

ERC Advanced Grant (9/2012 – 8/2017)Sources of Legitimacy in
Global Environmental Governance*SourceLeg*

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Proposal summary

Many of the biggest contemporary challenges to human wellbeing extend far beyond the political boundaries of any single country. Governments are trying to keep pace with such challenges by expanding the geographic scope of governance systems from the local or national to regional and global levels. This expansion appears indispensable, but has also generated intense public debates about democratic deficits in global governance and fairness in benefit- and burden sharing. Most global governance efforts rest on fragile foundations as long as their legitimacy within national political systems remains contested. Legitimacy denotes the “capacity of the political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for the society.” (Lipset 1983:64) The proposed project examines the sources of legitimacy and thus also public support for global governance. It focuses on procedural and outcome related sources of legitimacy; that is, how decisions in global governance systems are made (procedure), and how the benefits and costs of governance are allocated (outcome). Empirically, it concentrates on climate change, the most paradigmatic case of a global governance challenge. On the procedural side, the project explores the implications for legitimacy of variation in international decision-making rules, civil society participation, and involvement of international organizations. On the outcome side, it examines the implications of variation in outcome favorability (absolute gains/losses), burden/benefit sharing (outcome fairness, relative gains/losses), and reciprocity. It relies on survey embedded experiments in the laboratory and via a crowd-sourcing platform, as well as geographically representative survey experiments in five countries: Brazil, China, Germany, India, and the USA. The project is groundbreaking in three ways: (1) It fills an important gap in the literature on legitimacy in global governance; this literature is, thus far, primarily conceptual or has, empirically, focused on governments, rather than individuals (voters). The project will generate important new insights into how public support for global environmental governance systems could be enhanced. (2) It uses a unique combination of laboratory, crowd-sourcing, and geographically representative survey experiments; and it examines key sources of legitimacy in global governance based on a unified theoretical framework in five very different countries to find out to what extent specific sources of legitimacy vary in importance across cultural, political, and economic contexts. (3) It connects two important but hitherto separate fields of research on collective goods, namely local common pool resources and global environmental governance, by examining whether and how specific sources of legitimacy differ in importance when governance systems, and thus also chains of delegation and political representation, expand from the local to the global political level.