groups as their primary goal is to make profit rather than lobby for a particular policy. The same applies to universities, hospitals, and some non-profit organisations. Although all of these institutions attempt to affect government policies, their lobbying is usually occasional. In addition, the exclusive definition contends that interest groups consist of members who share the same interests and who unite in a group in order to promote them (Berry and Wilcox, 2015) – dimension which is also missing in the aforementioned organisations. The only case when firms are considered to be interest groups is when they unite in business associations (Dür and Mateo, 2013).

However, such narrow view of interest groups leads to an overlook of a significant part of the activity taking place in the political arena. Additionally, it disregards non-membership organisations that participate in politics (Nownes, 2013). Hence, some scholars adopt broader definitions and argue that organisations such as businesses, charity organisations, and churches can act as interest groups (see Berry and Wilcox, 2015; Cammisa, 1995; Dietrich, 1999) and

thus, can be studied as interest groups in their traditional sense (Renckens, 2020). Some authors emphasise that individual firms are relevant political actors exercising their lobbying capacities (Coen, 1998; McLaughlin et al., 1993). The common characteristics pertaining interest groups that both approaches agree upon are organisation, political interests, and informality. Organisation refers to the fact that an interest group is a more or less organised structure rather than a spontaneous movement or a certain aggregation of public opinion that might influence the decisions of the government. The factor of political interests, which is also referred to as political advocacy, concerns group's attempts to shift policy in a direction that is more desirable for it. Finally, informality means that a group does not seek to be elected or place its representative in a public office. Rather, its strategies to influence policy are based on interactions with policymakers and engagement in lobbying activities (Beyers et al., 2008). Following a more inclusive definition, the following organisations can be considered interest groups: for-profit business firms, non-profit business firms, trade associations, labour unions, professional associations, citizen groups, think tanks, domestic governmental entities, charities, political actions committees (PACs) etc. (Nownes, 2013).

This dissertation adopts a basic understanding of an interest group as a non-party organisation that attempts to affect the government (Berry and Wilcox, 2015; Nownes, 2013). This definition offers a more practical conceptualisation of interest groups. It does not give much weight to the formal characteristics such as membership. Rather, it pays greater attention to occasions when a domestic actor (business corporation, non-profit organisation etc.) acts as an interest group, namely, when it seeks to influence government policy, even if it happens on an *ad hoc* basis. Beyers and his co-authors (2008) suggest to label such groups 'interest organisations' – an equivalent to interest group which does not exercise a function of the aggregation of the preferences of a specific constituency. Taking this into consideration, this dissertation uses the terms 'interest group' and 'interest organisation' interchangeably while referring to (non)membership groups seeking to influence policy. This way of operationalising the independent variable allows for more inclusivity and, thus, provides a broader spectre of actors to explore with regard to their role in state disengagement from IOs.

When discussing a role that interest groups play in the formation of state policies, the concept of power should be mentioned. It is usually conceptualised through the three forms of power: instrumental, structural, and discursive (Renckens, 2020). Instrumental power is a form of power that stems from "actor-specific resources, such as financial, organisational, or human resources" (Fuchs, 2005: 775) and refers to the direct effect one actor (interest group) has on another (government). Instrumental power might also refer to particular mechanisms that

interest organisations can employ to influence state policy. Among them are the so-called ‘revolving door’, a movement of personnel between the public and private sectors, and social networks that facilitate lobbying (Fuchs, 2005). Even though this concept is used predominantly in relation to businesses, it also appears applicable to non-profit and non-governmental organisations (Leroux and Goerdel, 2009). Structural power covers the influence of interest groups on agenda-setting and the pool of alternatives from which policymakers can choose. Finally, discursive power can be observed when interest groups resort to the strategies of framing policy, ideas, and norms. The influence is, hence, exerted indirectly (Renckens, 2020). For example, interest groups usually have expert knowledge on the topic of their interest. Since media seeks to explain complex topics to their readers in a simple way, they often rely on metaphors and analogies supplied by interest groups, which allows the latter to influence framing of a specific issue (Culpepper, 2010).

It is evident that different faces of power are materialised through different strategies that interest groups can employ to influence policies. Moreover, these strategies can be available to or favoured by some groups and not used by the others. Binderkrantz (2008) presents two direct and two indirect strategies of how interest groups can influence policy-making. The former consists of approaching decision-makers in the bureaucracy and in the legislative body; the latter includes engaging with the media and mobilising supporters. The author suggests that public interest groups (e.g., environmental or humanitarian) tend to seek for attention in the public sphere and thus, are more likely to turn to media while trying to exert influence. Private or public groups with corporative resources, consisting of the significant participation in economy and production of public service, and valued by officials, exert influence by engaging with the bureaucracy. Both types of groups utilise interactions with the legislative bodies. Dür and Mateo (2013) refer to similar distinction among interest groups’ strategies and conceptualise them as inside (influencing decision-makers directly) and outside (mobilising and/or changing public opinion) lobbying used predominantly by business associations and citizen groups respectively. It is also possible for interest groups to enter coalitions in order to benefit from resource sharing and an increase in the number of supporters/constituents seen by officials as more persuasive and effective (Fyall, 2016).

It should be mentioned that this dissertation does not differentiate between activities conducted by for-profit and non-profit groups. In other words, it applies the term ‘lobbying’ when describing campaigns undertaken by any interest group studied in the dissertation. Despite the common misconception dominating mainly due to the negative view of lobbying (Pekkanen and Smith, 2014), non-profit organisations do lobby (Chand, 2017). In addition,

since ‘advocacy’ is a broad term used to describe attempts to influence public policy and ‘lobbying’ is a subtype of advocacy (Mosley et al., 2020), this dissertation uses these terms interchangeably to refer to any efforts conducted by any interest group (defined broadly) to influence the outcome of policy-making.

The adopted definition of interest groups and various ways to study interest groups’ power and influence define how their role may be measured. Defining and measuring the influence of interest groups is a highly challenging task and a topic for a separate research. It is, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in a debate on how to measure influence. Moreover, this dissertation does not seek to focus on one type of interest groups (e.g. only on business interest groups). On the opposite, it is expected that businesses, non-profits, and NGOs constitute the domestic level in both cases. In other words, there is competition for influence over policy among various interest groups. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is chosen when identifying which interest group(s) is able to exert more influence.

In addition, since some of the domestic actors might act as interest groups on an *ad hoc* basis, common ways of measuring interest groups’ influence such as looking at their campaign contributions (e.g., da Conceição-Heldt, 2011) might not be applicable (yet, they should not be dismissed). Therefore, to complement the analysis of various types of power available to relevant interest groups, this dissertation also considers the most immediate mechanism of influence – participation in decision-making (Andrews and Edwards, 2004)¹⁰. It also adopts one of many approaches to operationalise influence – through studying access – and follows it while analysing case studies. Although access does not equal influence, the former is more likely to indicate the latter (Bouwen, 2004). In other words, groups that enjoy access to the Administration or Parliament, are more likely to exert influence than those without access. The goal of interest groups’ access to public actors might be the one of receiving relevant information rather than influencing policy-making. Similarly, politicians and government officials can facilitate access in order to obtain information from businesses and use it in their interests. Yet, one should not underestimate the impact that specific selection and framing of information can have (Fuchs, 2005). Access that interest groups enjoy tends to be conceptualised as “an exchange relations between public officials and organised interests in which the transmission of policy relevant information has a central place” (Beyers and Braun, 2014: 95). This also means that access is easier to observe in real life, e.g. by looking at personal

¹⁰ Apart from access to decision-making, Andrews and Edwards (2004) identify other areas of interest groups’ influence, namely, agenda-setting, achieving preferable policies, controlling implementation, and shifting the long-term priorities political institutions.

or indirect interactions, participation in meetings and advisory committees, exchange of relevant information etc. (Arras and Beyers, 2019; Binderkrantz et al., 2017).

It is expected to observe the presence of various interest groups with potentially competing preferences. Most relevant of them will be explored regarding the level of power and access they enjoy, and strategies they employ to exert influence, following the suggested operationalisation scheme. Then, building on this, an interest group will be identified as most fitting to be capable of influencing foreign policy.

Finally, both independent variables have to be analysed with regard to the preferences they entail. As stated by the theoretical propositions, in order for an interest group or government branch to bring about state disengagement, it has to have a respective preference. Therefore, final step of the analysis of the independent variables is identifying preferences of a particular domestic actor. Various sources such as statements, recorded exchanges, committee hearings, and secondary resources are used to investigate what position a specific domestic actor took regarding state policy towards the IO in question. These preferences will be then compared with the respective policy draft or proposal in order to trace which ones got translated into an actual policy decision.

3.4. Causal mechanism

This section outlines and operationalises the causal mechanism that connects the independent and dependent variables and is based on two propositions drawn from the existing literature on the two-level game framework. The mechanism unites two hypotheses as they are expected to operate simultaneously. Therefore, X is defined as ‘relevant domestic actor’ and consists of X₁ – government branch that dominates in policy-making towards an IO, and X₂ – interest group exerting more influence. The causal mechanism consists of several parts which include a presentation of expected empirical manifestations of the mechanism (Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

Figure 3.1 presents the theorised causal mechanism:

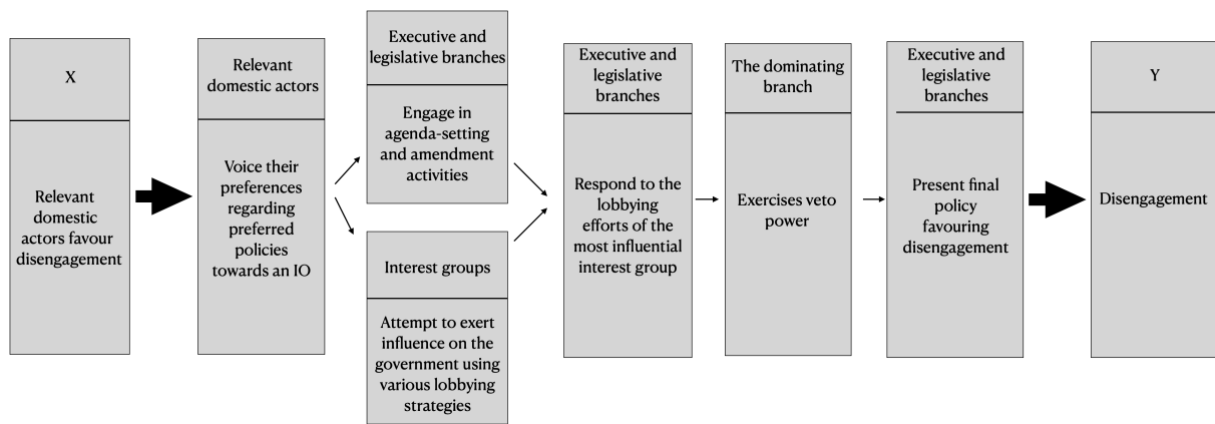


Figure 3.1 Causal mechanism between X and Y (own creation)

The first part of the causal mechanism involves the demonstration of preferences regarding state policy towards an IO by the relevant actors, i.e., the government and interest groups concerned with an IO at hand. It is expected that there will be divergence in preferences among these actors. In other words, within the government, the executive and legislative branches might have different positions as to how the state should proceed regarding an IO. Similarly, some interest groups are expected to align more with the executive and some – with the legislative branch. Based on the topic of this dissertation, some of the groups are expected to advocate for policy that has disengagement as an end point, while others – for policy focused on staying engaged in the IO in question. The assumption is that interest groups form their preferences according to the benefits that they expect to obtain from a specific policy (Frieden et al., 2015). Thus, it is worth paying attention to which interest groups prefer the former option and which – the latter. In order to identify each actor’s preferences, both primary and secondary resources will be used. Specifically, public statements (oral and/or written), policy papers, reports, and other secondary sources will be analysed.

The second part of the mechanism consists of two processes that are expected to occur simultaneously. On the one hand, the executive and legislative branches of the government enter negotiations. In other words, due to the balance of power between two branches, it is expected that one of them will set the agenda, while the other one will seek to amend it according to its preferences. This can be visible when, for example, an agenda-setter submits a policy proposal for consideration by an actor with amendment power. This part of the causal mechanism can also involve lobbying conducted by one of the branches towards another one via offering side-payments or recruiting key players to support policy suggested by the former.

At the same time, relevant interest groups attempt to exert influence on the government. Given the operationalisation of this variable, it can be done via different means that can be summarised in terms of inside and outside lobbying. Various interest groups are expected to differ in the level of their power (instrumental, structural, and discursive). In addition, they can enjoy different level of access to the government and its officials which, as was stated earlier, affects to what extent they can influence policy-making, if at all. Therefore, it has to be examined which group/groups are more likely to influence decision-makers. That is, which groups are more powerful and enjoy broader access. In order to pinpoint groups with more influence, a wide-range of evidence must be collected. Among indicators of group's power are its lobbying expenditures, group's size (how many employees can be tasked with research and lobbying), its reputation, previous experience and connections with the government and government officials. In terms of access, list of committees' and/or hearings' participants, press releases, oral announcements, news pieces reporting interactions between an interest group and the government, and other recorded exchanges of information/opinion can be used. Finally, interest groups' materials directed to the general public (e.g., a promo-video or critical article) can demonstrate the group's outside lobbying. It is important to mention that in this dissertation, a rather inclusive understanding of interest groups and their lobbying (e.g., organisations or firms as *ad hoc* interest groups) is adopted. Therefore, the expectation is that certain evidence of lobbying activity might not be applicable for some of them (e.g., information regarding how much resources are spent on lobbying per year). Nevertheless, other abovementioned indicators are used to balance the lack of this information and compare interest groups regarding their ability to influence the government.

The third part of the causal mechanism describes the process when the government responds to the lobbying efforts of the relevant interest groups. The expectation is that the government's final policy decision will reflect to a certain extent the policy preferences of the most influential interest group. This can be checked by comparing the policy proposals offered by interest groups and the government. Policy-making is a process, so is lobbying. Therefore, it is expected that before the formulation of the final policy, several iterations of interactions between interest groups and the government can occur. In the next step of the mechanism, the executive and the legislature can negotiate a policy proposal which accommodates their preferences shaped partially by the most influential interest group and present a final policy decision. Alternatively, the veto player exercises their power in order to reject the other branch's proposal and push for policy that is more in line with their preferences. In the final part of the causal mechanism, policy towards an IO favouring disengagement is presented via

a published document (law, bill etc.). This, in turn, leads to the outcome – disengagement from an IO.

The hypothesised causal mechanism is informed by the two-level game framework which also defines the environment in which the causal mechanism is expected to play out. The so-called scope condition (Beach, 2017; Falleti and Lynch, 2009) of the causal mechanism of state disengagement from IOs is the presence of some form of the division of power and the ability of non-governmental actors to influence policy-making. This means that the causal mechanism developed on the basis of the two-level game approach is expected to function in a democratic regime type. Although the framework can be effectively applied to policy-making in non-democratic regimes (Breuning, 2007; Steinberg and Shih, 2012; Weeks and Crunkilton, 2017), the mechanism might be different. It is expected to occur because main components of the two-level game approach, while present, tend to function differently. For example, in autocracies, interest groups would have different access points through which they could influence policies while the ratification would depend on the “selectorate”, a group of domestic actors able to remove an incumbent from office (Steinberg and Shih, 2012). Additionally, unlike in democracies, the impact of public opinion is expected to be mostly indirect or implied (Breuning, 2007).

Next two chapters present the empirical analysis of the chosen case studies that is guided by the theory and developed causal mechanism. Although the two-level game approach offers a rich set of tools to analyse the concept of disengagement, the research can benefit from alternative perspectives regarding factors leading to disengagement. Three alternative explanations will be eventually offered in the conclusive Chapter 6 (see Section 6.2). They will either highlight the strength of the explanatory power of the two-level game framework or lay out venues for future research.

4. Case study 1: US disengagement from the ITU through the change of venue

In order to answer the research question about how and why states disengage from IOs, this chapter examines the case of internet governance. Specifically, it looks at the issue of DNS and a process which resulted in the ITU losing its focality in this field due to the US disengagement through the shift to an alternative institution called IACNN.

Following the method of structured and focused comparison, the case study is organised in a way ensuring the obtainment of systematic and comparable data. First, a brief description of the context of internet governance, specifically the management of DNS, is provided. Afterwards, the main relevant actors involved in the issue are mapped. This is followed by the two-level game explanation of the US disengagement from the ITU based on the theorised causal mechanism developed in the theoretical chapter (Section 3.4).

This case demonstrates how domestic actors including the executive and legislative government branches, as well as interest groups, influence state disengagement from IOs. On the one hand, the chapter examines how different interest groups relevant for the policy issue at hand engaged with the government, what strategies and means (e.g. lobbying strategies, organising coalitions) they employed to influence it, and which interest groups were able to affect the government in a more effective way. On the other, it investigates how the two branches of the government were involved, what balance of power between them looked like, and how they responded to interest groups' lobbying. Detailed tracing of the abovementioned aspects demonstrates how the US disengaged from the ITU by creating a new institution.

4.1. General context: Technology and the need for its governance

Internet and its governance *per se* are not the focus of this dissertation. However, it is crucial to understand how it came about, which actors were involved, and which issues revealed themselves during the process of its formation, in order to capture the essence of the US disengagement from the ITU.

The system that we call the 'internet' was created in the US in the late 1960s. Originally, it was a research project conducted by the US Department of Defence (mainly through the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)) and some universities, the majority of which was located in California. Later, the National Science Foundation (NSF) extended this network to include more stakeholders (Lahmann et al., 2017). As a result, internet became a product of collaboration, sometimes unordered, among the government, academia, and business.

The internet and its governance were affected significantly by the adoption of DNS, a system that converts website names as we know them into Internet Protocol (IP) addresses to make a search performed by routers more efficient. In a nutshell, the scheme of how data communication takes place on the internet is as follows. Messages are broken into smaller units known as packets; these packets are then transferred from network to network. In order to know where to go, each packet carries a numerical address – IP address (Mueller, 2002). To make the process more user-friendly, each numerical address is associated with a particular alphabetical address (Mathiason and Kuhlman, 1998). For example, the IP address 129.187.255.151 corresponds to www.tum.de. When one types www.tum.de in a browser, the router has to find its numeric twin. Domain name allows it to limit the search and only do it for the addresses ending with ‘.de’, while making the procedure faster and more efficient. The suffixes such as .de, .com, .gov etc. are known as top-level domains (TLDs). The crucial aspect of DNS for internet governance is that both kinds of addresses (alphabetical and numerical) became “valuable resources, a kind of virtual real estate that can be sold and bought” (Mueller, 2002: 6).

Another important component is the root of the name and address space (henceforth, the root) – essentially the headquarters of the internet (see Figure 4.1). It contains a file with the IP addresses and their alphabetical configurations of the DNS servers for all TLDs: generic ones (gTLDs) like .com and country codes (ccTLDs) like .de. Hence, the root is the first step in translating alphabetical names into IP addresses (Musiani, 2016). The authority over the root included the following set of functions: 1) policy-making regarding IP addresses and management of their allocation and assignment; 2) management of top-level domain names¹¹; and 3) operating of root servers containing information about the top level of the domain name space. The system was organised in such a way that a designated person would have the authority to assign and resolve names at all levels of the DNS hierarchy. For a very long time the ultimate authority over the assignment of names and IP addresses resided in the hands of Jon Postel – one of the most significant contributors to the development of the internet. Together with the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), Postel brought DNS into full operation in the mid-1980s and was responsible for its maintenance until his death in 1998 (Mueller, 2002).

¹¹ This function can be especially political as top-level domain names include so-called country-code top-level domains (ccTLD). ccTLD are specifically designated for a state or territory and, thus, represent the identity of a country on the internet (Christou and Simpson, 2009). For example, a partially-recognized state of Kosovo seeks to obtain its own ccTLD as a sign of its recognition and digital independence (Stenlund, 2018).

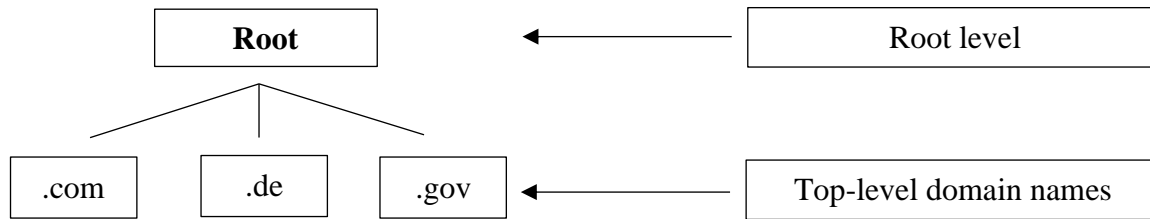


Figure 4.1 The hierarchy of DNS (own creation)

Postel and his colleagues who also participated in the establishment of the internet viewed themselves as the authority. They also had their own idea of how the internet should develop: “as an open, noncommercial network run by selfless experts for the benefits of all” (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008: 30). However, the internet development took the path of commercialisation. Nevertheless, despite the high technical, political, and economic importance of DNS and its root, none of the two was claimed by any established organisation or institution. Rather, internet’s number and name spaces were controlled by an informal technical community that was dispersed and unincorporated (Mueller, 2002). Moreover, they lacked a legal basis to claim their authority of the root and DNS (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008).

In short, the significant commercialisation of the internet and the absence of a coordinated authority to handle all issues related to it (including the distribution of domain names) led to the question of who owned the root and contestation among a relatively vast number of actors over this issue. Internet governance became a policy concern only in 1998, when the US government decided to institutionalise the internet (Mathiason, 2008). As a result, new institutions emerged. The next few chapters will outline how ICANN came into play, how the US chose it over the ITU, and what role the US domestic politics played in this outcome.

4.2. Mapping of relevant actors

This section lists actors that were involved in the process leading to the establishment of ICANN. It should be mentioned that internet governance includes a wide range of different actors such as businesses, the internet community, intellectual property interest groups, NGOs, and many others (an elaborate list can be found in Bygrave and Michaelsen (2009) and Mueller (2002)). However, some of them are omitted as the scope of this thesis does not allow for consideration of non-crucial actors in the issue of the US disengagement from the ITU at the same level of depth. The goal of this section is to introduce the reader to relevant stakeholders that can be divided into four groups: international organisations, the US government, the private sector, and the technical community. This information is crucial for the further examination of

the process of the establishment of ICANN and disengagement from the ITU. This section only briefly introduces the relevant actors and how they are connected to the issue of the internet and DNS, while their preferences and specific role in the US disengagement from the ITU are presented in the further sections of this chapter.

4.2.1. International Telecommunication Union

In the 1990s, the ITU was considered an important global player in the field of the standardisation of telecommunications (Balbi and Fickers, 2020; Cowhey, 1990). It also acted as a regulatory body and was rather successful, for example, in establishing international cartel rules which made it possible for national monopolies to preclude competition (Carpenter, 2013). The role of the ITU in the development of the internet, however, appears to be less important.

Given the organisation's regulatory role in other aspects of telecommunications, it seemed only natural to the administration of the ITU, that it was the first candidate to take charge of managing internet's addresses and names (Carpenter, 2013). However, some scholars argue that the Union was not fit for the role of internet regulator at the institutional level. The organisational structure of the ITU consisting of three divisions where ITU-R was responsible for radio communications, ITU-T previously known as CCITT – for standardisation in telecommunications, and ITU-D covered technical assistance to developing countries, demonstrated that the internet was not among main issues on the organisation's agenda (Ryan and Glick, 2012; Voelsen, 2019).

Others, however, recognise ITU's efforts – either successful or not – to stay relevant and engage in a fast-developing field (Balbi and Fickers, 2020; Winseck, 2020). Scholars and the ITU itself trace the organisation's involvement in the issue of the internet back to the first half of the 1990s. The organisation got its first access to the internet in 1991. In 1995, it was already sponsoring an event called the Geneva Internet Day. The event was open to the public but its main target was various UN organisations located in the city. The Geneva Internet Day aimed at spreading awareness about the new technology and getting those IOs interested in using it to their benefit (Carpenter, 2013). In October of the same year, the ITU hosted TELECOM 95, an exhibition and forum featuring among others the two-day internet weekend called internet@telecom95. Secretary-General of the ITU at that time, Pekka Tarjanne, participated in panels alongside internet pioneer Vint Cerf and engineer from the European Council for Nuclear Research known as CERN Brian Carpenter (ITU, 1995a), both of whom were members of Internet Society¹². In 1996, this organisation asked the ITU to join it on the

¹² See Section 4.2.3. for more information about this important player in the issue of DNS management.

International Ad Hoc Committee (IAHC) on domain names (ITU, 2002). The same year, the ITU co-sponsored a workshop on “Coordination and Administration of the Internet” (Shaw, 1997). However, until 1997, neither the final documents of the Plenipotentiary conferences (Geneva, 1992; Kyoto, 1994) – the principal policy-making body – nor the ITU news magazine explicitly mentioned the internet or DNS (see ITU, 1993, 1995b, 2020). The first ITU report that focused on the question of the internet was the 1997 report titled “Challenges to the Network: Telecoms and the Internet” (ITU, 1997a) in which authors discussed various topics regarding the spread of the internet: the challenges it poses, possible scenarios of its further development, economics of the internet etc. (Rudin, 1997).

To sum up, the ITU recognised a need to “be responsive to the fast-changing environment and to retain leadership role in the telecommunication community” (ITU, 1997b: 2). Nevertheless, most scholars agree that the ITU’s role in the telecommunications sector diminished with the appearance of the internet. This forced the organisation to seek ways of reasserting its position and regaining its focality in the field (Mueller, 2002; Shaefer, 2020; Winseck, 2020).

4.2.2. US government and domestic veto players

Over the years, the US government was involved in the development and evolution of the internet in different ways but its role was undoubtedly always important. First, it participated in almost all aspects of the development of the net. Then, it took a position mainly of a funder of research and development (Kahn, 1995). Various departments of the US government were involved, directly or indirectly, in the process of the development of the internet and related innovations including the introduction of DNS. Between 1981 and 1991, the US military was supporting the majority of the functions related to the assignment of names and numbers. Postel’s Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) was financed by DARPA (see Section 4.2.3). However, the internet was becoming more and more civilian. The number of names registered under the .mil – a top-level domain reserved specifically for the US military – was decreasing. This development divided the internet in military and civilian which, in turn, raised issues regarding policy-making and budget allocation. As a response, the Federal Networking Council (FNC) was created in 1990. It was a federal oversight and support body which brought together representatives from different federal agencies that were conducting computer-oriented research programmes. Among them were the Department of Energy, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and NSF. The Council also included external scientists and network users but it was mainly meant to serve as a forum for different US

agencies where they could agree on an informal division of labour. For example, questions discussed by the Council included which agency would fund a project or how the civilian internet can use the military internet infrastructure (Mueller, 2002).

Simultaneously, the growing significance of the civilian internet opened up more space for its commercialisation. In 1992, the US Congress passed the Scientific and Advanced-Technology Act mandating the National Science Foundation to:

“[...] foster and support access by the research and education communities to computer networks which may be used substantially for additional purposes if this will tend to increase the networks' overall capabilities to support research and education in the science and engineering” (US Congress, 1992: 2300).

Essentially, this Act authorised NSF to allow commercial activity on the internet. This was an important development for the network and its users, as it laid a foundation of the internet as we know it now (GAO, 2000).

Undoubtedly, the US government was engaged deeply in the evolution of the internet and was responsible for some key developments. However, it failed to specify whether it was the only institute exercising authority over internet management functions. Nor did it delegate these functions fully to the private sector (Werbach, 1997). Nevertheless, the Reagan administration created a fruitful soil with a flexible legal environment for internet developers. When the registration of domain names started increasing in the late 1980s, the Bush Sr. administration made a first step towards the institutionalisation of DNS. Namely, it partnered with the University of South California's Information Sciences Institute (ISI) and its employee Jon Postel (Kleinwächter, 2004). As a result of this partnership, IANA was established. However, neither IANA nor other non-profit organisations that were participating in the internet administration (e.g., Internet Society, IETF¹³), albeit carrying significant weight and authority in the internet community, had a clear legal status. This ambiguity on both sides (government and the internet community) contributed to the future conflict over who owns one of the key aspects of the internet – the root and thus, manages DNS.

During the process of defining the authority and principles of DNS management, the US domestic political set-up was as follows. Following the 1992 elections, the 103rd Congress (1993-1995) was controlled by Democrats with 258 Democrats against 176 Republicans in the

¹³ In 1986-1987, the National Science Foundation started funding the internet development efforts. Caused by a great impetus to grow, new and more complex engineering problems started disrupting the work of developers as they did not have enough resources to deal with them alone. In response to the much-needed internet technical standards, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) was established in 1986 (Mueller, 2002). IETF was an unincorporated organisation which membership consisted of engineers, designers, operators, and researchers (Bygrave and Michaelsen, 2009).

House and 57 Democrats against 43 Republicans in Senate. The next two Congresses, 104th (1995-1997) and 105th (1997-1999) faced similar party division, although not Republicans dominated both chambers (see Table 4.1).

	103 rd Congress	104 th Congress	105 th Congress
House of Representatives			
Dem.	258	204	207
Rep.	176	230	226
Ind.	1	1	2
Total	435	435	435
Senate			
Dem.	57	48	45
Rep.	43	52	55
Ind.	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100

Table 4.1 US Congress: Party division in 1993-1999. Own creation, based on information from the websites of the United States Senate (US Senate 2021) and United States House of Representatives (Congress Profiles 2021a, 2021b, 2021c).

The commercial significance of the internet became evident in the beginning of the 1990s, and the Clinton administration tried to present their internet-related policies as technology-friendly and pro-market. Both Democrats and Republicans shared a strong preference for ensuring the continuation of the development of new technologies by American firms, organisations, and institutions. The former were willing to continue patronaging the information and technology community. The latter, who had eventually won majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives, promised to avoid new taxes and regulations in this area. Thus, the Administration’s approach eventually became aimed at reducing direct government control and protecting the commercialisation of the internet from traditional regulations on commerce (Cowhey and Aronson, 2009). A significant step towards outlining a design of internet governance was undertaken in 1997. The Clinton administration issued a directive to the Department of Commerce in which the President required the agency and its Secretary to privatise the domain name system. Considering that at that time the internet was already governed partially by some private firms (supported by governmental money)¹⁴, this directive did not seem highly innovative (Feld, 2003). However, its core request outlined the intentions of the US government and the directive became a crucial step towards an ultimate US decision on how to govern the internet.

Between 1995 and 1998 – a key period for DNS – the government was divided with the White House led by a Democrat and Congress dominated by Republicans. Although both parties supported innovation and recognised a need to engage with new technologies, their

¹⁴ See Section 4.2.5

attitudes towards how this should be done were slightly different. Both Republicans and Democrats were highly protective of the technology invented on the American soil (Interviewees #2, 9). However, Democrats were more open to the idea of bringing it to the international level and including non-American stakeholders in the process of its governance (Interviewee #2). In addition, there was an opinion in the Administration and among some stakeholders that Congress should not be involved in decision-making as it was seen as a constraining power that would slow innovation down and prevent it from going global (Interviewee #11).

4.2.3. Internet Assigned Numbers Authority

As was mentioned before, in the first stages of the internet development, the authority over the root rested mainly with Jon Postel. The US government participated in the issue through the funding provided by the Department of Defence and NSF. As the internet started growing and obtaining a financial and political value, the US government decided to undertake the first step in formalising its authority over the root. Recognising the importance of the internet as a facilitator of various commercial and political communications and necessity to guarantee its stability, the US government decided to partner with Postel (Kleinwachter, 2003). In 1988, DARPA renewed the contract with the University of South California's Information Sciences Institute, Postel's employer at that time. As a result, Postel was granted authority to continue running DNS (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008) which he himself started calling IANA¹⁵, which was more a function rather than an institutionalised entity. The IANA function was exercised on behalf of the Internet Activities Board¹⁶ and later, the Internet Society. However, the contract between DARPA and the ISI did not mention IANA, in doing so, making the legal status of the latter rather ambiguous (Bygrave and Michaelsen, 2009).

4.2.4. Internet Society

Another relevant actor is the Internet Society (ISOC), an America-based nonprofit organisation. It was founded in 1992 by Vinton Cerf – one of the Internet's pioneers – to establish a governing structure for the internet which would also serve as a source of funding independent from DARPA and the US government (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008). According to Mueller (2002), ISOC was “an attempt to self-privatize internet governance in a way that finessed the issue of whether approval or any other action from the US government was needed” (Mueller, 2002:

¹⁵ It is common to use IANA when talking about Jon Postel as it was essentially a one-man organisation (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008; Kleinwachter, 2003). This dissertation adopts the same approach.

¹⁶ Internet Activities Board was a predecessor of the Internet Architecture Board (IAB) and acted as a body coordinating the development of the internet and its standards (Bygrave and Michaelsen 2009).

97). ISOC was an important organisation for those involved in the development of the internet and its standards. Before the establishment of ISOC, no organisation took legal responsibilities for the standards that were being created, which made individuals fear personal liability for their decisions and actions regarding standards. The Internet Society filled this gap (Bygrave and Michaelsen, 2009). In addition, ISOC organised workshops and conferences and coordinated the work of other internet-related bodies (Werbach, 1997). The Internet Society established itself as a rather influential organisation which provided financial support and legal protection to other participants of the evolution of the internet. ISOC's role was also recognised by the ITU which admitted the organisation to the Standardization Sector of the Union in 1995 (ITU, 1996). This was just the first step in cooperation between the two organisations. As was mentioned in the previous sections and would be elaborated on later in the chapter, the milestone of the ISOC-ITU cooperation would be the IAHC on domain names.

4.2.5. Network Solutions

In the 1980s, The Department of Defence introduced new regulations regarding their contracts, and as a result, most of them became open for commercial bidding. After Stanford Research Institute's contract to manage the root expired, this function was overtaken by a big contracting firm called "Government Systems Inc." which won the bid in 1990 and outsourced it to the Network Solutions Inc. (NSI) (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008). In 1992, NSI entered a cooperative agreement with NSF, a governmental oversight and support body, and became the sole registrar for nonmilitary domains such as .com, .edu etc. Since then, NSI was the main body for managing, coordinating, and maintaining DNS. The company registered domain names in gTLDs on a first come, first served basis while IANA kept the authority to oversee the overall policy of TLDs – their numbers and content (GAO, 2000; Goldsmith and Wu, 2008). The agreement between NSF and NSI was seen as rather controversial as the latter was a for-profit organisation which essentially became a monopolist in allocating domain names. More criticism arose when NSI started charging for registering domain names in 1995 (Glen, 2017) even though this move was authorised by the National Science Foundation (Balleste, 2015). This coincided with the growth of domain name registrations (the so-called dot-com bubble), and NSI managed to register over 1.5 million domain names between 1993 and 1998 – the period of the company's contract with NSF – which brought it a significant amount of financial benefit (Mueller 2002).

However, the role of NSI was rather controversial. On the one hand, the company's first come, first served policy led to numerous copyright and trademark disputes as some registered

domains conflicted with registered trademarks. The quality of the service provided by NSI also was not perfect. In July 1997, the internet was crippled due to NSI's error in updating the root (Mathiason and Kuhlman, 1998). At that time, it was "the most extensive network breakdown" (Markoff, 1997). On the other hand, NSI had the resources and infrastructure to meet the increasing demand for new top-level domains which the internet community, mainly IANA and the Internet Architecture Board (IAB)¹⁷, lacked¹⁸. Moreover, NSI's dispute resolution policy – the successor of the first come, first served principle – contributed significantly to internet governance. Designed as a tool to protect the company from trademark-related litigations, it was a first attempt to bypass the law of states and use the registry itself to manage and ensure property rights in names (Mueller, 2002). Specifically, the new policy made it possible for US or foreign trademark owners to complain directly to Network Solutions in cases when someone registered their trademarks as domain names (Maher, 1996).

In sum, NSI saw benefit in possessing authority over the root and DNS and was keen on continuing to be the sole registrar. However, this caused significant criticism from the technical community that saw NSI as "greedy, controlling, and monopolistic" (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008: 36). Due to the internet's increasing commercial value, there was also a necessity to ensure more stability of the internet and DNS. According to Vint Cerf, a co-founder of the Internet, the July 1997 breakdown showed that more than one central keeper of internet addresses was needed (Markoff, 1997). All of this led several groups to challenge NSI's authority and seek to end its monopoly (GAO, 2000).

4.3. Two-level game explanation of disengagement

It is evident that the development of the internet involved multiple stakeholders, and all of them had different interests and preferences regarding how the internet should be handled. This became even more apparent once the internet and DNS started turning into a commercial product leading to conflicts concerning financial benefits and property rights. The main struggle unfolded around the question of who owns the root, i.e. who is responsible for managing DNS. Triggered by the expansion of private companies, the internet community decided to solidify their authority. However, this led to a conflict not only with Network Solutions, a *de facto* DNS

¹⁷ The IAB, established in 1992, was another body focusing on internet standards. The IAB acted both as a committee of the IETF, overseeing and coordinating its activity, and an advisory body of Internet Society (Bygrave and Michaelsen, 2009).

¹⁸ This became especially prominent when NSI got acquired by Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) in 1995. SAIC brought in significant financial resources which allowed NSI to buy the most advanced equipment to maintain DNS (Beyster and Daniels, 2013).

monopolist at that time, but also with the US government. This section, hereby, seeks to provide a comprehensive account of a crucial moment for internet governance, namely a struggle for authority over the root, and the US's ultimate decision to transfer it to a newly created body called ICANN leading to the US disengagement from the ITU in the internet domain.

4.3.1. Statement of preferences by the government and relevant interest groups

The internet and its domain and name space were an arena where multiple stakeholders were present. Coming from various sectors, they naturally had rather different preferences regarding the management of DNS. The amplifying commercialisation and expansion of private companies triggered a part of the technical community led by the Internet Society and IANA to make a move towards solidifying their authority over the root and DNS. However, this led to a conflict not only with Network Solutions but also with the US government. The Internet Society and IANA argued for a multi-stakeholder approach, whilst NSI, which at that time enjoyed a significant level of support from the US government and dominated the private sector related to DNS, saw the management of DNS as a purely private sector matter.

The peak of the conflict between these two groups unfolded around three documents: The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) presented by the International Ad Hoc Committee on domain names, followed by the Green and White Papers issued by the US government. As was mentioned earlier, in 1995, Network Solutions started charging for registering domain names. Thanks to the significant increase in registrations, NSI's revenue ballooned and the company realised that "it had hit a gold mine" (Goldsmith and Wu, 2008: 36). At the same time, the contract between NSF and Network Solutions was due to expire in 1998. Both events led to the so-called gTLD-Memorandum of Understanding (henceforth, the MoU or Memorandum) that was presented in 1997 by the IAHC, an initiative led by the Internet Society and comprised by the representatives of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), ITU, IETF, and some other relevant organisations. This initiative was an attempt by the ISOC's CEO Don Heath and Jon Postel of IANA to consolidate their authority over the root and become the primary guardians of the name space while challenging the monopoly of Network Solutions. This monopoly, according to the majority of the technical community, undermined the essence of the internet (Mueller, 2002). The approach to domain name space governance suggested by the Committee was based on Postel's earlier ideas and presented a new form of public-private partnership that would unite technical organisations, the private sector, and intergovernmental organisations, establish a bottom-up process of policy development, and create a new oversight

body charged with the management of key internet resources, including domain names (Tikk-Ringas, 2015).

The process leading to the Memorandum was based on the series of consultations between the IAHC and the internet community through conferences and mailing lists (Mewes, 1998). The Memorandum was signed by 80 governmental and non-governmental parties. This number later grew to 200 signatories (Maher, 2006). Network Solutions was not invited to be a part of the Committee and the US was only represented by George Strawn, an official from NSF, whilst the ITU was a prominent participant of the IAHC. The Memorandum suggested that DNS management should be handled by an agency within the ITU. Namely, the organisation was expected to manage the registration of registrars¹⁹ (Mathiason, 2008). Among other agency's functions were "the maintenance and extension of international cooperation (...) for the improvement and rational use of telecommunications of all kinds" and the circulation of "the gTLD-MoU to the relevant public and private sector entities with an invitation to sign" (gTLD-MoU 1997). The Memorandum was signed in a ceremony supervised by the ITU in the end of April 1997 (Lipscy, 2017). The ITU was assigned a role of the Depository of the Memorandum (gTLD-MoU 1997).

It was goal of the ITU to occupy a certain niche in internet governance due to the Union's historical regulatory role. The narrative set by the organisation proved that. As then ITU Secretary-General Pekka Tarjanne claimed, "My hope is that ITU will play its full role in promoting the development of the internet (...) we intend to be among leaders" (Tarjanne, 1997). Similar to the technical community led by ISOC and IANA, ITU's position on internet governance was characterised by the rejection of "private ownership, and, arguably manipulation" and domination of the US and US-based actors (Tarjanne, 1997).

The ITU was given such a prominent role in the process of taking charge of DNS led by IANA and ISOC for several reasons. The Union was seen by the leaders of the IAHC as an "internationally recognized organisation" (Heath, 1998 as cited in Krempl, 1998) that would guarantee the Committee and its initiative international exposure and challenge the dominance of the US national and commercial interests in the field (Huston, 2004a). The ITU could become a forum where the interests of other nations would be also represented (Shaw, 1997). In addition, the ITU's telecommunications background was an asset. That is, the IO was providing a significant part of the infrastructure of the internet and, therefore, according to Don Heath

¹⁹ The WIPO, meanwhile, accepted a role of an administrator of the arbitration and mediation mechanism presented in the Memorandum (M2 Presswire, 1997a).

who was then ISOC's CEO, had to be involved in the issue of DNS management. Moreover, he emphasised the progress that the ITU had done in the internet domain:

"[...] the ITU and the WIPO were not very knowledgeable about the Internet and yet they were very knowledgeable of aspects of problems we had to solve [...] the ITU has embraced the Internet far more than anybody would have believed" (Heath, 1998 as cited Krempf, 1998).

The leaders of the IAHC envisioned that their DNS plan would introduce competition to the domain name space and urged the US government to endorse it (Pietrucha, 1997). The Memorandum suggested that gTLDs should be managed by 28 new registrars around the world who would also form a Council of Registrars (CORE). CORE was expected to be a non-for-profit organisation operating under Swiss law. The Policy Oversight Committee (POC) was designed to be a body to which CORE would be accountable to, while the Policy Advisory Body (PAB) was comprised of the signatories of the Memorandum (governments and corporations) and was expected to make recommendations to CORE and POC (Kleinwächter, 2000).

Whilst big telecom companies such as France Telecom, Telecom Italia, Bell Canada, and Australian Telstra, as well as some governments (French, Swiss, German, and Pakistani)²⁰ supported the IAHC plan, including a special role of the ITU (ITU, 1997c; M2 Presswire, 1997b), some US-based actors opposed the proposal offered by the IAHC. Major multinational companies originated in the US such as IBM, Bell Atlantic, and AT&T (Mueller, 2002), as well as Network Solutions, found that the Memorandum gave too much power to international organisations and overrode national regulatory mechanisms existing in the US (Mathiason, 2008). This came hardly as a surprise as lobbying of powerful private corporations over public regulators tends to be one of the major tensions that the ITU had to face as a techno-diplomatic actor and forum (Balbi and Fickers, 2020). There was no public confrontation between the IAHC and Network Solutions: the latter reacted to the Committee's proposal in a cautious manner underlining NSI's readiness to enter a discussion in order to reach a consensus (Mueller, 2002; Vesely, 1997). However, several scholars report that the US government was put under pressure by businesses, especially NSI, to reject the Memorandum and take the lead in designing a new plan of domain names management (Goldsmith and Wu 2008, Mathiason, 2008, Mueller, 2002).

²⁰ The level of support varied. For example, Pakistan was rather enthusiastic and hoped that the ITU would be more closely engaged in internet-related issues. France, on the other hand, underlined that ITU's involvement in the MoU should have been first checked by its member states. However, it supported the role of the ITU in the MoU and pointed out problems in the American approach (ITU Council, 1998).

Unlike Network Solutions, the US government was not as solid in its view regarding DNS governance. It did not actively engage in the issue until the publication of the Memorandum and developments that followed. Its position in the internet development and especially, in DNS, was rather ambiguous. On the one hand, it funded a significant, but not all, portion of the development of the internet. As Froomkin (2000: 22) puts it:

“As the paymaster for these contractors [internet community volunteers, NSF, civilian and military contractors, and grant recipients], the US government became the de facto ruler of the DNS, although it barely exercised – and for a long time may not in any real sense have been aware of – its power”.

On the other hand, the US government submitted to the necessity to slowly withdraw from being involved in the domain name space. It saw internet governance and domain name allocation as areas where “the government certainly should be a participant” but where “the private sector should be leading” (Magaziner, 1997).

In March 1997, the presidential policy adviser Ira Magaziner, who was in charge of developing an e-commerce policy framework since 1995, set up an Interagency working group on domain names. The group was chaired by Brian Kahin, an official from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. He was later joined by J. Beckwith Burr, a lawyer from the Department of Commerce. At the moment when the ITU issued invitations to the meeting of the signatories of the Memorandum, the group had been only existing for a few weeks (Mueller, 2002). After the issuance of the Memorandum, the position of the US government became more pronounced. Specifically, it condemned the leading role of the ITU in the whole process. In her cable sent on May 1, 1997, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright accused Secretary-General Tarajne of overstepping his mandate by signing the Memorandum on domain names without consultations with ITU member states. The US government was opposed to entrusting internet governance to an establishment (CORE) operating under Swiss law and linked to the ITU, an organisation with which it had a history of contestation over various standardisation issues (Lipsy, 2017) and where one-country-one-vote governance structure was operational (Kleinwächter, 2000; 2004). Several unidentified members of the Interagency working group mentioned their concern that “international organisations will have too great a role in the process” and “an Internet-related issues [will be addressed to] a forum that has traditionally done telecommunications regulation, like the ITU” (cited in Mueller, 2002: 157).

In July 1997, US President Bill Clinton issued a Presidential Executive Order authorising the Secretary of Commerce to privatise domain names, specifically:

“...[to] support efforts to make the governance of the domain names system private and competitive and to create a contractually based self-regulatory regime that deals with potential conflicts between domain name usage and trademark laws on a global basis” (Clinton, 1997).

It became clear that the US government preferred to have a non-state actor rather than an intergovernmental organisation such as the ITU in charge of DNS (Drezner, 2004).

Clinton’s Order allowed the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) at the Department of Commerce to launch a process of public commenting on DNS policy issues. In the Request for Comments, it was once again underlined that the government prefers private sector leadership in the issue (Daley, 1997). Based on around 280 comments collected in July-August 1997, Ira Magaziner started preparing a proposal on the management of internet domain names (Mathiason, 2008). Meanwhile, several congressional hearings also took place. Two of them focused on discussing internet domain names themselves and the IAHC’s proposition on how to manage them and took place in September 1997. The third one was held in March 1998 and included a debate on the plan presented by Ira Magaziner known as the Green Paper.

Among participants of the hearings were Jon Postel of IANA; Donald Heath of ISOC, Gabriel Battista, the CEO of Network Solutions, as well as some government officials in charge of domain name policies, and business lobbyists. The hearings were dominated by the critiques of the Memorandum. Some of them were opposed to the way of managing domain name space proposed by the IAHC. Vice-Chairman of the Basic Research Subcommittee Charles Pickering commented on the IAHC and management of DNS:

“American taxpayers have helped build the Internet as well as many U.S. companies and private sector investors. To now go into a transition plan that moves that to another country offshore – whether it’s Switzerland or any other country – I think would raise questions among American taxpayers, the American public” (Pickering, 1997 as cited in Clausing, 1997).

Some were arguing directly against the ITU and its dominance in the process. The CEO of Network Solutions stated that “an appropriate international anchoring organisation does not currently exist” (Battista, 1997). Larry Irving, Assistant Secretary for Commerce for Communications and Information, reported that many commenters considered organisations like the ITU “unaccountable, unelected, and unlikely to consult with the Internet community (...) moving too slowly to address rapidly developing Internet issues” (Irving, 1997). Concerns over ITU’s unresponsiveness and lack of accountability to businesses and consumers were also

mentioned (see Sernovitz, 1997). Among commenters there were also supporters of the IAHC plan who saw the ITU as a valuable way to exert a check on US dominance in internet governance (Irving, 1997). Nevertheless, most of the participants of the hearings and commenters demonstrated a strong attitude against the IAHC plan with its multi-stakeholder approach. Some participants simply did not see a reason for the ITU and other IOs to be involved in internet governance in the first place. Among them were Anthony Rutkowski (Rutkowski, 1997), a leading internet and telecommunications expert who previously served as executive director of the Internet Society and an adviser to the ITU Secretary-General (Swisher, 1996), and Barbara Dooley, executive director of the trade association of internet service providers, who noted that:

“(...) the International Telecommunications Union, which is historically a regulatory body composed of governments and which has had little justification for involvement in data networking over the Internet. There is nothing on the record or that can be justified historically (as, for example, the US Government’s funding for the Internet) that justifies the ITU’s involvement in Internet governance and policymaking. The ITU’s unresponsiveness to the marketplace, the one nation-one vote governance structure, the difficulty for any but large multinational companies to have input into ITU standards bodies are of concern” (Dooley, 1997).

In sum, in the US, two major camps were formed around the question of who can administer DNS and how it should be done (see Figure 4.2). On the one hand, there were ISOC and IANA that advocated for a multi-stakeholder approach with the strong involvement of international institutions such as the ITU and WIPO. They were supported by some domestic and foreign companies. On the other – the US government and Network Solutions that were also supported by other stakeholders from the private sector. Although the motivations of the government and NSI differed (the former was concerned with keeping some level of control over DNS whilst the latter was interested in keeping its highly lucrative status of the main registrar), their preferences were aligned: both strongly opposed the IAHC plan on how to manage DNS and believed that the US historically had more incentives and justifications to be involved in the issue. This case illustrates that in the beginning, the position of the US government was influenced by the private sector interests, especially those promoted by NSI. In the next section, I will explore to what extent NSI influenced the decision of the US government to reject the Memorandum on domain names and whether there were attempts to lobby the government by ISOC and IANA.

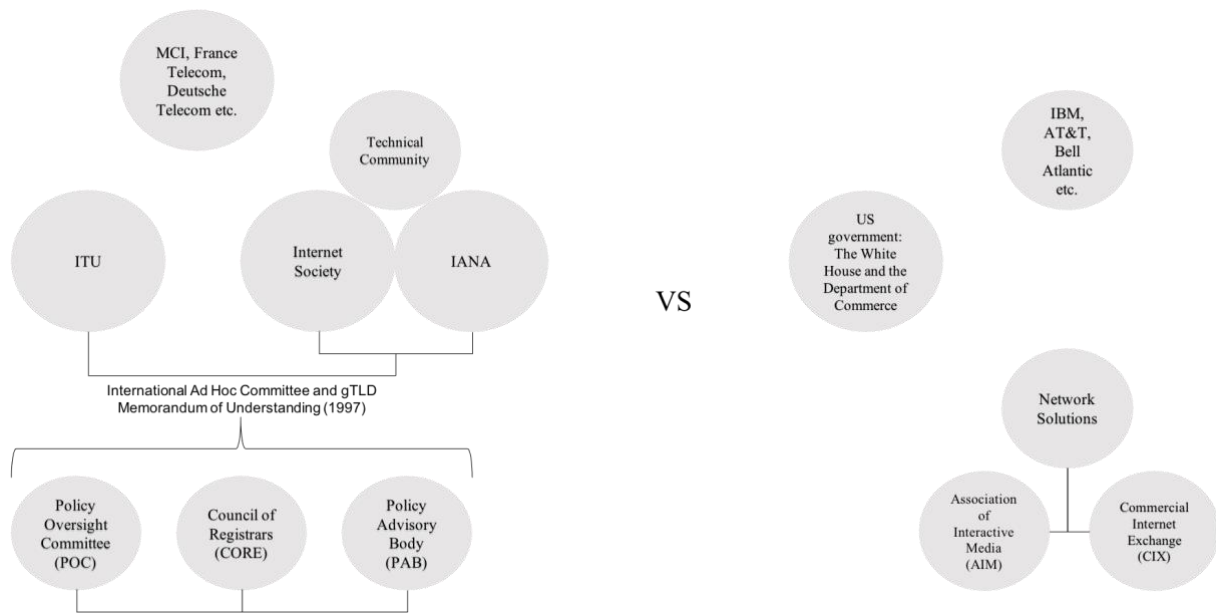


Figure 4.2 Preference constellation among major stakeholders and their supporters (own creation)

4.3.2. Interest groups access the government: IANA and the Internet Society vs NSI

The first round of access to the government evolved mainly around the question of whether the Memorandum of Understanding proposed by the IAHC is a valid way of DNS management. There were two major contenders – the IAHC with its derivatives and NSI – that were expected to try to influence the government’s position on DNS management. This section seeks to identify which group had more power, enjoyed broader access to the government and thus, played a greater role in forming governmental policy.

The major stakeholder from the private sector was Network Solutions. The company was preparing for an initial public offering in early 1997. Since its main source of income was coming from its control of the .com, the prospect of losing control over it and having to compete with alternative registrars forced the company to start acting²¹. The CEO of the company at that moment noted in an interview that they “were talking to anyone [they] could to put forth [their] position” (Battista, 1998 as cited in Hesseldahl, 1998).

While a relatively small company itself, NSI was backed by its parent company, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) which acquired Network Solutions in 1995 just before the latter started charging for registering domain names. At that time, SAIC was a government contractor which worked closely with the Pentagon and US intelligence agencies

²¹ Apart from the IAHC initiative, Network Solutions faced other troubles. In July 1997, it underwent a hacker attack and in September, Network Solutions became a defendant in an antitrust suit which it, however, won (Mueller, 2002). NSI, therefore, was highly interested in remaining a sole registrar in order to successfully go public.

(Bigelow, 2009a). This acquisition was seen by SAIC as a promising investment. Being a \$1.9 billion company in 1995 (PR Newswire, 1995), SAIC bought NSI only for \$4.7 million seeing it as an investment with good potential. However, the significant increase in domain name registrations and the subsequent influx of profit exceeded any expectations. Unsurprisingly, having realised that they had discovered a highly lucrative source of profit, SAIC was not interested in a scenario where somebody intervened in their strategy of gaining more profit. As noted by an Interviewee, the company had a “very rough and tumble point of view, they did not want their ‘cash cow’ to go to Geneva” (Interviewee #1). Officially, however, SAIC and NSI were concerned with a top-down approach taken by the IAHC which became a reason for them to get actively involved in the policy aspect of the issue and advocate for a more free-market approach (Beyster and Daniels, 2013).

SAIC and NSI were in a very good position to influence effectively policy-making regarding DNS. SAIC enjoyed great instrumental power thanks to its vast resources, political savvy, and access to lobbying mechanisms such as ‘revolving door’. Two companies could also act as an agenda-setter thanks to NSI’s proven experience in managing DNS and the absence of other companies with similar portfolio, which increased companies’ structural power. Although NSI was closely connected to some of the relevant government agencies, for example, NSF, SAIC was the one to provide an elaborate strategy of how to work with the government and the resources for its implementation. The firm was quite experienced in the domain of government relations. It had a dedicated department responsible for government affairs and was reported to make more than \$100,000 in political contributions every election cycle (Simpson and Simons, 1998).

The majority of people in Congress, the White House, and various federal agencies did not pay too close attention to the internet, nor did they appreciate the importance of the domain name system. Consequently, SAIC embarked on a mission to “educate the powers that be in Washington” (Beyster and Daniels, 2013: 1417) which, according to J. Robert Beyster and Michael A. Daniels, SAIC’s CEO and senior executive respectively, became one of the most important things that SAIC did. The focus of this educational campaign was domain names, Network Solutions and its registration business, and important policy questions related to domain names. According to Daniels, in the period from 1995 to 2000, “at least one-half of the entire United States Senate and House members as well as senior White House and cabinet-level officials” were brought to tour NSI’s facilities (Daniels, 2009 as cited in Bigelow, 2009b).

Apart from its great financial resources, SAIC had a reputational advantage. The company was “a trusted brand that was well regarded in government circles” (Beyster and Daniels, 2013: 1666). In addition, it enjoyed an extensive network of government connections that was established mainly through the ‘revolving door’ mechanism. The company relied heavily on its former employees who had moved to government positions (Douglass and Hasemyer, 1995).

Under the guidance from its parent company, Network Solutions began working with the government in order to shape a more favourable policy on DNS. NSI made its first political donation of \$7,500 to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and hired “top-dollar” lobbyists with close ties to Vice president Al Gore. One of them – Greg Simon – was Gore’s top technology adviser until March 1997 and hence, presented a typical case of the ‘revolving door’ mechanism. Since in accordance with the Federal law Simon could not lobby his former colleagues from the White House, he engaged in lobbying the Department of Commerce. Simon is reported to accompany Network Solutions representatives to the meetings with J.B. Burr and Larry Irving – Commerce Department’s officials who were in charge in different capacities of the issue of DNS management (Simpson and Simons, 1998). Both of them also participated in the congressional hearings on DNS²². Network Solutions also used services of Dutko & Associates, one of the top lobbying firms in 1997-1998 (Ness, 2000) which specialised in telecommunications policy. Dan Dutko, firm’s founder, was a good friend of NSI’s CEO Gabe Battista (Beyster and Daniels, 2013). He was also closely connected to Al Gore and was the single biggest fundraiser for the DNC. The Network Solutions’ parent company, SAIC, also hired a former White House deputy chief of staff, Harold Ickes, as an adviser on the matter of DNS (Simpson and Simons, 1998).

Having a rather solid foundation stemming from their instrumental and structural power, SAIC and NSI also engaged in activities aimed at affecting how and what people thought of DNS and the role of Network Solutions in its management. Leveraging its discursive power, NSI turned to some outreach tactics while trying to improve the public image of the company that suffered from the general backlash coming from the technical community, breakdown of the internet in July 1997, and the rise of lawsuits from companies and individuals. Chuck Gomes, internet relations and compliance vice president at NSI, started contributing to the domain policy list – a public forum hosted by Network Solutions to discuss domain policy and intellectual property issues. After some period of negativity, Gomes was reportedly able to gain

²² See Irving (1997); Burr (1997).

trust from list's participants and develop effective working relationships with them (Beyster and Daniels, 2013).

In a tactical alliance with Network Solutions were other US-based businesses some of which were also represented during the congressional hearings. For example, Andrew Sernovitz, one of the most outspoken critics of the IAHC plan, served as president of the Association of Interactive Media, a Washington-based trade organisation that represented businesses using internet, among which were Price Waterhouse LLP and Citicorp (Quick, 1998). Barbara Dooley, also a critic of the IAHC, was the executive director of Commercial Internet Exchange. It was a large trade organisation for internet service providers and other companies that offered access to the internet. Its main financial supporter – AT&T – was among those who rejected to support the Memorandum (Mueller, 2002).

Unlike NSI and SAIC, the technical community led by IANA and the Internet Society did not have an opportunity or desire to engage in an extensive lobbying campaign. Multiple interviewees underscored that there was a significant discrepancy between the private sector (mostly NSI and SAIC) and technical community in how they interacted with the government (Interviewees #1, 2, 5, 6). As captured by an interviewee when comparing strategies of influence of the private sector and academia, which constituted a significant part of the technical community involved in the issue of DNS:

“[...] Those dynamics do not work in the academic environment. In the academic environment, the way you interact with the members of Congress or Administration is to pretend that you are educating them about some topic that they need to know more about. So, interactions are never considered lobbying and you are very careful about that because lobbying and nonprofit status conflict with each other, whereas it is understood that commercial companies lobby and it is okay for them to do that because they pay taxes and the universities do not” (Interviewee #2).

This view might be contested as nonprofits do engage in lobbying, although there is no doubt that businesses tend to mobilise more effectively and lobby at higher levels (Chand, 2017). Moreover, the technical community used strategies of influence similar to NSI's. Namely, it also engaged in educating relevant officials through personal interactions and participated in congressional hearings which was considered by its counterparts from NSI as proper and rival lobbying (see Beyster and Daniels, 2013).

The main channel through which the technical community coalition tried to exert influence was based on personal connections, meetings, and the recognition of ISOC as a focal point in internet-related issues. The Internet Society organised information sessions in different parts of the world. Sometimes rather high-level people were invited, some of whom eventually became ministers in their governments. Attendees would get “indoctrinated” (Interviewee #9)

on the principles of the internet as seen by ISOC. According to the Interviewee #9, this strategy “created a group of people who were emotionally charged with protecting the internet from governments and corporation’s takeover, who were committed to the Internet Society, people that were in governments all over the world” (Interviewee #9).

Finally, one of the Interviewees pointed out a ‘cultural difference’. Some technical experts were rather cautious about the government involvement and preferred to stay out of it arguing that they were “experts”, they had “their own way of doing things”, and they “did not need the lawyers in suits” (Interviewee #1). Marilyn Cade, a top AT&T lobbyist, recalls a phone call with Jon Postel where he said that “he did not understand Washington, he did not understand politics” (Cade, 2017). Organisations that represented the technical community took on a role of an observer of the policy-making process and seemed as if they were not interested in positioning themselves as a key player in policy discussions (Interviewee #6).

Even though SAIC executives argue that the technical community engaged in extensive lobbying against the domain name fee and NSI’s monopoly position as both the registry and registrar of domain names (Beyster and Daniels, 2013), it is clear that the technical community had less power and resources to influence in a meaningful way the policy-making process. It is rather evident that the private sector led by NSI and its parent company SAIC had significantly more instrumental power stemmed from its human, organisational, and financial resources, to exert influence on governmental policy towards DNS management. Moreover, thanks mainly to SAIC’s experience and political savvy, NSI enjoyed broader access to various government agencies and officials. IANA and ISOC, on the other hand, could not employ the same means to advocate for their preferences. They enjoyed significant reputational weight and authority within the technical community and were acknowledged by outsiders for their expertise. However, IANA and ISOC lacked the will to instrumentalise their advantages by turning them into structural and discursive power. Additionally, significantly lower organisational and financial resources hindered their chances to stir policy-making regarding DNS in a direction that was more aligned with their preferences. As well summarised by the Interviewee #2, “If you have money, you speak louder” (Interviewee #2).

4.3.3. Response of the US government: The Green Paper

The NTIA was expected to present a plan for DNS management in November 1997. However, the issuance of a policy statement was postponed on several occasions due to intense lobbying and elaborate consultations with stakeholders conducted by Magaziner, Kahin, and Burr. A policy proposal that became known as the Green Paper (labelled like this as it was a draft that

necessitated more comments) was eventually presented in January 1998 (Mueller, 2002). The Green Paper, titled “A Proposal to Improve the Technical Management of Internet Names and Addresses” proposed a new private, non-for-profit corporation (“NewCo”) which would inherit the responsibilities of IANA. The Department of Commerce was suggested to become the main coordinator of a transition process. The new corporation would be located in the US and incorporated under US law. This aligned with the preferences of Congress expressed by Charles Pickering from the Basic Research Subcommittee who claimed that “If they [the Department of Commerce’s NTIA] come out with a plan that has it [DNS management] moved offshore, we will look at the appropriate vehicles to make the legislative position know” (Pickering, 1997 as cited in Clausen, 1997). However, since the usage of the Internet was expanding internationally at a significant speed, the corporation’s board of directors would consist of stakeholders from around the world. Governmental and IGO’s officials were not allowed to serve on the board. Neither the IAHC and its Memorandum nor the Internet Society were mentioned in the proposal (NTIA, 1998). Magaziner explicitly mentioned that the ITU, was not even considered while preparing the proposal:

“I do not want a group like the ITU running these processes. It would not make sense for us to get out of this only to turn it over to another intergovernmental body” (Magaziner, 1998 as cited in Quick, 1998).

Special attention was given to the role of NSI in the transition. According to Network Solutions, taking its monopoly away would lead to chaos in cyberspace. Magaziner and his colleagues, who were sympathetic with this argument but also supported the necessity of competition, therefore, tried to design a proposal that would bring in competition without destabilising the existing system (Simons and Simpson, 1998). The proposal allowed NSI to keep a position of a commercial registrar of .com, .net and .org but eventually face competition in this field. The company would remain an exclusive registry to operate the registration databases for those domain names. However, new registries would eventually be established to manage other domain names (Tessler, 1998).

The Green Paper was put forward for public comments in February 1998. Eventually, over 500 distinct comments were submitted. Those included short comments stating the preference for or rejection of the plan and more elaborate discussions of advantages and disadvantages of the proposed model of DNS management. The comments came from individuals, companies, and the European Union²³. 63,5% of all comments came from

²³ The archive containing comments on the Green Paper can be found at: <https://web.archive.org/web/19990127204224/http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/domainname/130dftmail/> (accessed 15 October 2020).

individuals and 16,4% – from businesses with a significant representation of non-US entities (Mathiason, 2008). Those supporting the Paper welcomed final streamlining of what had been a rather chaotic process. Those opposing the proposal saw it as a government intervention of the US into the self-regulating internet community. The network of the Memorandum’s supporters consolidated itself around the US government’s proposal. A significant number of public comments on the Green Paper received by the NTIA was ISOC- or CORE-inspired (Mueller, 2002). Specifically, some comments criticised little role of international organisations in the proposal (Mathiason, 2008).

Interestingly, the government’s proposal brought the European Commission (EC) and some national governments to the side of the Memorandum’s supporters, even though earlier, some of them were rather critical of the IAHC plan due to its lack of sufficient governmental engagement (Paré, 2003). The main criticism voiced by the EC and other governments concerned the US-centric character of the Green Paper. For example, the Australian government and the EC argued for a more internationally inclusive and representative approach (Mueller, 1999; 2002). Many policymakers in the US, however, saw this level of involvement as a fair return on the investment of technical and financial resources of the US government during the earlier stages of the internet (Lipsky, 2017). In addition, European representatives voiced their concern over the omission of the IAHC in the Green Paper (Communications Standards News, 1998a; Kleinwächter, 2000) and a still strong role played by NSI. In its written response to the Green Paper, the European Community and its member states argued that “the US proposals (...) appear not to go far enough to ensure a level playing field and fair competition” (Wilkinson, 1998). On the other hand, Vint Cerf, then Senior Vice President at MCI²⁴ and ex-head of the Internet Society, argued that the company found it shortsighted that the Green Paper did not recognise the role of ISOC. He also encouraged officials in charge to “take advantage of the expertise and credibility ISOC can bring to the reform process” (PR Newswire, 1998). Some major companies based in and outside of the US, for example, France Telecom, IBM, and Telecom Italia, shared opinion that the overlook of the whole IAHC process was a significant drawback of the Green Paper (Business Wire, 1998a).

The Green Paper also initiated another round of congressional hearings held in March 1998. Both opponents and supporters of the proposal presented their arguments either in the written form or personally before Congress. Among witnesses at the congressional hearings were Ira Magaziner, presidential adviser and co-author of the Paper, and Jim Courter, president

²⁴ MCI was also an early supporter of the IAHC and Memorandum of Understanding.

of IDT Corporation who testified on behalf of CORE. Courter heavily criticised the Green Paper emphasising that it does not end but, rather, “perpetuates and consolidates” the NSI’s monopoly, and underlined that the internet is a “global resource” which, in his opinion, the Green Paper had failed to recognise (Courter, 1998). Some analysts, indeed, saw the administration’s proposal as a victory of Network Solutions and its lobbyists as it allowed the company to continue its domination of the Web-addresses business (Robinson and Farrell, 2000; Simpson and Simons, 1998). This is also in line with the theoretical expectation derived from the two-level game framework. The data collected on the resources available to relevant interest groups and the analysis of their power supported the proposition that the group with broader access to the government is able to exert more influence on policy-making and push for its preferences to be included in a policy proposal. In other words, in comparison to the technical community, NSI supported by SAIC was significantly more powerful along all three faces of power (instrumental, discursive, and structural) and thus, enjoyed more access to the government. Hence, the first variant of policy on the management of DNS contained aspects that favoured and were in line with the preferences of NSI, namely, its desire to maintain its control and dominant position in the DNS business.

Answering the criticism directed at the US-centric approach of the proposal, Ira Magaziner argued that the Interagency working group did not seek to design “a monolithic governance system” in the Green Paper. On the contrary, he emphasised that the internet should not be governed “by a single body or plan”. He also noted that a corporation, creation of which was proposed in the Paper, would include representatives from various international interests (Magaziner, 1998). The role of international organisations was once again rejected due to their bureaucratic and government-dominated structure which, according to one of the speakers (Barbara Dooley), was the opposite of what the internet represented (Dooley, 1998).

Ultimately, the Green Paper and the Memorandum overlapped in many policy aspects (Weinberg, 2000). Alan Hanson, chairman of the executive committee of CORE, noted that “A quick reading of this draft indicates there are several areas the U.S., CORE and the international Internet community agree on,” whilst underlining, nevertheless, that “As of today, we believe CORE is the only organisation that can accomplish most of the organisational functions outlined in the Green Paper” (Hanson, 1998 as cited in Business Wire, 1998b). The main divergence concerned the question of control over the transition period. This challenged major internet stakeholders who were opposed to the government involvement in the matters (Paré, 2003). In addition, the Green Paper stripped the IOs such as the ITU and WIPO off any power that was assigned to them by the Memorandum, and reduced the status of the EC and national

governments to commenters and observers, whilst moving the whole process under the auspices of the US government and enhancing its role in it (Mueller, 2002).

The US government was forced to come up with another plan of managing DNS. NSI's contract with NSF was due to expire in October. Hence, a solution was supposed to be found before that date. A new plan – the White Paper (see section 4.3.5) – was presented in June 1998 and followed by a series of consultations among various stakeholders. The next section explores interactions that took place among the US government, private sector, and technical community, and traces which actors exerted more influence and affected the ultimate decision to establish ICANN.

4.3.4. Interest groups access the government: Coalition-building

The period between the release of the Green Paper in January and release of the final policy proposal in June 1998 was characterised by another round of advocacy undertaken by the technical community and private sector. Political leadership of the coalition of organised business groups came from IBM and MCI (Mueller, 2002). The main forum for their interests was the Global Internet Project (GIP) – a voluntary organisation established in 1995 and consisting of internet software, hardware, telecommunications, and services companies such as aforementioned IBM, MCI but also AT&T, British and Deutsche Telecom etc. (Business Wire, 1998c). The organisation advocated for the internationality of the internet and expressed concerns about overload of national laws, rules, and regulations that were potentially dangerous for the internet's growth. The companies saw the Project's mission in educating decision-makers all over the world about the internet and its potential. As stated on the website of the GIP, “if decision-makers are educated about this medium, they are much more likely to make sound public policy choices” (GIP, 2020a). Against this backdrop, the GIP established a contact with the ITU and OECD and presented a paper on “Global Internet Emergence and Policies to Foster its Growth” to these organisations (GIP, 2020b).

The GIP was closely connected with the Information Technology Association of America (ITAA), a Washington-based lobby organisation. Whilst the GIP and its executives designed a strategy for the group, the ITAA was responsible for implementing it. The GIP also enjoyed rather close ties with the White House and Congress, both through its executives who were deeply involved in the Administration's development of the e-commerce framework and the ITAA (Mueller, 2002). For example, there is a recorded contribution by the ITAA that was made to Congressman Rick Boucher (Open Secrets, 2020a) who participated actively in internet-related legislating (Internet Innovation, 2020).

The GIP was also strengthening their ties to the technical community. IBM hired Brian Carpenter, scientist from CERN who also served on the IAB, while MCI had Vint Cerf, co-founder of ISOC, as its Senior Vice President, and John Klensin, an IETF and IAB member, as distinguished engineering fellow (Internet Hall of Fame, 2020; Mueller, 2002). These liaisons were solidified even more in February 1998, when Jon Postel and Carpenter established an IANA Transition Advisors Group (ITAG). The task of the ITAG was defined as assisting Postel “in drawing up draft statutes for the new, not-for-profit, IANA organization, with particular attention to its open, international governance” and “on any other critical issues concerning the transition to the new organization” (Farber, 1998). The Group had six members, five of which had for-profit affiliations. The Group was also joined by aforementioned John Klensin (MCI), Geoff Huston (Telstra, Australian telecommunication provider), Randy Bush (Verio, Inc., an internet service provider), and Steve Wolff (Cisco). It is worth mentioning that Wolff previously served as director of NSF’s Computer and Information Sciences and Engineering Division (until 1994), that was responsible for supervising the transition to the commercial internet (Radu, 2019) and thus, provided a useful link to the US government.

While in close contact with the private sector represented by the GIP (see Figure 4.3), the technical community, still largely dominated by the Internet Society and IANA, also employed significant resources and personal backgrounds of their supporters to make sure that their position was delivered to the government in a strong and persuasive manner. Generally, it appears that this time they were more involved in lobbying activity towards the US government. First, leveraging their structural and discursive power, ISOC and CORE initiated a campaign to send comments about the Green Paper to the NTIA. They mobilised interested individuals by sending emails calling for action and put up websites with templates that were ready to be sent to the NTIA. As a result, out of approximately 50 emails sent shortly before the end of the commenting period, almost 75% were sent by ISOC members and CORE participants with some of the messages being identical. Additionally, in an attempt to solidify their instrumental power, CORE spent \$1 million received from the registrar application fees to hire lobbyists and public relations experts (Mueller, 2002).

Second, ISOC reportedly held several behind-closed-doors meetings with Ira Magaziner and other officials involved in the development of new policy. As noted by an Interviewee, big tech companies such as IBM and AT&T employed some very powerful people dedicated to the internet issues, some of which were highly instrumental in bringing the technical communities’ preferences to the front of the discussion whilst protecting the interests of their companies (Interviewee #9). However, these businesses were, similar to NSI, highly concerned about the

involvement of the ITU (Cade, 2017, Interviewees #1, 10, 11). Therefore, their support came at a price – the ITU which, unlike WIPO, had a direct connection to telecommunications, had to be excluded from the process. As summarised by an interviewee, “once the trademark issues and the ITU got out of the way, all big businesses were happy and supported IANA and ISOC” (Interviewee #11). Another interviewee argued that the ITU was only one of the options. When an alternative solution that satisfied the main principles of the internet community appeared, they went for it (Interviewee #1).

Network Solutions still enjoyed significant bargaining power as a main and only registrar. However, it was excluded from the coalition of big telecom businesses as its agenda and interests were too far from the coalition’s and hence, could not be accommodated (Mueller, 2002). NSI was a public company with its shares on Nasdaq and, therefore, it could not “just be brushed aside” (Turcotte, 1998 as cited in Smith, 1998). In order to advance its interests, the company again turned to the services of two lobbying firms, specifically, Simon Strategies and Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering. NSI’s total lobbying expenditures in 1998 accounted for \$300,000. The lobbying was targeted primarily at the Department of Commerce, Executive Office of the President, and Federal Communications Commission (FCC) (Open Secrets, 2020b).

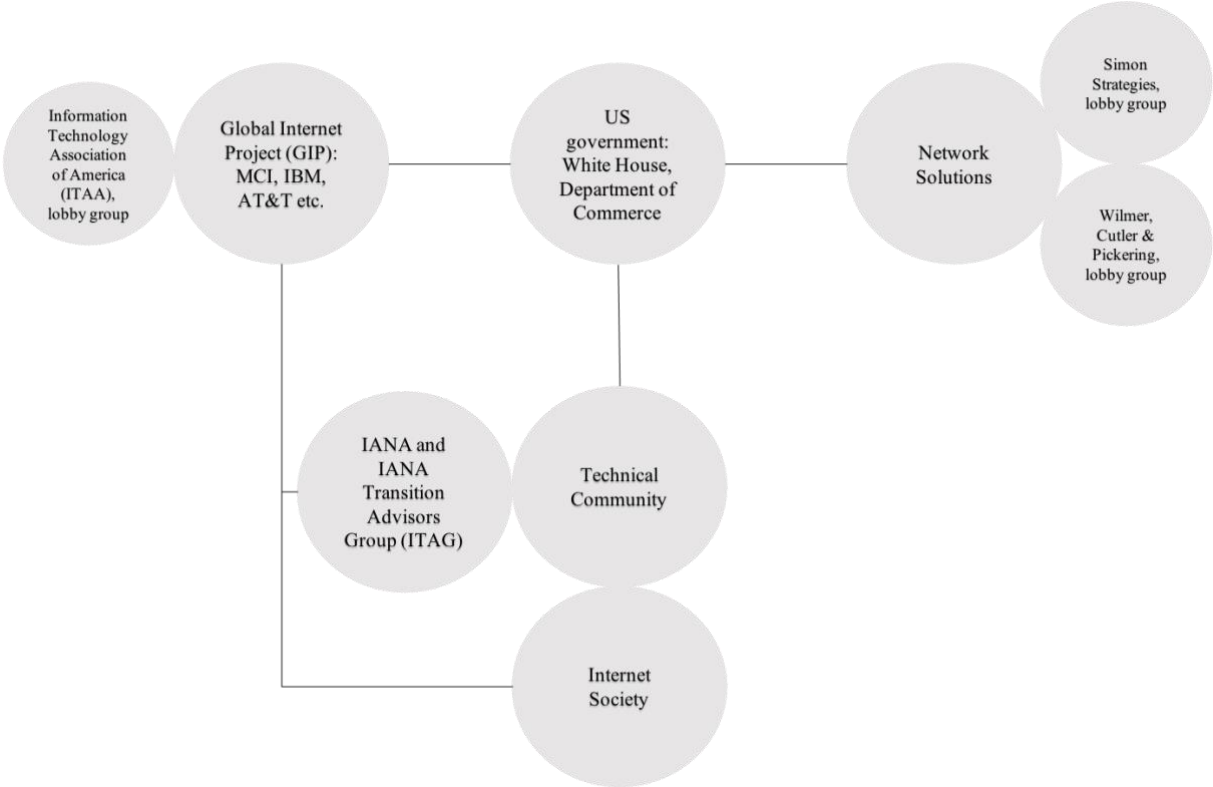


Figure 4.3 Coalitions and linkages among various stakeholders after the Green Paper (February 1998) (own creation)

Whilst Network Solutions did not change its strategy of promoting and protecting their interests, the technical community appeared to be more engaged in advocacy efforts after the Green Paper. Not only did they engage in more direct interactions with government officials, they also gained support of some big businesses that shared their view on how the DNS issue should be handled. The partnership with the GIP allowed the technical community led by ISOC and IANA to use strategies that were not available to them before. In other words, by working together with big corporations, mobilising public support (commenting on the Green Paper campaign), and engaging more actively in different lobbying activities, they were able to increase their power and access to the government. Hence, the technical community's influence on policy-making increased. At the same time, NSI's position weakened. Even though it was still a relevant participant of the discussion, once the decision to establish a new corporation was made, it became less of a factor and its influence on policy issues decreased, whilst the Internet Society became more influential (Interviewee #10).

4.3.5. Response of the US government: White Paper and the creation of ICANN

The Clinton administration released its final policy plan – the White Paper – in June 1998. It was a non-binding “statement of policy” which signified the US' eventual retreat from managing DNS and entrusting it fully to the private sector. The White Paper was significantly different from the Green Paper. The latter prescribed a detailed plan on how to create a new non-profit corporation to manage DNS and proposed a series of specific policy decisions on various DNS-related issues. The former, however, was less precise and gave a significant level of discretion to the private sector. Unlike the Green Paper, the White Paper contained “a broad set of guidelines describing the characteristics of an acceptable non-profit corporation” (Committee on Science, 1998). The Paper emphasised the importance of international representation and transferred the authority to choose the directory board of a new corporation to the corporation itself. The corporation, in turn, was expected to be created by the private sector through a consensus of different, rather conflicting, stakeholders (Mueller, 2002). As noted by J. B. Burr, a Commerce Department official,

“We hope that the private sector can get the new corporation up and running by Oct. 1 of this year, and we expect that the corporation will assume full responsibility for the functions we are now performing by Oct. 1 of the year 2000, at the outside” (Burr, 1998 as cited in ZDNet UK, 1998).

Unlike the Green Paper, the White Paper also took into consideration proposals made in the IAHC Memorandum. Specifically, the White Paper mirrored its dispute resolution framework and delegated the process of its establishment to WIPO (Paré, 2003). The ITU was not regarded as an important stakeholder and thus, was not mentioned in the Paper. Although

the organisation itself still appeared to be highly interested in participating in DNS management. One of the commentators on the White Paper, who used to work for the ITU, reported that:

“[...] some staff and participants at the International Telecommunications Union as an intergovernmental organization are aggressively pursuing significant DNS-related jurisdiction and functions [...]. At the ITU’s governing Council meeting just held 20-29 May, this action was apparently terminated through the intervention by the U.S. representative” (Rutkowski, 1998).

In the White Paper, the US government tried to accommodate preferences of key interest groups: the government itself, the Internet Society and IANA, major private sector stakeholders led by the GIP, and the European Commission and other national governments (Hutter, 2003; Mueller, 2002). In order to satisfy those criticising the previous proposal for its US-centric character (the majority of the internet community, including the leaders of the IAHC, i.e. ISOC and IANA), it withheld from creating new laws or government agencies. On the other hand, to reassure businesses who feared chaos in case of government withdrawal and unsupervised competition (e.g. NSI, see Section 4.3.3), the White Paper promised that the US government would still be involved to a certain extent and required the new corporation to be headquartered in the US. This would guarantee the stability of the internet (Franda, 2001; US Department of Commerce, 1998).

The release of the White Paper was followed by a round of public comments. It was received rather well by the public, primarily due to the fact that it left all controversial policy decisions regarding the management of DNS for the new corporation to make (Weinberg, 2000). This prompted various interested parties to compete for the privilege to design the new organisation. As a result, several coalitions emerged and eventually proposed their own projects of the new corporation to the Department of Commerce.

Firstly, a so-called “International Forum on the White Paper” (IFWP) emerged. It was a series of self-organised meetings among major stakeholders aimed at drafting a legal framework for the new corporation managing DNS. Meetings were open and received interested parties from various backgrounds (Glen, 2017). They were held in July-August 1998 across the globe, specifically, in Virginia, Geneva, Singapore, and Buenos Aires (Franda, 2001). The leaders of the IFWP also called it an “Internet Institutional Convention” and claimed that the main purpose of the meetings was to “prepare a model, set of common principles, structure and general charter provisions” (Rony and Rony, 2020) for a new corporation that would manage domain names. This nonprofit corporation would be controlled by a board elected from different professional groups and interests (Glen, 2017). Two of the IFWP

workshops were briefly attended by Magaziner who encouraged the participants to continue their initiative (Mueller, 1999). In addition, both IANA and NSI, two main competitors for managing DNS, joined the process. According to Lessig (1998), IANA was reluctant in the beginning but the first IFWP meeting turned out to be successful, and Jon Postel decided to participate in the Forum. NSI was more optimistic from the start; its CEO, Gabe Battista, believed that the Forum was the first time when “all stakeholders have been truly represented” (Battista, 1998 as cited in WashTech, 1998).

IANA joined the IFWP with an already prepared set of draft bylaws for the new corporation which, however, was rejected. As a result of this rejection, Jon Postel, on behalf of IANA and ISOC, launched its own parallel process. Assisted by Joe Sims, a prominent lawyer from Washington, Postel continued designing new DNS-managing corporation. The coalition of IANA and ISOC eventually was joined by the GIP members IBM and MCI, and an official from the European Commission. Their discussions, conversely to those of the IFWP, were conducted in a closed, networking manner. Some input was also received from the US Department of Commerce (Paré, 2003).

Disregarding different approaches and level of transparency, both groups claimed that they represented a consensus among main internet stakeholders regarding how the new corporation should look like (Franda, 2001). Moreover, an organisational model suggested by the IFWP differed significantly from that proposed by the Postel-led coalition (Mueller, 2002). As well summarised by Lessig (1998: 4-5),

“IANA thus proceeded as IFWP did to develop its own view in the way that it thought such views should be developed. IANA in a process of comments and drafts that it ultimately controlled; IFWP in an extraordinarily messy but public process, with meetings that its directors could not control. Both processes had a claim to legitimacy; but each represented the views of the net in a different way”.

Nevertheless, until a certain point, representatives of both initiatives tried to work together and reach a consensus with regard to the new DNS corporation. In August 1998, Tamar Frankel, Chairwoman of the IFWP, attended an IETF meeting where she expressed her cautious support to the “New IANA” proposed by Postel (Communications Standards News, 1998b). This, although shaky, cooperation came to a halt in September 1998 when the IFWP decided to finalise the process and present a constitution for the new corporation. While many stakeholders including NSI agreed to participate in the meeting, IANA refused. Moreover, some IANA-supporters inside the IFWP steering committee tried to hinder the process and disband the forum completely (Lessig, 1998; Mueller, 1999). This was one of the “complex and involved” (Boston Working Group, 1998) reasons of the IFWP’s eventual failure to produce any specific proposal.

The last published teleconference record of the IFWP where the wrap-up session was discussed dates to August 28, 1998. No further records of the meetings or teleconferences were published (see IFWP 1998).

Meanwhile, Ira Magaziner urged two key stakeholders in DNS – IANA and NSI – to enter negotiations and produce a common framework of managing domain names. On September 17, 1998 they released a draft-design of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Magaziner, however, pointed that the draft required more adjustments in order to reach “a broad enough consensus” (Magaziner, 1998 as cited in Communications Standards News, 1998c). Specifically, there were complaints that the joint proposal favoured NSI’s top-level domain monopoly (Mills, 1998). This stripped the draft off the support from main stakeholders, especially those who previously belonged to the MoU group and non-US-based actors. As a result, IANA backed away from the negotiations with NSI and issued the so-called fifth iteration of the proposal on September 1998 which also included a unilaterally composed list of potential ‘interim’ board members. IANA claimed that the document represented a consensus within the broad internet and technical community (Franda, 2001; Mueller, 2002).

At the same time, some participants of the IFWP meetings formed the so-called Boston Working Group. They built upon the discussions that took place in the Forum’s meetings and submitted a proposal of a new plan of DNS management to the US government. Much like IANA, the Boston Group claimed that their “work represents a real consensus of the Internet Community as arrived at through a broad and open process, and represents a true response to the NTIA White Paper (Boston Working Group, 1998). However, as reported by one of the news outlets, the Group’s draft was regarded “as an irritant” and was not taken “too seriously” (Communications Standards News, 1998c). Another alternative proposal was submitted by the Open Root Server Confederation (ORSC), a group of alternative domain registries that had support from NSI (Franda, 2001). As a result, the US government was presented with three different proposals regarding the new corporation to manage DNS (see Figure 4.4).

The draft submitted by IANA, while being supported by such important actors as the Internet Society, ITAA, IETF, and IAB, also faced significant criticism from its competitors – groups and organisations that also submitted proposals on domain name management (the abovementioned Boston Group and ORSC), and foreign associations from Europe, Asia and Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean. Both Jon Postel and Joe Sims considered this criticism invalid and insignificant (Mills, 1998) while Magaziner and Burr took it into consideration and

urged creators and supporters of ICANN to start negotiations with the Boston Group and ORSC. In the exchange of correspondence between Burr and ICANN, the former stated:

“We note, however, that the public comments received on the ICANN submission reflect significant concerns about substantive and operational aspects of ICANN [...] The submissions of the Boston Working Group and the Open Root Server Confederation, among others, articulate specific concerns, many of which we share. As you refine your proposal, we urge you to consult with these groups and others who commented critically on your proposal to try to broaden the consensus” (Burr, 1998).

Despite the difficulties and criticism faced by ICANN-supporters along the way, the US government finalised its decision to transfer authority over DNS to ICANN on November 25, 1998 when both parties signed a memorandum of understanding. Later, ICANN entered a similar agreement with the University of South California, the home institution of late Jon Postel and IANA. The Commerce Department officially recognised ICANN as the White Paper’s private, non-profit organisation managing DNS in February 1999 (Mueller, 2002). Reportedly, the ITU was not even aware that the discussion leading to the creation of ICANN took place (Hills 2007) which once again sheds light on the fact that the organisation was excluded and regarded as an irrelevant participant of policy-making regarding the management of DNS.



Figure 4.4 Three coalitions and their proposals on the new DNS managing corporation to the US government (own creation)

Since Postel’s proposal was backed by the IANA and ISOC-led coalition which worked in close cooperation with Magaziner, it is not surprising that members of the Internet Society were given a prominent role in ICANN despite their fiasco with the IAHC and its Memorandum. Moreover, their expertise was recognised by the government and as noted by Drezner (2004: 496), “Between ISOC’s proven ability to develop successful standards and ISOC’s critics, who had no such experience, Magaziner went with ISOC”.

4.4. Interim Conclusion

The creation of ICANN became another prove of the US unwillingness to delegate internet governance to the ITU. However, it also signified the US unwillingness to be too much involved in the process itself. As a result, ICANN became “a private entity designed to make rules for global Internet” (Marlin-Bennett, 2001 as cited in Drezner, 2004: 496). The US employed the strategy of “internationalization through privatization” (Cowhey and Aronson, 2009: 220), which allowed it to avoid engagement in a demanding process of creating a new international institution. The ITU was also dismissed by its IAHC allies, mainly by IANA and ISOC. They shifted its focus to the cooperation with US-based businesses such as IBM and MCI with which they were closely connected. After the release of the White Paper, ISOC organised the Internet Summit (INET’98) that took place in Geneva, Switzerland in July 1998. The goal of the event was to “build an international consensus on the domain name issue” (Heath, 1998 as cited in Internet Society, 1998). Unlike some other Geneva-based IOs including WIPO, former IAHC participant, and WTO, the ITU did not participate in the Summit (Internet Society 1998).

ICANN’s governance structure and mandate were deliberately designed in such a way to provide businesses with an institution of coordination and regulation that would be an alternative to the ITU (Huston, 2004b). The latter, which was a crucial actor in the standardisation of telephone networks, essentially lost its focality in governance of the internet and became obsolete (Balbi and Fickers, 2020). As well captured by Schafer:

“The ITU found itself excluded from the management of domain names by American actors – both those within the internet community and also, with the creation in 1998 of ICANN, private and governmental actors in the US (Schafer, 2020: 340).

This was evident during the ITU’s Plenipotentiary Conference that took place in October-November 1998. The IAHC Memorandum was treated as if it never existed. In the Resolution dedicated to the management of internet names and addresses, there were no references to the IAHC process or any documents it produced. Instead, ITU’s Secretary-General was instructed:

*“to take an active part in the international discussions and initiatives on the management of Internet domain names and addresses, which is being **led by the private sector**, with special attention to the activities conducted by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), **bearing in mind the purposes of the Union** (emphasis mine)” (ITU, 1998).*

After being rejected internet the governance mandate in 1997-1998, the ITU, nevertheless, kept attempting to negotiate a more prominent role for itself in a fast-developing internet domain (Interviewees #7, 9, 10, 11), trying “different ways and different paths” (Interviewee #9). For example, the ITU made some efforts towards “engineering” a stronger

role for the Union at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) that took place in 2003 and 2005 (Farrell and Newman, 2021; Interviewee #6).

This case demonstrates what role interest groups can play in state policy towards IOs. The hypothesis that an interest group that can exert more influence (measured through access and different faces of power) can push the government to the path of disengagement from an IO is confirmed. In the early stages, NSI and its parent company SAIC, a powerful corporation, advocated for the rejection of the ITU by the US government. It could leverage its instrumental, discursive, and structural power in a more effective way, which also translated into more access to the government. Having extensive financial, organisational, and human resources, NSI and SAIC could engage actively in direct lobbying efforts. In addition, they turned to indirect mechanisms trying to create a positive public image of NSI. As a result, the preferences of NSI and SAIC were accommodated in the Green Paper. Because the technical community lacked resources and the will to engage in a competitive lobbying campaign and utilise their expertise as leverage, the Green Paper was removed far from the preferences of the Internet Society and IANA. Later, the technical community entered into strategic partnership with large and well-established enterprises such as IBM and MCI. Being supported by these companies, the technical community was able to exert more influence. Additionally, through encouraging and facilitating public commenting on the Green Paper, it mobilised its supporters to indirectly voice their preferences to the government and influence the further development of policy regarding the management of DNS. When comparing the Green and White Papers, it is visible that in the Green Paper, NSI and SAIC interests are much more present. In the White Paper – the preferences of IANA, the Internet Society, and GIP, a coalition of businesses that supported the technical community, were more prominent. However, IANA and the Internet Society had to give up the idea of including the ITU in the process in order to gain support from more powerful and resourceful domestic stakeholders who undoubtedly allowed the technical community to take a stronger position against NSI.

Whilst the role of interest groups was proved to be highly prominent, this case also shed light on the role of domestic political institutions. The US government was rather unanimous in their preferences. Both branches were interested in taking things slow and being careful about “letting go of what they felt they created” (Interviewee #9). The only difference was that the executive branch was “more open” about bringing the DNS issue to the international level (Interviewee #9). It was able to engage with foreign stakeholders partially thanks to the fact that Congress chose not to legislate (Interviewee #11). In the beginning of the process, Congress, however, made it known that if their position regarding the management of DNS was

not accommodated in a policy proposal prepared by the Administration, i.e. when DNS governance, contrary to Congress' will, was transferred overseas and entrusted to the ITU, Congress would undertake necessary means to make their position heard. In other words, Congress essentially called upon its amendment power and signalled to the Administration that if Members of Congress were not satisfied with the outcome of policy-making, they would invoke their powers to legislate in order to produce policy that is closer to their view of how DNS management should be organised.

The collected data, thus, demonstrates the presence of the causal mechanism in the case of the US disengagement from the ITU. It should be mentioned, however, that the causal mechanism needs refinement regarding Part 4 – exercise of the veto power by the dominating branch. This part of the mechanism was absent. Although Congress was involved in the issue (mainly through the congressional hearings regarding DNS management, the Green and White Papers and direct engagement with main stakeholders from businesses and the technical community), there was no legislative process. Hence, the causal mechanism in the case of the US disengagement from the ITU looks as follows. Part 1 – relevant actors voiced their preferences regarding policy towards the ITU with some of them being interested in the inclusion of the ITU in the management of DNS and some of them strongly opposing this. In the second part of the mechanism, interest groups – NSI/SAIC and the technical community led by the Internet Society and IANA – attempted to influence the government in order to ensure the accommodation of their preferences by government policy. At the same time, the executive and legislative branches engaged in agenda-setting and amendment activities. While the Administration launched a policy-making process, Congress relied on its power in order to signal its preferences regarding the management of DNS and make sure that Administration's policy proposals took them into consideration. Additionally, it oversaw the process through congressional hearings that it hosted and in which various stakeholders from the executive branch and interest groups participated. However, Congress never got to ratify or authorise policy suggested by the executive branch. This was followed by the response of the government to the efforts of the most influential interest group. In the first iteration, the response of the US government was embodied in the Green Paper that favoured NSI' preference to keep its monopoly rather than transferring authority over DNS to the ITU – an option preferred by the technical community. In the second iteration, the government responded with the White Paper which was closer to the preferences of the technical community and GIP. Although the former wanted the ITU to be included in the management of DNS in the beginning of the process, ISOC and IANA had to trade this preference for the support of the resourceful GIP. The

coalition that included ISOC, IANA, and the GIP, hence, was able to exert greater influence. In the final step of the mechanism, final policy favouring disengagement was presented and as a result, the US disengaged from the ITU by creating a new institution to govern DNS, i.e. ICANN.

It is evident that the role of domestic groups was quite significant and all of them tried to influence the government and advocate their ideas. However, the decision to circumvent the ITU and establish ICANN as a DNS-managing institution also fitted in a broader narrative of de-regulating and democratising telecommunications. A number of interviewees (Interviewees #1, 2, 7, 10) mentioned that the US generally was at odds with the ITU due to its traditional model of governing characterised by the one-country-one-vote system and a slow-moving bureaucratic machine. As one interviewee pointed out, the US perspective on the ITU was that it “was getting in the way of liberalisation of telecommunications” (Interviewee #1). The IAHC process escalated this contention as the US government, especially the State Department, considered that act as an act of expansion of the ITU’s mandate without the authorisation from its member states (Interviewee #1). Nevertheless, the US needed the ITU in order to deal with other issues such as allocation of radio spectrum and coordination of satellite networks which are the issues of national security (Interviewees #1, 7). A conclusion can be made that the profile of organisations (their mandate and domains in which IOs are active according to it) can be a significant factor when it comes to state participation in IOs. It appears that it might affect which path of disengagement is taken. That is, disengagement through withdrawal of resources or even more so complete withdrawal would hurt rather than benefit the US because of the ITU’s importance in other telecommunications issues. As one of the interviewees recalls, there was an understanding: “whatever you do, not destroy the institution, [...] because we need it” (Interviewee #7). A more systematic discussion of other possible explanations of state disengagement will be offered in the concluding chapter.

5. Case study 2: US disengagement from UNESCO through withdrawal of funds

While examining the concept of disengagement, this chapter looks at the case of the withdrawal of American funds from UNESCO. Specifically, it investigates the process during which the Administration of President Obama tried to receive a national security waiver from Congress in order to resume payments to the organisation. Given the theoretical propositions of this dissertation, the chapter examines what how the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches and various domestic interest groups affected several unsuccessful attempts to waive the law.

In accordance with the methods used in the dissertation, the case study is structured following the theorised causal mechanism and a set of parameters necessary to evaluate whether it was present. First, a brief description of the context of withdrawal of payments is provided. Afterwards, main relevant actors involved in the issue are identified and characterised. This is followed by a two-level game explanation of the US disengagement from UNESCO. The focus is on competition among various domestic groups following different agendas and the effects of divided government.

First, this chapter demonstrates how and to what extent interest groups participate in and influence policy-making towards IOs. By looking at interest groups' resources and strategies, I identify a group with the broadest access to the government in order to test the respective hypothesis. Second, the chapter sheds light on what consequences divided government can have for decision-making regarding foreign policy and how the two branches of the government interact while drafting policy regarding a contested issue. The identification of relevant veto players within the government and detailed examination of interactions between the executive and legislative branches provide evidence necessary for illustrating the causal mechanism developed earlier. Tracing of the theorised parts of the causal mechanism demonstrate how the US disengaged from UNESCO through withdrawal of resources.

5.1. General context: Palestine's attempt to join the UN system and the US' response

In 2011, the subsidiary body of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Palestinian Authority and its President, Mahmoud Abbas, declared that they would seek Palestinian membership in the UN. According to the UN Charter, the Security Council's approval is required for the General Assembly to admit a new member. The Palestinians launched an extensive diplomatic campaign seeking to gain support from countries who have not yet recognised its statehood as they thought this would strengthen their prospects for UN

membership. During this campaign, the Palestinians won recognition from states such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Uruguay which attracted attention of the US to the Palestinian efforts. The American reaction was rather unanimous: Congress and the US President Barak Obama openly opposed Palestinian UN membership campaign (Ruebner, 2013). Unsurprisingly, the US embarked on its own international lobbying campaign aimed at preventing the UN Security Council discussion on the issue. In addition, American representatives and the US President explicitly stated that the US would veto any proposal regarding Palestinian membership if it was brought before the Security Council (Rogin, 2011a).

In September 2011, President Abbas submitted a letter requesting UN membership to the UN Secretary-General who, in turn, forwarded it to the Security Council. After receiving the request, the Security Council referred Palestinian application to the Committee on the Admission of New Members. This Committee, however, failed to reach any conclusive decision, thereby preventing the Palestinian Authority from getting a vote regarding its membership in the Security Council (Schaefer, 2011).

In the meanwhile, Palestine also sought to lay their path to the UN system via other UN organisations and agencies, specifically, UNESCO. The Constitution of the organisation allows this as states that are not members of the UN can be admitted to UNESCO given the approval from the Executive Board and a two-thirds majority vote of the General Assembly (UNESCO, 2021b). Hence, Palestine made a membership request to the organisation²⁵. On October 5, 2011, amid strong opposition from and attempts to prevent the vote from taking place by the US (Erlanger and Sayare, 2011a), the 58-nation Executive Board of UNESCO recommended the General Conference of the organisation to admit Palestine as a member (UNESCO, 2011a). A draft resolution for Palestinian membership, sponsored by several Arab states, was approved with 4 states voting against (Germany, Romania, Latvia, and the US) and 14 states abstaining (Sayare and Erlanger, 2011). On October 31, the 36th UNESCO General Conference held a vote which resulted in 107 “yes” votes which met the 2/3 bar. As a result, Palestine became the 195th full member of the organisation (UNESCO Press, 2011a).

The decision to admit Palestine as a member caused the US to halt immediately all its payments to UNESCO. On the day of the vote, Victoria Nuland, a spokesperson of the State Department, announced that the US would not be paying \$60 million scheduled to be contributed in November 2011 (Ruebner, 2013). The decision to halt payments was grounded

²⁵ The 2011 attempt was a reiteration of the original request submitted to UNESCO first in 1989 and repeated almost each biannual General Conference since then (Hüfner, 2017).

in legislation adopted in the 1990s, specifically two Foreign Relations Authorization Acts stating that:

“No funds authorized to be appropriated by this Act or any other Act shall be available for the United Nations or any specialized agency thereof which accords the Palestine Liberation Organization the same standing as member states” (101st Congress 1990: 70);

“The United States shall not make any voluntary or assessed contribution to any affiliated organization of the United Nations which grants full membership as a state to any organization or group that does not have the internationally recognized attributes of statehood” (103rd Congress 1994: 454).

Both laws are rather straightforward and did not provide any leeway for the Obama administration to circumvent them and continue paying to UNESCO (Schaefer, 2011). Unlike the law that requires US aid to the Palestinian Authority to be halted should the Palestinians join any UN agency; the 1990 and 1994 laws do not have a clause allowing the President to waive financial restrictions for national security reasons (APN, 2015), which is highly unusual for a foreign policy statute (Interviewees #13, 14). These two statutes concern different kinds of IOs: the first one is targeted at the UN and its 15 specialised agencies such as UNESCO, the WHO, ITU etc. The 1994 law is broader in its reach and applies to a wide range of organisations, funds and programmes, bodies and entities included in the UN-system. Hence, in the case of UNESCO, defunding was set in motion by the 1990 law passed before the Oslo Accords had been signed and the Palestinian Authority had been created. At that time, both statutes were passed by bipartisan majorities in Congress. While it was admitted that obligatory defunding could affect organisations important for the US, cutting off of the contributions was seen as beneficial rather than harmful in terms of the more general political strategy concerning Israeli-Palestinian relations (Kontorovich, 2018; Soueid, 2012). Specifically, both laws were meant to prevent the PLO from advancing in the UN and other IOs after gaining an observer, non-member status in the UN General Assembly in the late 1980s (Lynch, 2011a).

Disregarding the defunding, the US did not officially withdraw and continued to be present in the organisation. In fact, it was elected as a member of the Executive Board during the same 36th General Conference and then re-elected in 2015 (Hüfner, 2017). Notwithstanding, the US lost its voting rights in the General Assembly in November 2013 due to financial arrears which undermined significantly its “ability to exercise its influence in countries around the globe through the United Nations agency’s educational and aid programs, according to Western diplomats and international relations experts” (Rubin, 2013). UNESCO itself suffered significant financial damage as the US contributed 22% of the organisation’s annual budget,

which prompted UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova to go to Washington and negotiate with Congress to change the law (Erlanger and Sayare, 2011b).

The next few years would be characterised by the Obama administration's attempts to waive funding restrictions imposed by the legislation. These attempts, however, were not successful and faced strong opposition in Congress – the final decision-making point on the issue. The discussion also transcended the issue of payments to UNESCO as many Congressmen and Congresswomen on both sides of an aisle used American foreign policy towards Israel and Palestine as an underlying argument in their statements and judgements.

The following sections seek to analyse domestic debates regarding the US contributions to UNESCO, and the role that divided government and interest groups played in the US disengagement from the organisation. In order to understand the role of each actor involved in the process, a brief introduction to UNESCO and its relationship with the US government over decades is to be made. In addition, relevant interest groups are to be mapped.

5.2. Mapping of relevant actors

This section lists actors that were involved in the process of the US disengagement from UNESCO. The goal is to introduce the reader to relevant stakeholders that can be divided into three groups: international organisations, the US government, and interest groups. This information is crucial for the further examination of how the US disengaged from UNESCO and how the executive branch failed to revert it. The preferences of relevant actors and their specific role in the US disengagement from UNESCO are presented in the further sections of this chapter (Section 5.3).

Before mapping relevant actors, a short disclaimer should be made. Considering the grounds for the US initial disengagement from UNESCO, the discussion will inevitably steer into the direction of the Israeli-Palestinian question. In the case of UNESCO, it was not so much about the organisation itself or the UN, but about Israeli-Palestinian politics (Interviewee #16). As will be evident further on in the chapter (Section 5.3), the White House and Congress used arguments related both to UNESCO and the broader topic of US-Israel relations. Hence, it is not surprising that some of the pro-Israel organised groups were involved in the discussion about (non)payments to UNESCO. Relevance of these groups to the debate at hand was also confirmed by a number of interviewees (Interviewees # 13, 14).

This dissertation does not seek to contribute to the debate on the power and influence of the pro-Israel lobby on the American politics. It treats pro-Israel groups as any others and seeks

to investigate whether they had a say in the debates about UNESCO, what their position was, and what arguments they used when advancing their viewpoint.

5.2.1. United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNESCO is an organisation commissioned “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UNESCO, 2021b). UNESCO was once characterised as “easily the least ‘specialized’ of the specialized agencies” (cited in Singh, 2011: 15) due its broad mandate that included such varied fields of work. It also has been known as a deeply contentious and politically divided organisation (Graham, 2006).

Since its creation, UNESCO was rather often challenged politically by both sides of the Cold War. The organisation was undermined when the Soviet Union refused to join (although it eventually became a member in 1954) (Hooghe et al., 2017), criticising the negotiations about the creation of UNESCO as biased and propagandistic. Another instance of the politicisation of UNESCO evolved around the US-orchestrated push for freedom of information that resulted in the withdrawal of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. The Cold War-induced conflicts within the organisation were also aggravated by the emerging North-South politics as some of the post-colonial countries became members. As those states joined, UNESCO became a forum for anti-imperialist sentiments, which, in turn, led to accusations of politicisation expressed by the US and other Western powers (Dutt, 2009; Reynolds, 1986). The question of Israeli membership became another point of worries for the US. In 1974, the General Assembly took a series of decisions targeting Israel. This included a resolution condemning Israel’s archaeological activity in Jerusalem and rejection of Israel’s application to become a member of the European regional sub-group²⁶ (Reynolds, 1986). Citing organisation’s inefficiency and political biases, the US withdrew from UNESCO in 1984 (Dutt, 2009, Imber, 1989). This was followed by the withdrawal of the UK and Singapore and threats of withdrawal coming from West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark (Lewis, 1985). The withdrawal of the US cut organisation’s budget by a quarter. This forced the leadership of UNESCO to embark on a series of organisational reforms (Hooghe et al., 2017) that made it “less controversial and more focused” (Singh, 2011: 17). The United Kingdom returned to UNESCO in 1997 and the US – in 2003.

²⁶ Israel was later able to join the group.

The question of the admission of Palestine to UNESCO was first posed in 1989. As mentioned earlier, one can become a member on a recommendation given by the Executive Board and a vote in the General Assembly. Another condition for membership is statehood, although no precise definition and criteria of what is considered a state are given. All this gives UNESCO MS significant discretionary power in deciding about admitting a new member (UNESCO, 1989). However, this did not assist Palestine in winning UNESCO membership for 22 years (1989-2011).

5.2.2. US Government and domestic veto players

The issue of Palestinian membership was not the first hiccup in the relations between UNESCO and the US. The US government's concerns about the organisation were rather persistent dating back to UNESCO's early years (Reynolds, 1986). As was mentioned in the previous section, UNESCO generated much controversy that the US criticised heavily at different times. George P. Schultz, US Secretary of State from 1982 to 1989, denounced organisation's management and policies that did not fulfil UNESCO's original purpose but served "political purposes of a few member states" (Schultz, 1984 as cited in Jacobson, 1984). Since there is no weighted voting in the General Assembly and decisions are predominantly taken by a simple majority (Hooghe et al., 2017), the US also could not prevent various resolutions on Middle Eastern issues officially considered by the US as anti-Western or anti-Israel from being adopted (Jacobson, 1984, Singh, 2011). Multiple reasons related to UNESCO's poor financial and organisational management and political biases caused the US to withdraw from the organisation in 1984 (Dutt, 2009):

"UNESCO has extraneously politicized virtually every subject it deals with, has exhibited hostility toward the basic institutions of a free society, especially a free market and a free press, and has demonstrated unrestrained budgetary expansion" (US Department of State, 1983 as cited in The New York Times, 1983).

The US was ready to re-join the organisation under several conditions: UNESCO was expected to streamline its management, abandon its questionable policies, and change the voting system in order to ensure that bigger contributors' vote weighed more (Schaefer, 2001).

While the US was absent, UNESCO launched a reform process attempting to improve its management, delegation within the organisation, and accountability practices. In 1985, the Administration of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) set up the US Reform Observation Panel for UNESCO to monitor its efforts in reforms and based on this, advise for or against returning to the organisation (Schaefer, 2001). Under the residency of George H. W. Bush (1989-1993), the US Department of State reviewed UNESCO and did not find sufficient improvements,

recommending against re-joining the organisation (GAO, 1992). However, later reports done by the General Accounting Office, a non-partisan agency working for Congress, reported improvements in UNESCO's management and budget (GAO, 1992, 1993). However, the congressional set-up made it difficult to sell the idea of returning to UNESCO (Waxman, 2017). In 2001, Representatives Tom Lantos (D-CA) and James A. Leach (R-IA), introduced a legislation advocating for having the US return to UNESCO which was agreed to by a rollcall vote in the Committee on International Relations (US House of Representatives, 2001). Vice President Al Gore and Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley and pro-UN organisations such as the United Nations Association of the United States of America also exerted pressure pushing for re-joining UNESCO (Schaefer, 2001). Those opposed to the US return to UNESCO argued that some of its policies are "at variance" (US House of Representatives, 2001: 137) with the US policy objectives²⁷ and that the organisation still suffers from organisational malaise (US House of Representatives, 2001).

The US returned to UNESCO in 2003 under President George W. Bush (2001-2009). When announcing the decision at the UN General Assembly, he notably acknowledged the reforms undertaken by the organisation and pledged full commitment to UNESCO's mission "to advance human rights, tolerance, and learning" (Bush, 2002 as cited in Blanchfield and Browne, 2013: 10). Some analysts consider this decision as part of Bush's effort to weld the international community around the war on terror (Interviewee #13; Waxman 2017).

Since the United States came back to UNESCO, Congress has shown its support for the organisation by authorising between \$70 million and \$84 million in assessed payments per year. Voluntary contributions ranged from \$840,000 to \$1.89 million per year. Having had issues with UNESCO before, Members of Congress always kept it closely monitored ensuring that it was well-managed, stayed effective, and that its programmes corresponded to American interests (Blanchfield and Browne, 2014). Prior to the vote regarding Palestine, the US mission to UNESCO appeared to be rather involved in the work of the organisation. As noted in the report by the Office of Inspector General, "U.S. activism on UNESCO issues has never been perfunctory, but the past 2 years have seen the U.S. Mission and its leadership in overdrive, with remarkable results" (Office of Inspector General, 2012: 4). The US delegation facilitated public-private partnerships between UNESCO and US-based companies such as Apple,

²⁷ After the amend to the Authorization Act about returning to UNESCO was accepted in the Committee, 13 Representatives issue the so-called Additional View where they argued against joining UNESCO. As one of the reasons, they cited the fact that some actions of the UNESCO Director-General would promote tourism in Cuba which in turn would "provide hard currency to one of the worst human rights violators in the world" (US House of Representatives, 2001: 137).

Microsoft, and Proctor & Gamble. Despite not being a member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, it participated actively in the discussions on various topics and the Ambassador often acted as a mediator (Office of Inspector General, 2012).

At the time of the vote, the US domestic political set-up was as follows²⁸. Following the 2010 elections, in the 112th Congress (2011-2013), Republicans had a majority in the House of Representatives (242 to 193), while Democrats controlled the Senate (51 to 47). The 113th Congress (2013-2015) faced the same party division: 201 Democrat against 234 Republican in the House, and 51 Democrat against 47 Republican in the Senate. Finally, during the 114th Congress (2015-2017), both the House and Senate were controlled by Republicans (see Table 5.1).

	112 th Congress	113 th Congress	114 th Congress
House of Representatives			
Dem.	193	201	188
Rep.	242	234	247
Ind.	-	-	-
Total	435	435	435
Senate			
Dem.	51	53	44
Rep.	47	45	54
Ind.	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100

Table 5.1 US Congress: Party division in 2011-2017. Own creation, based on information from the websites of the United States Senate (US Senate 2021) and United States House of Representatives (Congress Profiles 2021d, 2021e, 2021f).

The general skepticism towards IOs expressed by Republicans included a particular concern about UNESCO. Over the years, Members of Congress have accused the organisation of its politicisation, poor financial management, and anti-democratic tendencies (Blanchfield and Browne, 2013). Similar to the whole UN system, UNESCO was on several occasions accused by Republicans of biased politics when the question of Israel and Palestine was involved (Rubenzer, 2017).

US foreign policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian question has been an issue over which Republicans and Democrats agreed for decades. Representatives at Congress have consistently demonstrated bipartisan support for Israel. However, various scholars point at an emerging divide when it comes to American foreign policy towards Israel, which inevitably includes a discussion about Palestine, its status, and Israel’s involvement in the Palestinian territories (Cavari and Nyer, 2014, Rubenzer, 2017, Rynhold, 2020). While Republican support for Israel

²⁸ The issue at hand covers a time period from 2011 to 2016. 2011 is the year when the vote in UNESCO took place and 2016 is the last time when the Administration attempted to resume contributions to the organisation. In 2017, the Trump administration announced the US withdrawal from UNESCO (Harris and Erlanger, 2017).

tends to consolidate (Pew Research Center, 2014), Democratic support appears to be less consistent. On the one hand, there is a decrease in support for Israel coupled with growing sympathy for the Palestinians among self-identified Democrats (Rynhold, 2020). At the same time, Democrats that have been elected tend to be less critical in their position towards Israel (Telhami and Kishi, 2014), partially due to the highly influential pro-Israel lobby. Despite growing differences between the Republican and Democratic parties, the overall tendency is still leaning more towards Israel. Although parties’ approaches might differ (Democrats emphasise the necessity of peace talks and Republicans take on a rather hawkish stance (Cavari and Nyer, 2014)), the two parties tend to converge rather than diverge regarding, for example, the US voting patterns on Israel-related issues in the UN or the level of aid directed to Israel (Rubenzer, 2017).

5.2.3. UNESCO-related groups: The Better World Campaign, UN Foundation, and Americans for UNESCO

One of the relevant interest groups in the discussion about (non)payment to UNESCO was a non-partisan organisation called the Better World Campaign (BWC). The group’s proclaimed goal is to facilitate a strong and effective relationship between the US and UN, while promoting American values and interests (BWC, 2021). Through a variety of initiatives, including the “Thank a Peacekeeper” campaign (BWC, 2011), regular surveys of American public opinion regarding the UN (e.g., BWC, 2006, 2017, 2020), and interaction with Congress (e.g. BWC, 2007; UN Foundation, 2009) BWC’s advocacy focuses predominantly on highlighting the importance of regular and full financial contributions to peacekeeping efforts and UN-system entities. In fact, this included advocacy for the US’ return to UNESCO in 2003 (BWC, 2003).

The Better World Fund (BWF), an umbrella organisation uniting the BWC and the United Nations Association of the United States (UNA-USA), was found in 1998 as an advocacy and outreach organisation aiming at supporting and lobbying the US Government to provide support to various UN activities (Williams, 2013). The Fund invests regularly in lobbying on foreign and defence policy issues, as well as federal budget and appropriations.

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Expenditures	\$660,000	\$700,000	\$750,000	\$720,000	\$570,000	\$770,000

Table 5.2 BWF’s total lobbying expenditures in 2011-2016 (based on data from Open Secrets (2021a)).

The BWC is also a sister organisation to the United Nations Foundation²⁹, an entity supporting the UN and its goals and promoting US leadership in the organisation. By acting as a strategic partner to the UN, the UN Foundation focuses on mobilising people and resources to assist the UN in its activities. The Foundation engages in behind-the-scenes activities such as lobbying and networking, as well as public awareness campaigns (UN Foundation, 2021).

A close partner of the Better World Campaign in dealing with the withdrawal of payments from UNESCO was the Americans for UNESCO (AU), an advocacy network founded by Jack Fobes, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO from 1971 to 1977, amid the US first withdrawal from UNESCO in 1983. The AU unites people who worked for or with UNESCO and academics who see the organisation as a valuable international platform for cooperation in science and education (Interviewee #17). Its main activities target intellectual communities and civil society in the US, encouraging and facilitating their participation in various UNESCO programmes (Americans for UNESCO, 2021).

5.2.4. American Israel Public Affairs Committee and American Jewish Committee

Among pro-Israel interest groups that were relevant for the UNESCO case were the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and American Jewish Committee (AJC).

AIPAC is a well-known pro-Israeli lobbying group describing itself as “bipartisan American organisation that advocates for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship” (AIPAC, 2021a). It was established in the 1950s and eventually grew to be the “behemoth” of pro-Israel interest groups. While it spends significantly less than many other lobby groups, it does maintain a status of the biggest spender among pro-Israel organisations (Waxman, 2019). In fact, both critics and supporters agree that AIPAC is highly influential, although as any other interest group it does not always get its way (Beauchamp, 2019; Walt, 2019). The influence of this group comes not only from its extensive financial resources (e.g., organisation’s budget was \$72 million as of 2015 (Terris, 2015)) but also from its broad network of connections to staffers and officials in the government, as well as its significant national membership (Waxman, 2019). AIPAC’s lobbyists are one of the most frequent visitors of the Hill (Beattie, 2015). AIPAC invests heavily in and have various lobbying and advocacy technics at its disposal (see Table 5.3). It engages in face-to-face lobbying, organises conferences in which top-ranking officials from the government participate, sponsors educational trips to Israel for Members of Congress,

²⁹ Both organisations were established by Ted Turner, an American entrepreneur and philanthropist, in 1998. However, they exist as two separate entities.

and involves local communities. Noteworthy is that it does not donate to congressional campaigns as the Committee is legally prohibited to do that (Walt, 2019).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Expenditures	\$2,850,400	\$2,761,388	\$2,977,742	\$3,060,332	\$3,388,700	\$3,602,343

Table 5.3 AIPAC’s total lobbying expenditures in 2011-2016 (based on data from Open Secrets (2021b)).

The AJC is a Jewish advocacy organisation working to influence policy and opinion on issues such as fighting antisemitism, strengthening Israel’s position on the international arena, and defending democratic and human rights values. Being one of the oldest advocacy-organisations mandated with promoting rights of Jewish people, the organisation has a broad reach with its offices spread around Europe, Asia, and Africa (AJC, 2021). In the US, it is also considered to be rather influential and affluent, although not as influential as AIPAC (Waxman, 2010). The AJC also founded a neoconservative magazine called “Commentary”, where it published extensively on and criticised the admission of Palestine to UNESCO and the Administration’s attempts to resume American payments to the organisation (Commentary, 2021, see also Rubin, 2011; Tobin, 2015).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Expenditures	\$150,000	\$120,000	\$150,000	\$120,000	\$110,000	\$150,000

Table 5.4 AJC’s total lobbying expenditures in 2011-2016 (based on data from Open Secrets (2021c)).

5.2.5. Americans for Peace Now and J Street

Established in 1981, the Americans for Peace Now (APN) is another pro-Israel organisation advocating for “comprehensive, durable, Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab peace, based on a two-state solution” (APN, 2021a). It characterises itself as nonpartisan and engages in grassroots activism and outreach (APN, 2021b). However, its lobbying expenditures are significantly lower in comparison to its fellow pro-Israel organisations (see Table 5.5). The organisation itself is rather small but it enjoys expertise of political savvy staffers and good reputation among other groups concerned with similar issues (Beattie, 2015).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Expenditures	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000

Table 5.5 APN’s total lobbying expenditures in 2011-2016 (based on data from Open Secrets (2021d)).

J Street was found in 2008 by Jeremy Ben-Ami, a former domestic policy adviser in the Clinton administration (Beattie, 2015). Since then, it has grown to a 60 employees-organisation (as of 2015) with a \$8 million budget. The organisation participates in financing federal candidates thanks to its PAC (Terris, 2015) and engages in various outreach activities such as organising educational trips to the Middle East for Members of Congress and students,

nationwide campaigning to promote a two-state solution, and establishing its chapters on university campuses (J Street, 2011a). The reach of J Street, however, is not as wide as AIPAC’s: in 2011, J Street’s annual conference was attended by 2,000 people (J Street, 2011a), whilst AIPAC’s 2010 conference attracted 7,000 (Waxman, 2012). J Street’s lobbying expenditures, whilst higher than APN’s, do not come any close to the money spent on lobbying by AIPAC (see Table 5.6). As confirmed by an Interviewee, although J Street’s influence is increasing, as of 2011-2016 (period of the US disengagement from UNESCO), it enjoyed significant less influence than AIPAC (Interviewee #13).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Expenditures	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000

Table 5.6 J Street’s total lobbying expenditures in 2011-2016 (based on data from Open Secrets (2021e)).

Although there is no consensus on how to position all pro-Israel interest groups regarding their political leanings, APN and J Street are considered to be relatively close (Beattie, 2015; Levy, 2011). Indeed, both organisations cooperate on certain issues and engage in joint efforts to promote their view on how US-Israeli relations should develop (APN, 2019; J Street, 2012a; Progressive Israel Network, 2021)³⁰. These groups tend to focus on promoting peace between Israel and Palestine while admitting that this does not equate supporting all policy decisions made by the Israeli government (Terris, 2015; Waxman, 2012).

5.2.6. Friends Committee on National Legislation

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is a nonpartisan Quaker organisation that also advocated for restoring payments to UNESCO. However, unlike the groups mentioned above, FCNL’s lobbying agenda is much broader: it seeks to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship (FCNL, 2021a). Among issues covered are economic justice, gun violence prevention, justice reform, native Americans, peacebuilding, as well as the Middle East and Iran (FCNL, 2021b). Therefore, even though its financial resources exceed those of APN and J Street (see Table 5.7), not all of them were directed to advancing UN-system organisations or a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Notwithstanding, being an older and better-endowed lobby group, FCNL enjoyed a certain level of influence and was recognised as a trustworthy source of information on Middle East issues (Beattie, 2015).

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Expenditures	\$1,546,141	\$1,516,919	\$1,266,351	\$2,238,565	\$2,430,000	\$2,990,000

Table 5.7 FCNL’s total lobbying expenditures in 2011-2016 (based on data from Open Secrets (2021f)).

³⁰ This is why the decision was made to discuss the APN and J Street separately from AIPAC and the AJC.

5.3. Two-level game explanation of disengagement

It is rather evident that the issue of withholding of financial contributions to UNESCO involved multiple stakeholders with different agendas and interests. In addition, both the executive and legislative branches of the government were actively involved. Since the issue of payments to IOs was embedded in a more general appropriations process, any changes in financial spending towards IOs had to be authorised. Considering the partisan set-up in Congress and the divide over the US role in IOs and the Israeli-Palestinian question, the issue of payments to UNESCO was developing in the context of divided government. This section, hereby, seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the attempts by the Administration to get a national security waiver on the legislation prohibiting payments to UNESCO over the course of five years and the role of various interest groups in this process.

5.3.1. Statement of preferences by the government and relevant interest groups

Although the US government was divided with the President-Democrat having to face a Republican majority in the House of Representatives (Congress Profiles, 2021d), the domestic response regarding the vote to accept Palestine as a full member of UNESCO was to a certain extent unanimous and generally negative, although the two parties differed in the level of criticism that they expressed.

This divergence is in line with the overall partisan divide regarding two policy issues: the UN and its agencies and programmes and the Israeli-Palestinian question. On the one hand, Republicans tend to be much more critical and less supportive than Democrats when it comes to international cooperation through IOs. While Republicans consider that the UN-system needs reforms and is less effective as compared to other means of international cooperation such as bilateral agreements, Democrats claim that the UN is beneficial to the US and thus, should be funded fully and the US should maintain its long-standing commitment. The isolation of Israel in the UN is also often cited by Republicans as a counter-argument to the US involvement in the organisation. On the other hand, there are more points of agreement between two parties in regard to Israel and Palestine. Since the issue of the admission of Palestine to UNESCO speaks to a broader topic of Israeli-Palestinian relations, views on withdrawal of contributions from UNESCO are dictated *inter alia* by each party's stance on this broader topic. While US foreign policy towards Israel has been predominantly bipartisan for decades, Republicans tend to be less sympathetic and uncompromising (Rubenzer, 2017) which was rather evident in the aftermath of Palestine's admission to UNESCO.

The move made by the organisation was condemned as premature and counterproductive by Democrats (Erlanger and Sayare, 2011a), while Republicans took a tougher stance with some of them calling the vote “anti-peace” (Erlanger and Sayare, 2011a) and urging the US government to “stand by Israel” (Flake, 2011). Both the Obama administration and many Members of Congress held the view that Palestinian statehood could only be achieved through negotiations between Israel and Palestine rather than through the UN (Blanchfield and Browne, 2014). Republican Senator from South Carolina Lindsey Graham pointed at the danger that this development could pose for US-UN relations:

“This could be a tipping point. There’s a lot of bipartisan support for cutting off funding to any political U.N. organization that would do this. What you are going to do is eventually lose congressional support for our participation in the United Nations. That’s what’s at risk here” (Graham, 2011 as cited in Coghlan, 2011).

The response from interest groups was also rather swift. UN Foundation President Timothy Wirth cautioned against undermining of America’s soft power and the potential loss of its influence in other IOs such as the IAEA and WIPO in the case if the Palestinians decided to advance beyond UNESCO (Levy, 2011). The Americans for Peace Now took their arguments further and underlined not only the negative effects of non-payment to UNESCO but also the right of the Palestinians to seek membership in the UN. The organisation emphasised that the Palestinian efforts at the UN do not mean their rejection of the negotiations process or represent an attack on Israel³¹ (Friedman, 2011a).

In spite of the initial reaction, the Administration and State Department recognised the importance of UNESCO for US national interests and the role that American financial contributions played in assisting UNESCO in achieving its goals (Killion, 2011; Nuland, 2011a). The Obama administration proclaimed a “new era of engagement” in the UN (Obama, 2009), “marked by unconditional and full payment of U.S. assessed contributions to the UN in the hope that such payments will increase U.S. influence” (US House of Representatives, 2011: 45). Being in favour of international organisations, the Administration did not want to have the withdrawal from one of them on their record (Interviewee #14). Following this agenda, the executive branch of the US government launched a campaign aimed at restoring funds to UNESCO by receiving a waiver from Congress that would allow to circumvent the 1990 and 1994 laws. The State Department’s fiscal year (FY) 13 budget proposal, released on February 13, 2012, included \$78,968,000 of contributions to UNESCO with a remark stating that “the

³¹ At the time, while opposing defunding of UNESCO, J Street did not take a position regarding the Palestinians’ efforts to join the organisation. During the Trump administration, J Street, however, took an approach similar to the APN’s and argued in favour of the right of Palestine to join the UN (Interviewee #18; see also J Street, 2021).

Department of State intends to work with Congress to seek legislation that would provide authority to waive restrictions on paying the U.S. assessed contributions to UNESCO” (US Department of State, 2012: 52). In addition, the Administration requested \$880,000 in voluntary funds (Blanchfield and Browne, 2013).

Following the budget and appropriations process, the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs subcommittees of both the House of Representatives and Senate held public hearings aimed at discussing the budget proposal prepared by the Department of State. When answering the question about UNESCO posed by Rep. Granger of Texas, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton defended the proposed waiver. In the administration’s point of view, withholding funds from UNESCO could create a dangerous precedent costing the US its leverage and influence in the UN system (Clinton, 2012 in US House of Representatives, 2013a). The same argument was put forward by the US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, who also pointed out a risk to other IOs such as the WHO, IAEA, and WIPO should the Palestinians continue their efforts to gain membership in the UN system. The 1990 and 1994 legislation, in her opinion, did not strengthen but rather weakened the position of the US:

“...the Palestinians did something reprehensible that we strongly opposed, and that was to try to take a short cut to membership of UNESCO prior to a negotiated agreement with the Israelis. We oppose that. We think there ought to be consequences for that. But, the consequences should not be to put a gun to our own head and force ourselves ultimately into a position where we can no longer fund programs that are in our interest and, ultimately, will lose our vote in this organization” (Rice, 2012 in US House of Representatives, 2013a: 543).

Arguments provided by Ambassador Rice were, however, met with skepticism and disagreement. Several policy-makers pointed out that restoring funding to UNESCO would send “the wrong message”, “hurt [...] national interest”, and “discredit(s) [...] credibility” (US House of Representatives, 2013a: 553, 555). In addition, some representatives highlighted that withholding payments from UNESCO would signify Congress’ allegiance to Israel (Flake, 2011; Poe, 2011). One of the most outspoken critics of Palestine’s bid for membership in the UN and strongest opponents to the waiver was Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from 2011 to 2013. A long-standing UNESCO-sceptic³² and Israel supporter (Beattie, 2015), she tried to propose even stricter legislation that would cut off contributions to a UN organisation that “grants upgraded status to Palestine” (Ros-Lehtinen, 2013 as cited in Hudson, 2013). She saw the 1990 and 1994 legislation as a

³² Ileana Ros-Lehtinen opposed the US return to UNESCO in 2003 (US House of Representatives, 2011).

necessary means to deter other UN agencies from following UNESCO's lead, and prevent taxpayers' money from going to biased UN bodies (Hudson, 2013).

The issue received a less extensive coverage in the Senate with only two Senators enquiring about the suggested waiver. Only one representative was positive and supportive of the administration's request. Specifically, Sen. Leahy (D-Vt) pointed out the detrimental consequences and self-harming nature of the withdrawal of payments caused by the almost 20-years-old laws:

"[...] sometimes these laws, while they may have great significance to Members or certain lobbies³³ can end up really hurting us in the end" (Leahy, 2012 in US Senate, 2012a: 12-13).

Similarly, very little attention to the issue was given by interest groups that testified before Congress in 2012. Among 43 groups with very different profiles there was only one – FCNL – that mentioned UNESCO. Specifically, it argued in favour of waiving restrictions on funding for UNESCO referring to its activities in the fields of literacy training, tsunami warning systems, Holocaust education etc. (US House of Representatives, 2013b). Outside of Congress, the FCNL also advocated that the 1990 and 1994 laws were "antiquated" and underlined that the UN should not be punished for decisions made by UN member states (FCNL, 2011), an argument also supported by some in Congress (Hudson, 2013). In the same vein, the APN called the laws anachronistic (APN, 2011). J Street appealed to the legislative body to amend the law in order to preserve American contributions to UNESCO. The organisation's Director of Government Affairs, Dylan Williams, used the same argument as the Administration. That is, about the US influence and national interests. Similar to some representatives at Congress cited earlier, he also pointed at the responsibility of the US to stand by Israel, although his argument was completely opposite. Specifically, he maintained that "[f]ailure to avert American defunding and disengagement from UNESCO [...] would also deprive Israel of its most vocal and powerful advocate in a key UN organ" (Williams, 2011 as cited in J Street, 2011b).

AIPAC had a very strong position regarding Palestinian statehood bid in general. The website of the organisation stated that Palestine's attempts to seek recognition of its statehood in the UN undermined US peace efforts. According to the Committee, granting recognition of a state would reward Hamas because it controlled the Gaza strip, an area that the Palestinian Authority considered part of its state (AIPAC, 2021b). In November 2011, the organisation has published a memo where they denounced the efforts of the Palestinians to become a member

³³ While Senator Leahy did not specify which lobbies he had in mind, a number of Interviewees mentioned that the 1990 and 1994 laws were heavily lobbied for by AIPAC and were considered a great achievement by this organisation (Interviewees #13, 14).

of UNESCO and considered it “an attempt to manipulate the U.N. system for their own political agenda” (AIPAC, 2011). The Committee called upon the US leadership in stopping Palestinian efforts to win further recognition and underlined that any US aid to the Palestinian Authority should be conditioned to how the Palestinians proceeded in the future in this regard (AIPAC, 2011).

In the wake of the vote at UNESCO and first attempts to resume payments to the organisation through the waiver, a number of trends could be identified. The strongest criticism of UNESCO for admitting Palestine as a member and hence, opposition to granting the waiver to resume payments to the organisation originated in Congress. There was a certain level of partisan divide in the House of Representatives and Senate regarding the waiver: the floor was dominated by Republicans, while support of the Administration’s efforts by Democrats was quite restrained. Interest groups that voiced their opinion publicly were in favour of the waiver, although for different reasons. Some of them, like the BWC, UN Foundation, and FCNL focused on the importance of UNESCO for the US and its national interests while others, like the APN and J Street, included an Israeli-Palestinian dimension to the discussion arguing that Palestine’s bid for membership was legitimate and the withdrawal of payments will hurt not only American but also Israeli interests.

In the next chapter, I will explore what efforts were undertaken by various actors in order to advance the waiver or, conversely, maintain the *status quo* (non-payment to UNESCO).

5.3.2. Interest groups access the government

The withdrawal of financial contributions to UNESCO had significant consequences first and foremost for the organisation itself. Having lost 22% of its regular budget, UNESCO had to come up with a strategy to deal with such a loss. As the focus of this dissertation is on the role of domestic politics in state policies towards IOs, only UNESCO’s actions in the US will be accounted for³⁴. In anticipation of the vote on Palestinian membership, the Director-General of the organisation, Irina Bokova, engaged in a public campaign advocating for UNESCO. She published a letter in Washington Post (see Bokova, 2011) emphasising the organisation’s contribution to what is “in line with U.S. security interests” (Bokova, 2011). In addition, she engaged in direct talks with the Obama administration, Members of Congress, and pro-Israel organisations (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2011). While noting that UNESCO enjoyed support from the Administration, Bokova underlined the need to promote UNESCO’s image in Congress:

³⁴ For the analysis of how UNESCO dealt with the budget cut internally, see Eckhard et al. (2019), Hufner (2017).

“There is a problem of legal procedures and a problem of how to convince some US Congress members who are not enthusiastic towards the UN or UNESCO, either because they are not fully aware of what UNESCO does, or because they are under the influence of old stereotypes about UNESCO from the 1990s” (Bokova, 2011 as cited in Asharq Al-Awsat, 2011).

After the vote, the Director-General traveled to the US again to meet with Congressional Leaders among which were Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Patrick Leahy. However, it did not result in a change of heart among opponents of the waiver, and Senator Leahy cautioned against any hopes that the waiver could be granted any time soon (UNESCO Press, 2011b).

Nevertheless, UNESCO continued its efforts to advocate for its importance to the US. It also sent an American national, George Papagiannis, working for UNESCO to the US as its Washington liaison. Having worked as Director of Communications for Representative Nancy Pelosi, Papagiannis drew on his experience in Congress to promote UNESCO in the US. As noted in his LinkedIn profile, he “leveraged relationships at the highest level with Members of Congress, as well as high-level US Government officials” (Papagiannis, 2021) and appeared on a television programme about the US and UNESCO (see pp.123-124).

Generally, UNESCO’s strategy of promoting the organisation in the US evolved around two aspects: UNESCO’s importance for US security interests and its role in the US domestic affairs. Significant efforts were targeted at local communities who could see the effects of the organisation’s policies first-hand and who could then talk to their representatives in Congress. The community-level approach was centered around three issues that were thought to be important to the Americans: jobs, peace, and security. In this regard, the UNESCO World Heritage³⁵ became the foundation for promoting UNESCO in the US:

“Around a World Heritage Site, there is an emerging economy resulting from the cite coming on the list [...] Poverty Point is located in one of the poorest parts of Louisiana where there is a high unemployment rate [...] the importance here is realizing that the community would benefit over time [...] the community would benefit across all level of the local economy” (Interviewee #15).

Although the World Heritage was not of a concern to many states in the US, other common ground was found in order to demonstrate the importance of UNESCO to the entire US: Creative Cities Network in which Detroit, Seattle, and other American cities participate; Harmful Algal Bloom Programme pertinent to communities like Florida and California; Early Warning (Tsunami) relevant for any coastal area in the US (Interviewee #15).

³⁵ UNESCO’s World Heritage seeks to promote “the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity” (UNESCO, 2021c).

Because there was rather evident opposition to the waiver among members of Congress, the decision was made to proceed in a rather reserved manner. Assessed contributions to the World Heritage come from the World Heritage Fund which is separate from dues to the general budget of UNESCO. Therefore, UNESCO thought that there was a better chance to first get a waiver only for the World Heritage rather than for UNESCO in general (Interviewee #15).

In the US, parliament has the power of the purse (Interviewee #16). That is, Congress is responsible for authorising the final version of the budget. The appropriations process in the US starts with the President's budget submission³⁶ which is followed by congressional consideration of a budget resolution – a plan for total spending, revenues etc. and a response to the President's proposal. While there are two types of bills that are passed during the appropriations process, namely authorisation bills and appropriation bills, the latter is of concern for this dissertation as it provides funding for agencies and programmes. It is quite common that the House and Senate appropriations committees discuss (primarily via hearings) the respective bills simultaneously. Eventually, both chambers generate their own bills which then have to be reconciled during a conference committee that is tasked with resolving differences between the House and Senate (Saturno et al., 2016). In other words, if a waiver was to be included in the final appropriations bill, it had to be present in both Senate and House versions of the bill. If a bill did not have its sister-bill in the other chamber, it was more difficult to get the issue at hand included in the final version of the appropriations bill. The absence of a companion bill meant that the process had to be started from scratch in an omnibus process (Interviewee #15).

The appropriation process normally consists of passing 12 regular appropriations bills (e.g., Foreign Operations, Transportation appropriations bills etc.) that are considered separately. However, there is an increasing tendency to pack those bills in one so-called omnibus bill. Some argue that omnibus bills “can be an efficient means for resolving outstanding differences within Congress or between Congress and the President” (Saturno et al., 2016: 13) as negotiators can make better trade-offs across several bills. Critics of this system maintain that the time allocated to pass these bills (the omnibus process usually takes place in the end of the year) and their length allow party and committee leaders to include controversial items in one lengthy bill that is voted on with limited debate and amendments (Oleszek, 2013). As summarised by an interviewee, “omnibus process [...] is like watching a rugby scrum – you never know who is going to come out with the ball” (Interviewee #15).

³⁶ For more information regarding how the President's budget request is generated see Section 3.2.

Because of the political dynamics in Congress, the urgency of some other foreign policy issues such as the Arab Spring and Syrian Civil War, and the specificities of the appropriation process, the approach to ask for less was also adopted by some US domestic groups interested in the issue. The so-called narrow waiver was expected to be more likely to pass the congressional appropriations procedures. Various interest groups advocated for a UNESCO-specific waiver as opposed to a blanket waiver for any organisation that might be defunded due to the acceptance of Palestine as a member (Interviewees #13, 16, 17).

For many actors the halt of payments happened rather unexpectedly (Interviewee #13) and because of the 2012 elections and more pressing international issues, the first serious discussion about the waiver occurred in 2013 (Interviewee #17). Some domestic interest groups, however, started acting immediately.

The Better World Campaign was at the forefront of the efforts aimed at restoring funds to UNESCO. The organisation went to the Hill, talking one-on-one to staffers and officials, testified during congressional hearings in 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 (Interviewee #13), and gave comments for a number of media publications (e.g., Hudson, 2013; Lynch, 2011a). Since the organisation lacked resources that would allow it to launch an extensive public campaign, the BWC leveraged its instrumental, structural, and discursive power by focusing its efforts on raising awareness among Members of Congress and the media about UNESCO's activities and their meaning for the US (Castellanos del Collado, 2013). Following lobbying strategies, BWC's personnel tailored their arguments depending on who they talked to: UNESCO's education about the Holocaust and its benefits to the US were emphasised when talking to a Jewish member of Congress, the organisation's programmes in Afghanistan and Iraq were brought before officials concerned with national security etc. Similar to UNESCO, the BWC attached great importance to the economic argument and the impact the organisation had at the local (state and community) level. In 2013, the Harbinger Consulting Group did a study on potential economic impacts of the admission of the five Spanish missions in San Antonio, Texas, to the World Heritage Site list³⁷. The highly positive conclusions from this report were used to prove the value of UNESCO during numerous briefings and meetings (Interviewee #13). In addition, the BWC tried to attract Congress' attention to the UNESCO case by organising events such as Herbie Hancock's concert in the House of Representatives. Co-hosted by Congressman John Conyers (D-MI) and Congressman Fred Upton (R-MI), UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and Grammy-Award winning jazz musician Herbie Hancock performed

³⁷ See Archie and Terry (2013).

and discussed how UNESCO and the United States partnered to advance American interests. In addition to the two Congressmen from Michigan and other Representatives, the concert was attended by officials from the Administration and UNESCO (Yeager, 2012).

In addition, the Better World Campaign tried to put together a coalition. First, they attempted to engage actors that were directly related to UNESCO and its mandate: the educational and journalism communities. While the BWC got some educational organisations to reach out to key Democrats, it was important to get Republicans on board (Interviewee #13). In this respect, it was seen more efficient to engage with the national security argument and get support from organisations that can be associated with US national security in a more direct way. However, because UNESCO was not too popular on the Hill and not so many people were even aware of why the organisation was important for the US (Interviewees #13, 15, 17), the BWC reached out to organisations connected to other UN specialised agencies. For example, they turned to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), to which the US contributed nearly \$23 million and where the admission of Palestine was not impossible (Lynch, 2011b). Two rather influential establishments³⁸, namely the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) and Lockheed Martin Corporation, were contacted. However, there was no concern on their side that the situation with UNESCO might repeat at ICAO. In general, there were not too many organisations willing to invest their resources in the UNESCO case (Interviewee #13).

Although there was no coordinated campaign, the BWC maintained close contact with the Americans for UNESCO. The collaboration between the two organisations mostly took place in terms of the exchange of information and contacts. Because the BWC worked extensively on the budget issues in general, they knew who to contact in Congress and shared this information with the Americans for UNESCO. The latter, in turn, focused its efforts to promote UNESCO, building on this knowledge. Similar to the BWC, the organisation benefited from its instrumental power and engaged in personal exchanges with Members of Congress and staffers. In addition, the organisation's focus on education and science issues allowed it to mobilise universities that had UNESCO chairs (Interviewee #17). As of 2016, there were 14 UNESCO chairs in various American Universities, e.g., UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Development, Early Childhood, Inclusive Education and Gender at the Georgetown University, UNESCO Chair in Learning and Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania, UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance at the American University and others (UNESCO,

³⁸ Both organisations have their own PACs and are known for their lobbying and advocacy in Congress (Munsil and Wright, 2015; NBAA, 2021).

2021d). Professors who contributed to establishing UNESCO chairs, worked through their universities, which tended to be quite closely connected to congressional staffers, to encourage re-engaging with UNESCO and finding a solution to the problem. Additional support was provided by the UN Association of the US and specifically, its National capital area chapter, who sent letters to Congress (Interviewee #17) and mobilised international support for their 2013 resolution on the US return to “a full dues paying member in UNESCO” (UNA-NCA, 2017).

Other interest groups appeared to be less active, at least publicly. The Friends Committee on National Legislation advocated for UNESCO only in its 2012 testimony (US House of Representatives, 2013b). Americans for Peace Now published a number of explainer pieces in various outlets criticising “legislative anachronisms” (APN, 2011) and pointing at the implications of the UNESCO case for the UN and the US (APN, 2015; Friedman, 2011b). J Street launched the “tell your Representatives” campaign in support of the continuation of funding of UNESCO that ran from 2011 to 2013 (J Street, 2012b).

An interviewee noted that although some activism was done, it was rather difficult to do something about the UNESCO case in terms of advocacy because the organisation did not have a domestic constituency: “We never did an action alert around UNESCO. We did not have national activists calling Members of Congress [...] partly because there was nothing to rally them around” (Interviewee #16). Although engaging grassroots are only one of the ways to show the importance of an issue to decision-makers, it is a necessary one. It is considered beneficial when Members of Congress can point to some level of constituent support when arguing for or against a certain subject or when being lobbied by competing interest groups (Interviewee #18).

AIPAC’s position regarding Palestine’s membership in UNESCO was clear. However, although it possessed a significant level of instrumental and discursive power, there is no sufficient evidence that the organisation embarked on an extensive public campaign in order to prevent the restoration of US payments. In the 2011 memo, AIPAC called for continuing “to withhold funds from U.N. agencies that accept the non-existent state of Palestine as a member” (AIPAC, 2011) and demanded that the US imposed further sanctions on the Palestinian Authority should they continue their efforts in the UN (AIPAC, 2011). Naturally, they were against the waiver. AIPAC’s reasoning was rather simple: if the Administration is given the waiver, the Palestinians will think they can go outside of negotiations with Israel (Interviewee #18) and “march through the UN system” (Interviewee #14).

Although AIPAC's structural and discursive power was challenged by alternative pro-Israeli groups such as J Street and the APN who offered a competing perspective on issues related to the US policy towards Israel (Rynhold, 2021), AIPAC still could exert the most influence on the government. The influence of the organisation stemmed predominantly from its significant instrumental (large financial, human, and organisational resources) and structural (agenda-setting through its annual policy conference attended by many policy-makers and activists) power (Waxman, 2010). As a powerful interest group in the field of American-Israeli relations, AIPAC enjoyed a significant network of connections to Congress. However, their congressional activity focused more on the prevention of Palestinian membership in the UN rather than on dealing with the consequences of Palestine's ascension to UNESCO. Beattie (2015) cites a congressional staffer saying: "The AIPAC people were out 100 percent to push punitive measures on the Palestinians for taking their case to the UN" (cited in Beattie, 2015: 302). AIPAC was also instrumental in passing the Senate resolution 185, opposing any efforts of the Palestinian Authority to establish or seek recognition of a Palestinian state outside of peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians (Beattie, 2015). As for the UNESCO case, AIPAC did not appear as active. None of their congressional testimonies before Congress called for a specific policy towards UNESCO or the UN in general, or even referred to the issue (US House of Representatives, 2014a, 2015a). However, a number of interviewees pointed at the role of the group in the rejection of the waiver on the prohibition to fund UNESCO (Interviewees #13, 14). One of them argued that, while AIPAC did not advocate publicly against the waiver, it also did not make any effort to indicate that compromise was possible, and this "effectively made it very difficult to do (*to get the waiver*) because it was clear they did not really want the change" (Interviewee #13).

It is evident that among domestic interest groups, one enjoyed the higher ground when trying to influence the policy-making process. AIPAC's dominant position, grounded mainly in its instrumental power, allowed this group to affect the policy process regarding American contributions to UNESCO. Significant material resources are an important factor in ensuring interest groups' level of influence. Naturally, money is necessary to organise a lobbying campaign regarding a specific issue. However, it also serves to a certain extent as a deterring factor. As described by an interviewee, one of the important aspects of interest groups' communication with politicians is to show that "if they take the position that you are advocating for, there will not be a flood of money going against them" (Interviewee #18). Hence, even though AIPAC did not direct all of its efforts to lobbying against the waiver, their strong financial position in comparison to other interest groups (AIPAC's lobbying expenditures were

higher than those of other groups combined) had an effect on how cautious members of the government were when deciding whether to support the waiver or not. Even those who would prefer to advocate for a more balanced position towards the issue were reluctant to support the waiver fearing the implications of such decision for their future campaigns and political work on other issues (Beattie 2015).

The US administration had an agenda-setting role in regard to Congress as it was the one to include funding for UNESCO and the waiver in the President's budget proposal. Congress, in turn, had veto power as both chambers had to agree to include the President's proposal in the final appropriations bill. Hence, after the submission of the Presidential budget request to Congress, the Administration essentially had to lobby Congress in order to make the case for the waiver and ensure its inclusion in the bill. Since the causal mechanism developed in Chapter 3 expects interest groups' access to the government and government branches engagement in agenda-setting and amendment activities to occur simultaneously, it appears justified to examine what has been done by the executive branch of the US government in this section. There were two venues through which the White House tried to push for the waiver. On the one hand, there were some efforts led by the US representation to UNESCO. On the other, the White House itself engaged in an informal campaign pushing for the renewal of payments to the organisation.

The US Permanent Representative to UNESCO at that time was David T. Killion, a veteran of the Hill. He worked as a Senior Professional Staff member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and was the Committee's top expert on International Organizations and State Department Operations from 2001 to 2009. Noteworthy is that as top UN advisor to Tom Lantos, the Chair of the Committee, he worked on the legislation passed in 2001 and authorising the US return to UNESCO (US Department of State, 2021a). In his capacity as the US Representative to UNESCO, he "led U.S. government messaging effort to convince Congress and U.S. citizens of strategic value of UNESCO" (Killion, 2021). One of the attempts to raise public awareness about the importance of UNESCO, was Ambassador Killion's interview to the Fletcher Forum of World Affairs, a foreign policy journal at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. After a lengthy discussion about UNESCO's prolific work in the domain of education, its influence in the world, and US' close ties with the organisation, Killion emphasised that the US disengagement from UNESCO posed a number of risks. Specifically, it undermined the Administration's commitment to multilateralism and created space for powers like China and Saudi Arabia to boost their influence in UNESCO by increasing financial contributions to cover the gap created by the US funding cut-off (Killion, 2013).

On the day of the vote regarding Palestine's membership in UNESCO, the State Department, together with the US Patent and Trademark Office, briefed leading US industries regarding the vote and the implications of a potential Palestinian accession to the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). Led by the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisation Affairs Esther Brimmer, the briefing was attended by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Business Software Alliance, and United States Council for International Business and others (US Department of State, 2011). The exchange between Victoria Nuland and a journalist regarding the meeting led by Esther Brimmer sheds some light on a strategic purpose of the US Administration when engaging in conversation with businesses:

“Question: Would it be fair to suggest that perhaps, with this meeting, the State Department is hoping to induce these companies to lobby for a change, an easing of these restrictions on UNESCO funding?”

Ms. Nuland: I think the stage that we are at is to make sure that our companies understand what may or may not be happening in this circumstance so that we can open a conversation about how we protect their interests going forward” (Nuland, 2011b).

Given that the UNESCO issue was coupled with a bigger discussion about Israeli-Palestinian relations, the executive branch engaged with the Jewish American community. On the one hand, the Administration sought to re-assure the community in the US commitment Israel and a two-state solution. In the beginning of 2012, Susan Rice, US Permanent Representative to the UN, addressed AIPAC and the AJC in order to underline that the US would not recognise Palestinian independence that did not originate in direct negotiations and a negotiated two-state solution (Rice, 2012a, 2012b). On the other hand, some attempts were made to advocate directly for UNESCO and the necessity to resume American contributions. Assistant Secretary Brimmer also tried to engage the Jewish American community. In April 2012, she delivered a speech to the American Jewish Committee' Miami and Broward Regional Office. After underlining the extent of Administration's efforts to normalise the status of Israel across the UN system, Assistant Secretary concluded her address with emphasising the importance of US support of Israel in the UN. She did not speak about UNESCO's value for American and Israeli interests. The focus was on the consequences that the law, which forced the US to stop paying to UNESCO, would have the organisations like the WHO and WIPO if the Palestinians gained membership in these IOs. In addition, she pointed at the implications of the loss of vote by the US as a result of withholding of funding (Brimmer, 2012). In doing this, she essentially advocated for some flexibility or compromise that would allow the President to restore payments to organisations that admit Palestine as a member:

“Since the founding of the UN, the U.S. has been at the table influencing key decisions at the UN, of concern to the U.S., and particularly those related to Israel. If the U.S. is not at the table, if we are withholding funding, the United States’ leadership role and ability to influence these decisions will diminish greatly” (Brimmer, 2012).

In Miami, Brimmer also visited the Miami Dade College to speak at a forum organised by the Social Sciences Department working in partnership with the Miami Chapter of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (MDC, 2012). While the choice of venues might be explained in different ways, it is noteworthy that some of the strongest critics of Palestine’s actions in the UN and proponents of a more hawkish approach to the Israeli-Palestinian issue were Members of Congress from Florida Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (House Foreign Affairs Committee) and Mario Diaz-Balart (Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee).

Officials from the executive branch regularly testified before Congress, arguing for the renewal of payments to UNESCO, although none of the hearings concerned UNESCO directly. Rather, a possibility of the waiver was discussed only when a Member of Congress specifically asked about the situation with funds to UNESCO during a general appropriations or foreign affairs hearing. In all cases, the Obama Administration was represented by top-ranking officials. In 2012, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton testified before the two Committees in the Senate (Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee and Foreign Relations Committee). She was joined by Ambassador Susan Rice in the House Appropriations Committee (US House of Representatives 2013a). In addition, Clinton talked to a number of Members of Congress and set up a team to reach out to Congressmen and Congresswomen to figure out what options the Administration had in regard to funding for UNESCO (Nuland, 2011b). The Administration took an approach that was different from the one taken by interest groups and UNESCO itself. Specifically, it decided to ask Congress for a blanket waiver. That is, a waiver that would allow the Administration to pay any UN organisation that might accept Palestine as a member (US Senate, 2012b). According to an interviewee, the choice that the Administration made was due to the growing pressure in other UN bodies to recognise Palestine as a state (Interviewee #17). The pro-waiver argument pushed forward by Clinton mainly concerned two aspects. First, if the Palestinians went forward to seek membership in other UN agencies, the waiver would allow the Administration to avoid losing its influence in organisations such as WHO and IAEA. Second, both the US and Israel agreed that UNESCO had programmes that were in Israel’s interests (US House of Representatives, 2013a; US Senate, 2012b). Unlike Secretary Clinton, Susan Rice complemented her testimony with mentioning of UNESCO’s importance for the US, i.e., its national interests. Specifically, she

pointed at various UNESCO's programmes and a space that US financial absence from the organisation created for countries like China and Qatar to jump in and turn UNESCO in "a direction that serves their interests" (US House of Representatives, 2013a: 554).

During President Obama's second term, the White House used the same strategy – new Secretary of State John Kerry and the Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power, testified before the House and Senate. Both of them highlighted American national interests and were more assertive in asking for the waiver. However, the UNESCO case still evolved greatly around the Israeli-Palestinian issue and hence, Israeli interests were also cited as one of the arguments in favour of the waiver (US House of Representatives, 2014b).

It was evident that the US Administration wanted to be engaged in UNESCO. As noted by an interviewee,

"the Administration was incredibly pro international organisations and they absolutely did not want to be the administration that was forced to withdraw the US from an important international organisation" (Interviewee #14).

Having lost the vote in UNESCO in 2013 due to the arrears, the Administration anyways appointed a new Ambassador to the organisation who was "very close to Obama's White House" (Interviewee #13). In fact, Crystal Nix-Hines, the new UNESCO Ambassador, was a raiser for President Obama, bringing between \$200,000 and \$500,000 to the campaign (Johnson, 2013). The choice of the new representative was demonstrative of the willingness and efforts of the Administration to manage the UNESCO situation (Interviewee #13). Nix-Hines made a case for UNESCO and why the US should re-engage with the organisation. For the first time, an economic argument was used. Apart from allowing the US to "promote quintessential American values" (US Senate, 2013a: 624), UNESCO cooperated with American companies such as Microsoft, Pepsi, and Google, which facilitated their global reach. Furthermore, the financial benefits of a World Heritage designation were highlighted (US Senate, 2013a).

In terms of more public outreach, the Administration was not more active than the interest groups concerned with the UNESCO case. The only substantive public discussion about what it meant for the US to leave UNESCO took place on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart (Interviewee #16), an American satirical news-program looking at current political issues. However, it was very helpful in terms of raising awareness (Interviewee #15). According to an Interviewee, the idea to do a segment on UNESCO was pitched by the US representation to the organisation (Interviewee #14). A two-piece report discussed why the US cut off its financial contributions to UNESCO, what implications it had for the organisation, its programmes all

over the world, and the Americans themselves. Correspondent John Oliver interviewed George Papagiannis of UNESCO and Robert Wexler, a former US Congressman from Florida. The latter argued that by cutting off American funds to UNESCO, the US demonstrated its adherence to an approach where Israel and Palestine ought to negotiate directly even though it also meant “cutting off UNESCO’s projects that are certainly complementary to our (*American*) interests” (The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, 2012).

Already after she finished her term as Assistant Secretary and prior to the US lost its vote in UNESCO due to the arrears, Esther Brimmer published an opinion piece in Washington Post advocating for the restoration of payments to UNESCO in order to prevent other countries from utilising the US inability to affect decisions and strategising to decrease American influence. While appealing to the common national security and economic arguments mentioned before, Brimmer argued for the first time that “Israelis should welcome an updated approach that restores the U.S. vote and strong voice in international organizations” (Brimmer, 2013), which signified a need to engage the US foreign partners to support the Administration’s quest for the waiver.

The most notable push for the waiver, this time the UNESCO-specific one (US Department of State, 2015b) was undertaken during negotiations of the omnibus bill in the end of 2015 under the leadership of Secretary Kerry (Interviewees #13, 17). An interviewee suggested that he was personally interested in resuming the American engagement in UNESCO due to his environmental and climate agenda. In particular, because of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, Secretary Kerry wanted to get the US back “in this dialogue” (Interviewee #17).

As noted by Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen in December 2015, “the Obama administration [was] making a push to get Congress to give the President the authority to waive a legal prohibition on U.S. contributions to UNESCO” (Ros-Lehtinen, 2015a). This evolved around several aspects. First, Secretary Kerry advocated for the US re-election to the UNESCO Executive Board. In a lengthy speech given during his visit to the organisation, Kerry again underlined the US commitment to UNESCO and its mandate (Kerry, 2015) and pledged to continue President Obama’s and his efforts to restore American contributions to UNESCO (UNESCO, 2015). Second, Kerry engaged heavily in recruiting key congressional figures. As noted by several interviewees, because the UNESCO case evolved around the question of Israel and Palestine and because in 2011-2016, Israel was still a mostly partisan issue, the key to receiving the waiver was heavy engagement of all key players (Interviewees #13, 14). Kerry

managed to get support from key Democrats and some Republicans in the Senate (Interviewees #13, 17). Although there were some key Republicans who were adamant about not allowing to grant the waiver, the Senate wanted to move on with the appropriations bill to avoid a government shutdown (Interviewee #17).

Finally, Kerry engaged with Israel regarding the US standing in UNESCO. Although there are no official documents or statements that would demonstrate what role Israel played in Administration's efforts to receive the waiver from Congress, multiple sources including two interviewees (Interviewees #14, 18) suggest that informal support from Israel was seen to be helpful in convincing Members of Congress to approve the waiver. For example, during a hearing, Senator Landrieu of Louisiana enquired:

"I see that the administration once again seeks waiver authority for funding this and other UN entities. Given the critical U.S. interests in providing waiver authority and funding to the World Heritage program, given that this Committee already voted to provide that funding, and given that the Israeli Government, who should be most concerned about this issue, supports a narrow waiver for World Heritage funds (emphasis mine), what is the administration able to do to show how critical this waiver is?" (Landrieu, 2014 in US Senate, 2014a: 40).

In his book, Michael Oren, the former Israeli Ambassador to the United States, noted that, while the Administration was dissatisfied with defunding of UNESCO, it also "took Israel to task for supporting the cut-off" (Oren, 2015: 245).

During an interview to an Israeli channel, John Kerry himself pointed at the necessity to conduct a dialogue with the Prime Minister and government of Israel in order to facilitate the US domestic discussion considering the waiver (Ahren, 2015). This is by no means suggesting that the Israeli government had to approve the decision to grant a waiver. Rather, given that the issue of UNESCO concerned American Israel-oriented interest groups and because these groups participate in policy-making through lobbying, it appears justified to argue that Israel's support could assist the US Administration in promoting the waiver in Congress. As suggested by an interviewee, the reason of bringing Israel on board to support the waiver was mitigating the opposition to the waiver by more conservative pro-Israel organisations (Interviewee #18). Eventually Kerry's efforts paid off and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu agreed to stop opposing the renewal of US payments to UNESCO (Pecquet, 2015; Ravid, 2015) which Israel's Embassy in Washington then communicated to "relevant congressional offices" (US Department of State, 2015b). However, no evidence was found that groups like AIPAC changed

their position and informed Congress about that³⁹. Nor did this persuade Members of Congress who were against the waiver to re-consider their position:

“[...] Secretary Kerry has been pressuring the Israeli Government to relent in its opposition to U.S. funding for UNESCO [...] But, with all due respect to the Israeli Government’s newfound position, which undoubtedly was achieved under duress, this is a matter of U.S. law and Congress’ clear desire to force fundamental reforms at the broken U.N. system” (Ros-Lehtinen, 2015b).

It is evident that although multiple interest groups were interested in restoring of American contributions to UNESCO, most of them acted independently. While some attempts were made by the Better World Campaign to mobilise a coalition, they were not successful. This impeded their chances for success. As argued by interviewees,

“[...] there were not a lot of organisations who were willing to invest time and energy to push for it. And that is what was needed to counter organisations like AIPAC” (Interviewee #13).

“There are so many actors in the United States [...] educators, scientists, architects, geologists, human rights people etc. But it is such a disparate group of interested actors. They are hard to organise. The opposition [...] who care about what they see as very poor treatment of Israel, they are very organised” (Interviewee #14).

In addition, the absence of the domestic constituency to support UNESCO made it more difficult for interest groups to make their argument to the government. Essentially, they had to rely on direct lobbying of Members of Congress and sporadic efforts to raise awareness about UNESCO among them. This was a challenging task as there was very little knowledge about the organisation not only among the American population but also among politicians. Hence, a lot of time had to be spent on educating Members of Congress about what the organisation is, what it does, and why it is important for US interests to participate in it. An interviewee mentioned that “Unless you are dealing with somebody who had specific contact with UNESCO, you have to prepare your pitch very carefully. And that takes a lot of time” (Interviewee #17). Given limited resources available to pro-UNESCO groups, this suggests that, although all of them were undoubtedly political savvy, their efforts could not be deployed on a large scale.

While there was no unified coalition to advocate for UNESCO, the arguments interest groups used were rather similar: outdated character of the laws that endangered other UN-agencies seen as more directly connected to the US domestic scene, American national interest, and support of Israel in the UN. In addition, they were in line with the official position of the Administration and UNESCO, which were also engaged in efforts to lobby the waiver in

³⁹ As mentioned earlier, the availability of the data (no response to interview requests or access to the archived documents and website’s content) were an obstacle in analysing AIPAC’s activities.

Congress. According to an interview, this harmony in narratives played in favour of the pro-UNESCO efforts (Interviewee #16).

Nevertheless, AIPAC was more powerful and hence, enjoyed more access to the government. Given their clout in Congress, even their “silent” approach, that is, not indicating that there might be some compromise, created an impression that not resuming payments to UNESCO was important (Interviewee #13).

5.3.3. Response of the US government

The US administration was trying to restore funding to UNESCO by obtaining the national security waiver from Congress for around 5 years. The narrative of both sides hardly changed during this time. Disregarding which official represented the executive branch, they upheld similar arguments concerning American national interests, the implications of Palestinian membership in other UN agencies provided that the 1990 and 1994 laws were active, and the US support for Israel in the UN.

While there were some supporters of the waiver, Congress was rather homogenous regarding UNESCO and its relations with the US. The fact that the question about contributions to UNESCO was so deeply embedded in the Israeli-Palestinian issue made the opposition to the waiver almost bipartisan (see Section 5.2.2). In addition to that, the UN system was seen with a certain level of skepticism, and UNESCO in particular was perceived in Congress as an agency that had been accused of anti-Israel bias before. Multiple interviewees underscored that domestic audience did not differentiate between UNESCO as a bureaucracy and UNESCO as an assembly of member states. Some decisions made by the governing bodies consisting of MS were perceived as decisions made by the agency. Hence, UNESCO was seen as a main culprit that had to be punished (Interviewees #13, 16, 17). These factors made it more difficult to advocate for UNESCO. Additionally, effective lobbying for the restoration of payments was only possible if the Administration engaged heavily with key players in Congress (Interviewee #13), which was not always the case (Interviewees #14, 16). Lobbying by interest groups also appeared to play a certain role. As noted by Senator Leahy (D-VT) during a congressional hearing:

“[...] we should talk about this later Secretary Kerry, we were lobbied, Congress was, to show how tough we were in our support of Israel by withdrawing payments to UNESCO”
(Leahy, 2014 in US Senate, 2014a: 33).

The adverse to the waiver environment was evident both in the House and Senate. In June-July 2011, before the vote on Palestinian membership in UNESCO, both chambers passed almost unanimously resolutions aimed at preventing the Palestinians from pursuing

membership in UNESCO (Ruebner 2013). Similarly, the House of Representatives dominated by Republicans and the Senate led first by Democrats and as of 2015, by Republicans, were reluctant about lifting sanctions imposed on UNESCO.

Regarding the power dynamics during the legislative process, there are stages at which individuals matter and stages where the total number of votes plays a crucial role. When the bills are being drafted and amendments are being discussed, the most powerful voices belong to the Chairs of and top party representatives in the committees. In the case of the foreign affairs budget, in which contributions to IOs are included, both the relevant Subcommittee⁴⁰ of the Appropriations Committee and Foreign relations Committee play a role (Interviewee #18). Hence, it is important to pay attention to individual Members of Congress when discussing Congress' decision-making regarding the waiver (see Table 5.8).

As seen from the previous sections, there was a discussion about and some attempts to promote the necessity for the waiver. The most outspoken defender of UNESCO and Administration's efforts to lift legislative prohibitions on funding of the organisation was Senator from the Democratic Party Patrick Leahy of Vermont (Interviewees #14, 16) who both defended UNESCO's work and criticised the outdated and self-defeating character of the laws that compelled the US to halt its contributions to the organisation (see Leahy, 2013, US Senate, 2013b). Although Senator Leahy was the Chairman of the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee until 2015, other key players relevant to the UNESO case were not as supportive of the organisation and/or had a strong position regarding the defence of Israel. When Republicans gained the Senate majority, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina switched from the position of Ranking Member to the position of Chairman of the Subcommittee. Senator Graham was generally supportive of development aid aimed at stabilising troublesome regions (Rogin, 2011b) and shared an opinion that it was in the interests of the US to be actively involved in UN-system organisations (Rogin, 2011c). However, "when it comes to the issue of Palestinian recognition, the politics just don't allow any room for compromise" (Graham, 2011 as cited in Rogin, 2011c). In other words, although the Senator saw some value in the US participation in UNESCO, the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the issue of Palestine's statehood were a higher priority for him. Once he became Chairman, Graham, a long-standing supporter of Israel (Graham, 2015), reiterated his commitment to the peace process and vowed that his Subcommittee would react appropriately if the UN "tries to take over the peace process" (Graham, 2015 as cited in Rudoren, 2015).

⁴⁰ Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Robert Menendez (D-NJ) was closer to Republicans in his views regarding the US policy towards Israel and Palestine (Lynch and Gramer, 2021). Hence, unsurprisingly, Senator opposed Palestinian efforts at UNESCO from the very beginning and urged the State Department to “immediately cut off all funding to UNESCO and any other international organization that recognizes a Palestinian state” (Menendez, 2011).

In the House, the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee was led by Kay Granger, a Republican from Texas, from 2011 to 2017. She worked in tandem with the Ranking Member from the Democratic Party, Nita Lowey from New York. Both criticised Palestine’s bid for membership in the UN and called upon Irina Bokova not to act on Palestine’s application (Rogin, 2011d). Similar to Senator Graham, Congresswoman Lowey was more lenient towards US foreign aid spending but had a very strong position towards the Israeli-Palestinian question. Being a top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, she was influential and respected across the aisle (Hudson, 2015) and maintained good relations with the pro-Israel groups and Israel itself (Interviewees #14, 18). While she was sympathetic with peace-oriented Palestinians, Lowey’s commitment to Israel was unshakeable. Both Granger and Lowey also had significant support from colleagues on the Subcommittee and full Committee levels (Beattie, 2015). The Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Eliot Engel (D-NY) was another top Democrat who was rather undermining than improving Administration’s chances to get the waiver (Interviewee #18). Similar to Lowey, Engel was known as a stalwart Democratic supporter of Israel (Samuels, 2021). Finally, the most active opponent of the waiver was Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, first Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee (2011-2013) and then Chairwoman of Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism House Subcommittee (2013-2017). While being strongly pro-Israel as many other Members of Congress (Beattie, 2015), she was also rather critical towards the UN, a position that only partially stemmed from her perception that the UN is biased and anti-Israel. Additionally, Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen was critical of the UN approach to Cuba (Interviewee #17).

Taking into consideration the distribution of positions in the Committees relevant for the UNESCO case and the overall partisan divide in Congress, it is not surprising that Administration’s efforts to receive the authorisation to resume payments to UNESCO was met with scepticism and repeated rejections. In the period between 2012 and 2015 (FY2013-FY2016), neither the House nor Senate included a waiver or funding for UNESCO in their appropriations bills (US House of Representatives 2012, 2013c, 2014c, 2015b; US Senate

2012c, 2013c, 2014b, 2015). Even key Democrats in Congress who could back the executive branch were reluctant to support the waiver. Combined with the dominance of Republicans in the House and as of 2015, in the Senate, this reduced the chances of any progress regarding American contributions to UNESCO. As noted by two interviewees, “If key Republicans and Democrats are against it, there is no chance” (Interviewee #13) and “If there is one chamber controlled by Republicans, there is no chance that the waiver can get passed” (Interviewee #18). A vivid example of this is the appropriations process for FY2014. In July 2013, Senator Mary L. Landrieu (D-LA) suggested an amendment that would give the Administration a narrow waiver allowing to resume contributions to the UNESCO World Heritage programme. The waiver was granted by a vote of 19-11. However, during negotiations with the House of Representatives, it “deleted this line item, and refused to include it in the Omnibus spending package” (Landrieu, 2014 in US Senate, 2014a: 40). In addition, the issue was always considered sensitive due to its relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which decreased the political space for any Member of Congress who would want to back the Administration to act on it (Interviewee #18). Finally, the White House never considered the renewal of payments to UNESCO a non-negotiable issue (Interviewee #13). In other words, it did not resort to threatening to veto appropriations bills if they did not include the waiver or funds for UNESCO. As a result of the aforementioned dynamics between the White House and Congress as well as interest groups in the US domestic arena, the US disengaged from UNESCO.

	112 th Congress		113 th Congress		114 th Congress	
	House	Senate	House	Senate	House	Senate
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations	Kay Granger (R), Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D), Ranking Member	Patrick Leahy (D), Chairman Lindsey Graham (R), Ranking Member	Kay Granger (R), Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D), Ranking Member	Patrick Leahy (D), Chairman Lindsey Graham (R), Ranking Member	Kay Granger (R), Chairwoman Nita Lowey (D), Ranking Member	Lindsey Graham (R), Chairman Patrick Leahy (D), Ranking Member
Foreign Affairs (House) and Foreign Relations (Senate) Committee	Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R), Chairwoman Howard Berman, Ranking Member	John Kerry (D), Chairman Richard Lugar, Ranking Member	Edward Royce (R), Chairman Eliot Engel, Ranking Member	Bob Menendez (D), Chairman Bob Corker, Ranking Member	Edward Royce (R), Chairman Eliot Engel, Ranking Member	Bob Corker (R), Chairman Ben Cardin, Ranking Member
Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism House Subcommittee	Steve Chabot (R), Chairman		Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R), Chairwoman		Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R), Chairwoman	

Table 5.8 Key players in decision-making regarding the foreign affairs budget. Red – committee is dominated by Republicans, blue – by Democrats (own creation, based on data from Ballotpedia 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).

5.4. Interim Conclusions

In the end of 2011, the US disengaged from UNESCO by the means of withdrawal of funds. The decision was guided by the law from the 1990s and required the US to halt its financial contributions to the organisation because it accepted Palestine as its full member.

This case demonstrates what role interest groups and domestic political institutions can play in the formation of state policies towards IOs. Both hypotheses derived from the two-level game framework are confirmed. The case highlighted the role of different branches of the government when forming policy towards an IO. Moreover, in the case of the US disengagement from UNESCO, the discrepancy in preferences between the two branches of the government appeared to play a more instrumental and direct role than competition among interest groups. During 2011-2016, the executive branch was led by the President from the Democratic Party and the legislative branch was dominated by Republicans. Moreover, even Democratic leaders in the House and Senate were aligned more with Republicans on the issue of UNESCO than with the White House. Hence, the Administration faced a strong bipartisan opposition to its efforts regarding the waiver. Since the question of contributions to IOs is included in the budget and appropriations process, Congress was a dominating government branch. Although the executive branch engaged in negotiations with both chambers and attempted to push for the waiver, it never considered the issue as non-negotiable. That is, it never threatened to veto appropriations bills because they did not include the waiver that would allow to resume payments to UNESCO. As a result, the heterogeneity in preferences between the legislature and the executive led to a gridlock situation and hence, policy towards the organisation reflected more the preferences of the legislative branch (majority of Members of Congress), and the US disengaged from UNESCO by withdrawing funds.

The case of the US disengagement from UNESCO is also a demonstrative example of the role of the level of access to and influence over the government in interest groups' participation in policy-making towards IOs. When the US halted payments to UNESCO, a number of groups stepped forward to advocate for or against the resumption of payments. On the one hand, there were multiple groups including the pro-UN and pro-UNESCO Better World Campaign and Americans for UNESCO, as well as interest groups concerned with Israeli-Palestinian issues that were advocating for the waiver that would allow the US government to resume financing of UNESCO. On the other hand, there were organisations, most notably AIPAC, that were in favour of keeping the *status quo*. That is, they wanted the US government to keep withholding contributions from the organisation. After a careful analysis of these groups regarding their

power, resources, and the level of access to the government, it became evident that AIPAC was the most influential interest group. Even though the organisation could not make campaign contributions to politicians, it leveraged other resources in order to ensure its influence. Founded in the 1950s, it accumulated significant financial resources and national membership, as well as extensive knowledge regarding different strategies of approaching the government and a broad network of connections with it. In other words, AIPAC enjoyed high levels of instrumental, discursive, and structural power. Whilst there were a few advocacy groups that tried to push for the waiver, they did not work together and hence, could not overpower AIPAC. It should be noted that due to the data availability issue (none of the requests for an interview sent to AIPAC's representatives was answered; the request to access AIPAC's archived documents related to UNESCO and Palestinian membership in it was also not successful), no significant evidence of an active lobbying campaign on the UNESCO case was found. However, multiple interviewees from different groups pointed at the role that AIPAC played in the final outcome – repeated rejection of the waiver and hence, continuation of withdrawal of funds from UNESCO, i.e. disengagement. Additionally, given a certain level of connection between key Members of Congress and AIPAC, a claim can be made that while the organisation did not lobby specifically on the issue of UNESCO, it definitely contributed to the formation of their preferences that leaned more towards supporting Israel and criticising what was seen as a bypass of the peace process.

The collected data sheds light on the presence of the causal mechanism in the case of the US disengagement from UNESCO. There is strong evidence demonstrating the operation of the first part of causal mechanism. Shortly after the Palestinian vote at UNESCO and subsequent automatic withdrawal of American contributions to the organisation, the US administration announced that it would seek a waiver on the law that caused withdrawal of funds. At the same time, interest groups reacted to the event by publicising their preferences in this regard: some of them (e.g., Better World Campaign and J Street) voiced their support to the Administration's efforts, while others (e.g., AIPAC) opposed the waiver and US re-engagement with UNESCO. In the second part of the mechanism, interest groups accessed the government while trying to influence policy-making. Interestingly, the group that was identified as the most influential due to its high levels of power across all dimensions (instrumental, discursive, structural) – AIPAC – did not appear as active. By contrast, groups like the Better World Campaign and Americans for UNESCO engaged in active campaigning, promoting the importance of the organisation and the US involvement in it on the Hill. Nevertheless, they still lacked resources and power to become strong counterparts to AIPAC. At the same time, there is evidence of negotiations

between the executive and the legislature. The executive branch acted as an agenda-setter – it engaged with the issue of contributions to UNESCO and pointed Congress’ attention to it through President’s yearly budget proposals. Specifically, it requested a national security waiver on the 1990s laws in order to be able to resume payments to UNESCO. Additionally, it also embarked upon lobbying the legislative branch through congressional hearings and by engaging with individual Members of Congress. It is noteworthy that the Administration tried to influence Congress by recruiting or lobbying interest groups that they considered to be able to bring lawmakers to the executive’s side (e.g. the Administration tried to engage with businesses that could have been affected negatively if the same law that forced the US to withdraw funds from UNESCO had been applied to WIPO and the American Jewish community). Congress, on the other hand, engaged in amendment activities. It considered and amended the Administration’s proposal through the budget and appropriations process. The part three of the mechanism – response to the most influential interest group – played out through the Appropriations Acts submitted by the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittees of the House and Senate. In the reports accompanying the Acts, it was specified that the Committee does not provide requested funding for UNESCO (see, for example, US Senate, 2013c). The part four of the mechanism is absent. No veto power was invoked. Interestingly, several interviewees mentioned that the Administration chose not to make the waiver a non-negotiable issue of the appropriations process. There was an option to resort to ‘take it or leave it’ type of arguments, however, due to various reasons⁴¹ it did not happen (Interviewees #13, 14, 17, 18). Hence, the process went directly to the fifth part of the mechanism – presentation of policy favouring disengagement which was embodied in the appropriations bills. In the period between 2011 and 2016, none of them included funding for UNESCO or any kind of waiver, blanket or narrow one, allowing the Administration to resume the US payments to the organisation. Finally, the causal mechanism led to the outcome – disengagement.

⁴¹ Interviewees expressed different opinion as to why the UNESCO waiver was not an issue that the Administration was willing to make non-negotiable. Interviewee #13 maintained that UNESCO was not an issue of high priority. Interviewee #17 said that it was not a priority since there were more pressing issues such as the Arab Spring, Syrian Civil War, and climate change. Considering that the relationship with Congress was “pretty inhospitable”, there was not too much space to push for UNESCO. Interviewee #18 argued that the UNESCO issue was “nice-have rather than must-have”.

6. Conclusion

In the following chapter, the results of the research are summarised and an answer to the research question is laid out. Drawing on that, alternative explanations are offered. Finally, the limitations of the study are discussed and avenues for future research are suggested.

6.1. Final results

This dissertation focused on a phenomenon capturing complex and nuanced relations between states and international organisations. The empirical puzzle is that sometimes states deliberately choose not to make use of their rights as members, not to abide by the obligations imposed on them or pursue their goals via other venues with similar mandate. It is puzzling because such behaviour (e.g. when a state loses its voting rights as a result of financial arrears to an IO or simply does not attend the meetings) undermines their influence in IOs and deprives them of a forum to set the agenda or affect decision-making.

Building on the literature concerned with the vitality and survival of IOs, as well as state membership in them, I argued that the member/non-member dichotomy does not capture the nuances of state involvement in IOs. First, there is a discrepancy between the relatively low occurrence of state withdrawals from IOs and the state of international cooperation and multilateralism. In other words, quantifiable parameters such as the number of members in IOs do not provide a full picture of how healthy international cooperation is. Second, there are cases when IOs exist on paper only as their member states (in large numbers) lower their engagement, i.e. stop sending delegates or financial contributions.

Against this backdrop, I suggested that membership should be considered as a spectrum where one of the values is disengagement. Hence, the main goal of the dissertation was to examine how and why disengagement occurs. I introduced the concept of disengagement and operationalised it building on the state influence in IOs and regime complexity literature. Taking into consideration the discussion about different faces of state power in IOs and formal and informal channels through which this power can be exercised, I contended that a state disengages from an IO when it chooses not to utilise these channels of influence. Since this happens either through deliberate withdrawal of personnel (not attending meetings, not sending delegations etc.) or financial resources (which tends to result in the loss of voting rights), the first path that disengagement can take is withdrawal of resources. On the other hand, regime complexes, non-hierarchical arrays of overlapping organisations, allow states to strategies and choose an institution that fits their preferences better. When choosing to pursue its interests in

another organisation, a state undermines the relevance and authority of a *status quo* institution even if it does not completely withdraw from it. Hence, the second path of disengagement is the change of venue.

The second part of the research question regarding why disengagement occurs was answered drawing on the two-level game approach. Specifically, following the assumption that state preferences regarding the international level are shaped domestically, I proposed two factors that could drive disengagement. On the one hand, disengagement could be the result of the influence of the most influential interest group on the government. On the other hand, disengagement could occur if it fitted preferences of a government branch that dominated decision-making in regard to IO policies. The framework has been widely applied to a range of international level issues, such as environmental, economic or military policies of the state. As for state policies towards IOs and specifically, towards their membership in IOs, the usage of the two-level game approach is not as diverse. Studies connecting the domestic level and state membership in multilateral institutions limit themselves to answering questions about why states join or leave IOs (Minnich 2005; Shanks et al. 1996; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019a). Hence, this dissertation expanded the two-level game framework by applying it to study the concept of disengagement. In doing so, it opened up a black box of states decision-making regarding the level of their involvement in IOs. The framework is well-fit for examining the dissertation's puzzle since IOs evidently become more connected to diverse actors besides their MS and it is common to disaggregate states into different institutions, government branches, and decision-makers when examining their policies.

The research question around which this dissertation is built is highly relevant and contributes to the literature on the dynamics between IOs and their member states. On the one hand, the contribution is that this dissertation introduces and conceptualises a real-world political phenomenon the existence of which was pointed out at by a number of scholars (Kruck and Zangl 2020; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019a) but that has not been explored in greater detail. By introducing the concept of disengagement, this dissertation offers an analytical tool to assess the state of international cooperation in a more nuanced manner. On the other, this dissertation contributes to the literature on sources of foreign policy and the link between international and domestic levels by testing the two-level game framework against the formation of policy of a state towards IOs.

To answer the research question, a theory-driven analysis of the two cases was conducted using the method of structured and focused comparison and within-case process tracing.

Specifically, the cases of the US disengagement from UNESCO and the ITU were chosen on the dependent variable, representing disengagement through withdrawal of funds and the change of venue respectively. Given the absence of a formalised dataset on state disengagement, preliminary research was undertaken to identify potential candidates for case studies. After considering cases such as the WTO, UNIDO, and the UPU, the cases of UNESCO and the ITU were selected because, using the process-tracing terminology, they present positive (typical) cases. That is, they both contain three components of a mechanism – the cause, the outcome, and causally relevant conditions that allow the mechanism to function. Following the method of structured and focused comparison, each case study focused on aspects relevant for the two-level game approach. Similarly, both case studies were analysed in regard to the causal mechanism that was developed on the basis of the theoretical framework used in the dissertation.

The two-level game approach provided explanation of disengagement in both cases. Both hypotheses were confirmed and the correlation between the independent and dependent variables was demonstrated. However, in the two case studies, the role of each hypothesis was different.

In the case of the US disengagement from the ITU, the independent variable X₂ ‘interest group that exerts more influence on the government’ played a more pronounced role than the independent variable X₁ ‘government branch that dominates in policy-making towards an IO’. US disengagement from the ITU took the form of a change of venue. The US disengaged from the organisation by creating a new institution mandated with managing DNS. The policy-making process regarding the issue was divided into several rounds characterised by interest groups’ lobbying and consequential government response. In the beginning, NSI, a company that used to dominate DNS-related issues, and its parent-company SAIC were an interest group with most power and access to the government. They enjoyed significantly more financial, human, and organisational resources as well as reputational advantage in comparison to their competitors – the technical community led by ISOC and IANA. NSI and SAIC preferred to maintain the *status quo*. That meant that they would retain their monopoly in the field of DNS and the ITU would not be granted any authority over the issue. Conversely, ISOC and IANA wanted to challenge NSI’s dominating position and suggested a DNS management plan that, among other things, gave the ITU a great role. The US government responded with the Green Paper, a policy draft on DNS management, which was closer to the preferences of NSI and SAIC than to the preferences of the technical community. The second stage of the policy-making process regarding DNS was characterised by a shift in the balance of power and

preferences among interest groups. ISOC and IANA entered into a coalition with US-based businesses led by IBM and MCI, which self-organised themselves into an organisation titled the Global Internet Project. While providing the technical community with the necessary resources to access the government in a more effective way, these businesses also brought in their own preferences regarding DNS management. As a result of this partnership, ISOC and IANA overpowered NSI in terms of the influence they could exert on the government and switched their focus from the ITU to the idea of creating an entirely new institution to govern DNS. The final outcome of the process of deciding how to manage DNS was that 1) the ITU was excluded from the process and disempowered in internet-related issues, and 2) the US transferred authority over DNS not to the ITU, but to a newly created organisation called ICANN, which was designed by IANA and ISOC in cooperation with the GIP.

In terms of the domestic political institutions proposition, the US government was rather unanimous in its preferences regarding DNS management. Even in the presence of divided government during the peak of the DNS policy-making process, the executive and legislative branches of the government did not formally veto each other's policies. Although Congress did not legislate, it was actively involved in the deliberations about DNS. Through various congressional hearings, it oversaw the process of policy-making and familiarised itself with the actors involved and their preferences. In addition, the legislative branch made its own preferences towards DNS policy known to the executive and the public. It signalled that if the executive branch did not design policy close to Congress' preferences, it would use the means available to make its position heard and considered.

Similar to the case of the US disengagement from the ITU, the case of the US disengagement from UNESCO offered a rich soil for testing two-level game hypotheses. In the case of the US-UNESCO relations, the independent variable 'government branch that dominates in policy-making towards an IO' played a more prominent role. Due to the political circumstances (the presence of divided government) and the balance of power between the executive and the legislature (Congress was a dominating branch in policy-making towards the IO), the US disengaged from UNESCO. Specifically, because Congress has power of the purse and funding of UNESCO is embedded in the budget and appropriations process, the US Congress had more power than the Administration, which, in this case, acted as an agenda-setter. Led by the Republican Party, Congress was nearly bipartisan regarding the question of whether to pay or not to UNESCO's regular budget. As the withdrawal of funds to UNESCO was coupled with the discussion around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the majority of Members of Congress had a rather strong opinion on Palestinian membership in UNESCO and

the subsequent withdrawal of American contributions to the organisation. With minor exceptions, most of the influential and powerful Democrats who held top positions on the relevant Committees were highly reluctant to support Administration's efforts to obtain the waiver. Having faced strong and continuous opposition in Congress, the Administration failed to make any progress regarding UNESCO. Under the conditions of gridlock caused by divergent preferences of the executive and the legislature, Congress had ultimate power to make decisions. They were, however, guided by the preference to disengage from UNESCO. As a result, the US disengaged from the organisation through withdrawal of funds from 2011 to 2016.

Similarly, the independent variable 'interest group that exerts more influence on the government' was found to play a role, although it was less direct. When the US disengaged from UNESCO, several groups emerged attempting to influence government policy towards the organisation. Because the issue of the withdrawal of funds to UNESCO was closely connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, interest groups that sought to affect policy came from two areas. On the one hand, there were groups concerned with UN-related topics; on the other – groups whose activities focused on US-Israeli relations and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although most of the groups acted on their own, that is, no coalitions were formed, some of them shared views on how US policy towards UNESCO should develop. Groups such as pro-Israel J Street and Americans for Peace Now, as well as the pro-UN Better World Campaign and Americans for UNESCO, supported the Administration's efforts to obtain the waiver allowing to resume payments to UNESCO. Other pro-Israel groups such as AIPAC and the American Jewish Committee were strongly against Palestinian membership in UNESCO and hence, preferred the US to stay disengaged from the organisation by withdrawing resources. The analysis of these interest groups demonstrated that AIPAC was the most powerful group and thus, was able to exert the most influence on the government. It overrode groups with opposite agendas along multiple dimensions. First, it enjoyed extensive financial, organisational, and human resources. Aside from the budget, the biggest of all the groups analysed, AIPAC had an established network of connections with various government bodies. In addition, it enjoyed direct access to numerous politicians and officials through its lobbyists and annual conferences. Given its resources, it also served as a source of information for politicians and their staff. In other words, AIPAC exceeded other groups in terms of all three faces of power and could, therefore, influence the government in a more effective manner. While other groups could challenge AIPAC's discursive power, they lacked other resources to create noticeable competition to the influence it wielded.

The causal mechanism that was expected to operate in the cases of disengagement was developed on the basis of the two-level game framework and consisted of several parts. The first one dealt with the preferences of relevant domestic actors regarding a specific policy towards an IO. The second part captured the interactions between government branches and interest groups. More specifically, there are two processes that were expected to take place simultaneously, namely negotiations between the executive and legislative branches of the government, including agenda-setting and amendment activities, and attempts by interest groups to access and influence the government. The third part of the mechanism focused on the government's response to lobbying by interest groups, followed by the fourth part – exercise of veto power by the dominating branch. The final part involved the presentation by the government of the final policy favouring disengagement.

After collecting a large amount of data, which is required by the method, process tracing was conducted in order to examine the operation of the theorised causal mechanism in two cases. Regarding data, various primary and secondary sources were consulted and 17 interviews with 18 stakeholders were conducted (ITU case – twelve interviewees, UNESCO case – six interviewees). After careful examination of the evidence in both cases studies, the causal mechanism had to be refined, since in both cases, Part 4 – the exercise of veto power – was absent. In the case of the US disengagement from the ITU, while both branches of the government were involved in the discussions regarding DNS and ITU's involvement in its governance, Congress legislate. The executive branch was in charge of designing policy, whereas the legislative branch oversaw this process through congressional hearings. Congress expressed its preferences to the Administration, signalling that it would intervene and use its power to secure its interests if those preferences were not taken into account during the policy-making process. Although the executive and legislative branches were controlled by different parties, to some extent they shared preferences towards DNS governance. Specifically, both the Administration and Congress were reluctant to grant authority over DNS to an international organisation. Hence, due to a certain level of homogeneity of preferences, Congress did not have to resort to its authorisation powers.

In the case of the US disengagement from UNESCO, both branches were formally involved in the issue of US contributions to the organisation. However, their preferences diverged significantly. In a divided government, the Administration's request for a waiver that would allow it to restore financial contributions to UNESCO was met with decisive rejection. Nevertheless, considering the political context and other foreign policy priorities of the Administration, the issue of UNESCO was never seen as a top priority issue. Hence, neither

veto power nor threats to exercise it were made in order to push Congress to include the waiver in the appropriations bills.

To sum up, the evidence gathered during the research demonstrated that, on the one hand, domestic groups participate in decision-making regarding state's involvement in international organisations. Specifically, it was revealed that groups that possess more power and hence, enjoy the broadest access to the government, can influence state policies towards IOs in a more effective way. Both cases demonstrated that when the most powerful group favoured disengagement from an IO, the government's final policy accommodated this preference. On the other hand, when the executive and legislative branches of the government are involved in decision-making, the final policy towards an IO is more likely to resemble the preferences of a branch the dominates. The second case study highlighted the role of the distribution of power in divided government. Particularly, because the legislative branch was in favour of disengagement and dominated in decision-making, the final outcome was disengagement from the IO. Since both case studies demonstrated the operation of the theorised causal mechanism and following the process-tracing methodology, a cautious conclusion can be made that the same mechanism functions in other positive cases. That is, cases where the cause, outcome, and scope conditions are present.

Individually, both cases also highlighted several factors that might have played a role in the final outcome and that can serve a starting point for future research (see Section 6.3). In both cases, organisations and their mandates played a role. Thanks to ITU's focality in the issues of radio spectrum and satellite networks, which were highly important to the US national security agenda, the organisation continued to be regarded as important to have membership in by the US. Conversely, UNESCO's importance was rather hard to demonstrate to those who thought that it did not have any value for the US, which made it challenging for the Administration and pro-UNESCO interest groups to advocate for the restoration of US contributions to the organisation. Combined with the urgency of other matters, such as the Arab Spring and Syrian civil war, which were considered more crucial for US security, this defined UNESCO's position on the Administration's priority list. Specifically, contributions to the organisation were never considered a top priority and thus, they were never framed as a non-negotiable issue by the Administration when discussing it with Congress. Nor did the (non)importance of UNESCO urge the Administration to spend more political capital on bargaining or recruiting more Members of Congress to support the restoration of US contributions to this IO.

In this dissertation, the concept of disengagement was introduced and analysed through the prism of the two-level game framework. The framework provided a suitable toolkit for examining the factors driving state disengagement from IOs. Specifically, the study traced how the US disengaged from the ITU and UNESCO and what role the distribution of power and competition among interest groups played in this outcome. The preference for disengagement expressed by a group wielding more influence and/or dominant government branch ultimately determined state policy towards IOs and its disengagement from them. While the two-level game framework proved highly useful for analysing the introduced concept, it also benefited from this study. On the one hand, the dissertation expanded the application of the framework beyond traditional questions of membership in IOs. On the other hand, the inclusion of *ad hoc* interest groups into analysis highlighted the heterogeneity of domestic actors and contributed to a more extensive view of these societal groups when studying their influence on state foreign policy.

However, this framework was chosen as only one of possible explanations for state disengagement from IOs. While it provided valuable insights into the role of domestic politics in state policy towards IOs, there are frameworks that focus on other factors and thus, can produce an alternative perspective on the concept of disengagement. The following two sections will address this issue.

6.2. Alternative Explanations

This section offers alternative explanations of the cases and discusses to what extent they can answer the research question that this dissertation addressed. By engaging with the PA framework, neorealism, and HI, I seek to expand the discussion on state disengagement from IOs and highlight other possible perspectives on states lowering their level of involvement in multilateral institutions.

6.2.1. Principal-agent approach

The principal-agent approach studies relations between states (principals) and IOs (agents). Treating IOs as actors in their own right, PA scholars deploy the concept of delegation in order to analyse different dynamics between states and international organisations. IOs are functional; they serve member states, which, in turn, are willing to delegate certain level of political authority to IOs, while expecting that the benefits of delegation will outweigh the costs. In this case, the benefits of delegation consist of the facilitation of credible policy commitments, information exchange, increased efficiency of decision-making, and the ability to shift blame

for undesired decisions and policy failures. Costs, on the other hand, stem from the establishment of agents, introduction of control mechanisms, and the consequences of situations when agents overstep their mandates (Tallberg, 2002b).

Agency slack, an “independent action undertaken by agents which is contrary to the intentions of their principals” (Heldt, 2017b: 470), has become one of the central topics of the PA literature (see Cortell and Peterson, 2006; da Conceição-Heldt, 2013c; Gould, 2006; Heldt, 2017b). Agency slack can occur through shirking or slippage. The former takes place when an agent does not act diligently enough on its principal’s behalf. The latter happens when an agent pursues a policy that is removed far from its principal’s preferred outcome and is closer to its own preferences (Hawkins et al., 2006). Whilst agency slack is not always negative and detrimental to states, PA studies consider it as the result of imperfect control (Heldt, 2017b). In order to avoid undesired independent behaviour by agents, principals can establish various control mechanisms that tend to be similar to those that principals use domestically (Grigorescu, 2010; Hawkins et al., 2006). A principal can control its agent *ex ante* through administrative procedures that are usually embedded in the mandate and limit the scope of agent’s activity and hence, reduce the room for agency slack. On the other hand, there are *ex post* mechanisms of control allowing principals to monitor agent’s behaviour and influence it by deploying positive and negative sanctions. Control mechanisms, however, impose costs upon both agents and principals (Pollack, 1997). The so-called ‘police patrol’ mechanisms tend to be significantly costly as they imply a direct involvement of principals that engage in active monitoring of their agent. The “fire-alarm” oversight mechanisms are less costly as they are implemented through a third party but can be rather limited for the same reason (McCubbins and Schwartz, 1984). Agency slack is more likely to occur when member states constituting a collective principal have heterogenous preferences (Nielson and Tierney, 2003). In fact, apart from collective principals defined as a group of actors making common decisions and having one contract with their agent, agents can be also accountable to a single principal or multiple principles consisting of organisationally distinct actors (Lyne et al., 2006).

When in need of an agent, a principal can either delegate to an organisation that was chosen from a pool of existing entities or create a new one from scratch. The latter option is costly but more likely to offer an agent closer to the preferences and goals of the principal. The former presents an opposite picture: the principal avoids the start-up costs but since the pool of available options is limited, chances to find a perfectly matching agent are significantly lower. A necessity to decide whether to re-delegate to a *status quo* agent further complicates the problem. Both breaking relations with an existing agent and renewing a contract with a

problematic agent impose costs on the principal (Hawkins et al., 2006). The creation of a new agent is associated with contracting and uncertainty costs. Contracting costs include all sorts of resources that principals have to spend on negotiating and setting-up of a new agent and mechanisms to control it. These costs are increased by the uncertainty costs stemming from the impossibility to know how a new agent will operate in practice, whether the control mechanisms will be effective etc. (Hawkins and Jacoby, 2006).

When deploying the PA approach to answer the research question of the dissertation, several fundamental aspects should be mentioned. First, the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO are cases where the initial act of delegation has already taken place. Second, the US is a part of the collective principal made up of all member states of these organisations. Third, in the case of disengagement, the US is conceived as a single-unit principle. That is, the US executive and the legislature cannot engage with an agent separately from each other and regardless of each other preferences. Therefore, whatever policy towards an IO is, it is considered to be decided upon and conducted by the US as a unitary, homogenous actor.

Following principal-agent assumptions and terminology, the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO can be considered as a response to agency slack. The analysis of statements by relevant US officials demonstrates that in both cases, the actions of both organisations were perceived as agency slack: they were accused of overstepping their mandates and pursuing goals and preferences that were different from those of the US. The ITU was a well-established regulatory agent. However, when it became obvious that the development of the internet was gaining speed and this technology was set to become crucial for the foreseeable future, the ITU engaged partially in what Heldt and Müller (2021) labelled ‘self-empowerment’. Specifically, the organisation attempted to “broaden the scope of their decision-making authority (tasks and issues)” (Heldt and Müller, 2021: 84). Among a number of activities aimed at strengthening the role of the ITU in the telecommunications community, the most notable was the organisation’s participation in the International Ad Hoc Committee on domain names. The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the participants of the Committee assigned an important role to the ITU. Alongside tasks such as “the maintenance and extension of international cooperation” (gTLD-MoU 1997) in the field of telecommunications, the ITU was expected to host an agency mandated with managing the registration of domain names (Mathiason, 2008). Secretary-General of the ITU saw this opportunity as a way to retain the ITU’s leadership role and offer a model of DNS management that would avoid problems of private ownership of DNS (Tarjanne, 1997). The latter remark was addressed discreetly to Network Solutions, a US-based firm managing DNS at that time. The ITU’s participation in the IAHC received significant

backlash from the US government. Various actors in the US criticised the ITU for overstepping its mandate and not consulting with its MS before participating in the Ad Hoc Committee and signing the Memorandum (Lipsy, 2017). Additionally, the ITU was considered an unfitting agent to deal with fast-developing technologies such as the internet. It was seen as too slow, bureaucratic, outdated, unresponsive to the marketplace, unaccountable, and unelected (Dooley, 1997; Interviewee #1; Irving, 1997; Rutkowski, 1997). A big problem for the US was the ITU's internationality and intergovernmental nature as well as its one-country-one-vote institutional design (Kleinwächter, 2000; 2004). A domestic rather than international agent was preferred (see Clausen, 1997). Hence, the US decided to create and empower a new agent – ICANN – that had a different institutional design and hence, fitted better the preferences and criteria of the US.

In sum, following the PA approach, I suggest that the US disengagement from the ITU can be interpreted as follows. The ITU's participation in the Ad Hoc Committee on DNS was an instance of agency slack. As well summarised by an interviewee and what is very close to the common definition of agency slack, “[g]overnments are interested in IOs staying within the rules given to them by the governments. According to the US State Department, they were getting out of the lane, the ITU was expanding its mandate without the approval by member states” (Interviewee #1). ITU's agency slack has triggered the US (principal) to reconsider its delegation contract with the agency. Since the ITU did not present itself as an ideal agent due to its low performance, inefficiency, and disadvantageous institutional design that was seen by the US as problematic when applied to the issue of DNS, the US decided to re-delegate and empower a new, more “sympathetic agent” (Hawkins et al., 2006: 29) to govern DNS. In doing so, it disengaged from the ITU on the issue of DNS and caused agency's disempowerment in the area of internet governance. One can, thus, consider disengagement as a form of sanctioning of an agent that slacked. Considering that the US did not have a broad pool of alternative agencies to choose from and it could not credibly threaten the ITU to apply sanctions as they would be too costly for the US (the ITU was the only forum to coordinate radio-frequency spectrum and satellite slots globally, and both issues were connected directly to US national security (Interviewee #7)), disengagement through the change of venue appeared as, although a rather costly, more attractive option.

Similarly, the acceptance of Palestine to UNESCO was considered by the US as contradictory to its preferences as the organisation's principal. The decision to admit Palestine was made by the Executive Board and General Assembly, both of which consist of member states rather than international bureaucrats, and the US launched an extensive lobbying

campaign trying to persuade other member states to vote against the admission (Nuland, 2011c; Ruebner, 2013). However, when the vote took place and the majority of states voted in favour of admitting Palestine, the US blamed not only the Palestinian authorities for bypassing the peace process but also UNESCO itself. The organisation was accused of supporting the Palestinian push for statehood and setting a harmful example for other UN bodies:

“This action by UNESCO emboldens the fraudulent Palestinian bid for recognition [...] The United States had no choice but to refuse to make a scheduled \$60 million transfer to UNESCO. That \$60 million should be used to pay down our Federal debt instead of to support an organization committed to thwarting peace in the Middle East” (Olson, 2011).

“UNESCO made the decision in spite of an existing U.S. law which prohibits U.S. contributions to the United Nations or any associated organization that awards the Palestinian Authority the same standing as full member states [...] Nevertheless, UNESCO has made its decision, and the U.S. should stand by existing law and cut off funding for the organization. Anything short of this will send a clear message to other international organizations considering similar action that Congress and the United States does not follow up on what it says [...] Congress needs to stand by Israel and all of its allies and hold UNESCO accountable for the decision that it made” (Flake, 2011).

It is noteworthy that, following the terminology laid out by Lyne and co-authors (2006), in the case of the US delegation relationship with UNESCO, the former acted as a single principal. Although the executive branch is usually in charge of conducting foreign policies and it preferred to re-engage with the organisation instead of sanctioning it, the ultimate decision was left to Congress controlling the purse-strings. In other words, the President could not resume payments to UNESCO without congressional approval, and because the majority of the Members of Congress argued that UNESCO ran amok when Palestine was admitted as a full member, the decision was made to sanction the agent. Additionally, as the US was part of a collective principal, it could not unilaterally re-design its delegation contract with UNESCO or change its institutional design (or design of other agencies) to prevent similar misconduct from happening. Nor did it have alternative agents with similar mandate. Hence, drawing on the PA framework, the US disengagement from UNESCO presents a case of agency slack and subsequent sanctioning of the agent by the principal, a form of which was defined by the availability of sanctioning mechanisms.

Although the PA framework offers a useful perspective on the relations between states (principals) and IOs (agents) when studying disengagement, it lacks a more detailed look into actors' preferences. Rather, it leaves it up to other theories to fill them in (Grigorescu, 2010). By analysing disengagement through the principal-agent lens one can obtain meaningful insights into how agent characteristics, pool of alternative agents, and costs of various control mechanisms at principals' disposal, can affect state disengagement from IOs. However, while the PA approach can offer alternative insights regarding state disengagement from IOs, it lacks

a toolkit to examine how exactly the preference of a principal to disengage from an agent is formed. This problem could be solved by disaggregating delegation from a state (as a unitary actor) to an IO and grounding one's approach in domestic politics as exemplified by Broz and Hawes (2006). Additionally, one can combine the two-level game approach and PA theory in order to conceptualise governments as collective agents of the parliamentary majority and electorate (da Conceição-Heldt and Mello, 2017; Opperman, 2008). The two-level game approach enables a researcher to open up the black box of the preference formation regarding IOs and examine in a more detailed manner the influence that various domestic actors exert during policy-making towards IOs.

6.2.2. Neorealism

Unlike the PA approach, neorealism does not grant agency to international institutions. According to neorealists, IOs play a rather limited role on the international arena and exist merely as a tool to serve interests of states that created them. Moreover, it is usually powerful states that utilise IOs to their benefit (Waltz, 2000). Another thesis maintained by proponents of neorealism is that interactions among states are explained by the balance of power in the international system. Hence, a state as a rational and calculating actor shapes and conducts its foreign policy in accordance with its power position in the world. State's power, in turn, stems from its capability to exercise control over resources and assert its interests (Baumann et al., 2001). Taking these two statements into consideration, the following assumption about state membership in IOs can be made. First, although states do cooperate through IOs, their positions in them differ: powerful states tend to dictate the rules of the game, fulfil their national interests, and influence other states through these organisations (Moe, 2005). Second, any changes in the state's IO membership status can, thus, be driven by power shifts or changes in the perceived ability of an IO to serve interests and foreign policy goals of this state.

The deployment of the neorealist approach in the cases of the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO offers the following insights into what played a role in the outcome. The issue of DNS was undoubtedly a matter of national interest for the US. Given the fact that the technology was developed by American engineers and scientists under the auspices of the US government, there was a clear understanding by the US that DNS management should be handled in such a way that would not hurt US national interests. Besides, the development of e-commerce was gaining speed, and the significant value of DNS became evident. Hence, the technology had great potential to contribute to the economic, political, and technological power of the US (Froomkin, 2000).

When the ITU and nonstate actors such as the Internet Society and IANA issued the Memorandum of Understanding where they proposed to establish a DNS-managing organisation within the ITU, it became evident that the US needed to get involved in a more active manner in order to secure that its interests and power were not undermined. There was always a certain level of tension between the US and ITU (Interviewees #10, 11) as the US was highly concerned about ITU's one-country-one-vote structure (Drezner, 2004; Kleinwächter, 2000; 2004). The neorealist approach would suggest that such design diminished the ability of the US to assert its interests regarding DNS and internet governance in general. Hence, the creation of ICANN could be easily interpreted in neorealist terms as an act of maximising opportunities for implementing state's preferences (Telhami, 2002: 160). In other words, the US facilitated the creation of an organisation that would serve its interests better than the ITU and where the US would have more, although informal, influence and control (Drezner, 2004).

Regarding the case of the US disengagement from UNESCO, one more concept crucial for neorealists is worth accounting for – alliances, which are formed in order to maintain the balance of power and address the security dilemma. Alliances are “a means to security against adversaries” (Snyder, 1990: 106). The US was the first country to recognise Israel as a state in 1948. Since then, it has been a long-standing supporter of Israel and its security has been among top priorities in the US foreign policy (US Department of State, 2021b). Israel was also a strategically important ally for the US to counter and contain the USSR's influence in the Middle East (Barnett, 2002). The military cooperation between two state includes American military financing, aid for missile defence, joint military exercises, and weapons development (US Department of State, 2021b). When Palestine was admitted as a full member of UNESCO in October 2011, the US immediately halted all payments to the organisation which was required by the legislation prohibiting funding of any IOs that have Palestine as a member. Although the legislation was enacted in the 1990s, it was still deemed relevant as Palestinian membership in IOs was considered to undermine US and Israeli interests and hinder the peace process (Schaefer, 2011).

Taking the neorealist view of IOs into consideration, UNESCO can be regarded here just as a tool which the US used to achieve its goals. On the one hand, the US used UNESCO as a means to contribute to the US security agenda. This was implemented mainly by UNESCO-led programmes such as Holocaust education and literacy and extremism prevention programmes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the UNESCO World Heritage programme benefited the US economy by including US-based historical sites in the list, which usually led to the increase in revenues and hence, to further strengthening of the US material power. On the other hand,

the admission of Palestine to UNESCO demonstrated a split of the US with the majority of other member states who voted in favour of Palestinian membership. Considering that the US conducted an active lobbying campaign trying to prevent the vote (because it did not have veto power to block the decision), Palestine's success in gaining membership signified a temporary decrease of the US influence in the organisation. Considering that American contributions accounted for 22% of the organisation's yearly budget, withdrawal of funds to UNESCO had two objectives. First, the funding cut was aimed at restating US influence by demonstrating that UNESCO cannot serve the interests of other member states as effectively without contributions from the US. Since, according to neorealism, states are rational and calculating, they were expected to re-evaluate their position and abstain from supporting Palestine if it tried to gain membership in other IOs. This, in turn, deterred Palestine from further attempts in the UN (Schaefer, 2011). Second, the US disengagement from UNESCO was also a way to signal the US commitment to its ally – Israel.

Although the focus of neorealism on the systemic level is useful for understanding the context of state behaviour (Keohane, 1986), one of its weakest aspects is that it views states as unitary actors. Hence, when explaining international matters, neorealists treat states as black boxes and do not account for domestic factors that might play a role (Fearon, 1998). This leads to a reductionist view of state preferences and their origins. By deploying the two-level game framework, the analysis undertaken in this dissertation opened up the black box of state preferences and highlighted the link between interest groups, domestic political institutions, and state policies towards IOs. While neorealist attention to the international system and balance of power among states highlights important aspects of the logic behind state membership in IOs, it leaves out domestic actors that can contribute significantly to the formation of the international behaviour of the state.

6.2.3. Historical institutionalism

This section turns to HI with a view to evaluate another alternative perspective on state disengagement from IOs.

Generally speaking, HI focuses on examining the potential role of sequence and timing of earlier developments in shaping later ones, and how prior events affect the pool of alternatives and strategies available to political actors making decisions in more recent times. This is captured by the notion of path dependence, a self-reinforcing process that was initiated by an initial event, decision or choice (Rixen and Viola, 2016). Path dependence is used to explain one of the main assumptions made by HI – that institutions persist even when they are

no longer relevant, their original causes no longer exist, or there are more effective alternatives (Fioretos, 2017; Rixen and Viola, 2016). Even when new institutions are expected to be more efficient and fitting to the preferences of states, their creation is costly and depends on agreements between various veto players (Hanrieder and Zürn, 2017). Additionally, there are usually learning effects acquired in the operation of the *status quo* institution, which gives it certain advantages over a new one. Finally, existing institutions are integrated in a broader set-up of other actors and institutions, raising the costs of change (Ikenberry, 2017). Hence, states are less likely to switch to a drastically new order or system (Ikenberry, 2017; Krasner, 2017). However, despite such stickiness of international institutions, change within them is still possible. The source of change is a shock – “sudden, big, and unexpected – or exogenous – events that quickly undermined the viability of existing institutions” (Fioretos, 2017: 14). When institutions lose their legitimacy because they are too slow and difficult to adapt to an external shock due to prior choices (Fioretos, 2017), a space for a more significant and drastic change is created and institutional adaptation occurs (Hanrieder and Zürn, 2017).

Deploying historical institutionalism to the US disengagement from UNESCO and the ITU, I argue that they both can be interpreted as path dependent processes. Specifically, they represent the cases of reactive sequences – “self-undermining mechanisms which change the opportunities, beliefs, or desires of the involved actors in the first place so that they erode support for the institution” (Hanrieder and Zürn, 2017: 100). In the case of UNESCO, the US disengagement was triggered by the admission of Palestine to the organisation. Borrowing the main assumption about reactive sequences from Hanrieder and Zürn (2017), I suggest that, although the US was a pivotal player in the organisation and was closely engaged in its establishment, it did not control the procedures prevailing in the organisation. Unlike in the UN Security Council, the US did not have veto power at the UNESCO General Assembly. Hence, it could not prevent the admission of Palestine which was admitted to the organisation by receiving the necessary 2/3 of the votes. In other words, Palestine’s membership vote signified a mismatch between a powerful member and existing institutional rules. Similarly, as a pivotal member state, the US was dissatisfied with the rules existing in the ITU (one-country-one-vote) and the way this institutional design could have affected shaping of internet governance (Drezner, 2004; Kleinwächter, 2000; 2004, see also Irving, 1997). There was an expectation that countries with different values and preferences regarding the internet (e.g. non-liberal states leaning towards a more controlling mode of handling the flow of information) would be able to have more influence in a traditional multilateral institution like the ITU (Farrell and Newman, 2021). On the one hand, the US perceived the ITU as an inadequate institution in regard to

governing DNS. On the other, being a powerful actor, it was well-positioned to initiate change in the *status quo* set-up that would be more beneficial and susceptible to its influence down the line (see Jupille et al., 2017). Hence, ICANN was established, and, as predicted by HI, the US enjoyed a significant level of influence over the organisation. Moreover, the founding moment of ICANN and the associated lock-in effects constrained the influence of other governments and immensely reduced the pool of credible alternative options (Lipsy, 2017).

In both cases, the US' own interests in the ITU and UNESCO were constrained by the previously made choices about the voting systems in these organisations. This led to a situation in which the US could not affect decision-making to an extent that would satisfy its interests. As a result, the US disengaged from the ITU and UNESCO.

However, the question about US preferences arises. Why was the US strongly against the admission of Palestine to UNESCO and why was the US not willing to delegate DNS authority to the ITU? One can suggest that these positions also resulted from path dependence. Regarding DNS governance, the system of domain names happened to originate in the US which, in turn, locked-in a preference and a more advantageous position of the US to decide how to govern DNS. In the case of UNESCO, the strong opposition towards Palestine's membership in the organisation can be explained by the path dependent US-Israel relations. As was mentioned in Section 6.2.2., the US was the first country to recognise Israel and since then, the two countries have developed a close relationship. Therefore, being interpreted by Israel as a threat to the peace process (Krever, 2011), Palestine's membership in UNESCO was met with criticism in the US due to the lock-in effects of the long-standing relationships and partnership between Israel and the US.

While HI generates some hypotheses regarding state disengagement from IOs, it leaves out of analysis a more detailed discussion regarding the underlying factors of state preferences. A combination of HI and the two-level game framework can prove useful to address this drawback. While the latter enables scholars to look at international politics through the lens of domestic politics, the former draws their attention to IO founding moments and path dependent processes (Heldt, 2019).

Given HI's rich explanatory capacity regarding persistence and survival of international institutions over time despite shifts in the distribution of power (Fioretos, 2017), the framework is more instrumental in examining the consequences of disengagement, particularly, how IOs facing state disengagement adapt to such development. It would be interesting to explore whether disengagement itself can serve as a critical juncture triggering path dependent

developments. Or, continuing with the power-decoupling (Hanrieder and Zürn, 2017) as a cause of disengagement argument, one could ask how the institutional adaptation in the ITU and UNESCO looked like following the US disengagement.

6.3. Limitations and avenues for future research

The deployment of the two-level game framework and a process-tracing method complemented by a structured and focused comparison proved useful to explain why and how states disengage from international organisation. However, the analysis of the cases of the US disengagement from the ITU and UNESCO also demonstrates certain shortcomings related to the choice of a specific theoretical approach and methodology. Further research can address these limitations and continue the discussion on state disengagement from IOs.

On a more general note, given the novelty of the introduced concept of disengagement, it can certainly benefit from collecting more data and building a data set of cases of disengagement. This will allow to undertake a quantitative analysis of the phenomenon and identify patterns and tendencies inherent to it. Additionally, the quantitative methodology performed on a database of state disengagement from IOs will facilitate a comparative analysis of different causes of disengagement in their relation to different paths of disengagement. It will also produce more generalisable results with a high level of explanatory power. Besides, by analysing disengagement quantitatively, scholars could contribute to a broader research on the general state of international cooperation and multilateralism and assist in resolving a debate on whether it is in decline or not. Finally, quantitative methods can be complemented by qualitative ones. For example, one can perform a statistical analysis to identify deviant cases, which can then be examined in more detail, applying qualitative methods (George and Bennett, 2005).

Although sometimes it is justified to select cases without variation in the dependent variable (Beach, 2017; Collier and Mahoney, 1996), a research might also benefit from following KKV's framework and conducting a study where cases demonstrate "particularly high and particularly low values of the dependent variable" (King et al., 1994: 241). Such strategy of case selection can assist in reaching valuable conclusions regarding the empirical validity of causal inference (King et al., 1994). While the goal of no-variation case selection is to study causal mechanisms operating within cases and to generalise about the presence of these mechanisms in causally similar cases, case selection where variation is present in one form or another (e.g. choosing diverse, deviant, or most similar/most different cases) is aimed at probing

for alternative explanations and hypotheses or to identifying a variable that leads to a variation in the dependent variable (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

Against this backdrop, when analysing disengagement, two-level game propositions could be further developed and strengthened by introducing variation in variables. First, by introducing cases where disengagement was preferred by some domestic actors but did not happen can shed some light on potential intervening variables and assist in identifying new linkages between the domestic political set-up and disengagement. Second, providing a comparative study of cases of disengagement, cases of withdrawal, and cases of engagement (full participation in IOs) can demonstrate under what conditions one option is preferred over the other.

This dissertation did not account fully for the societal level of the two-level game framework. While it considered interest groups as a possible driver of disengagement, the study did not engage with the public opinion argument which can be an important factor due to the increase in IOs politicisation (see de Vries et al., 2021; Heldt, 2020; Zürn et al., 2012). What happens, for example, when public opinion is critical of an IO, its performance, or policies and demands withdrawal while the government considers this option as too costly or vice versa? Could disengagement be a way to mitigate societal backlash towards IOs without leaving them and facing negative consequences of withdrawal? How can disengagement fit into a set-up where public opinion favourable of international cooperation imposes constraints on the government which is more militant to multilateralism and seeks withdrawal? Considering that IOs face increasing politicisation, inclusion of public opinion as a variable can offer additional insights into the causes of state disengagement.

Engagement with other theories can also prove useful. By deploying the PA approach and focusing on principal-agent concepts such as agent characteristics, specificities of delegation contract, or collective principal, scholars could answer questions related to what kind of agencies are more prone to state disengagement and how a specific set-up within a collective principal or decision-making rules can affect it. On the same note, intentionally choosing cases of disengagement from IOs of different importance can shed some light on whether the differentiation between IOs dealing with 'low' politics and IOs mandated to engage with issues of 'high' politics plays a role in the state's decision to disengage. On the other hand, by choosing cases of state disengagement from IOs where a state is not democratic could allow to further finetune the causal mechanism of disengagement and contribute to the literature examining the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy in non-democratic regimes. Besides, the

examination of more cases will generally facilitate obtaining more information regarding the cross-cases comparisons and thus, expand generalisations about the concept of disengagement.

While this dissertation was concerned with the events leading to disengagement, it would also be very interesting to look what happens after a state disengages from an IO. In this regard, several avenues for future research can be identified. On the one hand, one can include a temporal dimension and focus on whether and under what conditions states re-engage with an IO after initial disengagement or take it further and completely withdraw from an organisation. On the other, a researcher can focus on the consequences of state disengagement for IOs, whether they can be positive or negative, as well as the IOs' response and strategies to deal with these consequences.

International organisations and their relations with states keep attracting a lot of scholarly attention. The recent cases of withdrawals from supranational and intergovernmental organisations posed some fundamental questions about the current state of multilateralism and the liberal international order, and incited IR scholars to re-evaluate the meaning and power of previously suggested reasons for states to delegate authority to and act through intergovernmental institutions. Although withdrawals are still rare, there are other ongoing challenges that IOs face. They include popular backlash, delegitimisation, power shifts and struggles among member states etc.

This dissertation introduced disengagement, a concept, aimed at capturing complex relations between states and IOs and highlighting a heterogenous nature of state membership in international organisations. While complementing the literature on IOs vitality, withdrawals from IOs, and challenges to international cooperation, it offers a more nuanced perspective on state involvement in international cooperation and multilateralism by treating membership as a spectrum rather than a binary variable. This dissertation laid out the basis of the concept which, however, will benefit greatly from further research. Hence, in-depth examination of state disengagement from IOs should be undertaken by engaging with various IR theories and methods in order to obtain additional information on the factors and pathways of disengagement.

Appendix A: Interviews

Case study 1: US disengagement from the ITU

Interviewee #1, 8 February 2021

Interviewee #2, 9 February 2021

Interviewee #3, 9 February 2021

Interviewee #4, 11 February 2021

Interviewee #5, 12 February 2021

Interviewee #6, 18 February 2021

Interviewee #7, 24 February 2021

Interviewee #8, 26 February 2021

Interviewee #9, 3 March 2021

Interviewee #10, 4 March 2021

Interviewee #11, 7 March 2021

Interviewee #12, 17 March 2021

Case study 2: US disengagement from UNESCO

Interviewee #13, 12 August 2021

Interviewee #14, 16 August 2021

Interviewee #15, 17 August 2021

Interviewee #16, 24 August 2021

Interviewee #17, 24 August 2021

Interviewee #18, 20 September 2021

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