

An integrated approach to global issues?

Effects of the Sustainable Development Goals on issue integration in international organizations

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Presentation for the Evidence for Action 2021 symposium



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International organizations

- Proliferation and specialization over past decades ¹
- Functionally fragmented system of global governance ²
- International organizations operate in ‘silos’ ³
- Problematic in light of increasingly interconnected global issues ⁴

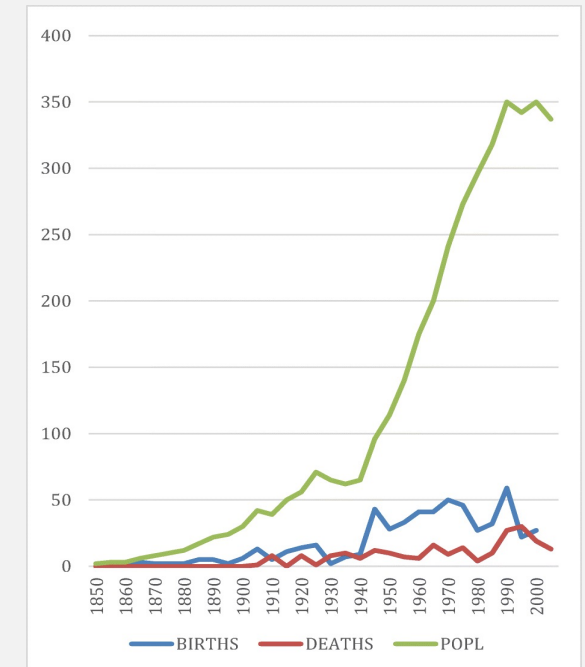


Image from: Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, Death of international organizations. The organizational ecology of inter-governmental organizations, 1815–2015. *Rev Int Organ* **15**, 339–370 (2020).

Sustainable Development Goals

- 17 ambitious goals covering range of global issues
- Emphasis on ‘integrated nature’ of goals and interlinkages between them ¹
- Aim to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental
- Goals are expected by drafters to better integrate policies and “enhance policy coherence” (target 17.14) ²

Do SDGs foster a more integrated approach to global issues in international organizations?

SDGs as drivers of issue integration?

- Some say ‘yes maybe’
 - SDGs may foster incremental changes towards policy integration ¹
 - SDGs create a more favorable environment for policy integration than existed before ²
 - Overarching goals allow for coherence while maintaining diversity ³
 - SDGs create strong narrative for collective action and attention towards the goals ⁴

1) Vijge et al. 2020, p.255-256; 2) Le Blanc 2015, Stevens 2018; 3) Aligica & Tarko 2012, Jordan et al. 2018;

4) Fukuda-Parr 2014, Fukuda-Parr & McNeill 2019.

SDGs as drivers of issue integration?

- Others say ‘probably not’
 - *cherry-picking* rather than integrated approach ¹
 - Lack of systems thinking and integrated approaches ²
 - Continued siloization amongst international organizations since 2015 ³

Questions to answer

- We can only expect an effect of the SDGs on International Organizations if they recognize the goals as an overarching framework
 - *Sub question 1: are international organizations recognizing the SDGs as a framework?*
- If so:
 - *Sub question 2: does SDG recognition lead to more issue integration amongst international organizations?*

Empirical test - Methods

- Quantitative content analysis on the website texts of international organizations (n = 239)
 - Included in set of IOs: IGOs, SDG Custodians, UN Funds & Programmes
- Website texts from 2015, 2017 and 2019 collected from the Internet Archive with custom-built web crawler
 - Filter texts on English-language and minimum length of 1000 characters (~4 tweets)
- Assumption: if IOs recognize the SDGs and are actively working on issue integration, they will write about that in their public communication channels.

Empirical test - Methods

- Keyword frequency analysis – How often keywords related to X occur, as proportion of all words on the website in year y.
- Independent variable: SDG recognition
 - SDG recognition – keywords related specifically to the SDGs, e.g. ‘SDG’, ‘Agenda 2030’

Empirical test - Methods

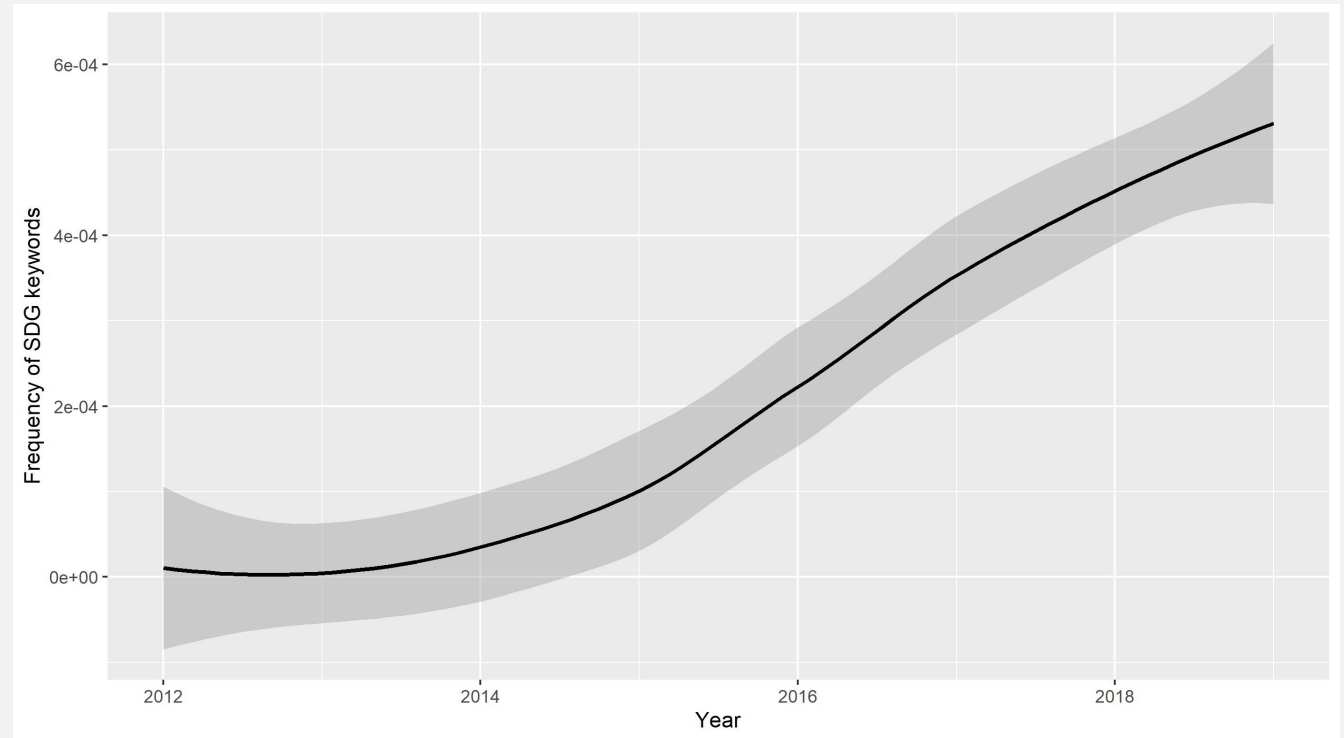
- Dependent variable – issue integration, measured in 3 ways
 - **Integration saliency** – keywords related to issue integration, e.g. ‘policy coherence’, ‘interlinkages’, ‘whole-of-government’
 - **SDG Topic diversity** – keywords related to each of the 17 SDGs to assess Shannon-Wiener diversity of the topics embedded in the SDGs for each IO.
 - Keywords related to the 17 SDGs based on dictionary by Oscar Romero-Goyeneche & colleagues.

Empirical test - Methods

- Control variables
 - IO size – member countries
 - IO size – staff count – **not collected yet**
 - Issue scope – single-issue, multi-issue or omni-issue
 - Part of UN System y/n
- Test effect of SDG recognition in year Y and control variables on issue integration in Y+2

Results – preliminary

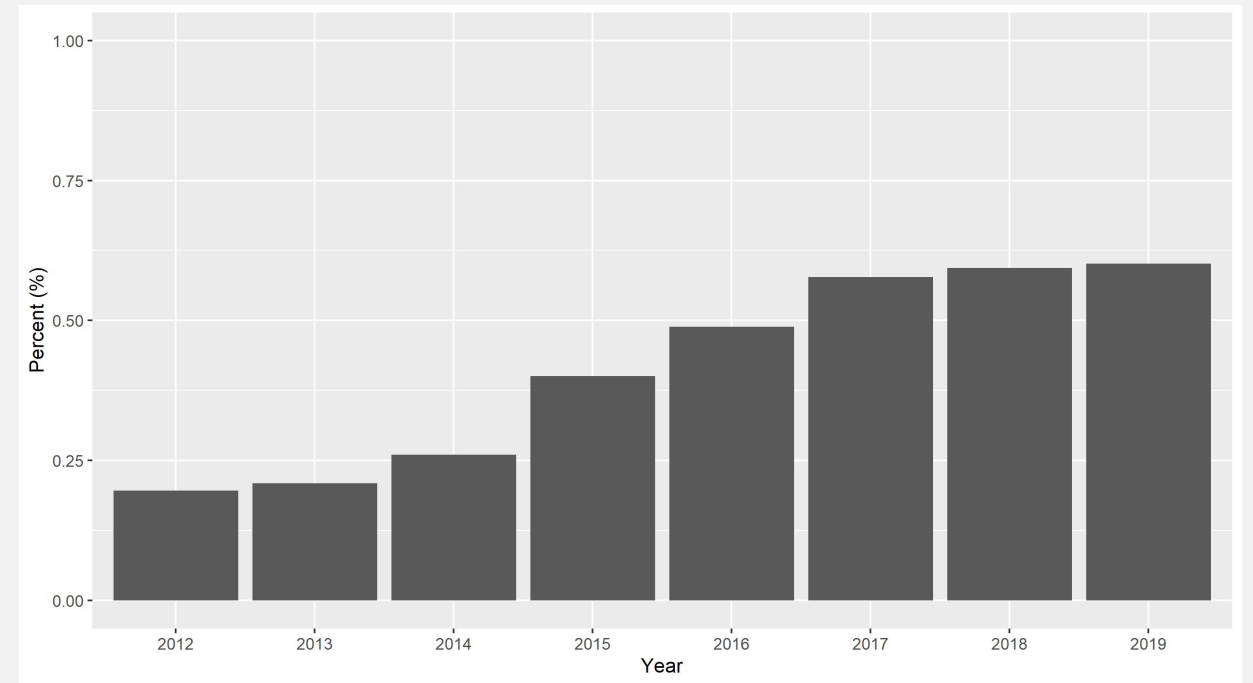
Sub question 1: are international organizations recognizing the SDGs as a framework?



SDG recognition score – Relative frequency of SDG keywords on international organizations' websites from 2012-2019 (n = 239)

Results – preliminary

Sub question 1: are international organizations recognizing the SDGs as a framework?



SDG recognition score > 0

Results – preliminary

Sub question 1: are international organizations recognizing the SDGs as a framework?

- The majority, yes, but far from all!
- Increasingly more mentioning of SDGs overall

Results – preliminary

Sub question 2: does SDG recognition lead to more issue integration amongst international organizations?

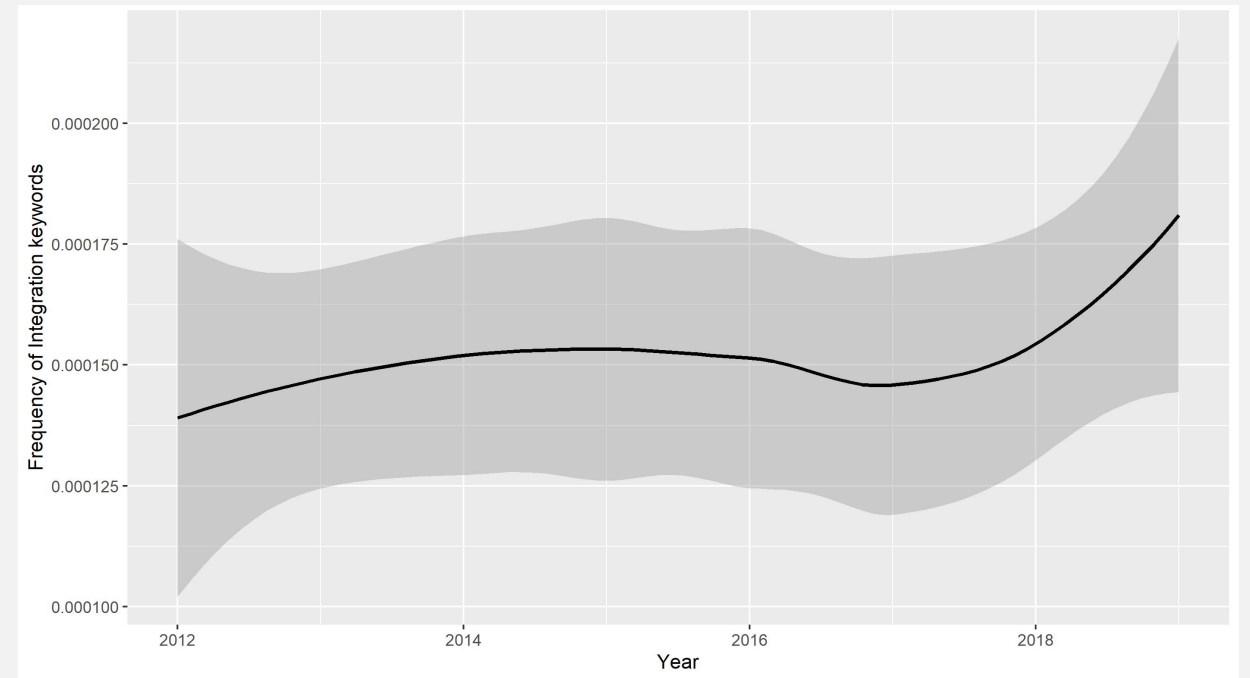
No regression models yet, some descriptives.

Results – preliminary

Sub question 2: does SDG recognition lead to more issue integration amongst international organizations?

1. Integration saliency score

No change from 2012-2018, apparent sudden increase in 2019, but not outside 95%-CI of earlier years.



Integration saliency score – Relative frequency of integration keywords on international organizations' websites from 2012-2019 (n = 239)

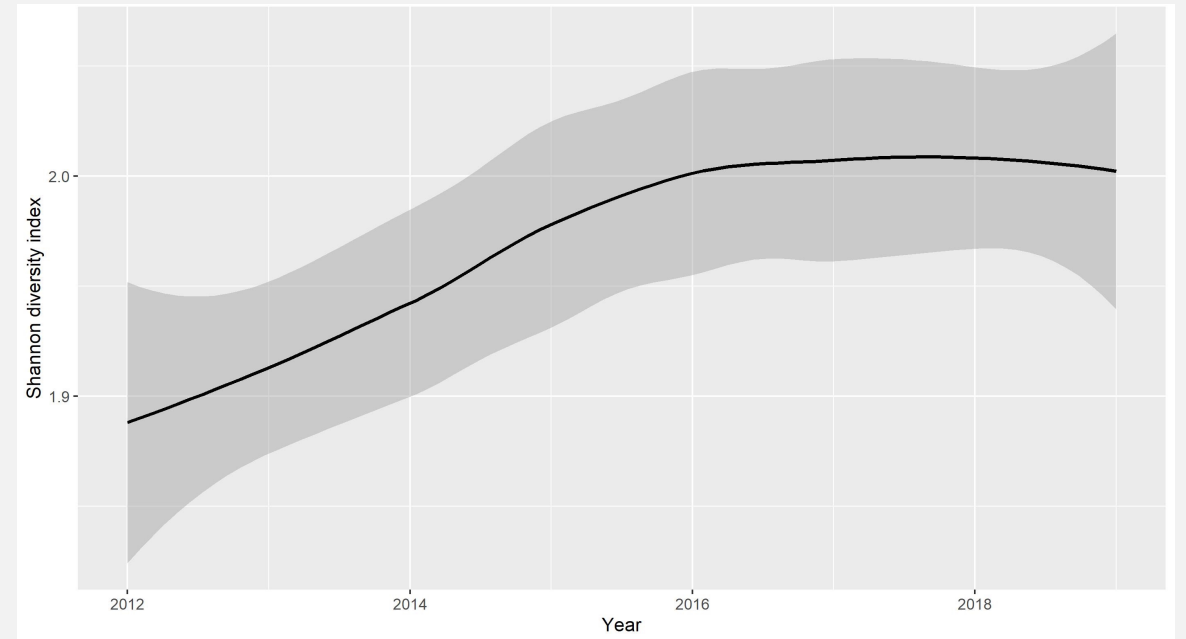
Results – preliminary

Sub question 2: does SDG recognition lead to more issue integration amongst international organizations?

2. SDG Topic diversity

Increase from 2012-2015, indicating that IO – on average – mention more SDG topics and/or provide more equal mentioning to all topics.

After implementation of SDGs stabilization (and small decrease?)



SDG Topic diversity– Shannon-Wiener diversity score of SDG topics addressed on international organizations' websites from 2012-2019 (n = 239)

Conclusion - preliminary

- SDGs are increasingly recognized by international organizations
- However, integration shows no significant increase since 2015, either measured by integration keywords or by topic diversity.
- On average, no increase in issue integration after adoption of the SDGs.

Discussion

- Noticeable increase in topic diversity leading up to 2015, so during negotiations of SDGs
- Public communication as data source – possibility of ‘window-dressing’

Thank you

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