

Quantitative Approaches to the Study of International Norms

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In 1996, when International Relations (IR) research on international norms was just about to pick up speed, Martha Finnemore observed that “data-intensive quantitative methods (...) usually [were not] associated with work on norms and culture in IR” (Finnemore 1996: 326) At the same time, Finnemore pointed to the potential of sociological institutionalism to challenge the then-dominant IR paradigms of realism and liberalism precisely because of its quantitative orientation.¹

More than 20 years later, realism and liberalism have indeed been challenged from various perspectives, and research on norms has become well-established. Interestingly, though, and in contrast to other disciplines such as economics or psychology, IR norms research has remained predominantly qualitative, with a strong focus on (theory-building) case studies, constitutive theorizing, and interpretative methods. But quantitative studies, relying on statistical methods and large-N analyses, are on the rise, having increased from about 10% of articles on norms published in *International Organization* and *International Studies Quarterly* in the period of 1985-2005 to about 30% in the period of 2006-2016 (Peez 2017: 16).²

Reflecting this trend, the aim of our workshop is to take stock of quantitative approaches to the study of international norms. In addition to gaining an overview of the different quantitative methods used by scholars, we seek to explore their potential to strengthen the theoretical fundament of norms research. Over the past decades, scholars have laid rich theoretical groundwork regarding major aspects of norms as political and social phenomena, such as their emergence, effectiveness, diffusion, localization, contestation, and erosion. But while the relevance of central factors (e.g. framing, salience, or social pressure) and mechanisms (e.g. socialization, persuasion, or cascades) is theoretically persuasive and *potentially* generalizable, the *actual* generalizability of the findings is difficult to assess. To be sure, single-case and small-N research designs remain indispensable for theory generation and they do allow for limited generalizability, but medium- and large-N designs bear the potential for greater robustness and precision as they could improve theoretical propositions by specifying the magnitude of effects and the causal status of conditions as necessary or sufficient.

This workshop will address questions concerning both theoretical frameworks and specific methods:

- Does a quantitative perspective imply a different conception of norms, and other ontological and epistemological differences?
- How prevalent are the suggested patterns and mechanisms of norm emergence, diffusion, and enforcement?
- Do quantitative approaches direct our attention to some rather neglected aspects of norms and contribute new theoretical insights?
- In what ways do hypothesized causal models and chosen methods interact? Which methods can best illuminate what mechanisms?
- How can qualitative and quantitative methods be suitably combined in mixed-method research designs to yield a more holistic understanding of the emergence and the functioning of norms?

We welcome submissions from political scientists, but also from researchers in adjacent disciplines, that reflect upon these and related questions, and employ large- and medium-N as well as mixed-methods approaches or quantitative methods in small-N designs.

¹ Martha Finnemore 1996: Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights From Sociology's Institutionalism, in: *International Organization* 50:2, 325-347, p. 326.

² Anton Peez 2017: Mapping IR Norms Research, 1985–2016: Case Selection and Research Methods, paper presented at the workshop „Methodological Issues in Norm Research“, Frankfurt, 29 September 2017, p. 16.