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Mapping Legitimacy Discourses in Democratic Nation States: Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States Compared

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ABSTRACT

This working paper first outlines the contours of a discourse analytical approach to the study of legitimation processes and then presents findings from a quantitative analysis of legitimacy-related communication in selected print media of the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the United States in 2004. Our data suggest considerable differences between the three countries with regard to levels of (de)legitimation, privileged legitimation resources, and legitimation styles. The micro dynamics of legitimation processes in 2004 were characterised by nationally specific legitimation attention cycles. References to internationalisation and deparliamentarisation – two trends that are often held responsible for a severe legitimacy crisis of the nation state and representative democracy – play no more than a marginal role in legitimacy discourses. We conclude that evidence for a pervasive and full-fledged erosion of the nation state's legitimacy – or a uniform shift from input to output legitimation – is scant.

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INTRODUCTION

From the vantage point of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the end of the Cold War and the demise of most socialist regimes demonstrated the superior performance and legitimacy of liberal democracy, clearing the path for a global triumph of liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1992; Huntington 1991).[1] With the benefit of hindsight, and despite the fact that no plausible alternative has emerged, this expectation may be qualified as premature. As an export model, liberal democracy is faced with new authoritarian and fundamentalist challenges (Mandt 1993). In the western world itself, the diagnosis of a performance and legitimacy crisis of the democratic nation state – already prominent in the 1970s (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975; Habermas 1976; Hennis, Kielmansegg, and Matz 1977, 1979; Offe 1972) – has returned with a vengeance.

Whereas this older literature saw the crisis rooted in the internal contradictions and perverse effects of capitalism and liberal democracy, the twin processes of internationalisation and deparliamentarisation – which presumably undermine the autonomy and capacity of the nation state as a whole together with the decision-making and control functions of its core representative institutions – now tend to be identified as main culprits. Both processes are usually described as having a largely negative impact on the operation of democratic institutions in the western world (Guéhenno 1996; Offe 1998; Scharpf 2000; Stein 2001): *Internationalisation* – the shift of traditionally national competences to international or supranational regimes and organisations (Albrow 2003; Goldmann 2001; Held 1995; Zürn 1998) – erodes the democratic nation state by gradually undermining its relevancy as a political force influencing the lives and well-being of its citizens (Dahl 1994). *Deparliamentarisation* – the demise of national parliaments as core decision-makers and the transfer of many of their powers to executives and judiciaries, to independent central banks and expert commissions, or to private actors like business corporations and interest groups (Benz 1998; Börzel 2000; Hix and Raunio 2000; Marschall 2002; Maurer 2001; Norton 1996; Schütt-Wetschky 2001) – means that even in areas where the nation state has preserved its responsibilities, democratic control of political decision-making – the most important benchmark for a political system's

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legitimacy from the perspective of democratic theory – can no longer be taken for granted (Abromeit 1998: 19ff).[2]

This pessimistic assessment of representative democracy at the national level is compounded by the equally widespread perception that international regimes and supranational organisations are plagued by their own, and perhaps even more serious, legitimacy deficits (Abromeit 1998; Coultrap 1999; Follesdal and Koslowski 1998; Kuper 1998; Lord and Beetham 2001). A more sanguine minority view rejects the dominant crisis diagnosis, though, positing instead that legitimacy beliefs in western nations are merely undergoing a shift from democratic input to output orientation – in short, that we are faced with a transformation rather than the erosion of legitimacy (Scharpf 1999).

Hence, as political decision-making moves out of national spheres of sovereignty and parliamentary arenas, a number of traditional standards of democratic legitimacy seem to be falling by the wayside. Many academic commentators argue that this development has ushered in a legitimacy crisis of the democratic nation state and its core institutions. Tom Burns (1999: 182), to name but one influential voice, predicts that "without an effective redefinition of representative democracy's role or function, its profound incapacity and marginalization are not only likely to continue, but to contribute to a loss of faith in and support for democratic institutions. It will become increasingly difficult to maintain the public image of the centrality of parliamentary democracy in the face of growing democratic deficits and substantial gaps between presumed responsibilities and actual capabilities of governing" (for similar arguments, see Scharpf 2000). Internationalisation and deparliamentarisation are thus seen as challenges not only to the *normative* legitimacy of the democratic nation state – its acceptability in the light of criteria provided by democratic theory or other strands of political philosophy – but also to its *empirical* legitimacy – the factual acceptance of nation state institutions in the population (on this distinction, Barker 2001: 7ff; Beetham 1991: 3ff).

It would certainly be a mistake, however, to assume that a political system's normative legitimacy – judged on the basis of democratic criteria – and its empirical legitimacy are necessarily related. After all, the normative premises of democratic theory might be of limited relevance for the citizens' attribution of legitimacy to their political system. This implies that even if internationalisation and deparliamentarisation have the presumed impact on democratic procedures in western nation states, the empirical legitimacy conferred to their political institutions need not be affected in any significant way. The hypothesis of an imminent legitimacy crisis might thus be based on arguments

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[2] To some extent, deparliamentarisation is itself caused by internationalisation, as nation states are generally represented by their executives in supranational organisations. But other factors, such as the growing complexity of legislation and the imperatives of party government, are also important.

that have an inappropriate normative bias.[3] To confirm or disconfirm the crisis hypothesis, empirical research is needed that probes more deeply into the nature of legitimacy and legitimation processes in different political systems, into the beliefs and arguments on which public acceptance of political institutions is grounded, and into the rulers', or their rivals', legitimacy claims (on the relatively neglected aspect of self-legitimation, Barker 2001).

In this paper, we sketch a conceptual and methodological framework that can be used for this kind of inquiry and present empirical results on the structures and trajectories of public legitimation in three OECD countries: Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States. We address the following questions: How can a nation state's empirical legitimacy be mapped? Which resources are used in its legitimation, and how diverse and robust are they? Do these resources reflect the arguments and criteria privileged by democratic theory? Which general trends concerning legitimacy in the three countries can be discerned? To what extent do these trends superimpose idiosyncratic national debates, policy agendas, institutional arrangements, and political cultures? And finally, is there any evidence that internationalisation and deparliamentarisation really undermine the nation state's popular acceptance?

A DISCOURSE-ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE ON LEGITIMACY

If empirical legitimacy is conceptualised as the factual acceptance of nation state institutions, it needs to be distinguished from other forms and motivations of compliance such as merely habitual obedience, coercion and the fear of sanctions, or individual cost-benefit calculations. Unlike these forms of forced or instrumental compliance, legitimacy refers to a kind of acceptance that is explicitly or implicitly grounded in normative beliefs and claims about the appropriateness of a political object (Barker 1990: 21ff; Pakulski 1986; Steffek 2003: 254ff). However, the factual or argumentative basis of these beliefs and claims may vary greatly. Thus empirical legitimacy has to be perceived as a multi-faceted and dynamic rather than as a one-dimensional and static phenomenon. In a comparative perspective, its character and foundations can, at any given point in time, differ among individuals and members of particular social groups within a political community, or between entire nations and cultures. In a historical perspective,

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[3] This charge can be levelled both against the neo-Marxist legitimacy crisis literature of the 1970s (Habermas 1976; Offe 1972) and against its neo-conservative counterpart (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975; Hennis, Kielmansegg, and Matz 1977, 1979). Both literatures have been rightly criticised for inferring empirical delegitimation processes and making dire predictions of a legitimacy crisis on the basis of normatively derived criteria and assessments of legitimacy. The evidence offered to corroborate these assessments was sketchy at best, there was hardly any „attention to specific contexts and often, the operationalisation and measurement of empirical legitimacy was skipped altogether (Kaase 1979; 1985).

attention shifts to the emergence and stabilisation, erosion and replacement of legitimacy beliefs and claims.

This multi-faceted and dynamic character of empirical legitimacy is clearly expressed in some of the most influential theoretical concepts that have structured academic debates on the issue: Max Weber's (1978) seminal threefold typology of legitimate rule based on claims of traditional, charismatic or legal-rational legitimacy; David Easton's (1965) distinction between ideological, structural and personal legitimacy as sources of diffuse support for a political system or, more specifically, for its regime, its authorities, and its political community; Fritz Scharpf's (1999) dichotomy of input versus output legitimacy that has become particularly influential in recent debates about the legitimacy of the European Union. All of these authors share the view that there are multiple sources of a political system's legitimacy, and that it is necessary in empirical research to extend analytic perspectives beyond the criteria derived from, or germane to, normative democratic theory.

Yet as convincing as this reasoning is, it has so far not been translated into an empirical research programme that is capable of fully grasping the multi-dimensional and complex nature of legitimacy. In most empirical contributions, legitimacy is seen as a measurable and quantifiable *attribute* of entire political orders or their core institutions. This perspective often results in a relative neglect of *legitimation processes*, and hence of the question how legitimacy obtains. Two types of methods tend to be privileged in empirical legitimation research: firstly, public opinion surveys that record individual attitudes and behavioural dispositions that are considered to be relevant for a political system's legitimacy (Almond and Verba 1963; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Dalton 2004; Kaase and Newton 1995; Norris 1999; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1998; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Weatherford 1992) and secondly, the observation of (non-)conventional political behaviour, such as (non-)voting and protest activities (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Norris 2002; Putnam 2000; 2004; Rucht, Koopmans, and Neidhardt 1999).

While the data on empirical legitimacy produced by these methods is certainly not invalid or irrelevant, it suffers from serious weaknesses. In survey research, respondents only react to stimuli provided by questionnaires that offer respondents a preselection of political institutions to be assessed and of evaluative benchmarks to be commented on. This approach is unlikely to shed much light on the actual contours of legitimacy beliefs. Even more importantly, it neglects the context-bound nature of legitimation processes (Barker 2001; Dryzek 1988; Dryzek and Berejikian 1993; Potter 2001; Potter and Wetherell 1987; Rosenberg 1989). For instance, which are the aspects of a given political order that respondents would highlight themselves, without stimuli? What are the sources and foundations of their legitimacy beliefs, including unexpected ones? How

are legitimacy beliefs and assessments formed and phrased, and in which political situations are they expressed? Finally, what do attitudes revealed in surveys mean, and how are they to be interpreted against the backdrop of specific contexts?

Studies of political behaviour, on the other hand, have the advantage of focusing on readily observable political activities rather than artificially fabricated data, but their legitimating or delegitimating content is notoriously difficult to interpret (Sniderman 1981). For example, do low levels of electoral participation indicate an erosion of legitimacy, indifference, or high levels of satisfaction with a political order? Which forms of non-conventional behaviour are signs of active civic engagement, and which signal hostility towards the political system? Conversely, which forms of non-compliance are motivated by self-interest rather than by a denial of legitimacy? Moreover, the observation of political behaviour alone does not tell us very much about the specific aspects of a political order that are legitimated or delegitimated, or about the foundations and sources of legitimacy beliefs that drive people towards political action.

This paper therefore introduces and applies a new approach to the study of empirical legitimacy, one that is based on the analysis of legitimacy beliefs expressed and legitimacy claims made in *public communication*. Discourses in which legitimacy is affirmed or contested have thus far been all but ignored in empirical legitimation research.[4] This

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[4]   Some recent books published in the field of political theory stress the importance of political conflicts about legitimacy and the need to study the legitimacy claims of different political actors (Barker 1990; 2001; Beetham 1991). However, they do not translate theoretical insights into an empirical research programme, mainly drawing on anecdotal evidence instead. Empirical legitimation research, by contrast, continues to rely almost exclusively on evidence related to citizens' political attitudes and forms of political participation, both of which are analysed either in a comparative perspective – the "beliefs in government" series is a prominent example (Borre and Scarbrough 1995; Kaase and Newton 1995; Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Van Deth and Scarbrough 1995); similar titles outside of this series include Dalton (2004), Dogan (1988), Norris (1999), Nye, Zelokow, and King (1998), or Pharr and Putnam (2000)– or in case studies focusing on individual countries (Gabriel 1997; Uehlinger 1988). Some of these studies also address the influence of internationalisation and deparliamentarisation on individual attitudes and behaviour (Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995). The dimension of political communication, however, is only taken into account in some recent work on political protest that examines claims reported in the media in order to survey protest events (Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Koopmans and Statham 1999). Discourse analytical methods are used in these studies to complement observation, but the focus remains set on protest as a form of political behaviour rather than on legitimation and legitimacy discourses as such. The same is true for studies of political communication that assess the importance of public discourses – particularly media discourses – for political decision-making, concentrating either on the operation of entire political systems (Denton and Woodward 1998; Jarren, Sarcinelli, and Saxer 2002; Norris 2000; Perloff 1998) or on debates about specific policies (Deacon and Golding 1994; Ferree, Gamson, and Gerhards 2002). While political communication research is certainly a

is a serious deficit, since it is plausible to suggest that attitudes and behavioural dispositions are predominantly formed and expressed in the context of social and communicative interaction. Public discourses guide political action by shaping acceptable, hegemonic or collectively binding interpretations of social and political events and relationships. The participants of these discourses advance and justify, or contest, normative criteria for the attribution of legitimacy and their underlying value basis, and they debate the extent to which these criteria are met in reality. In other words, the legitimacy of government institutions is continuously established and modified, withdrawn and re-established in such discursive processes of interpretation and reinterpretation. Most of the political rituals that are used to affirm legitimacy – the celebration of national holidays, inaugural speeches, etc. – have a partly or entirely discursive character, too. The same holds true for many of those forms of political action – i.e., of non-compliance – that may be seen as the ultimate indicator of a system's legitimacy crisis.

The analysis of legitimacy discourses in public fora such as the media, parliaments, courts, or academic journals – but also potentially in private contexts – enables researchers to gain access to the complex and multi-faceted nature of legitimacy beliefs and claims without resort to fabricated data produced in artificial settings. Legitimacy discourses are the product of real-world social and communicative interaction. Their analysis permits us to compare pre-established notions about the configurations of arguments that are likely to occur, or desirable, with "natural" and concrete textual data. Methods of text and content analysis can be used to map the structures and trajectories of legitimation discourses – the arguments that underpin the legitimacy beliefs and claims of political actors and citizens, the normative benchmarks and criteria of acceptability they propose, and the way they justify or frame their interpretations and evaluations. Comparing legitimacy discourses in different spatial or temporal contexts also offers insights into the extent to which institutional arrangements and specific traits of national political cultures, or cultural factors at large, shape processes of legitimation and delegitimation (Fairclough 2003; Keller 2001; 2004; Nullmeier 2001; Schwab-Trapp 2001; Wodak and Meyer 2001).

ANALYSING LEGITIMACY DISCOURSES IN THE PRINT MEDIA

In our paper, we apply this conceptual framework to legitimacy discourses in selected print media of Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States – three cases that have been selected in order to maximise variation in democratic institutional arrangements and political cultures. Our aim is to gain a better understanding of legitimation in these

vibrant field, no comprehensive empirical studies with a systematic focus on legitimation have been published in this discipline.

countries, and to assess to what extent their political systems' legitimacy may be challenged by processes of internationalisation and deparliamentarisation. Of course, a focus on the print media enables us to capture only part of public legitimacy communication. Legitimacy discourses in the media are likely to differ from those in other fora, and any generalisations to empirical legitimacy as a whole have to be handled with care. It is plausible to expect, however, that media communication in liberal democracies mirrors popular perceptions of legitimacy at least to some extent, and that any serious legitimation problems will be addressed in media reporting.

For our study, we draw on a comprehensive text corpus of all articles touching upon issues of legitimacy that were published throughout the year 2004 in two top-quality newspapers per country.[5] To be included in our corpus, an article has to contain explicitly legitimating or delegitimating statements, i.e. propositions that evaluate the respective country's political order, or its key government institutions and principles, as legitimate or illegitimate, usually drawing on specific arguments. In our operational definition, a legitimation statement is thus characterised by three parameters – its object, its legitimating or delegitimating character, and the argument that underpins the proposed normative assessment.[6]

Our term *objects of legitimation* refers to the institutions and principles that are being legitimated or delegitimated. We deliberately restrict our attention to particularly important objects at the core of national systems of government: the political system as a whole; the political community (i.e., the nation and its citizenry); the dimensions and principles that characterise the modern western state in general (democracy, nation state, constitution/rule of law, welfare state, sovereignty/monopoly of legitimate coercion); types of democracy (parliamentary v. presidential, representative v. direct, etc.); specific institutions and branches of government (monarchy or republic, executive, legislature and judiciary, the electoral system, federalism/territorial organisation); and core groups of actors like the political class/elite, the party system, and the system of interest groups. Statements about the legitimacy of subnational and marginal institutions, individual actors, and specific policies were not included in the analysis.[7]

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[5] The following papers were included in the analysis: *Guardian* and *Times* (United Kingdom), *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (United States), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and *Tagesanzeiger* (Switzerland).

[6] Overall, 1,720 articles and 2,712 legitimation statements were retrieved and coded.

[7] Thus we draw on Easton's (1965) distinction of regime, political community, and authorities, but ignore statements on the acceptability of the latter and their activities. Here we are in line with most survey research in the area, which also aims to distinguish between the evaluation of authorities and assessments related to the political order as such.

An *evaluation* of one of these objects as legitimate or illegitimate occurs if a statement explicitly affirms or questions the object's acceptability. Hence, only a specific type of communicative acts and only a small part of all statements referring to political objects qualify as legitimation statements. This restriction, for instance, excludes descriptive or directive speech acts, the formulation of political demands, etc. (Searle 1969). In our study, the evaluative character of a statement is coded dichotomously, distinguishing legitimating and delegitimating statements: legitimation statements have to characterise an object of legitimation as either acceptable or unacceptable, justifiable or unjustifiable. Of course, the significance of such statements for the object's viability and the citizens' behaviour towards it must not be overestimated. For instance, communicative delegitimation of a political system does not necessarily imply that citizens will refuse to follow this system's laws or to pay taxes. The significance of legitimation statements rather lies in the fact that positive or negative evaluations, if used in a similar fashion in a number of statements and over an extended period of time, may shape dominant beliefs in the population and thus become relevant for political action as well.

A legitimation statement may either be generic, i.e. the object of legitimation is evaluated as legitimate or illegitimate without further justification, or it may refer to a specific *pattern of legitimation*. Patterns of legitimation are substantive criteria a speaker relies on when affirming or casting doubt on the legitimacy of an object. Since we do not want to rely too heavily on preset notions of the most likely, or normatively desirable, foundations and sources of legitimacy beliefs and claims, but rather seek to identify unexpected patterns as well, we do not approach the data with a fixed number of categories. Starting from patterns that play a prominent role in the theoretic literature on legitimation (e.g. popular sovereignty, accountability and responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness), our list has been continuously expanded whenever new patterns emerged in the articles we studied. It now contains twenty-five individual patterns (Table 1).

These patterns can be classified in two dimensions. In the first dimension, we distinguish between the *input* and the *output* side of political decision-making. A pattern of legitimation 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, their quality and consequences.[8] In the second dimension, we distinguish between *democratic* and *non-democratic* criteria.

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[8] Our definitions differ from those used by Scharpf (1999). In his conception, the relevant standard for assessing a

   polity's input legitimacy is the degree to which collectively binding decisions are made in a way that is responsive

   to the manifest preferences of the governed ("government by the people"), while a polity's output legitimacy de-

   pends on its capacity to solve common problems ("government for the people"). However, these definitions con-

Table 1 *Patterns of Legitimation*

	Democratic	**Non-democratic**
Input *characteristics of political processes*	*popular sovereignty* – all power resides in the citizens *accountability* – rulers can be controlled and removed *participation* – citizens can actively contribute to decisions *legality* – domestic legal rules are respected *international legality* – international legal rules are respected *transparency* – political processes are public and accessible *credibility* – political processes conform to stated objectives, no hidden agenda *deliberation* – political processes are based on a rational exchange of arguments	*charismatic leadership* – strong personal leadership *expertocratic leadership* – leadership by experts *religious authority* – political processes follow religious principles *tradition* – political processes follow traditional rules and customs *moderation* – political style is conciliatory and non-aggressive
Output *characteristics of political results*	*protection of human rights* – individual and political rights are guaranteed *democratic empowerment* – material and cognitive conditions of meaningful participation are guaranteed *contribution to public good* – political results serve the population as a whole *reversibility* – political results are not irrevocable	*effectiveness* – solution to common problems *efficiency* – political results are cost-effective, not wasteful *distributive justice* – equal distribution of resources and burdens *contribution to stability* – enhancement of political stability *contribution to identity* – political results reflect or enhance the political community's sense of identity *contribution to morality* – political results conform with moral standards *contribution to sovereignty* – enhancement of a polity's autonomy, capacity, power, or interest *good international standing* – enhancement of a polity's status in the international sphere

This distinction is grounded in an undemanding definition of democracy, such as that proffered by Schmitter and Karl (1996): "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". Patterns of legitimation pertaining to decision-making processes or political outputs that are essential to the implementation of such a system are classified as democratic; patterns that are

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found the distinction between political inputs and outputs with considerations based on the democratic quality of the processes in question. In particular, while output legitimacy can be secured both by democratic and non-democratic forms of governance, Scharpf seems to assume that input legitimacy is necessarily democratic in character. For an empirical analysis of the patterns of legitimation actually used in political communication, however, there is no reason to assume that statements referring to political inputs are consistent with the standards of democratic theory.

non-essential – though not necessarily antithetical – to democracy are classified as non-democratic.[9]

Table 2 *Examples of Legitimation Statements*

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Example 1: "The people and their representatives have been sent to the sidelines by the courts, and that's not right" (*Washington Post*, 6 February 2004).

Translation: "The judicial branch [object of legitimation] is illegitimate [evaluation] because it undermines popular sovereignty [pattern of legitimation]".

Example 2: "Totalitarian nations hold elections, but what sets democracies apart is offering real choices in elections. In recent years, contests for the House of Representatives and state legislatures have looked more and more like the Iraqi election in 2002, when Saddam Hussein claimed 100 percent of the vote for his re-election" (*New York Times*, 21 February 2004).

Translation: "The electoral system [object of legitimation] is illegitimate [evaluation] because it does not secure accountability [pattern of legitimation]".

Example 3: "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people, the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of liberties of the world" (*Washington Post*, 9 May 2004).

Translation: "The political community [object of legitimation] is legitimate [evaluation] because it is supported by religious authority [pattern of legitimation 1] and stands for the protection of human rights [pattern of legitimation 2]".

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A legitimation statement thus has the structure: [Object X] [is (il)legitimate] [because of Pattern Y]. Of course, actual statements in newspaper articles usually do not conform to this structure in a grammatical sense. The main task in identifying relevant statements, as well as in coding our variables, is therefore to translate the language used in the articles into the stylized structure on which our definition of legitimation statements is

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9   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 assure the "enlightened understanding" (Dahl 1989: 111f.) required if citizens are to make adequate use of them. Many discussions of democratic legitimacy focus exclusively on such democratic inputs, neglecting that 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" (Held 1995: 171). Therefore, our typology also includes patterns of *democratic output* which are characterised by 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".

based (Table 2). To generate our text corpus, we selected all articles from our six news-papers that contained at least one such statement.[10] The articles could be news reports, commentaries or features, from any section of the newspapers. The statements reflect propositional content advanced by the authors themselves or by some person quoted in the articles. In addition to the object of legitimation, assessment as legitimate or ille-gitimate and pattern of legitimation, three other variables were coded for each state-ment: 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 discursive references to internationalisation and deparliamentarisation.

LEGITIMACY AND ITS RESOURCES IN DIFFERENT POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Do legitimacy discourses in Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States corrobo-rate the hypothesis of a legitimacy crisis, or do they lend support to a more sanguine view? The frequency distribution of legitimating and delegitimating statements in our corpus provides us with a first indicator, although its significance is clearly limited. Overall, the balance tips slightly in the direction of delegitimation: 55 percent of the statements in our corpus give a negative assessment of the object of legitimation to which they refer, questioning or denying its legitimacy. This percentage, however, is not necessarily indicative of a pervasive legitimacy crisis, as the dominance of delegiti-mating statements is not very pronounced. Moreover, media content is generally as-sumed to have a negative bias, and hence critical assessments of political institutions are more likely to make it onto the pages of newspapers than affirmative ones, which may, in turn, dominate other discursive arenas.[11]

A look at the national breakdown further nurtures scepticism with regard to undiffer-entiated crisis diagnoses. The distribution of legitimating and delegitimating statements varies considerably from country to country, as Figure 1 illustrates. In the United States, legitimating statements prevail, if barely. By contrast, delegitimating statements domi-nate in the two other cases, but much more clearly in the United Kingdom than in Swit-

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[10] Texts were retrieved from an electronic media database in a two-step procedure, using automated search routines for the preselection of texts, and a close reading of paragraphs containing search words for the final selection. The employed dictionaries are based on our definition of legitimation statements and similar for each country, with country-specific adaptations for the various political orders and terminologies. The selection and coding tasks en-tailed a considerable amount of interpretation. In order to ensure reliability, both tasks were *not* delegated to non-expert coders but rather performed jointly by the authors.

[11] One could draw on extant literature in the field of communication research to estimate such effects, which may themselves vary between countries with different journalistic traditions and media systems (on this line of re-search, see Eilders 1997; Galtung and Ruge 1974).

zerland. Evidence of general legitimacy problems, then, is weaker in the US and Switzerland than in Great Britain. However, we refrain from defining any a priori quantitative threshold beyond which we have to speak of a full-blown legitimacy crisis, as such an indicator would be extremely difficult to justify. Note that this problem also exists with other measures of empirical legitimacy, such as survey results. However, our discourse analytical method enables us to probe more deeply into the qualitative contours of legitimation in different political systems, and into the *resources* they draw on to secure their legitimacy. It therefore permits the identification of potential legitimation problems with greater precision than any aggregate threshold measure would.

Figure 1 *Delegitimating and Legitimating Statements (rounded to the nearest percent)*

☐ Delegitimating statements ☐ Legitimating statements
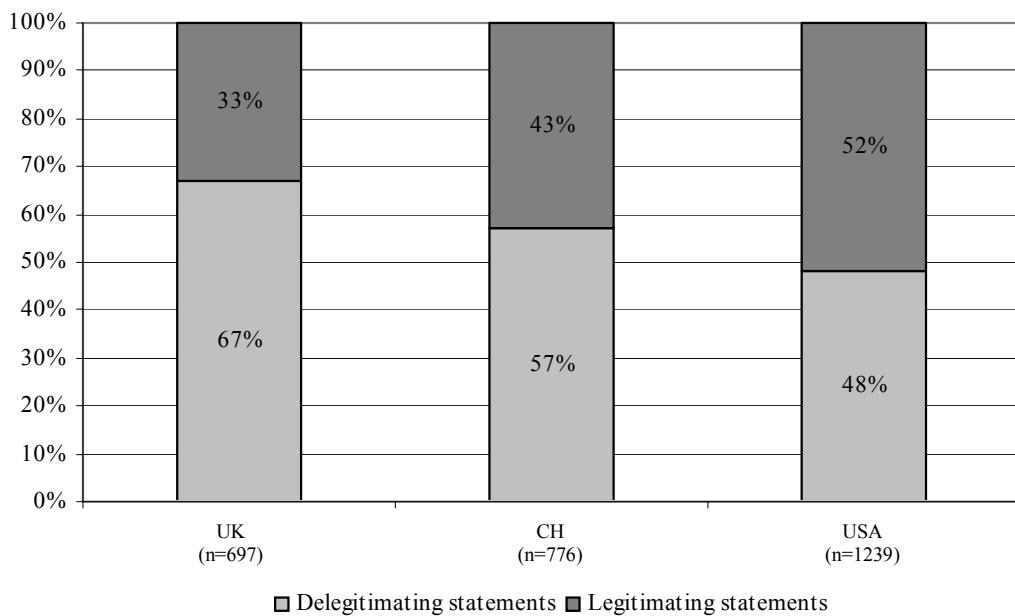
Both objects and patterns of legitimation may be powerful resources of a political system's legitimacy. A particular object constitutes an effective legitimation resource if it enjoys high acceptance in the population and thus serves as "anchor" of legitimacy for the system as a whole; an argumentative pattern plays this role if it tends to produce legitimating rather than delegitimating communication. The wider the range of objects and patterns a political system can draw on to justify its legitimacy, the less it will be threatened by legitimation crises. However, the objects and patterns most likely to be addressed in public discourses in a particular political system – and thus its legitimation resources – depend in part on specific institutional legacies and political cultures. Formal and informal institutions play a decisive role in shaping political actors' interpretations of the world around them, and hence structure their discursive constructions of legitimacy. Therefore countries with different institutional traditions and political cultures are likely to display particular *legitimation styles*, each of which tends to highlight

different resources when the acceptability of a political system or its institutions be-comes an issue.

Table 3 *Objects and Patterns of Legitimation Referred to Most Often*

	Object	state-ments (%)	of which		Pattern	state-ments (%)	of which	
			dele-giti-mation (%)	legiti-mation (%)			dele-giti-mation (%)	legiti-mation (%)
UK **(n= 697)**	political order	28	70	30	human rights	11	45	55
	political community	10	49	51	credibility	11	97	3
	political class	9	90	10	popular sovereignty	10	59	41
	democracy	8	66	34	accountability	10	80	20
	constitution	8	67	33	effectiveness	7	74	26
CH **(n= 776)**	political order	31	56	44	effectiveness	15	83	17
	direct democracy	14	38	62	popular sovereignty	7	37	63
	political community	8	60	40	accountability	6	63	37
	federalism	7	54	46	human rights	6	31	69
	welfare state	6	74	26	moderation	5	76	24
					stability	5	14	86
US **(n= 1239)**	political order	56	40	60	human rights	18	22	78
	democracy	10	48	52	popular sovereignty	10	58	42
	political community	8	48	52	morality	6	54	46
	constitution	5	39	61	legality	5	39	61
	electoral system	5	80	20	international standing	4	88	12

Concerning objects of legitimation, it is plausible to expect that if a political order's core institutions and principles have been firmly in place for a long period of time, they will become part of the citizens' belief systems and thus tend to enjoy a higher legitimacy, or contribute more strongly to overall legitimacy, than those institutions that are of lesser importance, more recent additions to a political order's institutional structure, or more narrowly associated with specific political actors. Legitimacy discourses in Great Brit-ain, Switzerland, and the United States confirm this hypothesis. To begin with, our data indicates that in none of the three countries, there is a general trend of delegitimation that affects all of the political system's institutions and principles. Table 3 shows that among the objects of legitimation referred to most often in each case, some constitute particularly effective anchors of legitimacy, as they are generally evaluated positively at a rate highly above average: the political community in the UK, direct democracy in Switzerland, and the constitution in the US. Conversely, certain objects turn out to be focal points for delegitimating communication, like the political class in the UK, the

welfare state in Switzerland, and the electoral system in the US. To analysts of the three countries, none of this will come as a great surprise, as well-known images used in public communication come to mind: discourses about the exceptional qualities of the British people, as well as the traditional opposition of "court versus country"; the intense pride displayed by the Swiss in their peculiar institution of direct democracy; and the sustained reverence for the constitution and its framers in the US.

Legitimation styles, however, also consist of patterns of legitimation that play a crucial role in the self-legitimation of a political system or in public communication about political institutions and principles. A look at the legitimating and delegitimating arguments used most often in the UK, Switzerland, and the US reveals that discourses in each country draw on a specific combination of patterns. Some of these clearly correspond to institutional characteristics: For instance, the relatively high importance of credibility and accountability in British legitimacy discourse probably stems from the lack of formalised checks and balances in the country's political system, which means that informal conventions of good conduct and the possibility to remove political leaders are the main safeguard against a strong government turning into an "elective dictatorship". Similarly, the central position of patterns like effectiveness, popular sovereignty, moderation, and stability in Swiss discourse reflects both the strengths and the downsides of the Swiss system of direct and consensus democracy: on the one hand, direct rule of the people and high stability, on the other, a potential for ineffectiveness and gridlock. 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. The comparatively high importance of legality points in the same direction. Moreover, a considerable number of statements refer to morality, reflecting the importance of religion in American society and politics.[12]

Some of the most important patterns used in the three countries are particularly noteworthy as they display a clear legitimating or delegitimating tendency: For example, arguments that refer to the protection of human rights tend to be legitimating in all three countries. The guarantee of human rights obviously constitutes one of the most reliable resources of legitimacy for western democracies, regardless of the specific political system. In addition, popular sovereignty and stability prove to be firm anchors of legitimacy in Switzerland, while legality plays a similar role in the US. In contrast, public communication framed in terms of credibility and accountability in the UK, effectiveness and moderation in Switzerland, and international standing in the US is most likely to be delegitimating. These patterns give a good indication of how the peculiar

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[12] The pattern "religious authority" itself was in sixth place in the US, only slightly behind "good international standing" on our list of the most frequent arguments.

strengths and weaknesses of the three political systems are evaluated in the national mass media.

Table 4 *Delegitimating and Legitimating Statements by Country and Aggregate Pattern of Legitimation (rounded to the nearest percent)*

	UK (n=697)			CH (n=776)			USA (n=1239)		
	state-ments (%)	of which		state-ments (%)	of which		state-ments (%)	of which	
		delegiti-mation (%)	legiti-mation (%)		delegiti-mation (%)	legiti-mation (%)		delegiti-mation (%)	legiti-mation (%)
democratic input	44	76	24	28	52	48	29	60	40
non-democratic input	8	70	30	9	75	25	9	64	36
democratic output	16	42	58	11	49	51	19	22	78
non-democratic output	22	67	33	36	62	38	25	55	45
sum democratic	59	67	33	39	51	49	48	45	55
sum non-democratic	30	67	33	45	64	36	34	57	43
sum input	52	75	25	38	58	42	38	61	39
sum output	37	56	44	47	59	41	44	41	59
general	8	61	39	12	46	54	11	33	67
other	2	88	12	4	67	33	7	49	51
total	100	67	33	100	57	43	100	48	52

To further our understanding of the resources of legitimation at the disposal of the different political systems, it is useful to group the individual patterns according to the two dimensions – input v. output and democratic v. non-democratic – explained above (Table 4). An analysis of these aggregate patterns underlines the great diversity of the legitimation resources the three countries can draw on. Our data show that it would definitely be misleading to restrict discussions of potential sources of a political system's legitimacy to patterns of democratic input, as some contributions to democratic theory suggest. Rather, all four groups of patterns play a role in legitimacy discourses. Democratic input and non-democratic output are the patterns used most often in all three countries. In the UK and the US, democratic input patterns are the most popular, with non-democratic outputs in second place. Interestingly, the situation in Switzerland is reversed, as non-democratic output is the most common pattern here. In all three countries, non-democratic input and democratic output patterns are used less frequently.

A comparison of the extent to which legitimating and delegitimating statements make use of the four categories of legitimation criteria is also revealing. Two tendencies can be observed: Firstly, in Switzerland and the US, statements using democratic patterns are more likely to be legitimating than those using non-democratic patterns. Even

if this effect is lacking in the UK, where there is no difference between democratic and non-democratic patterns, it is clear that democracy has by no means ceased to be a resource of legitimacy for the political systems we studied. Secondly, in the UK and the US, statements concerning political outputs are legitimating to a larger extent than those concerning inputs, while in Switzerland, there is almost no difference between input- and output-based patterns. Still, in all three countries, output-based arguments often play a reaffirming role in legitimation discourses. In each case, statements based on democratic output patterns – referring, for example, to the protection of human rights – are legitimating to a greater extent than those from any other category.

These findings indicate that the hypothesis of an imminent legitimacy crisis of the democratic nation state may be exaggerated, or at least has to be differentiated. Concerning objects of legitimation, it is important to note that in none of the countries, the political order as a whole, the type of democratic rule, or core institutions and principles are delegitimated at a higher rate than average. This suggests that even if internationalisation and deparliamentarisation indeed challenge the legitimacy of nation state institutions, this challenge may be directed at specific, generally more marginal institutions, or at specific policies and/or political actors. Concerning patterns of legitimation, the most important finding is the considerable diversity of resources used to legitimate political systems and their institutions. If this range of sources for legitimacy beliefs is underestimated, the extent to which western democracies are threatened by an erosion of legitimacy is just as easily overestimated.

Our findings on legitimation styles, however, also suggest that certain political systems might be more susceptible to a legitimacy crisis than others. If different political systems, depending on their specific institutional arrangements, political cultures and legitimation styles, draw on different resources of legitimation, the effects of internationalisation and deparliamentarisation on perceptions of legitimacy should not be uniform either. Rather, legitimation styles are likely to play a gate-keeper function vis-à-vis internationalisation and deparliamentarisation, and to influence the interpretations of these processes (for a similar argument, Busch 2003). For example, legitimation that relies heavily on patterns like accountability might be more seriously affected by internationalisation and deparliamentarisation than legitimation that relies on patterns like legality or stability. This might account for the differences that can be observed between the share of legitimating and delegitimating statements in our three countries. Before jumping to premature conclusions, though, we must turn to additional, short-term factors that influence the structures and trajectories of legitimacy discourses.

NATIONAL POLITICAL AGENDAS AND LEGITIMATION ATTENTION CYCLES

By their very definition, our legitimation statements have a *generalising* character: They assess basic and relatively stable elements of the regime or the political community as a

whole rather than the authorities, the politics of the day, or the minutiae of specific policies. In other words, they advance the kind of propositions that we consider to be most instrumental in providing a system of government and its citizens with long-term resources and motivations of (non-)compliance, and hence to be crucial for the stabilisation or erosion of legitimacy at the system level. Yet while every effort has been made to include only this particular type of statements in the analysis, it would be inappropriate to suggest that there is no linkage between legitimation statements in this narrow sense and wider political discourses covering issues of everyday politics. Quite to the contrary, and quite apart from the *methodological* problem of distinguishing attitudes or statements related to authorities from those related to the regime,[13] we suggest that communication on the legitimacy of a political order is usually triggered, or at least influenced, by specific events, debates, and conflicts that dominate national political agendas and media reporting at any given point in time.

A look at the issues and policy fields in whose context our legitimation statements were uttered serves to both complement and qualify the analysis offered so far. It enables us, firstly, to identify the *types* of political events, debates, and conflicts that are most likely to foster legitimating or delegitimating communication. As legitimacy discourses are tied into a wider political context, short-term fluctuations in their scope and nature are to be expected. This ebb and flow may move specific institutions and principles of government temporarily into the limelight, or it may put specific arguments, discursive positions and strategies to the fore. And not the least, short-term influences may give a temporary boost either to legitimating or delegitimating positions. In short, as our empirical material illustrates, we have to understand and examine the phenomenon of *legitimation attention cycles* in the comparative analysis of legitimacy discourses.[14]

The identification of legitimation attention cycles serves a wider purpose. For we have to discount their effect in order to substantiate (a) findings related to the impact of national institutional arrangements and political cultures on discursive *structures*, as presented above, and (b) conclusions related to discursive *trajectories* – the change of prevailing legitimacy beliefs and claims under the influence of trends like internationalisation and deparliamentarisation. We need to corroborate that, or to what extent, the similarities and variations between Great Britain, Switzerland, and the United States emerging from our material indeed represent stable features or linear trajectories of their

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[13]   This is a problem that we share with all other methodological approaches to empirical legitimacy. However, the articles from which we retrieve legitimation statements usually provide good clues for this disambiguation.

[14]   Here we are of course indebted to Anthony Downs' (1972) concept of issue attention cycles.

respective public discourses, or rather the contingent and ephemeral result of singular or regularly occurring events, and hence a mere snap-shot of national politics in 2004.
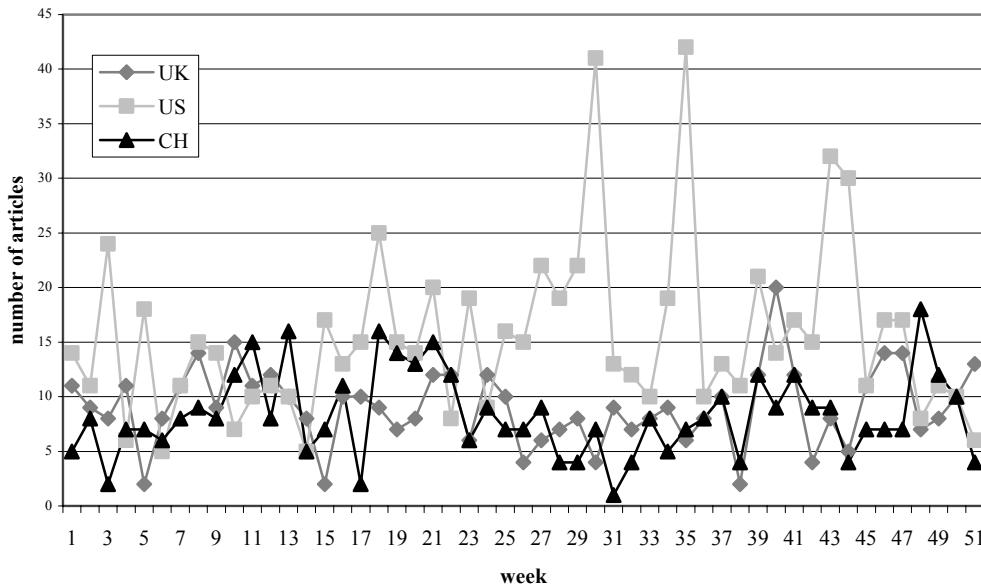
Figure 2 *Articles per Week by Country*

Figure 2 uses a very simple indicator – the number of relevant articles per country and week – in order to carry home this point. We immediately note that the incidence of legitimacy communication greatly varies from country to country, and from week to week. Clearly, no linear trend of legitimation "awareness" over the span of the year 2004 can be discerned (something that we hardly expected to find in such a limited time period), and no shared cross-national pattern of any kind emerges. Quite obviously, idiosyncratic features drive these national cycles.[15] In order to shed light on them, we turn to data on the issues and policy fields that gave rise to our legitimation statements.[16]

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[15]   The national differences at this micro level of legitimacy-related communication are equally pronounced if only the number of *delegitimating* statements per week is considered. Again, no cross-national pattern is visible. Moreover, *within* national discourses, no systematic relationship between the intensity of legitimacy debates, as measured by the number of statements per week, and the share of delegitimation statements seems to exist. A peak in legitimation "awareness" is therefore just as likely to foster an increased share of negative evaluations of the political order as it is to foster positive ones.

[16]   A very fine-grained category system has initially been used to code the policy fields and other issues in whose context legitimation statements were made – notably fiscal, economic and infrastructural policy (13 subcategories); social, educational and cultural policy (14 subcategories); other dimensions of domestic policy (seven subcategories); foreign policy (nine subcategories). An additional group of nine subcategories covers instances where no reference is made to specific policy fields, but rather to political routine operations (electoral campaigns, etc.), or to political institutions and actors. The coding instruction is to identify the main issue dealt with in the para-

Before we turn to the data, it may be useful to point out that they do not reflect issue attention cycles as such, but rather the extent to which discourses on specific policy fields and other issues triggered communication on legitimacy. Hence, for instance, the low percentage of cases related to environmental policy in our corpus may either mean that the field did, in 2004, not figure prominently on the public agenda altogether, or that it did, but without nurturing legitimacy debates. Conversely, the higher percentages reported below for several other fields may be no more than the effect of a temporary shift in issue attention, with a corresponding surge of legitimation statements, but they may also indicate that some issues are especially prone to give way to legitimacy debates.

As illustrated by Table 5, there is actually a high percentage of statements in each country that is *not* embedded in debates on specific policy fields, but rather tackles some key aspect of the political order – the electoral process, the functioning or reform of a specific institution, etc. – without mentioning policy debates. These statements are in many cases at one remove from everyday political conflicts, focusing precisely on the general and legitimacy-related assessments that we seek to identify. Note that the distribution of legitimating and delegitimating statements in this particular category also closely mirrors the aggregate distribution: The share of delegitimating statements in the United Kingdom even reaches more than three quarters here, followed by Switzerland with about two thirds, and the US with slightly more than one half.

The ranking of specific policy fields, on the other hand, differs markedly between our three cases. Social, educational and cultural policy triggers one fifth of all legitimation statements in the British case, but ranks only fourth in Switzerland and the US. Of course, this picture may quickly change as soon as new issues are lifted onto national public agendas. In the American case, for instance, one important social policy reform – the introduction of a prescription-drug benefit in the Medicare programme – was enacted in 2003, whereas Social Security reform – an issue with potentially huge ramifications for the legitimation of the welfare state dimension of the American political order – may enter the agenda during the second term of the Bush administration. The distribution of legitimating and delegitimating statements in this category is remarkably similar across the three examined nations. In each case, almost three quarters of the statements are linked with negative assessments of some object of legitimation.

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graph from which the statement is retrieved, as entire articles may address a whole range of issues and policy fields.

Table 5   *Ranking of Issues and Policy Fields, by Country, without other (unclassifiable) issues*

	Issue	state-ments (%)	of which	
			delegiti-mation (%)	legiti-mation (%)
UK **(n= 697)**	political routine operations, institutions and actors	41	*77*	*23*
	social, educational and cultural policy	20	*71*	*29*
	other domestic policy	15	*44*	*56*
	foreign policy	7	*64*	*36*
	fiscal, economic and infrastructural policy	4	*68*	*32*
CH **(n= 776)**	political routine operations, institutions and actors	35	*64*	*36*
	foreign policy	14	*31*	*69*
	fiscal, economic and infrastructural policy	14	*65*	*35*
	social, educational and cultural policy	12	*74*	*26*
	other domestic policy	9	*46*	*54*
US **(n= 1239)**	political routine operations, institutions and actors	52	*52*	*48*
	foreign policy	19	*42*	*58*
	other domestic policy	11	*28*	*72*
	social, educational and cultural policy	4	*71*	*29*
	fiscal, economic and infrastructural policy	1	*33*	*67*

Moving on to the third most important group of policy fields, we see that other domestic policy issues played a greater role in the United Kingdom and the US than in Switzerland, although the difference between the latter two nations is not pronounced in this regard. In our coding scheme, this category comprises predominantly regulative fields like public security and minority issues, which largely account for the relatively high percentages of British and American cases: Issues related to the American-led War on Terror and homeland protection were frequently debated in both countries, while the highly topical issue of same-sex marriage figured prominently on the public agenda of the US. The distribution of legitimating and delegitimating statements in this category is almost balanced in the British and Swiss cases, but strongly lopsided in the US. A Supreme Court ruling that rebuked the Bush administration and reinstated due process rights for foreign and American "enemy combatants" is partly responsible for this, as it was often linked with affirmative evaluations of the court, the entire judicial branch, and the constitutional order/rule of law.

Unsurprisingly, foreign policy issues and debates surrounding the War on Terror, the occupation regime in Iraq, etc. are mostly responsible for the second largest group of statements in the American case, whereas the British involvement in the occupation has

not had the same impact. As shown above, issues related to these foreign policy developments *did* enter legitimacy discourses, but were more often framed as questions of domestic policy, for example in debates about government-media relations after the suicide of weapons expert David Kelly. In Switzerland, foreign policy ranks second, too, but other issues, such as the question of EU membership, obviously play a role here. Given the American public's well-documented propensity towards parochialism in the perception of international affairs, foreign policy may quite plausibly be expected to generate much less legitimacy communication in the US as soon as the American involvement in Iraq is scaled back. In the British and Swiss cases, on the other hand, ongoing membership in, or involvement with, the EU is likely to ensure a continuing groundswell of legitimacy debates related to foreign policy. In this category, the distribution of legitimating and delegitimating statements in the US is rather balanced. In Great Britain, it is skewed towards the negative and in Switzerland, towards the positive side. The British involvement in the War on Terror and the Iraq occupation seems to have contributed to delegitimating assessments of a variety of institutional features of that nation's political order. By contrast, the comparison between the alleged flaws of the EU and the strength of the national political order is a frequent argumentative pattern in Swiss debates on foreign policy issues.

Finally, fiscal, economic and infrastructural policy is relatively marginal in the British and American cases, but ranks second, together with foreign policy, in Switzerland. Here, the British and American cases show almost exactly inverse distributions of legitimating and delegitimating cases, whereas positive and negative evaluations are almost balanced in Switzerland. We are now in a better position to explain the peaks in Figure 2. For each country, we focus on weeks that saw the number of relevant articles rise at least one standard deviation above the annual mean.[17] A return to our text corpus reveals the country-specific events, debates, and conflicts that largely account for these peaks. Considering the US first, these events themselves, and the reasons why they were strongly accompanied by legitimacy communication, are quite easily identified. Discursive contributions to, and political rituals linked with, the electoral campaign throughout the year and the presidential and congressional elections in November were a fertile source of legitimation statements. Hence five peaks can be related to President Bush's state of the union address and the Iowa caucus of the Democrats (January), the Democratic and GOP national conventions (July and August/September), the final week of the electoral campaign, and the immediate aftermath of the elections. These events, and discursive contributions like the candidates' televised debates, acceptance, victory and

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[17] The 9th, 11th, 20th, 47th, 48th and 52nd week for Great Britain, the 4th, 19th, 31st, 44th and 45th week for the US, and the 12th, 14th, 19th through 22nd and 49th week for Switzerland.

concession speeches, provided the backdrop for much legitimating communication of the "we are the greatest nation on the face of the earth" genre. The remaining peak coincides with the breaking of news on the Abu Ghraib prison scandal – a singular event (or so one would hope) that notably gave rise to assessments of the rule of law in the US, the role of the executive branch, the oversight responsibilities of Congress, or the legitimacy, moral underpinnings and international standing of the American political system and national community as a whole. A quick glance at the British case is largely consistent with this finding on the function of certain political rituals as generators of legitimacy communication. Thus the Conservative party convention and the Queen's throne speech (in October and November) translated into a temporary surge of legitimation statements. In Switzerland's direct democracy, important referenda seem to have a similar function – the peaks in May and November/December were related to referenda on old-age security and fiscal equalisation.

This discussion of issues and policy fields that triggered legitimacy communication culminating around key events of the political year 2004 also helps us to put our above findings on national resources – and potentially stable features – of legitimation into perspective. Hence, for instance, the strongly negative assessments of the political class in the United Kingdom – often linked with credibility as pattern of legitimation – appear to be predominantly triggered by controversies over the Blair government's decision to participate in the Gulf War on the basis of faulty claims about Iraqi weapons arsenals. Ongoing debates on constitutional reform were another important trigger. We may thus hypothesise that the United Kingdom's rather bleak legitimacy situation will considerably lighten up, and be more in line with the other two cases, as soon as debates on these issues begin to abate. In a similar vein, the War on Terrorism and the electoral campaign, respectively, have undoubtedly contributed to raising the frequency of statements on the legitimacy of the constitution and the electoral system, of democracy, and of the political community in the US. The same appears to be true for the ranking of patterns of legitimation. Hence, for instance, the dominance of moral and religious arguments in the US corpus[18] can clearly be related to specific events – although these patterns of legitimation will probably continue to play a greater role in the US than in the other two cases even after these events have disappeared from media agendas. Similarly, in the Swiss case, many references to the political system's ineffectiveness can be linked to referenda blocking important government policies, creating the impression of political gridlock. The increasing polarisation of the Swiss party system that has challenged many traditional structures of consensus democracy and made it even harder to bring

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[18]   This result mirrors similar findings of survey research on the American culture wars and religious revival, thus strengthening our confidence in the discourse-analytical instrument.

about political reform also contributed to this impression. However, after the passage of an important reform initiative – the new system of fiscal equalisation – in November 2004, more optimistic evaluations of the country's effectiveness might be expected in the future.

At this point, we are not yet able to fully disentangle stable features and linear trajectories – i.e., persistent change – of national legitimacy discourses. In order to do so, additional and independent data on issue attention cycles – texts and communicative acts that did not get on our radar screen, as it were, because they did not contain legitimation statements – will be needed. Moreover, only the analysis of longer periods can yield more robust insights into the role played by singular events and regularly occurring political rituals in the affirmation or erosion of legitimacy. It is clear, however, that legitimacy obtains in processes that are a compound of short-term events, cyclical trends, and relatively stable institutional features, and that all of these effects mediate or even outweigh dynamics generated by long-term processes like internationalisation and deparliamentarisation.

THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONALISATION AND DEPARLIAMENTARISATION

Against this background, it makes sense to search for more systematic evidence that internationalisation and deparliamentarisation really play an important role in legitimacy discourses, as the crisis hypothesis sometimes advanced in the literature would lead one to expect. These trends may, in principle, impact legitimacy discourses in a variety of ways. The internationalisation and deparliamentarisation of governance structures and decision making processes could, for instance, raise or decrease the visibility of particular institutions (objects of legitimation), or the use of specific arguments (patterns of legitimation). Thus if globalisation undermines the welfare state, and the welfare state dimension, in turn, has an important legitimation function, we might expect more legitimation statements that assess the welfare state, draw on patterns of legitimation like social justice, efficiency or effectiveness, and are formulated in the context of social policy debates. Hence some of the data presented above may indeed reflect the indirect effects of internationalisation and deparliamentarisation.

However, such inferences must remain speculative. The two trends could trigger a growing number of delegitimating references to executive institutions (as too powerful) and parliaments (as increasingly unable to assume their traditional functions), but could just as well foster affirmative statements that defend parliaments, representative democracy, and the nation state. Similarly, globalisation may of course be linked with a rising share of legitimation statements formulated in the context of foreign policy debates. Yet not all foreign policy conflicts, events, and issues are related to internationalisation, as defined here. In short, internationalisation and deparliamentarisation may well be influential background factors of legitimation processes. But only *explicit argumentative*

references to these political trends enable us to ascertain that the normative considerations and presumptive causal chains on which the crisis hypothesis is ultimately based are indeed reflected in, and have the alleged effects on, public communication related to the legitimacy of the democratic nation state.

Table 6   *References to Internationalisation and Deparliamentarisation (rounded to the nearest percent)*

	UK (n=697)			CH (n=776)			USA (n=1239)		
	state-ments (%)	*of which*		*state-ments (%)*	*of which*		*state-ments (%)*	*of which*	
		delegiti-mation (%)	*legiti-mation (%)*		*delegiti-mation (%)*	*legiti-mation (%)*		*delegiti-mation (%)*	*legiti-mation (%)*
reference to interna-tionalisation	4	*45*	*55*	10	*35*	*65*	1	*33*	*67*
no reference to inter-nationalisation	96	*68*	*32*	90	*60*	*40*	99	*48*	*52*
reference to deparlia-mentarisation	2	*69*	*31*	1	*57*	*43*	1	*100*	*0*
no reference to depar-liamentarisation	98	*67*	*33*	99	*57*	*43*	99	*48*	*52*
total	100	*67*	*33*	100	*57*	*43*	100	*48*	*52*

Our data provide little evidence that this is the case. As Table 6 shows, very few statements contain direct references to internationalisation and deparliamentarisation. Only the Swiss sample offers a considerable number of such references. They reflect intense political discussions on Switzerland's bilateral relationship with (or future membership in) the EU, as well as debates on the country's role in the UN. Neither the British nor the American samples provide enough statements relating legitimacy claims to the process of internationalisation to enable us to discern any particular tendencies. However, we may cautiously observe that statements linked with references to internationalisation are mostly legitimating. It seems that references to international organisations and regimes with their democratic deficits and other shortcomings are often used to affirm the legitimacy of national political orders and institutions, which continue to inspire more confidence than their international counterparts.[19]

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[19] This finding suggests that the growing interdependence of national and supranational political institutions may correspond to an increasingly *relational* nature of legitimacy beliefs and statements. For instance, dissatisfaction with national institutions may be compounded by dissatisfaction with the European Union, but it may also be compensated by a shift of legitimacy to supranational and regional levels of government. Similar effects could play a role in the relational evaluation of parliaments and institutions like the German Bundesbank, which sometimes enjoy high levels of trust despite their lack of democratic legitimation. We intend to explore these possibilities in future research.

Table 7 *References to Internationalisation Related to Selected Patterns and Issues (rounded to the nearest percent)*

	UK (n=697)			CH (n=776)			USA (n=1239)		
	state-ments (%)	of which		state-ments (%)	of which		state-ments (%)	of which	
		refer-ence (%)	no refer-ence (%)		refer-ence (%)	no refer-ence (%)		refer-ence (%)	no refer-ence (%)
Pattern									
international legality	1	0	100	2	69	31	1	57	43
national sover-eignty/power	1	100	0	1	88	12	2	0	100
international standing	1	0	100	4	59	41	4	0	100
Issue									
foreign policy	7	38	62	14	41	59	19	5	95

In a second step, we examine linkages between references to internationalisation, on the one hand, and selected patterns of legitimation or issues, on the other (Table 7). One should, for instance, expect that arguments related to international legality or statements formulated in the context of foreign policy debates often make explicit references to internationalisation. However, our data show – with the exception of the Swiss case – that even in statements with such "internationally oriented" patterns of legitimation or issues, the connection is made quite rarely. In the American case, the share of statements that do not spell it out reaches as much as 95 percent. Perhaps in line with the current trend of unilateralism and suspicion vis-à-vis international organisations, they almost remain a non-issue in the retrieved legitimation statements. Only in the Swiss case, the expected consistency between "internationally oriented" patterns or issues and argumentative references to internationalisation can be observed. This finding is in line with the fact that it is precisely debates on EU or UN membership – *political* interna-tionalisation – that account for most foreign policy related legitimation statements in Switzerland. The conformity of foreign policy action with Swiss (constitutional) law is always reviewed closely. Given the country's strong tradition of neutrality (extending to non-participation in international organisations) and national sovereignty, the potential impact of international relations on those two fundamental elements of the Swiss politi-cal order and identity is frequently at the centre of legitimation statements.

The very few cases with references to deparliamentarisation (Table 6) – especially the American ones – lend some support to the hypothesis that increasing deparliamenta-risation affects the nation state's legitimacy in a negative way. In terms of related issues, objects and patterns of legitimation, the three national discourses are rather similar. Un-

surprisingly, references to deparliamentarisation are frequently linked with the legitimation or delegitimation of the executive and legislative branches, and of the judiciary in Great Britain. As for patterns of legitimation, arguments related to (the lack of) popular sovereignty and accountability, and to (gains in) efficiency and effectiveness dominate. Finally, deparliamentarisation is usually addressed in the context of debates on political routine operations and institutions.

All things considered, there is ample reason to remain sceptical that internationalisation and deparliamentarisation strongly contribute to delegitimation, or structure legitimacy discourses, in the examined countries. While both trends may well have the alleged effects on state capacity and the role of parliaments in national decision-making, they trigger much less legitimation communication than might be expected, and do not seem to result in any dramatic weakening of public approval for the state and its core institutions. Our data thus provide little evidence that internationalisation and deparliamentarisation have a major effect on the nation state's empirical legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This paper is not meant to deny that the challenges posed by the current transformations of democratic government for the legitimacy of the western nation state are real. Our findings indicate, however, that they have – at least up to now – not resulted in serious or pervasive problems of empirical legitimacy. Several factors can be identified that prevent internationalisation and deparliamentarisation from eroding the nation state's legitimacy, or at least mediate their effects. Firstly, a political system's acceptance in the population is based on a wide range of resources, and is thus quite difficult to undermine in a comprehensive way. Even if one resource of legitimacy ceases to function as an effective anchor of legitimacy for the system as a whole, others may step in.[20] Secondly, we find that the institutions and principles at the core of national democracies are deeply embedded in political cultures and belief systems. As a result, the political order as a whole, the type of democratic rule, or core democratic institutions and principles are considerably more difficult to delegitimate than more marginal institutions, political actors, or specific policies. Thirdly, processes of legitimation are highly volatile, reflecting current policy agendas and debates. Thus long-term processes like internationalisation and deparliamentarisation are only one group of factors among many others that influence the structures and trajectories of the nation state's legitimacy.

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[20] Most importantly in our context, procedures of democratic decision-making are not the only source of legitimacy that the democratic nation state can draw on – yet as our study shows, even these procedures still constitute effective legitimation resources in many instances.

While our study casts doubt on the hypothesis of an imminent legitimation crisis of the nation state, we do not suggest that the contours of its legitimation have remained unchanged over the last decades, or can be safely expected to remain stable in the future. Rather than conceptualising changes in legitimation as processes of erosion, however, one should view them as processes of transformation, affected by short- and long-term political developments, as well as by relatively stable institutional or cultural features, and shaped by discourses in which the content and structure of arguments privileged in the justification of democratic governance are continuously challenged and re-established. It certainly cannot be ruled out that such processes may result in serious legitimacy problems or crises, but given the differences between national legitimation styles and policy debates, and their respective influence on legitimation, it is implausible to expect that such crises will affect different nation states in the same or even in a similar way. Different institutional designs may be more or less susceptible to delegitimation, and it is worthwhile to determine which forms of democratic governance are best suited to deal with the challenges to legitimacy posed by internationalisation and deparliamentarisation. But internationalisation and deparliamentarisation do not automatically jeopardise the legitimacy of the nation state as such, in a general and uniform way. Undifferentiated crisis hypotheses are certainly not well founded.

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