On those rare occasions when scholars of international organizations (IOs) consider the issue of change, they typically highlight the centrality of states. Although states are important for understanding when and why there is a change in the tasks, mandate, and design of IO, IOs themselves can initiate change. Drawing from sociological institutional and resource dependence approaches, in this article we treat IOs as strategic actors that can choose among a set of strategies in order to pursue their goals in response to changing environmental pressures and constraints that potentially threaten their relevance and resource base. We delineate six strategies—acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, manipulation, and strategic social construction, and suggest that the strategic choice by IOs is contingent on the level of both organizational insecurity and the congruence between the content of environmental pressures and organizational culture. We emphasize how IOs must make a trade-off between acquiring the resources necessary to survive and be secure, on the one hand, and maintaining autonomy, on the other. We apply this framework to the case of Interpol, investigating how different calculations of these trade-offs led Interpol staff to adopt different strategies depending on its willingness to accept, resist, or initiate changes that demand conformity to external pressures.

For all the attention international relations scholars have heaped on international organizations (IOs), they have scarcely considered the fundamental issue of organizational change.1 We know a lot about the conditions under which states will establish IOs, why states will design them the way they do, and some of the con-
ditions under which states will grant autonomy to IOs. But we know relatively little about how, why, and when change will occur.

All theories of IO change contain a conceptualization of the relationship between the organization and the environment. The dominant view is that external forces in general and states in particular are responsible for its timing, direction, and content. Although the first wave of studies of IOs detailed their internal characteristics, the general conclusion was that states mattered most. For instance, in their impressive study of decision making in IOs, Cox and Jacobson (1974) argued that the environment is second to none in understanding the sources of influence and reduced the environment to states as primary actors. Contemporary theories have continued this venerable tradition. Realism claims that any change in the mandate or design of the IO owes to demands imposed by Great Powers (Mearsheimer 1995; Gruber 2000; Glennon 2003). Neoliberal institutionalism emphasizes how states construct IOs and assign them various functions in order to overcome problems of collaboration and coordination (Keohane and Martin 1995). Although it recognizes that institutions are sticky, it largely presumes that IOs are fairly responsive to state demands; if not, then states would presumably end their support. Although constructivist theories operate with a broader definition of the environment that contains both material and cultural elements, its best-known statements lean heavily on the environment for understanding IO change. World polity theorists treat IOs as constituted by their environment, demonstrating how shifts in regulatory, professional, epistemic, and normative patterns shape their formal structure, goals, rules, and standards of appropriateness.

Yet if IOs can take on a life of their own, then they can be agents of change. Some approaches focus on the goal-oriented activities of organizations and their staff. Survival-seeking activities might cause IOs to try to expand their missions (Haas 1964:90–92). Organizations are posited to have expansionary tendencies owing to their desire for bigger budgets and bigger mandates (Niskanen 1971). Struggles between different units over power, prestige, and resources can lead to the adoption of new rules, particularly as these rules advantage some within the bureaucracy because they now have a greater role in the formulation and implementation of the organization’s mandate (Allison 1971; Halperin 1974). Other approaches focus on the organizational culture, emphasizing the processes by which staff interpret and negotiate the meanings of their mandates, rules, and policies, and how this interpretive process shapes its response to external stimuli. There are institutionalized ideologies of reform (Jepperson 1991). There can be a “failure trap” marked by excessive exploration of new ideas and tasks (March 1999). Organizations can become ensnared in the “capabilities trap,” a situation where the presence of capabilities drives the desire to do more (when you are a hammer the world becomes a nail) (Douglas 1986). The virtue of a focus on the characteristics of the organization for explaining organizational change is also its vice: The emphasis on the organization can lead to the neglect of the environment. IOs can make their own history, but not necessarily under the conditions of their choosing.

In this article we treat IOs as strategic actors and argue that the strategies they adopt in response to environmental pressures represent one important source of change in their tasks, design, and mandate. Drawing from resource dependence and sociological institutionalist theories, in Section 1 we develop a model of stra-

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2 See, respectively, Keohane and Martin (1995), Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal (2001), and Hawkins et al. (2006).
3 For a review of this tendency, see Farley (1981).
ategic choice that examines the “connection between what actors want, the environment in which they strive to further those interests, and the outcomes of this interaction” (Lake and Powell 1999:20). Our model, in brief, is as follows.

We posit that IOs want to further their mandate as defined by their professional training and expert knowledge, protect their autonomy, and minimize organizational insecurity. In order to be effective, relatively autonomous, and secure, they require symbolic and material resources, which are controlled by others. The need to acquire these resources from others places pressure on IOs to conform to their external environment. However, because conformity might come at a cost to their autonomy and ability to pursue their mandate as they define it, IO staff will be attentive to the autonomy-resource trade-off. How they respond to environmental pressures to conform depends on two central factors: the level of organizational insecurity and the congruity between the organizational culture and the content of the environmental pressures. The combination of these factors determines their preference for one of six strategies— acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, manipulation, and strategic social construction, arrayed from conformity to resistance.

Recognizing that the strategic response by IOs to environmental pressures can be a source of change has two major advantages over existing approaches. To begin, it explicitly recognizes that IOs can be strategic actors. Largely because of the statism in the field and the general presumption that IOs have little if any autonomy, there has been little interest in even investigating this possibility. After all, it makes little analytic sense to treat actors as strategic if they have no agency. The recent application of principal-agent models to IOs offers a potentially promising approach because these models explicitly recognize that IOs have some autonomy from states, and that IOs can potentially use that autonomy in ways that are not dictated or delegated by states. So far, however, devotees of this approach have not considered the strategies of IOs, probably because they have focused on the moment of IO creation and failed to explore what makes IOs tick or what forms their interests (Hawkins et al. 2005). Because we posit a portfolio of interests and attempt to see the world as IOs see it, we are better positioned to treat IOs as strategic actors, to delineate a set of strategies, and to identify the variables that condition their strategic preferences.

Second, our model overlaps with but is not reducible to either constructivist or rationalist approaches. Although these are two distinct approaches that can generate competing hypotheses regarding the origins and evolution of IOs, because our approach treats IOs as goal directed, cultural creatures that behave strategically in response to changes in the international environment, it overlaps with each. It shares with rationalist and materialist theories a concern with how organizations strategize in order to ensure their survival and maintain their resource base, but incorporates the role of organizational culture in shaping how IOs make sense of the world and the normative environment that not only constrains the organization but also might constitute its design and mandate. Our model shares with constructivist approaches a concern with organizational culture and the normative environment, but incorporates rationalist dimensions most explicitly when considering the strategies of goal-seeking IOs.

In Section 2 we apply our model to the case of the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO), better known as Interpol. Interpol’s predecessor, the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC), was established in 1923 by professional police officials, most of whom were acting in an unofficial capacity, and states for facilitating the exchange of information about common criminals escaping across national borders. Since then its tasks and mandate have expanded to include

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6 This is a rapidly developing and popular line of inquiry. For good statements see Hawkins et al. (2006), Nielson and Tierney (2003), Pollack (2002), and Thatcher and Stone Sweet (2002).

7 Important exceptions include Gould (2003) and Pollack (2003).
the coordination of international police operations, police training and professional development, and counterterrorism. Because the ICPO was championed by a transnational police network and Interpol’s membership includes both state and professional organizations, some might object that Interpol is not an IO, or certainly not a run-of-the-mill organization. There is, of course, considerable debate over how to define an IO. Some scholars adopt a highly restrictive definition and limit membership to states, while others offer a more permissive definition that also allows for nonstate actors (Archer, 2001:ch. 2). We follow Clive Archer (2001:33) and classify Interpol as an IO because it has a formal, continuous structure established by agreement between state and nonstate members (including at least two states) with the aim of pursuing the common interests of the membership. The fact that Interpol has both state and nonstate members hardly makes it unusual. Indeed, because a significant percentage of IOs have a mixed membership, Interpol might be as representative of the population of IOs as the “typical” IO studied by scholars.

Not only does Interpol qualify as a case of an IO, but the framework that we develop to explore Interpol’s strategic choices potentially generalizes to most IOs (although not those that are exclusively forum organizations). Students of IOs typically differentiate between functionally oriented service organizations that promote cooperation in a technical issue area (Cox and Jacobson 1974:5) from other kinds of IOs, on the grounds that we should expect the former to have more autonomy. However, the dividing line between technical and service organizations on the one hand, and other kinds of organizations, on the other, is hazy at best; most IOs perform a range of functions that blur standard classification schemes (Haas 1964). Interpol is exemplary in this regard. It is a technical organization that facilitates cooperation, and thus can be expected to have considerable autonomy, yet it also handles sensitive security matters of tremendous concern to sovereignty-sensitive states, thus giving states ample reason to squash any autonomy it might have. For this reason, Interpol should be a hard case for unseating the null hypothesis that states are the primary instigators of change and for demonstrating that IOs can be strategic actors. Finally, our framework is informed by well-developed theories and hypotheses from different strands of organizational theory that have been tried and tested on a range of organizations in the domestic domain. We see no a priori reason, at this point, to limit the framework to a subset of IOs.

We begin the discussion of Interpol with a brief examination of ICPC’s origins, highlighting how transnational police created an IO to further its goals against the threat of encroachment by states. We then examine three episodes, two when it initiated change (avoidance and acquiescence) and one when it resisted external pressures to conform (defiance), demonstrating how its selected strategy was a function of its organizational security and the congruence between the organizational culture and the content of the environmental pressures. The first episode occurred in 1946 when ICPC leadership redesigned the organization. There is no evidence that states demanded this development. Nor is there any evidence that staff believed that a redesign would help them be more efficient at their established tasks or expand in new directions. Instead, the ICPC adopted a strategy of avoidance to enhance its organizational security while minimizing autonomy loss. Briefly, after World War II an ICPC that was deeply fearful for its future decided to model itself after “successful” IOs in order to raise its status and attract financial and political support. The strategic logic was that symbols would generate legitimacy, legitimacy would attract resources, and resources would further the organization’s goals. Yet ICPC staff worried that by raising the profile it also would be inviting

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8 Shanks, Jacobson, and Kaplan (1996). Also note the important role played by nonstate actors in establishing IOs (Archer 2001:43; McNamara 2002).

9 Data available at the Union of International Associations yearbooks.
states to impose more controls, thus threatening its autonomy. Consequently, they redesigned the organization so that it had the appearance of a bona fide IO but absent the external checks. These circumstances and debates informed the 1956 decision to revise the design of the organization.

A second moment came in the late 1960s when terrorism became a pressing issue on the global agenda. Notwithstanding the intense lobbying by powerful patrons that Interpol extend its mandate to include terrorism, for two reasons the Secretariat adopted a strategy of defiance and refused the invitation to become involved in a hot area that presumably would generate resources and status. Staff defined terrorism as “political.” This designation not only placed terrorism as outside its mandate, but also ensured that it avoided an issue that potentially threatened its authority and thus its autonomy. Also, at this moment Interpol was feeling secure, organizationally speaking. Interpol’s refusal, though, caused states to create alternative transgovernmental mechanisms to handle terrorism. Now facing a new, competitive, environment, Interpol worried that it was losing its market share to rival organizations and that its defiance had sacrificed its relevance. In this third episode, Interpol concluded that in order to maintain its relevance, it had to adopt a strategy of acquiescence with the implications that it would become involved in “politics,” yield more control to states, and suffer a loss of autonomy.

We conclude by examining how this model contributes to the study of organizational change and how the case of Interpol reformulates important issues regarding the so-called constructivist–rationalist debate over how to study IOs.

1. IOs and the Choices They Make

Our model of strategic choice uses resource dependence and sociological institutionalist theories to assign interests to IOs, to specify the nature of the environment that shapes and constrains their goals, and to explore the strategies they adopt in response to environmental pressures. We posit that IOs have three goals. One, the staff of IOs want to further their mandates, and their professional backgrounds and expertise shape their interpretation of their mandates and the appropriate means to pursue them. The IMF’s goals of economic growth and balance of payments stability, and its idea about the best means to achieve those ends, derive in large measure from the professional training of economists. The UNHCR’s goal of refugee protection has been shaped by the legal backgrounds of the lawyers that staffed its protection division (Barnett and Finnemore 2004:chs 3 and 4). Interpol’s goals of fighting international crime and exchanging information pertaining to “common” or “nonpolitical” criminals has been grounded in the perceived expertise and jurisdiction of the transnational professional police community.

Two, like all organizations, IOs want to survive and be secure (Haas 1964:90; Thompson 1967; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Although IOs have a relatively low mortality rate, there are moments when their survival is at stake and more frequent periods when they worry about their relevance and whether they have the resources to carry out their goals. Organizations need material and symbolic resources if they are to survive and accomplish their goals. Certainly organizations require material resources, including technologies to carry out their tasks and money to pay for the technology, programs, facilities, and staff. But they also require symbolic resources. They need to be perceived as legitimate by the broader

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10 For the literature on professional training and networks, see Brint (1994), Friedson (1994), and Schein (1996).
11 See Finnemore (1996), Adler (1998), and Weaver and Leiteritz (2005) for statements that explicitly incorporate professional cultures.
12 Following the conclusion of Chester Barnard and his studies of managerial leadership, Haas (1964:91) observed that the function of the IO chief is to “enable his organization to survive in a constantly changing and essentially hostile environment.”
community, as serving a useful function (Suchman 1995). This is both an end in itself and a means for securing the material resources they require for accomplishing the organization’s goals. Indeed, because nonprofit organizations do not generate their own source of revenue, they depend on their perceived legitimacy for generating external support. Consequently, IOs are likely to be very attentive to their legitimacy and whether they are perceived as serving ends valued by international society in general and key constituencies in particular.

A third goal is autonomy. Autonomy is not an end in itself but rather a means for reducing insecurity and enacting expert policy. By possessing autonomy, organizations are able to control the conditions of their work (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:95–96). For IOs, the more autonomous they are the more likely they will be able to avoid having their preferences politicized and to shield themselves from external pressures or threats to the organization. To maintain or expand their autonomy, they can try to secure an independent revenue base so that they are not susceptible to manipulation or conditionality criteria from their donors. They can construct an independent basis for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating knowledge so that they are not dependent on others for information, and potentially use private information in their dealings with others in order to advance their desired outcomes (Moravcsik 1999; Young 1999a). They can seek out alliances with other, like-minded, actors (Haas 1964; Cox and Jacobson 1974; Cox 1996). They can try to minimize or escape the control mechanisms established by states.

They also can try to further the basis of their authority. Many IOs are keenly aware that because authority causes others to defer to their judgment, it shelters them from unwanted demands. IOs contain a mixture of authority claims—rational-legal, delegated, moral, and expert—that give IOs the space to act in relatively autonomous ways. For modern IOs, these authority claims frequently turn on the belief that they are impersonal and neutral, that is, that they are not exercising power but instead are using impartial, objective, and value-neutral knowledge to serve others. In this way, many IOs claim that they are not being “political” and instead are using depoliticized, objective criteria to fashion their policies. Because their authority is premised on these beliefs, IOs are likely to be quite attentive to this very image and assiduously avoid the appearance of being “political” (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004:ch. 2) This tactic, we will see, was particularly important for Interpol.

a. Environment

The environment conceivably includes all events, processes, and structures in the world that surround the IO and affect its activities. Most approaches to IOs conceive of the environment as defined by states, either singularly powerful states, coalitions of states, or competing blocs and alliances. The sociological institutionalist and resource dependence approaches that inform our model incorporate the centrality of states, but emphasize how states, in addition to other cultural elements in the environment, matter to the extent that they affect the IO’s mandate, resource base, and security; IOs are frequently pressured to conform to environmental demands in order to gain the required resources to accomplish their objectives.

Sociological institutionalism focuses on the “socially constructed normative worlds in which organizations exist,” emphasizing the social rules, standards of appropriateness, and models of legitimacy (Orru et al. 1991:361). The environment constrains organizations because IOs must conform to the external rules and legitimation principles if they are to receive support (Scott and Meyer 1983:140). In other words, sometimes IOs will be forced to curtail activities they would like to pursue, but there are also times when they must conform to the environment in

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ways that drive task expansion—even if the IO would prefer not to do so. In international politics, various factors drive this outcome, including regulatory structures associated with international law, states’ demands, transnational actors and epistemic communities, and international public opinion. Because organizations are rewarded for conforming to rules and legitimation principles, and punished if they do not, they tend to model themselves after these environments. In general, organizations conform to the environment for several reasons, including the desire to secure the resources required for accomplishing their various goals.

Resource dependence approaches highlight how organizations require resources to survive and to accomplish their mandates, which means that the most critical feature of the environment concerns its dependence on material resources and its competition with others for access to these resources. Specifically, three factors determine the degree of organizational dependence on others: (1) the importance of the resource to organizational survival; (2) the extent to which others outside the organization control resource allocation; and (3) the extent to which there are alternatives (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:46). The more dependent they are on others, the more likely IOs will alter their activities in a way that conforms to these external demands and standards.

Although resource dependence approaches highlight how external factors such as dependence and competition for scarce resources can cause conformity, they offer two additional insights that suggest, first, that the pressures to conform can vary and, second, that conformity has a price (Oliver 1991). They explicitly recognize that organizations might depend on different actors that have different expectations and goals and thus make contradictory demands; this situation can give organizations latitude regarding how to respond to external demands and the space to choose those changes that are closest to their preferences. They also highlight the benefits of noncompliance and resistance. Specifically, nonconformity increases “the ability to maintain discretion or autonomy over decision making, the flexibility to permit continual adaptation as new contingencies arise, and the latitude to alter or control the environment in accordance with organizational objectives” (Oliver 1991:150). As suggested earlier, all organizations want autonomy because they want to control the conditions of their work; the less autonomous they are the more beholden they will be to outside actors who might use their leverage in ways that potentially threaten the organization’s goals, principles, and rules. Consequently, IOs will be highly sensitive to the possible trade-off between resources and autonomy.

This discussion suggests that the willingness of IOs to conform to the environment depends on two features. One is the level of organizational insecurity, which increases when their relevance is questioned, when states and other actors make demands that counter what staff believe to be the IO’s core mandate, when there are broader cultural shifts that potentially leave it out of synch with its normative environment, and, most critically, when these and other factors challenge the organization’s resource base. If its insecurity is high, and particularly when there is a threat to their resource base, IOs will feel compelled to conform to the environment.

The second feature is the congruence between the organizational culture and the content of the environmental pressures. The organizational culture can be under-

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14 The heart of the resource dependence approach, according to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:2) is that “organizations survive to the extent that they are effective. Their effectiveness derives from the management of demands, particularly demands of interest groups upon which the organizations depend for resources and support . . . . There are a variety of ways of managing demands, including the obvious one of giving in to them.”

15 Also see Blau (1964:119–125) and Thompson (1967:31).

16 On this and on other points, resource dependence and principal–agent models arrive at similar claims.

17 Also see Pfeffer and Salancik (1978:94) and Thompson (1967).
stood as the identity of the organization “and its relationship to the solutions that are produced [. . .] to meet specific problems, and then how those solutions become institutionalized as rituals, values, and ultimately as rules” (Vaughan 1996:64). The existing culture and rules will strongly influence how external pressures are interpreted and what sort of response is considered to be appropriate and desirable (Weick 1995; March 1999). Indeed, there are a variety of rule-based reasons why organizations will be highly conservative and thus resistant to externally induced change, including standard operating procedures (March 1999) and the tendency to focus obsessively on their core competencies rather than branching out into new areas or types of tasks (Douglas 1986; March and Olsen 1998:964). For these and other reasons, organizations adapt incrementally if not glacially to shifts in the environment and exhibit path-dependent change (Pierson 2000). Their willingness to conform, therefore, depends on how staff interpret the content of these pressures from the environment. Everything else equal, the greater the discrepancy between the organizational culture and content of the environmental pressures the more the organization will resist (because of a fear that the loss of autonomy could threaten the organization’s identity); the greater the congruence the more it will conform (because it will not view any loss in autonomy as harming its identity).

b. Strategies

So far we have argued that the IO’s response to international pressures is dependent on its level of organizational security and the congruence between the organizational culture and the content of these pressures. For simplicity’s sake, we treat both variables as dichotomous: organizational security and organizational congruence can be either high or low. These dichotomous variables combine in ways that inform its preference for one of six strategies—acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, manipulation, and strategic social construction. These strategies represent a reasonably comprehensive spectrum of choice, ranging from compliance to resistance. As we diagram in the following table, IOs are likely to embrace one strategy over another depending on their level of organizational security and cultural congruity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural incongruity</th>
<th>Organizational security</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Acquiescence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Avoidance, manipulation, strategic social construction</td>
<td>Defiance, manipulation, strategic social construction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We are interested in identifying tendencies and cannot provide deterministic predictions for several reasons. These are dichotomous variables and improved prediction would require greater refinement of the variables (and perhaps the addition of others). Furthermore, the adopted strategy depends in part on how IO staff judge the trade-off between autonomy and resources. These strategies are

18 Organizational culture is not the same as organizational ideology, a term favored by earlier studies of international organizations (Haas 1964; Cox and Jacobson 1974). The concept of ideology presumes a disjunction between material reality and how actors experience the world, with the presumption that the reason for this distortion owes to beliefs that favor the interests of hegemonic or dominant actors. Other concepts that are organized around social knowledge, including culture, do not assume that there is an integrated social reality or that such social reality necessarily favors the objective interests of others. This is one reason why those like Ernst Haas moved away from the concept of ideology in favor of discourse, epistemes, and knowledge.

19 We rely heavily on Oliver (1991) for the delineation of these strategies (but also see Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:xii, 44, 71).
listed in terms of the resource-autonomy trade-off. Acquiescence and compromise, for instance, suggest conformity while manipulation and strategic social construction suggest attempts to make the environment safe for the organization. The selected strategy also is dependent on debates within the organization over how to interpret these pressures and what constitutes the desirable response. One hypothesis is that the winning side will argue convincingly that its position can manage critical uncertainties and dependencies without sacrificing organizational autonomy (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:xix).20 Finally, while some of these strategies are mutually exclusive—an organization cannot simultaneously acquiesce and defy—other strategies are complementary and thus IOs can be expected to pursue multiple strategies at a single moment.

IOs are likely to adopt a strategy of acquiescence, conforming to their environment by adjusting their mandates, design, tasks, and rules, when both organizational security and cultural congruity are low. In other words, because they need resources and the perceived cost to the existing organizational culture is minimal, they will conform to the environment in order to improve their legitimacy, enhance their relevance, and curry favor with core constituencies. Staff, then, are driven to redesign the organization not only to increase its efficiency but also to increase its legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan 1991; DiMaggio and Powell 1991), and to accept new tasks not only because they are tied to their core mandate or competency but also to conform to external demands. Organizational change and expansion, then, is driven less by some unquenchable hunger than by a desire to maintain its perceived relevance to core constituencies. This would be an instance of the environment coaxing expansion.

IOs are likely to adopt a strategy of compromise, attempting to secure the benefits of acquiescence while minimizing the cost to its autonomy, when insecurity is high and cultural congruity is low. The organization can adopt any number of tactics in the attempt to balance on the knife’s edge of conformity and resistance. It might try to play off various constituencies. It might try to pacify and mollify key supporters. It might negotiate with important funders, attempting to exchange their support for various policies and reforms (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:143).

IOs are likely to adopt a strategy of avoidance when organizational insecurity is high but it is unwilling or unable to conform because staff believe that to cave into such pressures would harm the organization’s identity. In these situations, organizations might try to project the appearance that they are conforming by adopting the myths and symbols of the international environment, but they continue business as usual. In this way they attempt to dupe others into providing resources while protecting the organization’s identity and autonomy (Meyer and Rowan 1991:50). The most important tactic that falls under a strategy of avoidance is “ceremonial conformity.” Here the IO intentionally redesigns itself so that it looks more like a modern, rational, IO, thus increasing its symbolic legitimacy. But there is no attempt to bring form and function into convergence. Appearances, in other words, are deceiving.21 A complement to this tactic is to try to avoid outside scrutiny so that they can circumvent external detection. In general, when IOs adopt a strategy of avoidance they are attempting to placate key constituencies by generating the symbols of conformity without the substance.

IOs are likely to adopt a strategy of defiance, directly and visibly challenging the demand to conform, when organizational insecurity is low and when they believe that conformity threatens their identity, interests, and principles. The different forms of defiance vary in terms of the extent to which the organization openly challenges the pressures. At a minimal level, an organization pursuing this strategy

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20 External dependencies also will shape dynamics, culture, and power within the organization (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978:xiii), a point we raise in the conclusion.

21 Weaver (2005) describes this as organizational hypocrisy.
would consciously decide to ignore directions given by states or reject rules and values gaining normative ascendance. An overt stance would include actively protesting the efficiency or legitimacy of the environmental pressures, or openly criticizing those who try to enforce conformity.

The last two strategies, manipulation and strategic social construction, involve efforts by the IO to control the demands imposed by the environment; in other words, it amounts to trying to tailor the environment so that it is consistent with the organization’s goals. The critical difference between these strategies is whether the attempt is to manipulate the resource dependence or to redefine the broader normative environment. Because the organization is attempting to control the environment, it is only likely to expend the resources to do so when there is a meaningful gap between its cultural principles and the content of external pressures. The preference for manipulation over strategic social construction, or vice versa, will depend on whether organizational insecurity is high or low; if it is high then organizations will have a strong incentive to focus on those strategies that have a greater chance of immediately improving their resource base. That said, while these are distinct strategies because they emphasize different tactics, IOs could easily adopt them simultaneously.

A strategy of manipulation involves attempting to “turn the tables” on clients or competitors through cooptation, lobbying, and influencing formal reviews of organizational practice. Cooptation might occur, for example, when an organization forms a strategic alliance with a competitor, as it tries to cultivate new dependencies in others, thereby securing its own autonomy and existence. Strategic social construction revolves around the active effort by the IO to change the normative or cultural environment so that it becomes consistent with the values and goals of the organization.22 The relevant micro-level mechanisms are primarily social psychological, including social influence and persuasion, which occurs when the organization tries to change the preferences of principals to make them consistent with its own. The organization might try to convince others of the necessity or desirability of a particular course of action or way of seeing the world, in hopes of recruiting converts to its organizational world view.

In sum, IOs, concerned about their professionally defined goals, survival, and autonomy, can adapt to the environment or have the environment adapt to them. Although traditional approaches to IOs have tended to assume that the environment dominates IOs, our approach suggests that IOs may choose to accept, resist, or actively change environmental pressures, based on their organizational security, cultural congruence, and evaluation of the resource-autonomy trade-off. In the following section, we apply this model to three moments in Interpol’s history.

2. Crafting Design at Interpol

Recognizing some basic features of Interpol’s origins is important for understanding how it responded to environmental pressures after World War II. The origins of international police cooperation follow a functionalist narrative. From the mid-nineteenth century through World War I, European states exhibited oscillating interest in international police cooperation, waxing and waning in direct relationship to the perception of internal security threats from communists, anarchists, liberals, and social democrats. European autocratic states first expressed interest in internationalizing police activities after the revolutions of 1848; their police forces began working together, gathering intelligence, engaging in covert operations, and

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22 As Haas (1964:103) nicely summarizes: “The true art of the possible, therefore, does not lie [sic] in the Machiavellian practice of deceit through the mouth and pen of the alert international officials, but in his ability to persuade governments that the functions are compatible with national purposes, provided the governments reassess their true aims.”
exchanging wanted notices on a systematic basis (Deflem 2000). European states
renewed their interest in international police coordination in the 1880s and 1890s
in response to anarchist bombings and the political assassinations of several Eu-
ropean leaders (Jensen, 1981:325–332). Toward this end, 21 states convened an
Anti-Anarchist Conference in Rome in November 1898.

These activities led not only to the establishment of formal mechanisms of in-
terstate police coordination but also to the development of personal ties, a trans-
national network, an awareness that police professionals had shared knowledge,
expertise, and norms, and the diffusion of policing “best practices” (Jensen 1981;
Deflem 2000). Importantly, the professional police network increasingly defined
itself by, and emphasized, the “nonpolitical” nature of police work. From the per-
spective of both police and state officials at the time, there now were distinct dif-
fferences between “political” and “nonpolitical” approaches to police cooperation.
In the eyes of police officials, the nonpolitical nature of their activities meant that
they should be allowed to develop and exchange new technologies and build in-
formal contacts across borders to aid practical police work. In general, police of-
ficials gradually “began to recognize one another as fellow experts of law
enforcement” (Deflem 2000:751), and formed “a fraternity which felt it had a
moral purpose, a mission, to perform for the good of society” (Fijnaut 1997:111).
The growing transnational police network enabled national police to deepen their
already existing cross-national ties, and, critically, to continue this process during
periods when states lost interest.

In addition to ongoing informal contacts, police officials began to use their ad-
ministrative autonomy and contacts abroad to organize their own conferences on a
purely nonpolitical basis outside the purview of states (Deflem 2002). The most
significant of these conferences was the Second International Criminal Police Con-
gress of 1923, when police chiefs from 21 states and territories, many of whom did
not have official standing, came to Vienna to discuss the appropriate response to a
perceived growth in international crime following the First World War (Deflem
2000). They decided to establish the ICPC. Although most of the delegates did not
have official standing, came to Vienna to discuss the appropriate response to a
perceived growth in international crime following the First World War (Deflem
2000). They decided to establish the ICPC. Although most of the delegates did not
have the negotiating authority to commit their governments to any treaties or
proposals (Babovic 1989:34; Valleix 1998), they treated the legal ambiguity and
denial of negotiating authority as a virtue because they preferred direct contact
with other police to diplomatic exchanges (Anderson 1989:39–40). Specifically, in
their view a fairly flexible, informal, and fluid IO was preferable to a traditional, all-
state IO because it better enabled them to do their work on their own terms.

Because states were not officially represented in large numbers and were viewed
by police professionals as an obstacle to interstate cooperation on police matters
(Jensen 1981:338–430; Fooner 1989:131), the delegates had both the motive and
the autonomy to use their expertise, culture, and norms to shape the ICPC’s de-
sign, membership, mandate, centralization, control, and flexibility.23 The delegates
opted for an inclusive membership. Police forces from around the world were
invited to join, and even a few territories such as the Saarland, Württemberg, and
later the Netherlands Antilles were extended membership.24 This membership
policy directly reflected the professional police norms of collegiality, inclusiveness,
and informality. Inclusive membership also was valued for its functional dimension:
if criminals did not stop at borders, then neither should police work. Thus the
barriers to membership were relatively modest, and any state could become a
member simply by filing a notice of its intention to join (Fooner 1989:48). Origin-
ally, Austria bankrolled the organization, but beginning in 1928 membership also

23 These are the central elements of design identified by Koremenos et al. (2001).
24 Only the Soviet Union was explicitly not invited, most likely due to Commission President Johann Schober’s
antipathy to communism and his perception of communist police forces as “political.”
entailed annual dues payments of one Swiss franc per 10,000 inhabitants (Fooner 1989:48; Ullrich 1998:59).

The ICPC’s expertise and desire to protect its sources of authority and autonomy also imprinted its mandate. Believing that the best way to safeguard their autonomy, professional norms, and apolitical character was to avoid political crimes that might rankle or worry states, the delegates restricted the mandate to ordinary international criminals and excluded “political” criminals or subversives. Not only did they believe that this move would avoid state scrutiny, they also were “well aware that west European governments were not willing to offer even indirect support to an international *political* policing organization” (Fijnaut 1997:114; italics in original). Although they had declared what they would not do, the original 1923 remit was fairly vague regarding what they would do, stating in general terms the desire to further mutual assistance between police forces in conformity with the laws of the state in question in order to facilitate the fight against crime (Fijnaut 1997:112). Eventually the ICPC concentrated on four key tasks: centralization of information about common criminals, information clearing between states, anti-counterfeiting, and publication of a monthly journal (Fooner 1973:16). ICPC assumed these tasks without requesting state permission, but they had good reason to conclude that they were acting consistently with states' interests, a point confirmed when states signed the 1929 League of Nations Counterfeiting Convention, which officially delegated its implementation to the ICPC.

The ICPC concluded that while the centralization of its activities, especially in the area of criminal activities, was essential to success, this centralization might cause states to worry that their sovereignty was being violated. If so, then states might take an active interest and involvement in the activities of the ICPC, an outcome that the delegates wanted to avoid. Accordingly, the delegates omitted centralization from the charter. They predicted that because each government claims proprietary rights over criminal information about its citizens, the centralization of such information could be “tantamount to asking for a grant of power, and that such actions would likely involve international negotiations at the diplomatic level, which was exactly what the participants at the Vienna Congress wished to avoid” (Fooner 1989:131). ICPC took care to avoid unwanted attention from states in order to protect its autonomy.

Although the ICPC dealt with highly intrusive domestic issues, the International Bureau in Vienna operated with surprisingly few formal control mechanisms. The International Bureau reported to annual General Assemblies held in various European capitals, where each delegate was allowed one vote, and states that sent more delegates were allowed more votes (Valleix 1998:178). The General Assemblies were responsible for electing the president of the ICPC, as well as the top administrators of the International Bureau, which included a secretary general and five rapporteurs. For a variety of reasons police professionals viewed Austria, which was keen to play a leadership role, as an acceptable patron (Anderson 1989). Consequently, Austria became the primary power behind the organization, paying for the organization until 1928, donating space for the International Bureau, and seconding staff.

Notwithstanding these formal mechanisms and Austria’s strong presence, the ICPC maintained the autonomy it required to organize its activities and to carry out its work according to its professional norms. The professional police network’s club-like nature and informality shaped the desire for considerable organizational flexibility. Informality and flexibility, in fact, became nearly synonymous as central tenets of the ICPC because of the belief that effective cross-border police coop-

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25 Koremenos et al. (2001:771) argue that centralization is a major issue for states for this very reason.

26 Austria believed itself to be assaulted by subversives, and it already contained many of the relevant files (Anderson 1989; Fijnaut 1997:112; Deflem 2000:757).
eration cannot be guided by rigid rules and texts but rather depends on informal,
personal relations between police officials. Rigid rules would hinder the ability of
national police forces to respond quickly and easily to unanticipated circumstances
(Fooner 1989:39). This flexibility had an added advantage: member state police
forces could potentially use the network of contacts for the “policing of politics as a
secret adjunct to criminal investigation” (Fijnaut 1997:114).

Although ICPC headquarters operated with considerable autonomy, states con-
trolled their own police forces and level of participation in the organization. The
ICPC was not envisioned to be an international police force authorized to use force
anywhere around the globe (the same holds true today for Interpol). The actual use
of force within states, based on ICPC criminal intelligence, was to be directed
through National Central Bureaus (NCBs). NCBs are part of the ICPC or Interpol
communication network and under full control of member states, functioning as
administrative units that provide central points of contact for switching messages
and exchanging criminal intelligence. For this system to function, then, there had to
be a central contact in each state. The NCB system, in short, made it easier for
foreign police officials to know who to contact in other capitals. Each state was
responsible for funding and staffing its NCB and could determine the content of
information transmitted through the ICPC or Interpol communication network
and which other states have access to that information. The ICPC formally rec-
commended that states adopt the NCB model in 1927, and most states quickly
established these bureaus.

Two features of the ICPC’s origins are especially important for understanding
what comes next. First, although states either assisted or consented to the estab-
lishment of the ICPC, this initiative was largely undertaken by a transnational police
network who believed that it would help them do a more efficient and expert job.
Second, they believed their professional expertise gave them superior and objective
knowledge regarding how to do their job, and that they could only maintain their
organizational security by resisting the encroachment of “political” states that could
potential divide members against each other. In other words, in their view they
had the expert authority and should have the autonomy to shape their fates. Yet all
this depended on having the resources and a relatively permissive environment. If
circumstances changed, the ICPC might be forced to choose between autonomy
and survival. This happened at various points after World War II, compelling the
organization to adopt different strategies in response to different environments.


Like the rest of Europe, the ICPC had been devastated by World War II and was
consumed with postwar survival and reconstruction. When Nazi Germany con-
quered Austria in 1938 it kidnapped the organization and its archives, removing it
to Berlin. Not only was the organization without headquarters or files, but there
was no patron saint on the horizon ready to sponsor its resurrection. Organizational
insecurity, in short, was extremely high. Yet the demand for police cooperation had
not diminished; indeed, in the chaos of the postwar environment there seemed to
be greater need than ever for transnational police cooperation. Consequently, a
Belgian police official, Florent Louwage, and several of his colleagues sought to
revive the ICPC. At the first ICPC meeting following the war in 1946, Louwage
called on delegates to reestablish the organization on the same footing and man-
date, saying “Let the flame not die!” The audience included representatives from
17 prewar ICPC member states who had been officially invited through diplomatic
channels by the Belgian Ministry of Justice, per Louwage’s request (Bresler
1992:84). To a converted choir, Louwage proclaimed that the functional imperative
to fight international crime in the aftermath of the war was greater than ever. But
demand was not enough to ensure the organization would survive.
France immediately stepped forward.\textsuperscript{27} It provided the ICPC with the needed, although hardly luxurious, headquarters; lodged in a small room in the French Ministry of the Interior, one secretary general recalled it had little “besides a sheet of paper and a pencil with little birds flying in from the Parc Monceau to peck about on my carpet” (Bresler 1992:93). For equipment, the organization was reduced to a “typewriter and a duplicating machine—both of which had been through the war.”\textsuperscript{28} France also provided officers and operating funds, although demand was quickly outstripping its capacity (Bresler 1992:135). Louwage also began the laborious task of reassembling the files. Although France had rescued the ICPC from oblivion, the organization was hardly on a firm foundation or capable of carrying out its goals.

ICPC confronted a challenge: Could it raise its visibility and the required funds without sacrificing the autonomy that allowed it to do its work as defined by its professional culture? At the 1946 meeting the delegates decided to make only minor modifications to the founding 1923 document to ensure that the ICPC would remain incognito because of its lack of a “proper Statute” (Babovic 1989:36; Valleix 1998:180). At this point the delegates’ preference for obscurity was driven by a desire to retain the atmosphere of a “policemen’s club.” Indeed, their desire for obscurity and its accompanying independence drove a rather unusual request of the United Nations Economic and Social Council: it asked to be recognized not as the IO that it was but rather as a nongovernmental IO with consultative status (Valleix 1998:180). Surprised that an IO was requesting to be placed in a legal category to which it did not belong, the UN hesitated (and then quickly agreed later to reclassify Interpol as an intergovernmental organization). From the view of the ICPC, “the discreet nature of its everyday activities and general lack of publicity surrounding it” would help it do its job. However, this inconspicuousness was harming its ability to raise funds (Anderson 1989:48). As former Secretary General Jean Nepote recalled, “you can’t do anything without money. Money is the mother of the fight” (Bresler 1992:123).

The challenge, then, was to increase its status (and the resources it would generate) without sacrificing its autonomy. Toward this end, ICPC staff adopted a strategy of avoidance and the tactic of ceremonial conformity. They believed that the secret to success was to remake the IO so that it had the appearance of a respectable and modern organization, which, in turn, would generate the desired resources. In other words, by aligning the design of the organization so that it conformed to the international normative environment, the ICPC would increase its legitimacy, and hence its funding. But they wanted to give the appearance of conformity without necessarily suffering a loss of autonomy that might compromise their ability to do their work and define their goals as they saw fit.

This tactic of ceremonial conformity began with ICPC officials surveying the international landscape in the attempt to identify the models of “successful IOs.” They fixed their sights on UNESCO, the Universal Postal Union, and the World Meteorological Organization, deciding to model its postwar constitution, regulations, formal structure, and even its name on these modern organizations (Fooner 1973:27; ICPO 1973:4). It made several moves toward this end. It changed its name to the ICPO-Interpol: by replacing the word “commission,” which suggested a transitory and ad hoc agency, with “organization” the members hoped to communicate a permanence (Fooner, 1989:67). It adopted a new emblem and flag, which the organization described with reference to the broader population of IOs: “the ground is blue, the color adopted by the majority of IOs” (ICPO 1973:4; italics added).

\textsuperscript{27} Three states offered to provide new headquarters, but France was chosen “because the central authorities were the first to give the necessary positive assurances” (Kendall 1995).

\textsuperscript{28} Firmin Franssen, quoted in ICPR 1967.
The ICPC also redesigned its formal structure so that it looked like a modern IO. But because this modernizing move potentially increased the role of states in the ICPO’s activities and discussions, it potentially threatened its autonomy and apolitical presentation. ICPC’s desire to formally modernize without losing autonomy was evident in discussions regarding its treaty status, membership, mandate, centralization, control, and flexibility. Throughout they erred on the side of autonomy, avoiding any reform that might give more control to states.

A central issue concerned whether ICPC needed formal treaty status. One view was that a treaty or convention was necessary because then “[g]overnments would formally recognize that the Interpol function is essential in the contemporary world; [and] this could be the basis for increasing its resources and extending its activities” (Anderson 1989:72). Toward this end, Jean Népote proposed to the Executive Committee the idea of bidding for treaty standing; he asserted that by changing the 1946 Statute and placing the organization on a firmer legal foundation the organization would gain greater credibility (Bresler 1992:122). The Executive Committee, however, rejected this proposal because it feared that it might increase state involvement and compromise the organization’s apolitical and impartial character. According to Anderson (1989:48), “The desire to keep the organization apolitical and unpublicized has always run counter to the drive to secure greater international recognition.”

The ICPC’s debate over membership also reflected the tension between the need to attract the attention of states without necessarily inviting their controls, and once again it opted to maintain the autonomy of the organization as a way of safeguarding the transnational police network’s professional norms of inclusivity, collegiality, and informality. Louwage and his collaborators had effectively skirted the question of membership at the first General Assembly meeting following World War II, creating ambiguously worded statutes that specified that effective members were appointed by their governments but also that criminal police departments were members of the ICPC (Valleix 1998:180). Jean Népote and others in the General Secretariat, however, believed that in order to increase the organization’s resource base it would have to elevate the role of states. Thus, Népote and Secretary General Marcel Sicot prepared a draft constitution for Interpol’s 1956 General Assembly meeting that would limit membership to states and thus make territories and other independent police units ineligible. Delegates, however, rejected the proposal. Instead, they opted to preserve the nonpolitical character of the organization by continuing the ambiguity inherent in the earlier statutes (Valleix 1998). Avoiding the words “states” and “governments” entirely, Article 45 of the new constitution referred to members as “countries” and requested only their tacit, post hoc approval of the constitution:

All bodies representing countries in Appendix I shall be deemed to be Members of the appropriate governmental authority unless they indicate in writing that they cannot accept this constitution. Such a declaration should be made within six months of the date of the coming into force of the present constitution.

Although no “countries” rejected Interpol’s constitution, on those rare occasions when this ambiguous wording has stirred legal controversy, governments have ruled that Interpol members are, in fact, states (Anderson 1989:59).

The debate over the ICPC’s mandate directly concerned its “apolitical” standing. A legacy of the ICPC’s prewar culture was that to be “nonpolitical” meant engaging in police cooperation on an informal basis without regard to formal politics or state interests and avoiding “political” crimes. Accordingly, Article 3 of the 1956 constitution declared that “it is strictly forbidden for the Organization to undertake any intervention or activities of a political, military, religious, or racial character.” Even though the ICPC’s original statutes did not specifically preclude providing
assistance to fight “political” crimes, its conservatism probably owed to the fear that any breach of the political might compromise its neutrality, harm its reputation, and alienate its rapidly growing membership (which included Communist and non-Communist countries, Bresler 1992:106–107). Yet given the difficulty of defining “political” activities a priori, Article 3 did not specify what sort of crime is political. In a later effort to introduce greater precision, Interpol specified that political crimes would include acts “sometimes designated as crimes by national penal codes—membership in organizations, limitations on liberties of opinion or the Press, insults to public authorities, endangering the security of the state, desertion, spying, practice of a religion, proselytizing, and belonging to a racial group,” as well as terrorism if the act’s “preponderant” character was political (Anderson 1989:144).

Notwithstanding the effort to differentiate the political from the nonpolitical, it was inevitable that there would continue to be differences of opinion among states and between states and Interpol over whether a crime was political. Significantly, these debates tended to reinforce a conservative interpretation. One important incident occurred in 1950 when three aircraft from Czechoslovakia were hijacked to a U.S. military air base in Germany. On the grounds that this was not political and was a case of air piracy, Interpol honored the Czech government’s request and assisted in the exchange of information relating to the hijacking. From the U.S. perspective this was a highly political act because refugees “from a Communist regime [were] using a legitimate means of escape” (Anderson 1989:44). The U.S. protested by withdrawing from Interpol, and did not resume full participation until 1958.29 Strikingly, the U.S.’s action caused the ICPC not to alter its definition of the political to incorporate this major power’s preferences but instead to cleave to the original meaning (TVI Staff 1985:3). Interpol’s 1951 General Assembly unanimously resolved “to see that no request in connection with offences of a predominantly political, racial or religious character, should ever be sent to the General Secretariat, even if—in the requesting country—the facts amount to an offense against the ordinary law” (Bresler 1992:121). The desire to steer clear of the political remained through the 1980s.30

If Interpol wanted to have the look of a modern IO then it would have to provide states with more control mechanisms over its activities. It did so in several ways. The 1946 charter “added an Executive Committee of five to the top governing group and opened the presidency to all members, although the idea of a preference for a citizen of the headquarters as secretary general was retained” (Fooner 1989:66–67). The 1956 constitution expanded the number of delegates on the Executive Committee to 13, including the president of the organization, three vice-presidents, and nine delegates chosen to ensure diversity of geographical representation (Fooner 1989:188). The Executive Committee was designed to supervise and guide the General Secretariat, providing another potential oversight mechanism for states. States officially guided the policy direction of the organization, however, through the General Assembly, where each member state received one vote. The 1956 constitution also emphasized anew the centrality of the NCBs, making the appointment of an NCB a precondition for membership. As in the ICPC’s early years, states retained control over the participation of their own police forces, determining their NCB’s budget, personnel, scope of inquiry, and information clearing partners.

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29 Between 1950 and 1958, however, the United States Treasury Department continued to maintain contact with Interpol and even paid annual dues.

30 Until the 1980s, the General Secretariat would not even permit Interpol channels to be used to clear information about Nazi war criminals due to the perceived “political” content of this information, and that these types of cases ultimately fell outside their area of competence (TVI Staff 1985:3; Anderson 1989).
ICPC’s desire to redesign the organization owed to its desire to model itself after the international environment as a way of securing status and resources, and not to state demands. To be sure, France was a major backer of ICPC, providing nearly 75% of its funds through the 1950s (Anderson 1989:43; Fooner 1989; Bresler 1992:86). Yet there is no evidence that France used its financial leverage to compel Interpol to undertake these changes. Moreover, beginning in the late 1950s there was a shift in the funding patterns that more evenly distributed the burden and thus reduced the potential leverage of any single state. At the insistence of Secretary General Jean Népote, Interpol reformed its population-based system of budgetary contributions in the late 1950s in a manner that led to the major powers giving relatively equal amounts (Kendall 1995). Although France might have treated this development as a potential threat to its leverage over the organization, there is no evidence that it worried about such an outcome. Indeed, at the 1965 General Assembly meeting the French delegate urged Interpol to pursue a policy of financial independence vis-à-vis the host government (ICPO 1965:289).

The avoidance strategy succeeded. ICPO grew significantly without sacrificing its organizational culture, reducing its autonomy, or compromising its mandate. The organization’s membership expanded, growing from 35 affiliated countries in 1949 to nearly 100 by 1966. Although its annual budget was a relatively small (only about one million dollars in 1969), its growing membership assured it of a relatively stable and increasing income. The organization also was increasingly active. The number of cases it handled increased exponentially, from 280 in 1947 to 22,733 by 1972 (Bresler 1992:134). In the late 1950s Interpol began hosting international symposia at its Paris headquarters related to the exchange of specific, confidential intelligence on drugs, organized crime, and fraud, and in the early 1960s, it began holding regional meetings and conferences (Anderson 1989:51; Bresler 1992:129–130). Interpol had new customized headquarters outside of Paris, which was hailed as a symbol of the organization’s vitality and bright future (ICPO 1966:280, 284). In 1972 it reached a Headquarters Agreement with the French government that secured its legal status in the country (the agreement was revised in 1982, granting legal immunity to Interpol and its staff, comparable to other IOs).

All this success had not changed Interpol’s fundamental character. Its mandate remained the same. It retained its traditional “club-like” spirit, with elections and appointments conducted in a relatively informal, harmonious atmosphere, and the network providing valuable personal contacts for police officials (Anderson 1989:43). Indeed, not only had it come through this impressive expansion without becoming “political,” but its apolitical nature was viewed as one of the secrets of its success. According to the secretary general, critical was “a Constitution which was freely accepted by all our members’ governments and which makes it impossible for the ICPO to engage in any activities with a political, racial, military, or religious bearing” (ICPO 1966:280). Interpol’s rags-to-riches story was aided by a forgiving environment and states that were ready to provide it with the required resources to carry out a mandate as defined by its professional culture. As Interpol President William Higgitt declared at the organization’s 1974 General Assembly in Cannes, “[W]e have become a large and important IO. We have firm foundations and our continued expansion of services in the fight against crime is assured” (ICPO 1974:260).

b. From Defiance to Acquiescence

Interpol was becoming a premier international crime-fighting organization at the very moment that states were viewing terrorism as an increasingly important threat. Beginning in the late 1960s, groups such as the Baader-Meinhof gang, the Japanese Red Army, and the Red Brigades had been carrying out bombings, arson,
and skyjackings. Western European states, in particular, wanted Interpol to take a more active role and attempted to delegate authority over antiterrorist information clearing to Interpol. In 1971 the Interpol General Assembly passed a resolution recommending the use of organizational channels for crimes involving letter bombs, terrorist murders, and hostage taking (Anderson 1989:143–144). There was growing pressure from states on Interpol to take a prominent role in terrorism.

The Secretariat’s response was to see antiterrorism not as a potential growth area that would be rewarded by states but instead as a threat to the organization because it violated its understanding of the “political.” In other words, a significant discrepancy between the content of the pressures states were applying to Interpol and its internal organizational culture deterred the Secretariat from going where the action was. A move into the realm of antiterrorism, Interpol Secretary General Jean Népote believed, would threaten the organization by violating its professional commitment to “impartiality” and dividing its membership. This was not a new stance. Beginning in the 1950s, particularly with the stinging rebuke of the United States withdrawal after the airline hijacking case out of Czechoslovakia, Interpol categorized terrorism as political and thus outside its mandate. In fact, Interpol officials believed that the organization's very existence hinged on its nonintervention in terrorism cases. In 1966 President Firmin Franssen reiterated that while some states wanted Interpol to become active in counterterrorism, he insisted that Article 3 must guide its response because it “is our Organization’s greatest source of strength” (ICPO 1966:280–281). In a similar vein, President Paul Dickopf argued that provisions limiting Interpol’s scope of activities to the “nonpolitical” were what had allowed it to survive (ICPO 1972:274).

While the lack of congruence between the external pressures and organizational culture determined Interpol’s willingness to shun conformity to these pressures, its organizational security made possible a strategy of defiance. The organization had just experienced a period of rapid expansion, admitting a large number of newly decolonized states; Interpol staff attributed this successful expansion that had enhanced its legitimacy to its flexibility and its focus on nonpolitical crimes. Its finances were modest but reasonably secure, and no single country’s contribution was so great that it would threaten its solvency. Given such conditions and its desire to maintain its autonomy, the Secretariat calculated that it could defy the demands by powerful states to become involved in counterterrorism.

Interpol’s defiance was on display at various moments. It continued to reject pressures from powerful patrons to become involved in counterterrorism, including those from Western European states that were the organization’s biggest clients and benefactors (Anderson 1989:143–144). Although during the 1970s its General Assembly passed resolutions that expanded the organization’s remit to include cooperation in interference with civil aviation and hostage-taking (Deflem and Maybin 2005), the Secretariat held the line, assiduously avoiding any consideration of terrorism and refusing demands by member states to become involved in specific terrorism cases. For instance, in 1971 Interpol’s General Assembly urged the Secretariat to become more involved in letter bombs, terrorist murders, and hostage-taking, and while the General Secretariat drafted guidelines, the Executive Committee never implemented the resolution (Anderson 1989:143–144). In response to the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972, the West German NCB asked the General Secretariat to provide information about known or suspected Arab terrorists. But Interpol refused, citing the prohibition of “political” interference (Bresler 1992:152). Even when Interpol held its very next General Assembly meeting in Frankfurt two weeks later, Secretary General Népote persuaded outgoing President Paul Dickopf to keep silent on Interpol’s decision because terrorism was clearly political and thus outside the organization’s mandate and interests (a position not completely shared by others in Interpol, Bresler 1992:152–154). In 1975, the U.S. formally requested that terrorism be placed on
the agenda of the next General Assembly meeting. Yet Népote refused, warning that the Arab delegations might withdraw in protest (Bresler 1992:160). For the secretary general and others, tackling terrorism might increase Interpol’s resources and status, but it also would threaten the organization. As Interpol President William Higgitt explained in 1974, “In my book all terrorists should be dealt with as murderers. But the point is that, if we were to become a political body, the organization would break up. We’d become nothing more than a United Nations debating assembly, whereas at the moment we are having considerable success in our intelligence-gathering operations” (quoted in Bresler 1992:164). The T-word, “terrorism,” was strictly forbidden, along with any case that might violate its professional principles and nonpolitical identity.32

Interpol’s defiant strategy proved costly, although not because states decided to punish Interpol for its defiance. Rather than forcing the organization to reform, which would have required high transaction costs, states opted to establish other organizations. In 1975 the member states of the European Community (EC) established its own transgovernmental police network, Trevi, to coordinate antiterrorist information clearing and policy (Anderson et al. 1996:53). Various reasons were cited. European states found Interpol to be a “cumbersome, factious, and inadequately financed body—totally unsuited to coordinate the effort” (Johns 1986; also see Gammelgard 2001:238). And, finally and most important for our purposes, the organization refused to get involved in terrorism. As one frustrated American police official stated, Interpol “can’t get involved in anything with political ramifications and, of course, 90% of all terrorist activity has political ramifications” (quoted in Prial 1981). Interpol was neither consulted nor involved in the planning for Trevi, but there is little evidence that it was itching to get involved. Soon, though, it became acutely aware that it had a competitor in its midst (Anderson 1989:99; Bresler 1992:162; Anderson et al. 1995:69–70).33

Interpol’s organizational insecurity began to rise. Competitor policing organizations were not only becoming involved in this high-profile issue but also were encroaching on Interpol’s core mandate (Anderson 1989:91; Bresler 1992; Anderson et al. 1995:69–70). This development, and the insecurity it bred, led many in the Secretariat, including those who defended the party line, to wonder whether they had preserved the organization’s autonomy at the price of its relevance. Interpol was “going through almost a crisis of conscience” (Raymond Kendall, quoted in Shenon 1985). Interpol’s General Secretariat, and even its Secretary General Jean Népote, began to reconsider the taken-for-granted assumption that being “nonpolitical” was the only way to maintain the organization’s survival. Interpol also began to worry about its financial health. It entered the 1970s feeling financially secure, but exited feeling vulnerable. At the 1978 General Assembly meeting, Carl Persson, the president of Interpol, warned that its financial straits were harming the organization’s effectiveness (Anderson 1989:102). Organizational insecurity surged to levels not visited since the early postwar years.

Although Interpol’s insecurity meant that a strategy of defiance was no longer tenable, a strategy of acquiescence was not a foregone conclusion because powerful factions cleaved to its “apolitical” standing as a way of protecting Interpol’s authority and autonomy (Bresler 1992:163). These external pressures and heightened insecurity triggered an internal debate regarding whether and how Interpol might reinterpret the meaning of “political” so that it permitted Interpol to become involved in those tasks once viewed as forbidden. Eventually those who defended the status quo lost to those who argued that Interpol had to change with the times, and that such changes would not disfigure the organization’s identity and

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32 The organization was, however, willing to handle any cases of air piracy that did not appear “political,” and in fact acted on 144 cases of “unlawful interference with civil aviation” in 1972 alone (Bresler 1992:148).

33 Trevi later became Europol. The U.S. DEA is also sometimes considered a competitor (Anderson 1989:163).
interests. Raymond Kendall, Interpol’s head of police, was one of the most forceful proponents of change and opponents of the status quo minded secretary general. Kendall began by quietly encouraging states to use Interpol channels to clear information about terrorism cases:

We were able to act in a rather discreet and hypocritical kind of manner. When there was, for instance, a serious bomb incident at the railway station in Bologna in Italy in August 1980, when 84 people were killed and nearly a hundred injured, some cooperation did take place, but we would not call it “terrorism.” That word was banned from our dictionary... [W]e called it “violent crime by organized groups” (Bresler 1992:163).

Reinterpreting Article 3’s prohibition on “political” interference, Kendall insisted that Interpol channels be used to assist police in their work investigating the assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II in St. Peter’s Square in 1981. Interpol got involved in the case by circulating and seeking information related to the firearms used (Anderson 1989:144). By both reinterpreting the political and handling peripheral aspects of terrorism cases, Interpol gradually began to accept a new category of cases.

Interpol formally reinterpreted the meaning of “political” at the 1984 General Assembly in Luxembourg, ending the organization’s ambiguous stance toward terrorism and allowing itself to act in cases where the action was “preponderantly” criminal instead of political. Asserting that organized criminal groups used terror to achieve “allegedly political objectives,” the resolution stated that while only states can determine the political character of a criminal incident with national legislation, “it is nonetheless essential to combat this type of crime which causes considerable damage in Member States” (quoted in Deflem and Maybin 2005). Kendall concluded that “perhaps our inability to come to terms with [terrorism] for a long time in the 1970s did affect our credibility” (quoted in Shenon 1985). Reflecting on the trade-off between autonomy and resources, Kendall commented that Interpol’s entry into antiterrorism means that member states “must be prepared to accept from now on that for everything they expect from us, they should be prepared to pay for it” (quoted in Marsh 1986). From the beginning, the fundamental question, for both Interpol and its member states, had been whether adoption of this formerly “political” task would threaten the organization’s impartiality or expert authority, hindering the organization from performing its already established and accepted tasks. Perhaps this was a risk, but in the end Interpol staff believed that the only way to compete was to reform.

The reinterpretation of the “political” facilitated Interpol’s expansion into once forbidden areas. Most obviously, it became involved in counterterrorism. It also decided to help hunt Nazi war criminals, a position it had previously rejected. In April 1985, Interpol issued an international arrest warrant for Joseph Mengele, believed to be living in Latin America. This decision was based on a rereading of the UN Convention on Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, an interpretation favored by Raymond Kendall, the acting secretary general (Anderson 1989:46). In 1985 it became involved in the highly controversial case of the Rainbow Warrior, issuing arrest warrants for the French agents suspected of blowing up the Greenpeace ship that was in New Zealand waters to protest the French nuclear site (Naïm 2001).

Interpol’s willingness to expand its mandate was immediately rewarded by states. Most importantly, the United States rewarded the organization for its growing involvement in counterterrorism (Anderson 1989:52, 143; Bresler 1992:176).34

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34 Deflem and Maybin (2005) also suggest that the FBI began to have enhanced national jurisdiction over antiterrorism, spurring greater initiative by the U.S. within Interpol.
The budget of the U.S. NCB increased from $125,000 to $6 million over a 10-year period, and its staff increased from 10 to 125 (Bresler 1992:177). American officials now turned their attention to electing more proactive candidates, that is, less tied to tradition, and installing American John Simpson as the organization’s president (Bresler 1992:177). Speaking at its General Assembly in Washington in 1985, Ronald Reagan saluted the organization and its value to the U.S. (Bresler 1992:177–178, 193).

The continuing existence, and in some ways intensification, of competition from other transnational police and criminal organizations led Interpol to try and keep pace in order to maintain its relevance. Two years after Interpol made the formal changes necessary to begin counterterrorism work, Secretary General Raymond Kendall hoped that counterterrorism efforts, such as those begun by the EC and the Tokyo summit, would “not lead to alternative organizations being set up which could bypass Interpol” (Marsh 1986). He was hoping against experience. New organizations came into existence, including Europol, ASEANPOL, the Schengen group, and the Financial Action Task Force, which increased Interpol’s organizational insecurity (Anderson et al. 1995:70). Additionally, many national police forces developed their own communication networks. Predictably, Interpol responded by expanding into new task areas as a way of shoring up its resource base and reestablishing its value to states. It has moved into organized crime (McClure 2000). Most important, antiterrorism has become one of its calling cards. At the 1999 General Assembly meeting in Seoul, delegates declared that antiterrorism was “one of the main aims of Interpol’s action in carrying out its general activities of police cooperation.”

In recognition of Interpol’s new role in this area, the 1999 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism specifically mentions that states may use Interpol channels to exchange information (UN 1999). Interpol’s position strengthened after September 11. In October 2001 Willy Deridder, Executive Director of Interpol’s police services, predicted that these events would forever change Interpol’s role, and later stated that “the organization’s goal [is] to become the No. 1 global police agency, one that will coordinate and lead a multi-dimensional antiterrorism and antiorganized crime approach, where police will conduct joint operations directly with judicial, intelligence, diplomatic and military services” (ICPO 2001).

The strategy of acquiescence allowed Interpol to survive in a more competitive environment, but at a cost to its autonomy. Interpol’s expansion into “political” areas and state controls on Interpol appeared to move in lock-step, resulting in both a growing list of responsibilities and a reduction of autonomy. States were able to control Interpol’s activities not only through financial levers but also by penetrating central points of decision making within the organization. Interpol’s staff size grew and became more international, which erased its tightly-knit, club-like atmosphere, diluted its organizational culture, and gave more access points to powerful states. In 1985 the British Raymond Kendall was elected to the position of secretary general, a postwar first for a non-Frenchman. A Japanese police official, Akira Kawada, rose to become Head of the Police Division. The United States also began to send representatives from the FBI, DEA, Customs, Secret Service, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to Interpol headquarters (Anderson 1989:52), boosting the U.S. representation in the General Secretariat from one to 12 individuals (Bresler 1992:177). The Drugs Subdivision of the General Secre-

35 Comparing Europol and Interpol, Raymond Kendall noted, “For the EU countries, if you take their contribution to us and their contribution to Europol, the Europol contribution is as much as 25–30% more and I am not at all convinced that the service they get for that money is equivalent to the service they get from us” quoted in Mason (1998:33).
36 Quoted in Deflem and Maybin (2005).
tariat markedly changed composition, and by 1987 had “eighteen nationalities in a staff of about thirty” (Anderson 1989:52). Through the efforts of the United States’ John Simpson on the Executive Committee and Raymond Kendall as secretary general, there developed a Headquarters staff and Executive Committee and Presidency that was much less wedded to tradition and much more sympathetic to state interests.37

States also began to assert control over Interpol’s discretion over its files and finances (Anderson 1989:47, 64–67, 102). For different reasons France and Germany successfully sought greater data protection regulations for the organization (Anderson 1989:65). The newly established Supervisory Board was composed of members appointed from three different bodies: the French Government, Interpol headquarters, and members of the electronic data-processing profession (Fooner 1989:171). The effect of the Board was to “tighten up Interpol’s internal procedures for collection and dissemination of information” (Anderson 1989:66), representing a loss of autonomy for the organization. Beginning in 1968 and then increasing ever since, the United States pressured for greater oversight of Interpol’s finances (ICPO 1968:282; Anderson 1989:47). Interpol did not yield to the U.S. position until the 1986 General Assembly, when it appointed the French Cour des Comptes to conduct the first external audit of its administrative and financial management (Anderson 1989:47, 102). To keep receiving funds from states the organization had to surrender its prerogative to manage its own accounting procedures.

In sum, Interpol’s strategic responses to environmental pressures were shaped by its organizational security and the congruity between its organizational culture and the content of the external pressures. During the early postwar years the major challenge was to secure its resource base. Toward that end, it adopted a strategy of avoidance and the tactic of ceremonial conformity, redesigning the organization so that it would look “modern,” increase its legitimacy, and improve its resource base. The ICPC’s new look, though, reflected a strong desire to preserve the autonomy and professional norms of the organization. If they were able to redesign the organization as they saw fit, it owed in part to the fact that states were not pressuring the organization to do otherwise. Since the mid-1970s Interpol has progressively “normalized” and become an IO like many others. This slow and sometimes painful process came as a result of new environmental factors that challenged the relevance of the organization and forced it to either keep pace with these changes or risk irrelevance. The emergence of terrorism in the late 1960s posed a challenge not only to states but also to Interpol. Interpol traditionally defined terrorism as a “political” crime and therefore outside its purview; this position was not only in keeping with its “apolitical” identity but also designed to protect its authority and autonomy. So, an organizationally secure Interpol adopted a strategy of defiance as it used its autonomy to rebuff state pressures to become involved in this matter of intense concern to them. Yet this professionally informed decision potentially proved suicidal, because states decided that if Interpol would not help then they would create other IOs that would be more responsive. These competitive pressures led Interpol to adopt a strategy of acquiescence, which forced it to redefine the “political” in a way that allowed it to expand its mandate into areas of increasing concern to states. Although this development came at the expense of Interpol’s traditional character and autonomy, it seemed preferable to standing on the side with its traditionally defined principles intact.

37 Richard Steiner, quoted in Bresler (1992:178). In the aftermath of September 11, there has unfolded a debate about whether the United States exercises excessive influence over Interpol (Lichfield and Bland 2003).
3. Conclusion

Our framework to the study of IO change and the case of Interpol holds several lessons for scholars of IOs and suggests some important areas for further research. Perhaps most important for theorists of IOs is the need to move beyond the current gladiatorial posturing typical of the rationalist–constructivist debate and to consider ways in which elements of these approaches might be combined to offer a more comprehensive understanding of IOs.\(^{38}\) This is exactly what happened in organizational theory as the resource dependence and sociological institutionalist schools began to listen and learn from one another, refining hypotheses in the process. Importantly, a sociological tradition of organizational theory recognizes that organizations operate with conceptions of both instrumental and normative rationality, and has used this fundamental insight as it has proceeded to develop arguments concerning convergence and divergence in organizational strategies and forms (Oliver 1997).

Our model drew from both resource dependence and sociological institutionalism, and in doing so utilized claims familiar to both rationalist and constructivist approaches. We claimed that IOs will have exogenously and endogenously defined preferences: they will seek to survive, further their mandates, and protect their autonomy; but the ways they achieve these goals are socially constructed and driven by an ongoing negotiation with the environment. We observed how the environment constrains the ability of IOs to pursue their goals and those constraints are both material (funds and state support) and normative (legitimacy). We recognized that IOs can be strategic actors and identified a set of strategies, but argued that the preferred strategy is dependent not only on their goals and constraints but also on their institutionally defined trade-off between autonomy and resources.

In this case change did not operate as purely statist approaches would predict. Interpol was not a mindless IO, simply acquiescing to any demands issued by powerful states. Rather, it adopted strategies of avoidance and then defiance, both normatively rational decisions within the context of Interpol’s organizational culture given its relative level of organizational security. In the early postwar years, Interpol’s redesign came not from state demands but rather from an internal assessment that this was the best way to secure the organization’s standing. This suggests that changes in organizational culture and interests are mediated by both the organization’s placement in networks of resource exchange relations and existing cultural or institutional barriers to unfamiliar tasks. Organizations do not see all forms of task expansion as equally desirable. This also suggests the necessity of examining power in networks of control and resource exchanges and dependencies.

Also in contrast to purely statist approaches, we recognized that the environment has an ecological element, with populations of actors competing with each other for status, distinction, and resources—the material and symbolic currency of international affairs. Whereas once Interpol was the lead agency for international police cooperation on a range of issues, states began to create alternatives partly because of Interpol’s unwillingness to follow the demands of states. This development created a new environmental context for Interpol officials, who now faced rival organizations and the prospect of irrelevance. So, they slowly but surely altered the meaning of “political” to include categories of crimes that mattered to states and accepted that their newly expanded mission would come at a cost. The mechanisms of change, therefore, were not explicit delegation processes or normative suasion but rather states’ determination to establish other IOs that had the (unintended) effect of compelling this semi-autonomous IO to change in a direction that was consistent with state preferences. Change occurred when Interpol leadership began

\(^{38}\) For a similar appeal, see Tierney and Weaver 2004.
to interpret ecological pressures in a way that made them worry about how to manage resource dependencies and bolster its relevance to states—but in a way that would allow the organization to maintain its autonomy.

The consequences of IO change also raise several important issues. A distinctive feature of Interpol’s evolution is that instead of becoming more autonomous from states it became more beholden to them. We say distinctive because some sociological and rationalist models insinuate that the older the organization the more autonomy it will accumulate. One of the themes of the post-1956 period was that Interpol had to choose: maintain its autonomy and the distinction between “political” and “apolitical” crimes at the risk of relevance and state support, or follow the action and the resources but at the cost of its traditional mandate and its autonomy. At first Interpol chose a strategy of defiance, but to maintain its relevance and compete with others it altered its mandate and adopted a set of goals more consistent with the preferences of other states. The internal debates that accompanied this restructuring process changed not only the behavior of Interpol but also its organizational culture. This suggests that the environment socialized Interpol. But the mechanisms of socialization were not persuasion or communication or dialogue, mechanisms favored by constructivists. Nor were they principally a consequence of intended actions by coercive states. Instead, these pressures emerged from competition and the need to demonstrate legitimacy and relevance to prospective benefactors. Indeed, Interpol’s sequencing of strategies suggests that environmental factors played a greater role in shaping organizational change than the conditions of its initial establishment, and that scholars need to examine a wider array of environmental conditioning factors. Although states certainly represent the most prominent external controls, international relations theorists have only begun to explore the range of possibilities.

References


