

THE DEMOCRATIC NATION STATE: EROSION, OR TRANSFORMATION, OF LEGITIMACY

6 Is there a legitimation crisis of the nation-state?

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It is widely accepted that internationalization and the increasing loss of parliamentary control over political power challenge the legitimacy of national democratic systems and their core institutions. We first present results from a study of public communication, which, when examined in the context of theories of legitimation, indicate that these processes do not necessarily lead to the erosion or breakdown of popular support for the nation state. The idea that there is a linear cause-and-effect relationship is overly simple, and a more detailed analysis is called for. Legitimation of a political system through public communication is a back-and-forth process which is determined by the system's specific institutional arrangements and by the fortuitous twists and turns of public debate. Nation states have more extensive, diverse and deeply rooted sources of legitimation than is often assumed.

Legitimacy in the nation-state: what do we know?

The idea of democracy is at the heart of the modern western state, whose institutions reflect what Robert A. Dahl called the 'second democratic transformation', i.e. the transfer of democratic self-government from the city-state to nations and large-scale societies.⁶ For a long time, this transfer was remarkably successful. Institutions of representative democracy at the national level secured effective citizen participation in political decision-making and they themselves became a central source of popular support for the nation state's political arrangements.¹³ This democratic dimension of the modern state, therefore, is critical to its legitimacy: Both the degree to which political systems enable collective self-government, a measure of legitimacy in the normative sense, and citizen acceptance of state institutions, legitimacy in the empirical sense, greatly depend on the nature and quality of democratic procedures.

These procedures, however, are affected by the transformations of the state discussed in this volume. Two factors are particularly important, the first being the *internationalization of political power*. Many of the nation state's traditional responsibilities have shifted to international or supranational regimes and organizations like the WTO or the EU. This is, in part, a response to challenges that the nation state can no longer effectively tackle on its own. But while such institutions may indeed be capable of more effective problem-solving, the democratic quality of their decision-making procedures is generally quite low. It would be natural to assume, then, that such internationalization jeopardizes the legitimacy of both the nation state and the transnational organizations: as the influence of the former dwindles, and the latter are found wanting in democratic quality, the democratic form of government is at risk of becoming one in which citizens, in Dahl's words, 'participate extensively in political decisions that do not matter much but cannot participate much in decisions that really matter a great deal'.⁶

The second factor in the transformation of the state that strongly influences democratic procedures is the *loss of parliamentary control over political power*, or deparliamentarization. While parliaments have traditionally exerted considerable influence as core institutions of representative democracy, their decision-making functions are increasingly being assumed by national executives, the judiciary, central banks, expert commissions, business corporations, interest groups, etc. Hence, even in areas where the nation state has preserved its responsibilities, democratic control over political decision-making can no longer be taken for granted. To some extent, this trend is itself caused by internationalization, as nation states are generally represented by their executives in supranational organizations. But other factors, such as the growing complexity of legislation, the imperatives of party government or the growing influence of private actors, are also important. They all contribute to a shift of power away from parliaments, and thus away from the core legitimating institutions of the democratic nation state.

As political decision-making moves out of national spheres of sovereignty and parliamentary arenas, many traditional standards of democratic legitimacy are falling by the wayside.^{1,3,12,15} However, we question whether these developments have in fact also eroded popular support for the nation state. Are we facing a legitimacy crisis of representative democracy, as many analysts of the viability of the modern western state maintain?^{2,10,14} They conclude that the changes in the state's democratic, constitutional, welfare and power structures are severely damaging the sources of its legitimacy. But do we really have empirical proof of such an erosion of support for the nation state and its institutions? Or are we mixing normative premises with dire, yet sketchy empirical findings?

We present here results from a study of media communication in Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States, highlighting the important role played by

public discourses in the construction, reconstruction and transformation of legitimacy. We examine if the hypothesis of an imminent legitimation crisis of the nation state can be corroborated, and to what extent it might have to be differentiated: Do internationalization and deparliamentarization really undermine popular support for the nation state? To what extent is legitimation communication shaped by idiosyncratic national institutional arrangements, political agendas and debates? How diverse and robust are the resources used in the legitimation of national political systems?

Legitimacy discourses and political institutions

Legitimacy is a key resource for every political system. It refers to the acceptance of a specific political order by its own citizens and to the beliefs on which that acceptance is grounded. Easton defined legitimacy as a function of 'diffuse' support and 'specific' support.⁷ Diffuse support is created in socialization processes and obtained when the members of a political community are convinced that the institutions and guiding principles of a political order or 'regime', as well as the behaviour of its representatives or 'authorities', correspond to their own moral principles. It is based on values and affective attachments, and relatively insensitive to short-term fluctuations in system performance. Specific support, on the other hand, is based on the relationship between the demands of the citizens and the material outputs of a system. Whereas diffuse support is anchored in beliefs about the political community and the regime, specific support is based predominantly on the citizens' perceptions and evaluations of authorities.

What is important here is that legitimacy, as a function of both diffuse and specific support, is attributed and constructed in an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation, and thus dependent on language. The norms and values central to the perception of a political system as legitimate are established, modified or re-established in public discourses. Such discourses guide and legitimate political action by shaping acceptable, hegemonic, or collectively binding interpretations of social and political events and relationships; they justify or contest normative criteria for the attribution of legitimacy, and debate the extent to which these criteria are met. These discursive processes can result either in the legitimation or in the delegitimation of a political order.

The political institutions at the core of democratic systems of governance play a vital role in shaping our interpretations of the world¹¹ and are thus in the Janus-headed position of influencing the very legitimation processes of which they are the object. If we want to know more about the resources of support at the disposal of political systems, we need to focus on how institutions influence the discursive construction of legitimacy. Institutional designs are also likely to play a gate-keeper function vis-à-vis internationalization and deparliamentarization

and influence the interpretations of these processes.⁴ Legitimacy may, however, be so deeply embedded in the institutional structure of a polity that any deficits in its attribution caused by these processes are directed at *specific* policies and/or political actors rather than at the polity's core institutions. Contrary to assumptions in much of the literature, problems induced by these challenges may only scratch the surface of the nation state's legitimacy.

Legitimation statements in public communication

Research on empirical legitimacy tends to privilege two types of methods: public opinion surveys, producing data on individual attitudes and beliefs, and the observation of (non-)conventional political behaviour, such as (non-)voting and protest activities. However, this research does not fully capture the role of discourses in the construction of legitimacy. As both public opinion, including beliefs on legitimacy, and political behaviour are embedded in or framed by public communication, we plead for an alternative method: the analysis of textual data. Here we aim to highlight the potential of this approach. Concentrating on one specific, albeit important segment of public communication, the print media, our study compares legitimacy discourses in political systems characterized by different institutional designs. We examine articles from two top-quality newspapers in each country studied: the *Guardian* and *Times* from the United Kingdom, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and *Tagesanzeiger* from Switzerland, and the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* from the United States. Conventionally, discourse is operationalized as a text corpus, but we focus on individual *legitimation statements* produced for or transported by the media. We define a legitimation statement as a statement that denies or affirms the legitimacy of a specific *object*, using a specific *pattern of legitimation*. The structure and content of a legitimation statement is thus characterized by these two parameters.

As *objects of legitimation*, we consider the key institutions and principles of national political systems: the political order, or regime, and the political community as a whole, i.e. the nation and its citizenry; the institutions and principles that characterize the modern western state, i.e. democracy, nation state, constitution/rule of law, welfare state, sovereignty; the form of government, whether it is a monarchy or republic; the three branches of government, i.e. executive, legislative, and judiciary; the electoral system; territorial organization, whether it is federal or unitary; the political class/elite; the party system and the system of interest groups; and type of democracy, whether parliamentary or presidential, representative or direct. Statements about subnational institutions, specific authorities, or individual policies are not included in the analysis.

As *patterns of legitimation*, we consider the substantive criteria a speaker relies on when affirming or casting doubt on the legitimacy of an object. We classify

the patterns within two dimensions. In the first, we distinguish between the *input* and the *output* side of political decision-making. A pattern of legitimization is called *input-oriented* if it refers to the process of decision-making, in particular to the actors involved and the procedures followed. A pattern is *output-oriented* if it refers to the results of the process, to their quality and consequences.^a

In the second dimension, we distinguish between democratic and non-democratic criteria. This distinction is more problematic: different theories of democracy rely on different criteria for a genuine democracy. For our purposes, the distinction between democratic and non-democratic patterns of legitimization should be grounded in an undemanding definition of democracy, such as that proffered by Schmitter and Karl: ‘a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by the citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.’¹⁷ Patterns of legitimization pertaining to decision-making processes or outputs that are essential to the implementation of such a system can then be classified as democratic; patterns that are non-essential – though not necessarily antithetical – to democracy are classified as non-democratic.

On the basis of these definitions, patterns of *democratic input* are those that refer to the decision-making rules that guarantee self-governance of the citizens and respect for these rules, and to the procedural conditions that ensure the ‘enlightened understanding’⁵ required if citizens are to make adequate use of them. Many discussions of democratic legitimacy focus exclusively on such democratic inputs, but as David Held notes in his 1995 book *Democracy and the Global Order* they can be rendered worthless if a society’s power structures ‘systematically generate asymmetries of life chances [...] which limit and erode the possibilities of political participation.’⁹ Therefore, we have also included patterns of *democratic output* which include references to political results that prevent the development of such ‘nautonomy’, as Held calls it. These include guarantees of individual liberty and of the material and cognitive conditions for full participation in citizenship, as well as the absence of political results that serve only small sectors of the population or limit the options of future generations.

Patterns of *non-democratic input* and of *non-democratic output* refer to characteristics or results of decision-making processes that may be valued in both democratic and non-democratic systems of government, but are not essential for democratic decision-making and the prevention of nautonomy. If we map patterns of legitimization in both dimensions, we arrive at a fourfold scheme, containing 25 patterns (Table 1).

^a Fritz W. Scharpf¹⁶ distinguishes input- and output-based legitimacy, but his standard for assessing a polity’s input legitimacy is ‘government by the people’, while that for output is ‘government for the people’; this confounds the distinction between political inputs and outputs with considerations of the democratic quality of the processes in question.

Table 1. Patterns of legitimation

	Democratic	Non-democratic
<i>Input: Characteristics of political processes</i>	<p><i>Popular sovereignty</i> – all power resides in the citizens</p> <p><i>Accountability</i> – rulers can be controlled and removed</p> <p><i>Participation</i> – citizens can actively contribute to decisions</p> <p><i>Legality</i> – domestic legal rules are respected</p> <p><i>International legality</i> – international legal rules are respected</p> <p><i>Transparency</i> – political processes are public and accessible</p> <p><i>Credibility</i> – political processes conform to stated objectives, no hidden agenda</p> <p><i>Deliberation</i> – political processes are based on the rational exchange of political arguments</p>	<p><i>Charismatic leadership</i> – strong personal leadership</p> <p><i>Expertocratic leadership</i> – leadership by experts</p> <p><i>Religious authority</i> – political processes follow religious principles</p> <p><i>Tradition</i> – political processes follow traditional rules and customs</p> <p><i>Moderation</i> – political style is conciliatory and non-aggressive</p>
<i>Output: Characteristics of political results</i>	<p><i>Protection of human rights</i> – individual and political rights are guaranteed</p> <p><i>Democratic empowerment</i> – material and cognitive conditions of meaningful participation are guaranteed</p> <p><i>Contribution to public good</i> – political results serve the population as a whole</p> <p><i>Reversibility</i> – political results are not irrevocable</p>	<p><i>Effectiveness</i> – solution to common problems</p> <p><i>Efficiency</i> – political results are cost-effective, not wasteful</p> <p><i>Distributive justice</i> – equal distribution of resources and burdens</p> <p><i>Contribution to stability</i> – enhancement of political stability</p> <p><i>Contribution to identity</i> – political results reflect or enhance the political community's sense of identity</p> <p><i>Contribution to morality</i> – political results conform with moral standards</p> <p><i>Contribution to sovereignty</i> – enhancement of a polity's autonomy, capacity, power, or interest</p> <p><i>Good international standing</i> – enhancement of a polity's status in the international sphere</p>

A legitimization statement thus has the structure: [Object X] [is (il)legitimate] [because of Pattern Y]. To generate our text corpus, we select all articles from our six newspapers that contain at least one such legitimization statement.^b The articles can be news reports, commentaries or features, from any section of the newspapers. In addition to the object, assessment as legitimate or illegitimate, and pattern of legitimization, discussed above, three other variables are coded for each statement: the issue or policy context in which a statement arises – i.e. the way in which it is framed – and the presence or absence of references to internationalization and deparliamentarization.

Monitoring legitimacy: some preliminary findings

The procedure described allows us to monitor legitimacy discourses, examine their structure, and track changes. Tables 2–4 summarize our first results, obtained for January to March 2004.^c This short time period does not yet allow for an analysis of trends or convey a complete picture of legitimacy discourses in the three countries studied. But it is already apparent that the structures and trajectories of national legitimacy discourses are more complex than is often assumed. And a number of tentative theses about legitimacy discourses, and the factors that influence them, are beginning to emerge.

(1) Delegitimizing statements dominate in national legitimacy discourses, but the scope of delegitimation is not uniform across countries

Sixty-three percent of all statements in our text corpus question or deny the legitimacy of their political objects, while only 37% evaluate them positively. These percentages are not necessarily indicative of the all-pervasive legitimacy crisis of western democracies so often referred to in the literature – it is probable that uncritical assessments are less likely to be expressed in discourse than critical ones. Furthermore, there are pronounced differences between the three countries, as evident from Table 2. While critical statements outnumber expressions of support in all three nations, they do so considerably more clearly in the UK (72%)

^b Texts are retrieved from an electronic media database in a two-step procedure, using automated search routines for preselection, and manual interpretation for final selection of texts. Search routines are based on our definition of legitimization statements and are similar for each country, with country-specific adaptations for the various political orders and terminologies.

^c Our text corpus to date consists of 626 legitimization statements from 399 articles: 102 articles and 173 statements from the two Swiss papers, 134 articles and 207 statements from the British, 163 articles and 246 statements from the American. Relevant articles constitute 0.65% of all articles published during that time (0.69%, 0.78% and 0.58%, respectively, for the three countries). On average, each article contains 1.57 legitimization statements (1.70, 1.54 and 1.51 respectively).

Table 2. Objects of legitimation addressed in British, Swiss and American legitimation statements (rounded to the nearest percent)

	UK			CH			USA		
	% of state-ments	% of		% of state-ments	% of		% of state-ments	% of	
		delegiti-mation	legiti-mation		Delegiti-mation	legiti-mation		delegiti-mation	legiti-mation
Political order	26	68	32	31	66	34	49	49	51
Political community	13	46	54	8	57	43	12	48	52
Democracy	7	79	22	5	38	63	9	68	32
Nation state	1	0	100	2	100	0	0	–	–
Constitution/ rule of law	10	70	30	4	43	57	7	41	59
Welfare state	5	91	9	8	64	36	1	50	50
Sovereignty	0	–	–	2	67	33	0	–	–
Parliamentary democracy	1	100	0	0	–	–	0	–	–
Presidential democracy	0	–	–	0	–	–	0	–	–
Direct democracy	0	–	–	17	30	70	0	–	–
Representative democracy	2	20	80	0	–	–	0	–	–
Other type of democracy	0	–	–	4	67	33	0	–	–
Form of government	4	75	25	0	–	–	0	–	–
Executive	3	100	0	4	100	0	2	83	17
Legislative	6	83	16	1	50	50	4	90	10
Judiciary	8	88	12	0	–	–	6	50	50
Electoral system	2	100	0	1	100	0	2	83	17
Federalism/ territorial organization	6	67	33	5	86	12	1	50	50
Political class	7	93	7	5	86	12	4	100	0
Party system	1	100	0	6	100	0	3	100	0
Organized interests	0	–	–	0	–	–	1	50	50
Total (not rounded)	100	72	28	100	62	38	100	57	43

than in Switzerland (62%) and the US (57%). Evidence of general legitimacy problems, then, is weaker in Switzerland and the US than in the UK.

(2) Legitimacy discourses are shaped by, or reflect, national institutional arrangements and political cultures

Conventional survey research is often limited to measuring quantitative changes in the degree of legitimacy granted to a political order or its elements, whereas an examination of the objects and patterns of legitimacy discourses provides insight into the qualitative nature, sources and foundations of legitimacy. If these aspects of legitimation are indeed shaped by or reflect specific institutional arrangements and political cultures, then the objects and patterns that dominate legitimation statements in the three countries should remain constant over time, at least as long as institutions remain stable. Our data cover too short a period to prove or disprove this hypothesis, but we can see variations in the dominant objects and patterns of legitimation that correspond to the different institutional configurations in the three countries.

The object of legitimation most frequently referred to in all three countries is the political order as a whole (Table 2), but the percentages vary greatly, from 25% of the statements in the UK to almost half in the American sample. The political community is often neglected in discussions of legitimation, but, as it turns out, it also receives relatively frequent consideration in all three countries, as an object of 8–12% of the statements. Beyond these general categories, one would expect that a particular political system's most significant or visible institutions would be objects of legitimation more often than peripheral ones. This expectation is borne out most clearly in Switzerland, where the peculiar Swiss institution of direct democracy (17% of statements) and the welfare state (8%) are frequent objects, while the judiciary – a comparatively peripheral institution in Switzerland – is not addressed at all. In the US, two objects of great importance for the American political system and its self-image, democracy (9%) and the constitution or rule of law (7%), are referred to most often, while the welfare state is the object of only 1% of the statements. In the UK, the form of government (i.e. the monarchy) is a predictably frequent object, but the prominence of the constitution and the judiciary is puzzling until we note that both were recently the subject of intense political debate. This suggests that legitimacy discourses reflect not only entrenched institutional arrangements, but also reform initiatives or debates that move marginal institutions temporarily into the limelight or give them a more central position. Similarly, despite the fact that Switzerland and the US have much stronger federal institutions and traditions than the UK, federalism and territorial organization are objects of legitimation more often in Great Britain – which may well be due to the recent debates about devolution.

The influence of national institutional configurations on legitimation statements is also apparent in the tendency for a political system's core institutions and principles to enjoy much higher legitimacy than those more narrowly associated with specific political actors. For example, despite the overall prevalence of delegitimizing communication in the UK, the percentages of supportive statements about the political community (54%), the political order (32%), the constitution (30%), and democracy (21%) are distinctly higher than for the judiciary (13%) and the political class (7%). In the US, more than half of the statements about the political order (51%) and the political community (52%) are positive, and satisfaction with the constitution and rule of law is even stronger, with 59% legitimating statements. Delegitimizing and legitimating statements are split fifty-fifty for the US judiciary, but all statements about the political class are negative. In Switzerland, direct democracy (70%) and the political community (43%) are the two objects most likely to be evaluated positively. However, the number of positive statements about the entire political order (34%) and some of its core elements and principles (welfare state, 36%; consensus democracy, 34%) is considerably lower, and only 12% of all statements on federalism are positive. This latter is puzzling and does not seem to fit with the general tendency to approve a system's core institutions and principles. Just as in the other two countries, however, nearly all evaluations of the party system and the political class are negative.

Finally, the distribution of patterns of legitimation used in the three countries (Table 3) provides still further insight into the ways national institutional arrangements and political cultures impact legitimacy discourses. The relatively high importance of accountability and credibility in British legitimacy discourse reflects the lack of formalized checks and balances in the country's political system. Informal conventions of good conduct are the main safeguard against a strong government turning into an 'elective dictatorship', so discussion focuses on the credibility and trustworthiness of government and the accountability of power-wielding institutions and actors. That tradition plays a more important role in the British legitimacy discourses than it does in the other two countries is also very much in line with expectations. In the US, the pattern of legitimation used most often is the protection of human rights, which includes references to freedom, obviously a fundamental American value. A considerable number of statements refer to religious authority and morality, two patterns hardly ever used in the UK and Switzerland, and clearly reflecting the importance of religion in American society and politics. Switzerland's traditions of consensus democracy are apparent in its relatively large number of references to moderation, the public good, stability, and identity. Surprisingly, the pattern of popular sovereignty is used considerably *less* in Switzerland than in the other countries, where it is one of the leading patterns. Almost one fifth of the Swiss statements, on the other hand, refer

Table 3. Patterns of legitimation used in British, Swiss and American legitimation statements (rounded to the nearest percent)

	UK	CH	USA		UK	CH	USA		
Democratic input	Popular sovereignty	12	6	12	Democratic output	Protection of human rights	10	9	12
	Accountability	10	6	6		Democratic empowerment	1	1	0
	Participation	5	2	6		Contribution to public good	1	4	0
	Legality	4	2	7		Reversibility	0	0	1
	International legality	1	1	1					
	Transparency	3	1	2		Effectiveness	8	18	4
	Credibility	9	2	1		Efficiency	2	1	2
	Deliberation	2	4	2		Distributive justice	5	3	6
Non-democratic input				Non-democratic output	Contribution to stability	5	7	2	
	Charismatic leadership	1	1		2	Contribution to identity	1	5	1
	Expertocratic leadership	1	1		0	Contribution to morality	1	2	5
	Religious authority	0	1		6	Contribution to sovereignty	1	0	2
	Traditional processes	3	1		1	Good international standing	0	4	3
	Moderation	1	4		0				
						Rest	General (no specific pattern of legitimation)	9	7
					Other (unclassified)	3	9	8	
					Total (not rounded)	100	100	100	

to effectiveness. If one considers the potential for political gridlock inherent in the Swiss form of direct democracy, this finding makes more sense: although direct democracy is generally evaluated positively, its downsides nevertheless play a role in the Swiss legitimacy discourse.

(3) Legitimacy discourses are often triggered, or influenced, by specific events and controversies that dominate national political agendas and media reporting at a given point in time

To what extent the described similarities and variations between the UK, Switzerland, and the US are truly stable over time and represent general tendencies remains to be seen. Our preliminary findings may well reflect ephemeral political

events and developments that dominated national political debates in the first quarter of 2004. Whether, and to what degree, this is the case will become clearer when we take a systematic look at the issues and policy fields that form the context of our legitimization statements. Such an analysis enables us to identify the types of political debates that were most likely to trigger legitimating or delegitimizing public communication. It also allows us to assess the relative influence of entrenched beliefs and institutions on the one hand, and transitory events and conflicts on the other, on legitimacy discourses.

Not surprisingly, some of the topics generating the greatest numbers of legitimization statements in our three countries are the same ones that dominated the political agendas and media reporting during the time period examined. By far the greatest number of statements come from articles having to do with the routine operation, performance, or reform of political institutions (44% of all statements in the UK, 43% in the US, and 39% in Switzerland). However, different institutions are highlighted in each country. In the UK, almost a third of the articles on institutions are about constitutional reform, particularly the Blair government's proposal for the creation of a Supreme Court. In the US and in Switzerland, articles about electoral campaigns, campaign finance, the electoral and/or party system, etc., are the most common. In the US, this is linked to the Democratic primaries and impending presidential election. In Switzerland, the 2003 elections and formation of a new government triggered debates on consensus and direct democracy, federalism, and the polarized nature of the party system.

Newspaper articles may also deal with specific policy fields. We distinguished the following categories: fiscal and economic policy; infrastructural policy; environmental policy; educational, research and cultural policy; social policy; domestic policy (interior ministry policies); and foreign policy. In the US, a large proportion of statements (24%) is linked with foreign policy issues such as the ongoing 9/11 investigations, the 'war on terrorism', and Iraq. Discussions about same-sex marriage and civil unions – triggered by court rulings and local initiatives in Massachusetts, California and elsewhere – resulted in fairly high percentages for domestic policy issues (16% of statements, with more than half from articles about minorities and citizenship). While articles dealing with fiscal and economic policy are almost completely lacking in the American sample (2%), they are quite frequent in Great Britain (13%). In contrast to the US, only 3% of British debates explicitly refer to foreign policy, with debate about Iraq generally framed as an issue of media, communication and government spin doctoring, rather than foreign policy. The predominant domestic policy issues (16%) in the UK were public security and immigration, reflecting controversies about government plans to combat terrorism and reform asylum laws. Similar debates on domestic policy account for a significant proportion of legitimacy communication in Switzerland (10%), but foreign policy is of greater importance (16%),

dominated by concern about the Swiss negotiations with the European Union, EU enlargement, and the EU constitution. Fiscal and economic policy (16%) are also important, especially the secrecy of Swiss bank accounts and sluggish economic growth.

Issues that are not prevalent in our text corpus may simply have been absent from the media and from political agendas during the period examined. Or they may have been quite prominent and generated heated debate on the details of a specific policy field, the behaviour of political actors, etc. *without* generating debate on the legitimacy of the political *system*. Hence, the relatively low percentages for social policy (9% in the UK, 5% in the US, and 4% in Switzerland) by no means reflect the share of articles on this policy field in the first quarter of 2004, but rather signify that social policy debates gave rise to a limited number of legitimization statements. This is surprising, given that the erosion of national welfare state systems induced by globalization is often considered one of the most difficult political challenges faced by contemporary western democracies. Apparently, political debate has managed to isolate welfare state reform from the issues of legitimacy potentially at stake. Even more remarkably, statements generated by articles dealing with environmental policy – one of the main topics of public and scientific legitimacy discourses in the 1980s – are almost completely absent during our study period.

The analysis of the issue contexts that give rise to legitimization statements enables us to put our figures on the dominant objects and patterns of legitimization into perspective. In many cases, however, it is still impossible to tell whether institutional factors or transitory events and conflicts have a greater influence. For example, in the British case, some of the objects of legitimization referred to most often – the constitution and the rule of law (10%), the judiciary (8%), democracy (7%), and the political class (7%) – are of central importance for the British political system, but were also at the centre of the debates on judicial reform and government ‘spin doctoring’ that dominated politics in early 2004. In the US, foreign and domestic policy issues, such as the war on terrorism, the Guantanamo prison camp, internment of ‘enemy combatants’ without due process, military tribunals, and same-sex marriage are visibly tied to a heightened scrutiny of key institutions, such as the constitution and the rule of law, the executive, the judiciary, and even the legislative branch. Similarly, while religion undoubtedly plays a crucial role in American politics, the number of references to religious authority in the period under review here may also be more specifically linked to a Supreme Court case argued in early 2004 which focused on the words ‘under God’ in the pledge of allegiance. On the other hand, we found that even the most prevalent issue contexts do not always translate into a high frequency for the particular objects or patterns of legitimization that might appear most closely associated to the policy debates in question. Most remarkably, although debates

on electoral issues generate a large number of legitimation statements in the US, the electoral system itself hardly ever appears as an *object* of legitimation (2%) in these statements.

(4) The legitimation resources of national systems of government are more diverse than many contributions to democratic theory suggest

If the range of sources for legitimacy beliefs is underestimated, then the extent to which western democracies are besieged by crises of legitimacy is easily overestimated. The many patterns of legitimation citizens may use when assessing the legitimacy of their political orders was shown in Table 3. If we group the individual patterns according to their two dimensions, i.e. input versus output, and democratic versus non-democratic (Table 4), we see that democratic input and non-democratic output are the patterns most often used in all three countries. In the UK, democratic input patterns are used in 47% of all statements and non-democratic outputs patterns in 24%. In the US, the figures are 37% and 25% respectively. Interestingly, the situation in Switzerland is exactly reversed, as non-democratic output is the most common pattern here. In all three countries, non-democratic input and democratic output patterns are used much less frequently (from 6% to 14%). Despite this diversity, discussions in democratic theory tend to focus only on democratic input.

A comparison of the extent to which legitimating and delegitimizing statements make use of the four categories of legitimation criteria is even more revealing. Statements concerning political inputs are delegitimizing to a much larger extent than those concerning outputs. This difference is particularly dramatic in the UK, where 81% of the input-based statements, but only 57% of the output-based ones, are negative. Patterns in the US and Switzerland are similar, with 63% of input-based and 46% of output-based statements delegitimizing in the US, and 70% and 58% respectively in Switzerland. If only the input-based patterns most commonly used in democratic theory were considered, these figures would indicate a problem with the legitimacy of the political systems examined. But taken together, they rather suggest that output-based arguments play a reaffirming role in legitimation discourses that may temper or prevent a full-blown legitimation crisis.

For the UK and the US, this interpretation is further supported by the fact that statements using democratic patterns of legitimation are much more likely to be delegitimizing than those using non-democratic patterns (75% versus 62% in the UK; 61% versus 48% in the US). In these two countries, then, statements based on democratic input patterns are delegitimizing to a greater extent than those from any other category. In Switzerland, however, democratic patterns are used to question or deny an object's legitimacy in only slightly more than half the

Table 4. Delegitimizing and legitimating statements within aggregate patterns of legitimization (rounded to the nearest percent)

	UK		CH		USA	
	% of state- ments	% of delegiti- mation	% of state- ments	Delegiti- mation	% of state- ments	delegiti- mation
Democratic input	47	81	25	65	37	70
Non-democratic input	6	75	6	90	9	36
Democratic output	12	52	13	36	14	35
Non-democratic output	24	59	41	64	25	51
Sum democratic	59	75	38	55	50	61
Sum non-democratic	30	62	46	68	34	48
Sum input	52	81	31	70	46	63
Sum output	36	57	53	58	39	46
General	9	74	7	58	7	39
Unclassified	3	100	9	69	8	90

statements (55%), whereas those using non-democratic patterns are negative in two thirds of the cases (68%). This indicates that satisfaction with the democratic quality of the political order is higher in Switzerland than in the UK or the US.^d Citizens' support for the political system may still be quite strong even in the latter, but according to the standards of normative democratic theory the sources of that support are not the most desirable.

(5) There is little evidence for the hypothesis that internationalization and the loss of parliamentary control over political power are at the root of the nation-state's problems of legitimation

If internationalization and deparliamentarization really have an influence on legitimacy discourses, this should be visible in either (or both) the context or content of a legitimation statement. The internationalization of political decision-making, for example, might mean that foreign policy issues become more likely to trigger legitimation debates than other topics, or that certain objects (e.g. sovereignty, the nation state) and patterns of legitimation (e.g. international legality, good international standing) become predominant in legitimacy discourses. Similar indicators can be identified for deparliamentarization, but in neither case do they establish a *direct* connection between internationalization or deparliamentarization and the content of a statement. Any conclusions based on these indicators are necessarily speculative, so we also monitor *explicit* references to processes of internationalization and deparliamentarization in the immediate context of our legitimation statements. For this purpose, internationalization is defined as the transfer of responsibilities to political structures beyond the nation state, and deparliamentarization as the transfer of responsibilities from the national parliament to a non-parliamentary domestic institution.

These explicit references in our text corpus are negligible (less than 2%) except for Switzerland, where 16% of the statements refer to internationalization. More than two thirds of those statements are actually re-legitimizing, which makes some sense when considered in the context of public debate about Switzerland's relations to the EU. Switzerland is usually compared favourably with the EU, and legitimated on the basis of democratic criteria, in such statements. In this case, objections to further European integration are linked to expressions of support for the national political order, a finding which corroborates the hypothesis that internationalization contributes to the erosion of legitimacy in a national political

^d De-legitimation or legitimation based on democratic patterns of legitimation could, theoretically, be grounded in substantively non-democratic arguments, e.g. if a person were to refer to popular sovereignty in an argument such as 'our political system is illegitimate because it gives the people too much power'. Our coding procedure allows us to monitor such an unexpected non-democratic usage of democratic patterns of legitimation, and it is, in fact, extremely rare.

order. A number of statements do, however, indicate that the inverse, the growing isolation of Switzerland, also contributes to its delegitimation.

The loss of parliamentary control over political power is mentioned even less frequently than internationalization, present in only 1% of statements in the US and Switzerland, and 5% in the UK. These latter generally occur in debates about expanding judicial and executive powers, and are mainly critical of these two branches of government.

Given the limited reference to either internationalization or deparliamentarization, our data provide little evidence that these processes play a major role in delegitimation in the countries studied. We cannot completely rule out, however, that they are influential background processes, even when not explicitly referred to in legitimacy discourses.

Has the legitimacy of the nation-state been transformed?

There is no doubt that the transformations of the modern western state through globalization and transnational integration affect processes of legitimation. As the structures and institutions of political decision-making change, the nation state faces serious challenges to its legitimacy. However, such challenges do not necessarily weaken the popular support of the state, or lead to a crisis of legitimacy. A number of factors may intervene.

Our analysis shows that legitimation communication is highly volatile, reflecting current political agendas and debates. While in many cases, we cannot differentiate between the short-term effects of fickle fluctuations in policy agendas and the long-term effects of institutional configurations or of internationalization and deparliamentarization, it is clearly an oversimplification to suggest that changes in the legitimacy of national systems are exclusively caused by the latter. Additionally, we have seen that institutional arrangements and political cultures shape the precise form of legitimation communication in every political system. Different institutional designs may therefore be more or less susceptible to delegitimation, and it would be worthwhile to determine which systems of democratic governance are best suited to deal with the challenges to legitimacy posed by internationalization and deparliamentarization. And finally, this study makes it clear that a wide range of resources needs to be taken into account when assessing a political system's popular support. Many discussions of democratic theory focus exclusively on aspects of democratic input, which are strongly affected by internationalization and deparliamentarization. Democratic input, however, is not the only, and perhaps not even the most reliable, source of legitimacy that a democratic nation state can draw on.

Our theoretical considerations and first empirical findings indicate that it may be premature to predict a serious crisis of legitimacy in the modern state, as such.

Rather, the crisis may be limited to specific political systems. Internationalization and the decline of parliaments do not automatically jeopardize or erode the state's legitimation resources. It seems more reasonable to expect a *transformation* of legitimacy and legitimation in the modern state – a process wherein the content and structure of the arguments used to justify systems of democratic governance change without completely destroying a nation state's legitimacy. This suggests that the scenario of an upcoming 'end of the nation state'⁸ is at least premature in the democratic dimension. It remains to be explored, however, whether empirical findings can be translated into normative ones: The democratic quality of the nation-state might be gradually diminishing even though public acceptance of its institutions can be shown to be stable or unrelated to internationalization and deparliamentarization.

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