Assessing the Effects of Hypocrisy on State Legitimacy

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INTRODUCTION

Hypocrisy carries few positive connotations. In domestic social and political life, the disjuncture of acts and discourse makes hypocrites subjects of suspicion and scorn. Within international relations, recent research interest on the effects of hypocrisy for international organizations has put forward two broad arguments, suggesting that hypocrisy has different consequences for organised groups than it has for private individuals. First, and somewhat counterintuitively, several scholars working with the concept of ‘organized hypocrisy’ argue that hypocrisy can be useful to international organizations under particular circumstances. Hypocrisy is a result of a political environment that contains either competing normative pressures or normative pressures that cannot be reconciled with the availability of material resources to carry them out. Hypocrisy can be useful to organisations because, within certain parameters, claiming an ethical imperative but failing to carry it out allows the organization to navigate these competing pressures without completely abandoning their normative preferences. However, and more in keeping with how we might normally conceive of hypocrisy, the second argument put forward by these scholars is to suggest that if organized hypocrisy is too

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1 This encompasses the literature on organized hypocrisy based on the work of Nils Brunson, for instance, Nils Brunson, "Ideas and Actions: Justification and Hypocrisy as Alternatives to Control," Accounting, Organizations and Society 18, no. 6 (1993).
sustained, or taken too far, these organizations can lose their legitimacy within the international system, with potentially disastrous effects.³

This paper takes the latter argument as its starting point, but seeks to refocus the discussion away from international organizations to consider the major actor in the international system, states, where the effect of hypocrisy has received far less attention. There are both theoretical and practical reasons to engage in this consideration. First, there is no shortage of allegations of state hypocrisy within the international system. Second, one of the primary propositions on the effects of hypocrisy is that a state might lose its legitimacy. For instance, Martha Finnemore argues that ‘hypocrisy undermines respect and deference both for the unipole and for the values on which is has legitimized its power,’⁴ and that, furthermore, ‘unrestrained hypocrisy undermines the legitimacy of power; it undermines the willingness of others to accept or defer to the actions of the powerful.’⁵ This is arguably important if, as many scholars argue, international legitimacy is an important source of power for states.⁶

Given this, what this paper seeks to do is to unpack the relationship between state hypocrisy and its effects more thoroughly. There are several questions that it seeks to answer through this exercise. If states potentially lose their legitimacy when they act hypocritically, in what way does this happen? What does it mean in this context for a state to lose its legitimacy? Is it legitimacy that the states are losing, or are we misidentifying the effect?

Though the literature on organised hypocrisy suggests that organisations, including states, can benefit from hypocrisy under certain circumstances, this paper focuses on the effects of vicious hypocrisy, where states are believed to wilfully

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³ Lipson, "Peacekeeping; Hirschmann, "Peacebuilding in UN Peacekeeping Exit Strategies; Weaver, Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform.
⁵ This is not completely one-sided: Finnemore also argues that the ‘judicious use of hypocrisy’ can be an asset, like many in the organized hypocrisy literature, but this paper will focus on the potential problems posed by hypocrisy. ibid.
conduct themselves in a way that is different from their professed beliefs. It does so not in the belief that this is the most common type of hypocrisy within the international system. Indeed, there is likely a mixture of organized and vicious hypocrisy in any state action. However, it takes vicious hypocrisy as a benchmark in order to sketch out the worst possible outcome for states that act hypocritically. This paper argues that, unlike international organizations, hypocrisy has very little effect on the legitimacy of states given our current understanding of legitimacy in international relations. Instead, it posits that the primary effect of hypocrisy on states is not on their legitimacy, but on their trustworthiness – but even here only under very specific theoretical understandings of trust and under certain conditions.

In order to make this claim, this paper proceeds in a number of steps. First, it considers how hypocrisy arises and its potential consequences outlined in the literature. Second, it suggests that hypocrisy will likely have very little effect on the legitimacy of states given our current theoretical understanding of the subject. Lastly, it argues that it is better to understand the effect of hypocrisy in the international system as related to trustworthiness, but only under a social understanding of trust among states not in a trusting relationship.

**WHAT IS HYPOCRISY?**

The English word *hypocrisy* originates from two Greek words. The prefix *hypo-* means ‘too little,’ and the word *kritein* means ‘being critical,’ in this case, of oneself. Within the international sphere, this lack of self-criticality or judgement occurs when there is a disjuncture between professed commitments and action, where political actors might exaggerate their state’s commitment to particular moral norms. When exposed, hypocrisy is arguably ethically worse than simply

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7 Note that this concerns the belief of other actors, not necessarily the actual character of the presumptive hypocrite. It therefore encompasses both those actors that are vicious hypocrites, and those actors who are engaged in organized hypocrisy, but have taken it too far.

8 Joris Lammers, Diederik A Stapel, and Adam D Galinsky, "Power Increases Hypocrisy: Moralizing in Reasoning, Immorality in Behavior," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 5 (2010): 742. The Oxford English Dictionary claims a derivation from κρίνειν, which is to decide, determine or judge.

lying, as it additionally makes the actors vulnerable to the charge that they are making themselves seem better than they actually are.10

Brunson argues that our problem with hypocrisy arises out of how we think about the individual in Western thought. We separate out to think from to act. Through their actions, people apply their ideas. These ideas are the source of control for the actions. Organizations are considered to operate in the same way. In this case, there is a division of labor between those who think, those who do, with an executive to link the ideas to the actions.11 However, unlike individuals, ideas need to be not only thought about by organizations, but they need to be talked about. The executive needs to put their choices in words and declare them as decisions. These both signal action for the actors and generate a way of describing and accounting for the actions of the executive before the constituency of the group.12 However, hypocrisy cannot be determined solely from the disparity between the professions and actions of individuals. We must also consider intent. This distinction is manifest on an individual level in the difference between a vicious hypocrite and a tragic compromiser. In the former case, the actor actively violates or ignores the moral principles that they espouse. In the latter case, the actor faces a dilemma through which they need to betray some of the principles that they hold. Because the intent differs, the latter cannot be condemned in the same way as the former.13 Indeed, it is the nature of the agency possessed by the vicious hypocrite – that they could have chosen the route that fit in accordance with their professed values – that makes them the subject of ethical derision.14

The idea of the tragic compromiser is embedded within the concept of organized hypocrisy, which exists where “actors respond to norms with symbolic action, while simultaneously violating the norm through instrumental behavior.”15 Organizations are subject to a variety of pressures and purposes pulling in different directions simultaneously. A disjuncture between professed values and action does not necessary mean that an institution is being intentionally

11Brunson, "Ideas and Actions," 489.
12Brunson, "Ideas and Actions," 490.
dishonest, and therefore does not necessarily deserve the same level of ethical condemnation. In light of inevitable structural conditions that prevent organizations from simply pursuing their stated ethical goals, Bukovansky argues that hypocrisy may be seen as a useful convention for organizations in that ‘even if it doesn’t quite reconcile the irreconcilable, at least renders that irreconcilability tolerable.’ However, it also creates vulnerability if these hypocritical policies are publically exposed. This can have two effects: first, it condemns the violators for noncompliance; second, it challenges the legitimacy of the institution itself.

It is this latter effect that is always the danger with engaging in hypocrisy, whether it be vicious or organized. Even though organizations can be pushed into hypocritical action because of structural pressures, this does not prevent them from falling prey to its damaging effects. This can be exceptionally problematic for international organisations and non-governmental organisations, since there is a presupposition that this degraded position will prevent them from acquiring the vital resources from states or other donors to continue to exist. For instance, Lipson argues that the legitimacy and support for the United Nations ‘depend[s] a significant extent about its being seen to exemplify and uphold widely held norms,’ making potential hypocrisy directly related to its legitimacy. Hirschmann equally argues with respect to the UN that ‘inconsistent rhetoric and actions become a question of legitimacy for the organization’ by ‘undermining its authority and causing member states to lose trust in its functional effectiveness.’ Weaver argues that this is true for IOs in general, that when they are ‘caught in the act of hypocrisy, it can become a source of dysfunction, undermining the organization’s legitimacy and moral authority.’

There is general scholarly agreement on the negative effects of hypocrisy on international organizations. However, states do not have the same properties as international organizations. Indeed, they are more foundational to the international

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16 Bukovansky, "Institutionalized Hypocrisy and the Politics of Agricultural Trade,” 73.
17 Ibid. See the Shklar (1984) work on why these two things are different.
18 Lipson, "Peacekeeping,” 12. Lipson is fundamentally interested in how organized hypocrisy can help the UN to achieve this goal, but the point still stands. Brunson also argued that if decoupled or counter-coupled elements of an organization are seen to be talking an acting in inconsistent ways, the organization’s coherence as an actor, essential to its legitimacy, can be called into question Nils Brunson, "Organized Hypocrisy,” in The Northern Lights: Organisation Theory in Scandinavia, ed. Barbara Gzarniawska and Guje Sevón (Frederiksborg: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2003).
20 "Peacebuilding in UN Peacekeeping Exit Strategies,” 172.
21 Weaver, Hypocrisy Trap: The World Bank and the Poverty of Reform, 2.
system itself. Given this, can we simply port these claims over to states? What exactly is the legitimacy that the state is losing? The next section will consider what it means for a state to lose its legitimacy. It will argue that states cannot be said to lose their legitimacy because of legitimacy given our current understanding of what legitimacy is and what it does within international society.

STATE HYPOCRISY AND THE LOSS OF LEGITIMACY

A recent generation of scholars have argued that legitimacy occupies a central place within international society. Legitimacy is important in any system because it creates order, stability and effectiveness. Each has its own importance, as David Beetham notes: ‘Order’ depends upon people obeying rather than disobeying. ‘Stability’ is ... a system’s ability to withstand shock and failure because a solid level of support from its subordinates can be guaranteed. ‘Effectiveness’ includes the ability of the powerful to achieve their goals because of the quality of performance they can secure from those subordinate to them.22 Though generalised to any system in Beetham’s formulation, these features are particular important to an international system that otherwise lacks a unified sovereign from which order and the law can be produced and enacted.

Ian Clark argues that we can see the empirical outcome of legitimacy in the international system through what he calls the practices of legitimacy among states. These are a set of state discourses that attempt to reach a tolerable consensus on a topic of international concern, given a particular distribution of power. It is through these practices of legitimacy that we can see the competition over and the creation of legitimate social structures.23 So what issues areas do these practices of legitimacy pertain to? Here Clark argues that legitimacy plays two key roles within international society. First, it expresses a ‘rudimentary social agreement about who is entitled to participate in international relations.’24 This lets us know who the legitimate actors within international society are, or who is entitled to rightful membership.25 The need for a tolerable consensus among the actors in the system over who can be afforded rightful membership means that no single

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23 Clark, Legitimacy, 3.
24 Legitimacy, 2.
25 Legitimacy, 5.
actor can define what is legitimate conduct, nor can they simple deem themselves to be legitimate – this status is always conferred on them by others.26 International society as a whole polices who gets in, and not all actors will be allowed the benefits of membership.

Secondly, legitimacy is about rightful conduct, or what behaviour is expected on the part of the members. As such, legitimacy, together with calculations of potential punishment and self-interest, can explain whether it is likely that an actor will obey or resist an institution or rule. Legitimacy helps to dictate what conduct is likely through the structural effects of norms of legitimate behaviour.27

So legitimacy within international society is fundamentally about the intersubjective understandings of both the status of the actors themselves and the means through which they conduct themselves. Thus, if states are to lose their legitimacy through hypocrisy, according to the current scholarship on legitimacy they must experience a direct loss in their own membership within the international system, or an indirect loss of legitimacy through particular ideas and values that they champion. I will take each in turn.

### HYPOCRISY AND RIGHTFUL MEMBERSHIP

The first way to consider how a state has lost its legitimacy is to consider rightful membership. If this is the type of legitimacy that is lost by the state when they conduct themselves in a hypocritical manner, then hypocrisy has profound consequences. Within modern international society, either a state is a state, in the sense that is recognised by other states, or it is not. There are very few avenues for juridical statuses in between.

Since the end of the Cold War, the rightful membership of states has been increasingly based on the link to particular types of rightful conduct, particularly concerning the internal make-up of the state.28 This also applies to following norms

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of international conduct. Ian Hurd, for instance, argued that the role of legitimacy in the international system is relatively strong, so strong in fact that even the hegemon cannot be seen as violating the ‘rules of the game’ too often because such hypocrisy is dangerous to legitimation.  

Seymour, equally, has argued that ‘statements exposed as lies or hypocrisies potentially damage a state’s reputation and legitimacy abroad.’ At the extreme, we can see this in the label of the ‘rogue state,’ or a state that does not abide by the rules of international society, and thus either has conditional rights of membership or perhaps has lost its rights altogether.

Hypocrisy becomes a problem because there will be times when all states will want to violate the norms that they have professed. Finnemore argues that one of the most common behaviours for unipoles given the constraints of rightful conduct is hypocrisy – they will claim adherence to the rules at the same time that they actively violate them. In fact, she believes that this is particularly a problem for unipoles as they tend to make more sweeping claims about the moral nature of their policies. We can see this argument in scholars commenting on empirical case studies. For instance, Huq notes that the hypocrisy of diplomatic assurances with respect to torture on the part of the United States triggered widespread revulsion at US conduct.

However, if a state is hypocritical with respect to norms of rightful conduct, does it loose its legitimacy with respect to rightful membership? It would seem difficult to sustain this claim. In cases where a state has recently received rogue status, such as Iraq or North Korea, the focus is on the grievous nature of the conduct itself – the fact that the state

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31 *Legitimacy*, 176.
32 Finnemore, "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity," 61. This point is also echoed in Beetham, to claims that the fundamental constraint to rulers in an international system is their need to ‘respect the basic principles that underpin the roles or system of power, and to protect them from challenge.’ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 36.
34 Note that this presupposes for the sake of argument that rogue status was designated by the international community as a whole, overlooking sources of dissent.
might also be hypocritical is much more of a moot point. This can be illustrated by considering the hypothetical case of a discursively revisionist state that otherwise conducts itself according to the norms of international society. How is such a state likely to be treated, and are they likely to be considered a rogue state? They certainly might pay costs for their open suggestions that norms deemed legitimate by the rest of international society be changed. However, it is unlikely that if they nonetheless follow these norms, their hypocrisy itself will lead to a loss of their status as a state within international society.

For instance, a state might disavow major human rights practices publicly, and it may pay political costs internationally for doing so. However, it would be difficult to argue that should it respect human rights domestically and therein act hypocritically, it would suffer significantly increased costs over and above its refusal to discursively accept the human rights regime. This hypocrisy would certainly not affect their perception to be rightful members of international society alone. To be demoted from the society of states is therefore too strong a formulation to account for the effects of hypocrisy alone. Any state that reaches this point has not gotten there because of their hypocrisy, but because of an incongruity between their conduct and international norms.

As such, if we separate the effects of challenging international norms from the effects of hypocrisy, it is difficult to see how any argument can be made that a state will lose its legitimacy through hypocrisy, if we consider legitimacy in this case to be rightful membership within international society.

**HYPOCRISY AND RIGHTFUL CONDUCT**

However, what if the legitimacy loss is not direct, but instead has to do with the loss of legitimacy through the delegitimation of ideas that states champion? As Finnemore has argued, hypocrisy can undermine “the respect and deference both for the unipole and for the values on which it has legitimized its power.” The threat of hypocrisy might be that it damages values intrinsically tied to the state and its power. We can think of this in two ways. First, the

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35 Finnemore, "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity," 61. This point is also echoed in Beetham, to claims that the fundamental constraint to rulers in an international system is their need to ‘respect the basic principles that underpin the roles or system of power, and to protect them from challenge.’ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 36.
hypocrisy could be directly related to the values that legitimize a state’s power. This argument suffers from the problem associated with the argument that it might lose rightful membership – that the real work done to harm the particular norm is committed by its breach, and not necessarily because of the disjuncture between discourse and action. Additionally, it is important that Finnemore here is speaking about unipolar power. This presupposes that there is something particular about the nature of the unipole that they have the ability to uphold particular international norms that they benefit from on their own. This vision almost presupposes a version of hegemonic stability theory, whereby the hegemon upholds the norms on which all other states free-ride. However, it ignores the real possibility that the rest of the international community might otherwise continue to effectively uphold the values despite both the defection and the hypocrisy of the unipole.\footnote{See, for instance, previous work that argues that the defection of the Bush administration from international torture and \textit{habeas corpus} norms has had little effect on the international human rights system: Vincent Charles Keating, \textit{US Human Rights Conduct and International Legitimacy} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).} This problem is only augmented if we consider the potential effect of the hypocrisy of smaller states on the legitimacy of the norm, whose defection and potential hypocrisy will have even less of an effect on the status of any international norm.

Given the way that legitimacy is currently conceptualised within the literature, it is difficult to argue that hypocrisy affects the legitimacy of states. In the case of both direct legitimacy through rightful membership and indirect legitimacy through norms intrinsically tied to the state and its power, there is an issue of conflating the costs created by violating legitimate international norms and the costs of potential hypocrisy. Additionally, with respect to indirect legitimacy, there is a problem that most states in the international system to not have sufficient impact on the condition of international norms that might be tied to the values of the state. Only large groups of states might have this ability,\footnote{Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "Norm Dynamics and Political Change," \textit{International Organization} 52, no. 4 (1998).} but even here the crisis in the norm is created primarily by the defection itself.

Despite the fact that there is little to suggest based on our current understanding of legitimacy within international society that hypocrisy has a significant effect on the legitimacy of states, this doesn’t exhaust the potential effects of hypocrisy on states. In fact, I would like to suggest that the key effect of hypocrisy does not have do to with the legitimacy of states,
but with their trustworthiness, and it is a conflation of the two that leads to the conceptual murkiness. But even here, hypocrisy only have effects under certain conditions.

**HYPOCRISY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The link between hypocrisy and trustworthiness is bound up in the intent to deceive. The reason why the intent matters is because the vicious hypocrite not only betrays someone’s trust, but does so by manipulating them with an appeal to their values – the espousal of a particular moral principle is used to undermine that very principle. Dovi argues that this betrayal of trust is more profound than a betrayal that might come from mere incompetence or weakness of will. 38

Finnimore argues that acting hypocritically therefore provides information about character and identity. Other states despise hypocrites because they try to deceive us, and they pretend to be better than they are. Hypocrisy calls into question not only the validity of the moral commitments professed by an actor, but also their moral constitution and character. 39 Having a good reputation in international politics is important because, among other things, it can enhance trust. 40 On the other hand, hypocrisy ‘interferes with credible commitments and entails reputation costs. Saying one thing and doing another shows that the state in question is not trustworthy.’ 41

At first glance, this seems to be a plausible argument, since it suggests a state that might not have as much of a problem saying one thing but doing another, which would increase the uncertainty in any interaction with states that engage in hypocrisy over those that do not. But this fundamentally depends on how we conceptualise trust, as different answers to this question affect the way we might think hypocrisy and trust might overlap.

**HYPOCRISY AND RATIONAL TRUST**

Some scholars that argue that trust is fundamentally a function of rational choice. Andrew Kydd, a prominent scholar taking this perspective, believes that trust is a perception on the part of one state that another state will cooperate or

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40 "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity," 75.
41 "Legitimacy, Hypocrisy, and the Social Structure of Unipolarity," 73.
defect from a particular agreement. \textsuperscript{42} Trust is based on a form of interest based on encapsulated interest, or a situation where, "I trust you because I think it is your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter seriously."\textsuperscript{43} Trust operates through the determination of the preferences of potential cooperating partners – whether one state believes the other to be trustworthy or not.\textsuperscript{44} This understanding takes place through a learning process based on Bayesian method, where states through repeated interaction are more likely to converge on the correct beliefs about the other state than they are about incorrect beliefs.\textsuperscript{45}

The question is then whether hypocrisy affects this process in a negative way. Kydd does not speak to the issue himself, relying on the pattern of cooperation and defection experienced in the past or other sources of intelligence to determine the level of trust one state should have in another. As such, it is not so much the discourse that matters in the determination of trustworthiness. The question is whether belief in the other state’s interest not to defect is affected by hypocrisy? The problem with the vicious hypocrite is that they mislead others as to what their interests actually are – they profess one interest, yet act according to another. While this might affect early rounds of interaction under Kydd’s framework should the discourse be convincing, over time the true interests will be revealed by the other state’s action and intelligence gathering focused on the preferences of the other state to cooperate, and states will adjust accordingly with respect to any particular issue area. In this sense, hypocrisy has no real effect other than being a potential drag on state’s Bayesian development of their understanding whether the other state has cooperative preferences.

A bigger question concerns whether there is any type of spillover from one issue area to another. In other words, does being hypocritical in one issue area affect the potential level of trust in other issue areas? To the extent that this is true, hypocrisy might lead some states to mistrust where they should trust, as initial evidence to trust will be discounted. However, this is also prone to Bayesian learning. Hypocrisy in one field becomes increasingly unimportant as states take

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Andrew Kydd, \textit{Trust and Mistrust in International Relations} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Russell Hardin, \textit{Trust and Trustworthiness} (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002), 1. See also Bernhardt Lieberman, "I-Trust: A Notion of Trust in Three-Person Games an International Affairs," \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution} 8, no. 3 (1964).
\item \textsuperscript{44} Kydd, \textit{Trust and Mistrust in International Relations}, 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{45} \textit{Trust and Mistrust in International Relations}, 18-19.
\end{itemize}
into account the effects of previous rounds of interaction in their calculation over whether states are likely to cooperate or defect.

So from a rational trust point of view, hypocrisy seems to have reasonably limited effects at the very beginning of the interactions when information about the other side’s type is scarce. However, since rational trust is fundamentally interested in determining type though reflection on the results of previous interactions, the scope for hypocrisy affecting this process decreases as time goes on and more information is available.

**HYPOCRISY AND SOCIAL TRUST**

Social scholars of trust attempt to argue that there is more to trust than just making a good bet on the intentions of the other side. As Aaron Hoffman put it, trust proceeds from the belief that “trustees have a responsibility to fulfil the trust placed in them even if it means sacrificing some of their own benefits.”46 He notes that this notion of responsibility is tied to how we tend to think of others, that they are not simply a good bet, but that they are upright or honourable.47 This does not lead to the other being automatically bound, but it does suggest that there is a particular social structure attached to trust that is unaccounted for by the rational trust theorists. As such, states can form trusting relationship, which includes both the ideas of risk and obligation.48 Keating and Ruzicka, building on the work of Niklas Luhmann,49 further argue that the special property of trust is that it allows for the cognitive reduction in the perception of risk. This opens up the possibility that states can enter into a habitual trusting relationship for which the perception of defection by the other side is essentially zero.50

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48 "A Conceptualization of Trust in International Relations," 376-77.
50 For example, Canada treats the tiny but non-zero possibility of defection by the United States in its security alliance as essentially zero in terms of its preparations against potential defection, see Vincent Charles Keating and Jan Ruzicka, "Trusting Relationships in International Politics: No Need to Hedge," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014).
There is significantly more room for hypocrisy to affect relationships between states if we consider social theories of trust. Primarily, the idea that states are judged to be upright or honourable, and not just a good bet, suggests that the vicious hypocrite would face problems of perceived trustworthiness for which they would pay penalties. This is particularly the case for those scholars who argue that the development of empathy between leaders is a key component for trust-building measures.⁵¹ Thus, hypocrites would be seen as more untrustworthy under a social theory of trust than they would be under a rational theory of trust in the process of trust-building between states.

Interestingly, however, the opposite is the case once a trusting relationship is formed. The more that states have developed a habitual trusting relationship where cognitive perception of defection approaches zero, the more resilient this relationship will be to hypocrisy in other fields than two states that have not formed such a bond. So hypocrisy might play a role in reducing the trustworthiness of hypocritical states, but only inasmuch as the states do not have a strong trusting relationship.

CONCLUSION

Given our understanding of the nature of legitimacy and hypocrisy in the international system, there is relatively little to suggest that hypocrisy greatly affects the legitimacy of states. Instead, this paper suggests that trust that is potentially affected, but here only within certain parameters. This is important because although trust and legitimacy might seem to be related, they are conceptually distinct. Trust is about the belief that another will act in accordance with a particular norm or agreement, whereas legitimacy concerns the determination of rightful membership and what is to be considered rightful action. States within the international system can be viewed as exceptionally untrustworthy, and though this has effects on cooperation and conflict, it has never been a reason to deprive them of membership within international society. So although it might be true that a state becomes increasingly untrustworthy as hypocrisy increases, it cannot be said that a state loses its legitimacy because it becomes untrustworthy unto itself.

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The reason for the confusion over the effects of hypocrisy on legitimacy might stem from a conflation of the effects of breaking a norm with the effects of being hypocritical because the state previously endorsed the norm as well. This paper argued that it is the breaking of the norm which is of importance to the legitimacy of the state, particularly as rightful membership is increasingly bound up in particular forms of both internal organisation and external conduct. The effect on trustworthiness, on the other hand, is of more of a concern, particularly if the state forgoes opportunities for cooperation that would bring it benefit, but here only among states that do not have a strong trusting relationship.

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