

Abstract

Some of the most pressing challenges of our times – climate change, biodiversity, poverty, international peace and security - are of an inherently transnational nature. To address these challenges, states have increasingly delegated competencies to international organizations (IOs) over the last decades. Today, IOs are central actors in global governance that shape policy discourses, design and implement projects, but also develop, monitor and interpret global rules. Multilateral development banks (MDBs) are a species of IOs that have assumed particularly far reaching governance tasks in the field of global development, as they provide loans and financial assistance to developing countries and play a crucial role in implementing the most important global governance initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The increasing governance functions of MDBs thus correspond with the notion that the “Anarchy Problematique” in International Relations has given way to the “Problematique of Rule”. Consequently, scholars and civil society member worldwide wonder, which standards MDBs should meet to be considered legitimate, whereby *legitimacy* is understood as a normative concept referring to “the right to rule” of a given political order or institution. In parallel to the growing competencies of MDBs, social movements increasingly joined forces beyond national boundaries to demand that MDBs adhere to human rights, that they govern in a transparent way and that they can be effectively sanctioned in case they violate human rights. In short, transnational social movements (TSM) demanded human rights accountability from MDBs.

Instead of simply assuming which standards MDBs should adhere to, this work begins with a philosophical reflection on the legitimacy of multilateral development banks in light of their increasing governance competences over the last decades. My argument is that MDBs should adhere to human rights accountability in order to be normatively legitimate. In a first step, I conceptualize accountability as a triad of a) standards, b) transparency concerning MDB activities and c) sanctions in cases of non-compliance. Departing from common notions of MDB accountability, I argue that those individuals affected by MDB governance are ultimately the relevant accountability holders. Then, I argue for human rights as the right standard of accountability, since human rights express each person's equal moral status by guaranteeing the protection of basic human interests. In addition, the justification of human rights accountability as a standard for

MDB legitimacy is grounded in already existing legal obligations of MDBs, as well as in a consideration of larger empirical trends in global governance.

Against the background of this normative reflection, this work turns to transnational social movements as actors that have pushed MDBs to institutionalize human right accountability, thereby socializing them into the community of legitimate governance actors. In doing so, TSM have used a variety of conventional and disruptive tactics towards MDBs under varying scope conditions and with differential success. To shed light on the effectiveness of movement engagement, this work asks how and under which conditions transnational social movements are successful in strengthening the human rights accountability of multilateral development banks? Drawing on the extensive body of studies on social movement tactics, I derive a causal mechanism of movement influence on MDBs which is already contained in the literature, but has not been theorized explicitly to date. Specifically, I argue that a sequence of disruptive tactics towards the MDB producing crisis (Part 1), followed by conventional tactics towards MDB member states aimed at persuading key decision makers (Part 2) then enables these member states to push for policy and institutional reform at the MDB Board of Directors (Part 3). At each step of the mechanism, the respective movement tactics are only effective under a set of distinct scope conditions relating to properties of the actor seeking change, the target organization, the issue and the discursive environment. To capture the dynamic interplay of movement action and MDB reaction, I theorize “counter mobilization” as a continuous scope condition along the process. Finally, I draw on rational choice and sociological institutionalism to explain the underlying dynamics of MDB socialization in terms of complementary, yet different ‘logics of action’ that dominate at different parts of the mechanism.

In a most-similar case study design involving two cases of transnational social movement activism toward the World Bank, I engage in process tracing to reconstruct the presence and vigor of my causal mechanism. The first case study (1988 – 1994) centers on the institutionalization of a quasi-judicial sanctioning body, the second case (2011 – 2016) centers on a comprehensive review of World Bank accountability standards. In both cases, TSM engagement followed the sequence of the theorized causal mechanism. However, while the TSM was successful to socialize the World Bank into *comprehensive* human rights accountability in the early 1990s, it failed to impede the adoption of only *limited* human rights accountability provisions in 2016. This outcome is puzzling at first glance, since several scope conditions remained constant (e.g. the organizational mandate, the distribution of shares among member states, the issue at stake) or even point to enhanced chances for movement success (e.g. the evolving norm that MDBs should adhere to human rights accountability, the increasing organizational resources and epistemic authority of the movement). My analysis reveals how subtle, yet effective forms of counter mobilization on behalf of the MDB bureaucracy interacted with indirect forms of counter mobilization by a Chinese-led group of emerging powers. By organizing an impressive multi-stakeholder consultation process, the World Bank was able to define the boundaries of critique, to divide moderate from more radical constituencies, and to engage the movement without integrating key demands. In parallel, counter mobilization by the Chinese-led coalition of member states primarily took the form of counter multilateralism: the indirect exercise of pressure by founding a new

development bank – the AIIB. Together, both forms of bureaucracy and member state counter mobilization led to a breakdown of the causal mechanism. Today, three decades after the movement-centered socialization in the early 1990s, we now witness a decrease in World Bank human rights accountability: less binding and less precise human rights policies, a decrease in the scope of policy application across the World Bank portfolio as well as a weakened role of the quasi-judicial oversight mechanism (the World Bank Inspection Panel). Worrisome from a normative point of view is that this decline of human rights accountability at the World Bank entails dynamics that point to larger trends in contemporary global governance: first, the decline of US hegemony and the simultaneous emergence of authoritarian states (especially China) as major donors in development, and secondly, a challenge to multilateralism and the human rights script by these authoritarian states, but also from within established liberal democracies. To overcome these challenges, my study suggests several advocacy and policy implications for an alliance of progressive social movements and liberal democratic forces within MDB bureaucracies and member states.

