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Hegemonic practices in multistakeholder Internet governance: Participatory evangelism, quiet politics, and glorification of status quo at ICANN meetings

Aaron van Klyton^a , Mary-Paz Arrieta-Paredes^b , Nicola Palladino^c  and Ayush Soomaree^d

^aSchool of Management and Marketing, College of Business and Management, Kean University, Union, New Jersey, USA; ^bSchool of Accounting, Finance and Economics, Faculty of Business, University of Greenwich, Greenwich, UK; ^cTrinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland; ^dDepartment of International Business and Economics, University of Greenwich, Greenwich, UK

ABSTRACT

In this exploratory study we examine a less scrutinized aspect of multistakeholder arrangements: the presence and directionality of hegemonic power in the language used in the stakeholder deliberations. Specifically, we examine the deliberations of ten stakeholder groups of ICANN's policy development body. Using meeting transcripts from 2011 to 2020, we operationalized hegemony as a latent, dependent variable (HEIN) by linking stakeholder participation to the policymaking agenda. We employed a mixed-methods approach comprising textual linguistic analysis (using DICTION 7.1), principal components analysis, and an autoregressive moving average model to identify the statistical significance of key variables that emerged from textual linguistic and principal components analyses. We found that three primary rhetorical devices – participatory evangelism, quiet politics, and glorification of the status quo – were present, which reinforce the entrenched power structure that favors some stakeholders and interfere with other stakeholders' efforts to influence Internet governance decisions. In addition, four Diction variables, Commonality, Leveling Terms, Satisfaction, and Commonality at the GNSO (Generic Names Supporting Organization) level, yielded a positive impact on the production of hegemony, and Insistence was negatively associated with HEIN.

Acronyms: ALAC: Ad-Large Advisory Committee; ASO: Address Supporting Organization; BC: Business Constituency; ccNSO: Country Code Names Supporting Organization; CSG: Commercial Stakeholder Group; DNS: Domain Name System; GAC: Governmental Advisory Committee; GNSO: Generic Names Supporting Organization; IAB: Internet Architecture Board; IANA: Internet Assigned Numbers Authority; ICANN: Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers; IPC: Intellectual Property Interests Constituency; ISP: Internet Service Provider; ISPCP: ISP and Connectivity Providers Constituency; NCUC: Noncommercial Users Constituency; NCSG: Noncommercial Stakeholder Group; NPOC: Not-for-Profit Operational Concerns; NRO: Number Resource Organization; NTIA: National Telecommunications and Information Administration; PIR: Public Interest Registry; RSSAC: Root Server System Advisory Committee; RrSG: Registrars Stakeholder Group; RySG: Registries Stakeholder Group; SSAC: Security and Stability Advisory Committee

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Introduction

For many observers in the Internet governance field, multistakeholderism has become a “mantra” (Hofmann 2016) and a “value in itself” (Raymond and DeNardis 2015). Herein actors are seen as legitimating their authority by fostering the participation of different types of affected actors in the decision-making process, regardless of the effectiveness of such

participation. By convening different types of actors, multistakeholder initiatives are supposed to achieve superior and consensual outcomes, acceptance, and rule compliance in the transnational sphere (Bäckstrand et al. 2010; Dingwerth 2007; Faysse 2006; Hemmati 2002; Mena and Palazzo 2012). On the other hand, multistakeholderism in Internet Governance could result in a “rhetorical exercise aimed at neutralizing

CONTACT Nicola Palladino,  palladin@tcd.ie  Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute, Trinity College Dublin, College Green 2, Dublin, D02 PN40, Ireland

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criticism” (Padovani and Pavan 2007, 100). As Carr (2015, 658) noted, multistakeholderism “reinforces existing power dynamics ... ‘baked in’ to the model from the beginning”, privileging the interests of the US domain name industry. Likewise, Palladino and Santaniello (2021, 26) pointed out that this approach has masked practices of “domination, manipulation, and hegemony” (see also Cammaerts 2011; Padovani and Pavan 2007). In this vein, Chenou (2014) defined multistakeholderism as a discursive tool to create consensus around the hegemony of a power élite.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is the organization entrusted with managing the Domain Name System (DNS), a core Internet function. Through the DNS, every resource connected to the net is assigned a unique numeric IP address and often also – for human legibility needs – a “domain name”, which unambiguously identifies sources and destinations of data flows, facilitating the functioning of the Internet as a unitary worldwide communication network. However, since its early stage, ICANN’s authority over the DNS has been contested. The reasons for the contestations have been geopolitics (Becker 2019; Negro 2020) and opposition to it privileging corporate and commercial interests, especially those of Western countries (Froomkin 2000). ICANN tried to address these criticisms and increase its legitimacy by developing a more complex and articulated multistakeholder governance structure. However, such efforts have not proved sufficient to end charges of power imbalances (Bygrave 2015; Calandro and Zingales 2013).

In this study, we theorize that the language used by various stakeholders in policy deliberations contributes to the construction of hegemonic power affecting (or supporting) organizational control. Our approach is informed by Fairclough (2010, 56), who argued that language and ideology “ought to figure in the wider framework of theories and analyses of power” – hegemony in particular. Further, this understanding that discursive order maintains the power structure aligns with Gramsci’s (1971) conceptualization of power. Nevertheless, few Internet governance studies (Pohle 2018; Santaniello et al. 2018; Santaniello and Palladino 2022) have empirically examined the language used in policy deliberations.

We hypothesize that three primary rhetorical devices support the hegemony of dominant groups within ICANN: “Participatory Evangelism” (Mueller 2009), which emphasizes participation as a way to democratize Internet governance, masking the lack of effective accountability mechanisms; “Quiet Politics” (Culpepper 2010), which acts as an agenda-setting strategy using technical expertise to marginalize

troubling issues and arguments; and “Glorification of Status Quo” (Hajer, Hoppe, and Jennings 2013), which channels positive evaluation on the current state of affairs in order to undermine claims for change.

We then analyze the existence of hegemonic discourse embedded within ICANN’s governance arrangements using DICTION 7.1, a textual statistic software designed to investigate power semantic structures. Finally, we analyze the meeting transcripts from 2011 to 2020 of Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) and supporting groups, which together affect the highest number of users as well as constitute the most inclusive multistakeholder policy development body within the ICANN system.

The promise of multistakeholderism: Legitimizing transnational governance

The Domain Name System ensures consistency between IP addresses and domain names worldwide, enabling the functioning of the Internet as we know it. Instead of collecting names and IP addresses in a single file, like a telephone book, the founders of the Internet adopted a hierarchical structure of domain names and a distributed management of databases containing correspondences between IP addresses and names. Top-Level Domains (TLD) (e.g., .com, .edu, .us) and corresponding name and address registries were created and assigned to registry operators for technical and administrative management. These could be commercial organizations, cooperatives of Internet service providers, not-for-profit companies or governmental departments. Domain name registration services are sold/retailed to users by other companies, called registrars, which pay a fee to registries (even when registry operators also act as registrars).

Initially, the management of the DNS was performed by the technical and academic communities that built the Internet. However, as the users of the Internet increased exponentially since the 1990s, the “technical regime” (Hofmann 2009) came to be seen as ill-suited for dealing with the consequent economic, legal, political, and social issues (Goldsmith and Wu 2006). As a result, several alternative institutional arrangements were advanced for the Domain Name System during the so-called “DNS war” (Grosse 2020; Mueller 2010; Palladino and Santaniello 2021), including intergovernmental arrangements under the United Nations system and self-governance regimes. In the end, the US government opted to create a new, private-led non-for-profit corporation to develop and implement policies for the DNS.

The new organization, ICANN, was established in late 1998 as a not-for-profit corporation under California law. It started to perform DNS management through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the US Department of Commerce, a contract with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and a series of agreements with technical organizations responsible for developing Internet standards and protocols (e.g., Internet Engineering Task Force), Regional Internet Registries (RIRs), and associations of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) managing and allocating Internet number resources (Post and Kehl 2015). As per its bylaw, ICANN was composed of three divisions called Supporting Organizations (SO): Address Supporting Organization (ASO), representing RIRs; Domain Name Supporting Organization, representing name registries and registrars; and Protocol Supporting Organization, which acts on behalf of standard-setting organizations. The SOs were entrusted with advancing policy proposals for the DNS to be approved by a Board of Directors, composed partially of members nominated by the SOs themselves and partially of members elected by Internet users. The ICANN's governance structure also has three consultative bodies: Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), DNS Root Server System Advisory Committee, and Advisory Committee on Membership (coordinates the election of board members by users).¹

The establishment of ICANN raised concerns. Many countries, especially those characterized as emerging markets and developing economies, found the unique oversight role the US reserved for themselves through the NTIA contracts unacceptable (Hofmann 2009; Mueller 2001), giving rise to enduring geopolitical tensions and calls for the internationalization of the DNS. While the recent IANA transition process, wherein the US government relinquished its legal authority over the stewardship of DNS, may have significantly calmed down contestation on this score (Becker 2019), many other long-running disputes continue to undermine ICANN's legitimacy. One of them is the representativeness of the global Internet community. As discussed earlier, ICANN's governance structure was perceived to unfairly privilege some interests over others (Froomkin 2000). ICANN and its contractual partners are seen by the critics as constituting an "entrenched elite with significant, growing forms of power and wealth", profiting from their monopoly of the lucrative domain name market (Mueller 2010, 218). Even within ICANN, the technical community, registries, RIRs, the Board, and the staff form a densely intertwined power elite where

"revolving doors" and "multiple hats" are commonplace (Palladino and Santaniello 2021). Finally, since ICANN has never had shareholders or statutory members, the lack of a single accountability figure is a further concern (Weber and Gunnarson 2012). Put plainly, the Board of Directors is "not subject to any form of institutional control" (Hofmann 2016, 39), and other mechanisms of control have been proven to be largely ineffective (Berkman Center for Internet & Society 2010; Mueller 2010; Palladino and Santaniello 2021).

ICANN developed an increasingly complex multistakeholder governance structure to gain legitimacy for its contested authority on DNS. As discussed earlier, multistakeholderism has become increasingly popular among global governance scholars and practitioners. This is mainly due to its promise to provide a source of authority and legitimacy in the absence of supranational political authority (Radu 2019; Risse 2006), which could help address long-standing governance, implementation, and participation deficits at the international level (Bexell and Mörrth 2010; Haas 2004). Legitimacy, indeed, is a precious begetter of authority, especially for supposed voluntary and bottom-up arrangements. It can facilitate compliance springing from a "self-imposed obligation to do what is perceived as right" (Weiss 2013, 110). As Tallberg, Bäckstrand, and Scholte (2018, 9) noted, legitimacy is tied to the belief that audiences maintain about the institution's exercise of authority, even when the decisions undertaken go against the narrower self-interests of a given audience.

Multistakeholderism purports to provide transnational governance regimes with gold standard legitimacy and democratic legitimacy (Bernstein 2004; Nanz and Steffek 2004). While in democratic countries participation entails electoral mechanisms ensuring representation and accountability, multistakeholderism attempts to adapt core principles of democratic theory to a "beyond the state" context (Bäckstrand et al. 2010; Dingwerth 2007; Macdonald 2008; Risse 2006), shifting the focus from the "vote-centric" to the "talk-centric" side of democracy (Chambers 2003; Druckman, Leeper, and Slothuus 2018). As indicated, democratic legitimacy in multistakeholderism is derived from the deliberative model of democracy that provides all stakeholders the possibility of participating in the decision-making process through inclusive, fair, informed, rational, and respectful debate (Druckman, Leeper, and Slothuus 2018; Dryzek 2010; Elster 1998). In keeping with this logic, in 2002, by reforming its bylaw, ICANN developed a more inclusive multistakeholder structure. The Protocol Supporting Organization

eliminated and substituted the Domain Name Supporting Organization with two novel bodies: The Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) and the Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO). The former was entrusted with formulating policies for generic TLDs (.com, .org, .net, etc.), while the latter performs a similar function for country-code TLDs (.us, .uk, .de, etc.).

Multistakeholder governance and hegemonic power

Critics of multistakeholderism point out how empirical research often reveals a tremendous gap between the “ideal deliberative procedure” envisaged by the multistakeholder model and reality (Cohen 1989, 30). While deliberation is supposed to neutralize power asymmetries, ensuring that “no force except the force of the better argument is at work” (Dingwerth 2007, 25), in truth, many multistakeholder initiatives are dominated by experts from the Global North and the private sector (Palladino 2021). This gives rise to hegemonic practices that solidify existing power imbalances (Cheyns and Riisgaard 2014; Dentoni, Bitzer, and Schouten 2018; Faysse 2006).

Hegemony is a persuasive form of power that secures consent to a particular social order (re-) produced by dominant groups (Gramsci 1971) through a nexus of institutions, social relations, and ideas (Stoddart 2007). In the same vein, Fairclough (2010, 61) characterized hegemony as a form of leadership and domination that extends across “economic, political, cultural and ideological domains.” Antoniades (2008, 2) spotlights its defining characteristic, when he notes that it operates outside of “direct and official control.” For hegemony to germinate, the dominated groups should feel that they are complying with legitimate values and rules rather than being controlled from the outside (Golding 1992; Morton 2007).

Some structural elements of multistakeholder arrangements provide dominant and powerful actors with opportunities to exert hegemony. The consensual and deliberative approach may produce “depoliticization mechanisms that limit political expression and struggle” (Moog, Spicer, and Böhm 2015, 6), thus inhibiting divergent or radical viewpoints (Santaniello et al. 2016). The latter could be dismissed as “extremist,” “ideological,” or contrary to multistakeholder initiatives’ collaborative and goal-oriented spirit (Cheyns and Riisgaard 2014; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2001). Furthermore, the lack of capacity of lesser resourced stakeholders to understand the complexity of “technically-opaque policy fields” (Keller 2016, 291)

can lead to asymmetric power that thwarts equal participation (Take 2012). These tendencies are amplified by the fact that multistakeholder initiatives often arise thanks to the leadership of a few self-selected actors with deep interests in the field. Such actors often by themselves decide the goals of the initiatives, the categorization of stakeholders, and engagement rules, thereby aligning the process toward their favored outcomes (Boström and Hallström 2013; Dentoni, Bitzer, and Schouten 2018; von Bernstorff 2003; Zeyen, Beckmann, and Wolters 2016).

When multistakeholder governance is developed around a preexisting organization, with its entrenched practices and ways of reasoning, the former’s discursive order could be a carryover of the latter. This gives rise to what Hajer, Hoppe, and Jennings (2013) called *discourse institutionalization* – the day-to-day routines that reproduce the discourse of the dominant groups with its assumptions, categories, and ideas.

The preparatory documents that informed ICANN’s establishment, such as the *Green Paper* (US Department of Commerce 1998), clearly ascribed to the neoliberal paradigm (Chenou 2014; Palladino and Santaniello 2021). For instance, the *Green Paper* talked of the Internet names increasing having “commercial value” and advocated the principle: “Where possible, market mechanisms that support competition and consumer choice should drive the technical management of the Internet because they will promote innovation, preserve diversity, and enhance user choice and satisfaction” (US Department of Commerce 1998). Broadly, the DNS is conceived as a “neutral” technical service (provided to customers), denying or ignoring the consequent social and political implications, reflecting the deeply entrenched beliefs of the technical community (Drake and Wilson 2009; Hofmann 2016). Such embedding of a dominant discourse within a multistakeholder institutional setting can yield hegemony – a form of consent and conformity to a prescribed social order – that “integrates rather than simply dominating” subordinate groups (Fairclough 2010, 61), producing “moral and political passivity” (Gramsci 1971, 333).

We argue that the hegemonic power of ICANN’s ruling élite is produced and reproduced via following mechanisms embedded within ICANN’s multistakeholder institutional practices:

Participatory evangelism

Mueller (2009, 1) uses “participatory evangelism” to refer to how ICANN’s ruling élite “seem more willing to offer people opportunities to get involved than they

are willing to offer them real authority or influence over the decisions.” Participation evokes feelings of being responsible and attentive to the policymaking process, “even when they are, in fact, relatively powerless” (Mueller 2009, 3). Further, Mueller (2009, 8) notes that this tactic is used to, at the minimum, obfuscate accountability, and the “massive emphasis on public participation” could be perceived as ICANN’s over-compensating for the “glaring absence of ... accountability.” By stressing the deliberative and “talk-centric” side of multistakeholderism without establishing effective accountability mechanisms, participatory evangelism inscribes and realizes hegemonic power within and through ICANN multistakeholder arrangements. Discursively, participatory evangelism works by emphasizing the value of “taking part” and belonging to an “open”, “bottom up”, “transparent” governance forum such as ICANN.

Quiet politics

Culpepper (2010) uses “quiet politics” to refer to an agenda-setting strategy that manipulates the salience of issues and makes strategic use of technical expertise. He pointed out that a lack of sufficient specialized knowledge might result in an inability of lesser-resourced stakeholders to sustain high salience for an issue over an extended period, which facilitates control by dominant and more skilled groups (Bromley-Trujillo and Karch 2021; Geiß 2019). In the same vein, Taylor (2015, 431) noted that the complexity and length of ICANN’s multistakeholder policy development process require a “high level of time commitment”, discouraging some participants from giving high salience to issues over a sustained period. Consequently, the movement of Internet governance issues tends to be toward lower salience issues, making quiet politics and hegemonic order co-constitutive. This state is maintained through performativity – that is, “Internet governancing” (Cheniti 2010) through negotiations and controversies that both “implicate and are implicated in creating the worlds in which a mode of governance makes sense” (Ziewitz and Pentzold 2014, 317), ideological acquiescence (Showstack Sassoon 1987), and informal rules. As a result, issues migrate from high to low salience as subordinate groups begin to defer their interests to the preferences of more dominant groups. In the case of DNS, this resulted in the persistence of definitions, assumptions, and views in the foundational documents, which continue to provide the lexicon and the frames for ICANN discussions. Consequently,

deliberation tends to be narrowed to those issues and arguments consistent with a technical-market oriented approach (e.g., DNS as a technical service provided in a market regime). Others tend to be ignored or blamed as inaccurate or inappropriate (Palladino and Santaniello 2021).

Glorification of the status quo

As Hajer, Hoppe, and Jennings (2013, 69) noted, “the normative appeal of the long-standing practices, with their proud record of success, made it difficult to argue for change.” Usual practices and ways of reasoning are presented “as a permanent, natural state of affairs.” In the case of DNS management, this is a recurrent and powerful argument. By focusing on technical efficiency and customer satisfaction, the elite portray ICANN as an enduring history of success in keeping the Internet functioning, while ignoring the failure to deal with its political and public policy implications (Palladino and Santaniello 2021). “Do no harm” and “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” are commonly evoked in ICANN discussions to undermine claims for change and dissenting views.

Research questions

To understand hegemonic power in the context of multistakeholder governance, we focus on language and discursive practices in ICANN. While language is embedded within articulated practices of power and the connection between power and internet governance has been examined (Dutton, Palfrey, and Peltu 2007; Epstein 2011; Mansell 2012; Pohle 2016; Pohle, Hoesl, and Kniep 2016; Radu 2019), a more systematic and granular analysis of how language is used or contributes to the production of power (and for whom) is needed. We theorize that the language used in policy deliberations contributes to constructing power that affects (or supports) organizational control.

ICANN meetings constitute the “mutual enactment of the social and material forms” (Dale 2005, 658) of Internet governance that serves to stabilize power relations and as discursive spaces for dialogue and coordination (Antonova 2011; Pohle 2016). The language used in these spaces wields widely accepted qualities to either promote or detract from dominant groups’ power and influence. Consequently, the stakeholders report their accomplishments to constituents in the broader communities, emphasizing representation rather than action and actual policy change, giving participants a sense

of accomplishment and agreement with the principles that govern the system (Femia 1981) – to some extent, regardless of policy outcomes. On the other hand, it produces a false consciousness, where participants socially construct “their own oppression” (Hatch 2012). As a result, power remains centralized, diminishing subordinate stakeholders’ effectiveness in pushing through real change (Hofmann 2016; Mueller 2009).

To investigate how ICANN multistakeholder governance reproduces a hegemonic discourse, we analysis the meetings of the GNSO and its constituencies. The GNSO could be considered the most relevant policy development body within ICANN, affecting the largest number of websites and users with its policy development activities. Furthermore, it is the body where the effort to make participation more inclusive has been particularly intense and visible. Correspondingly, GNSO spawns a complex and articulated system of constituencies, each with its own charter, executive committee, and meetings. The Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) and the Registrars Stakeholder Group (RrSG) represent registries and registrars, respectively; Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG) encompasses the Business Constituency (BC), Intellectual Property Interests Constituency (IPC) and ISP and Connectivity Providers Constituency (ISPCP); Noncommercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG) comprises of civil society-oriented Noncommercial Users Constituency (NCUC) and the Not-for-Profit Operational Concerns (NPOC). Of these constituencies, RySG and RrSG represent the interests of the domain name industry and, together with ISPCP, are the most integrated with the technical and economic interests dominating the ICANN Board and staff. The BC and IPC represent commercial interests and are primarily concerned with trademark protection. The Noncommercial Stakeholder Group function to promote the interests of users and the public. It is the weaker, less-resourced, and marginalized stakeholder group (Calandro and Zingales 2013; Gross 2011; Mueller 2009).

Our research questions are as follows:

1. To what extent is the use of language in GNSO council meetings influenced by the most prominent stakeholders’ groups, such as RySG?
2. To what extent does the use of language in GNSO give rise to a hegemonic discursive order?
3. To what extent does hegemony act as a latent power structure, spread and solidified within GNSO’s constituencies?

We construct hegemonic power as a latent variable and theorize it as an outcome of language interactions. Using a Gramscian lens to analyze archival meeting transcripts, we identify and interpret instances of subjectivity and dominance and examine the extent to which language acts as a material arrangement that shapes “the roles, position and ideas of the actors” in Internet governance (Pohle 2016, 5). The transcripts we analyze span ten years (2011–2020), providing a comprehensive, accessible, and accurate source of textual materials for longitudinal analysis.

Data

Transcripts of ICANN meetings and video conference calls from 2011 to 2020, including transcripts from virtual meetings held during the COVID-19 pandemic, constitute the data for our analysis. As discussed earlier, ten stakeholder groups were selected for analysis (GNSO, CSG, BC, IPC, PSPCP, NCSG, NCUC, NPOC, RrSG and RrSY). The ICANN holds stakeholder meetings thrice yearly and maintains fairly meticulous archives, producing a rich dataset for analysis. For this study, the textual corpus is 5,842,923 words (11,686 pages). The data were first cleaned by removing “front matter” from the transcripts, including introductions and roll calls. The data were then visually checked to ensure that most of the dialogue involved attendees who were not ICANN employees. The unit of analysis was the transcript. The texts were segmented into 500-word segments, which facilitates standardizing of the scores (Craig and Amernic 2018) and thereby comparisons across groups of texts (Davis and Gardner 2012). Preliminary tests were run on segments and randomly checked to ensure that ICANN employees dominated no segment. DICTION 7.1 generated normalized indexes (z-scores) of the entire transcript for each stakeholder group meeting, thus providing a basis for additional tests to conceptualize and measure hegemony.

The variables obtained were used to conduct a principal components analysis. Then a response variable was constructed as an indicator of hegemonic power. Finally, Panel Data, ARMA and Multilevel Models were applied, modeling hegemonic power to test for robustness.

Methods

DICTION 7.1

The textual corpus was analyzed using DICTION 7.1. The software compares textual corpora with 31

dictionaries, four calculated variables, and five master variables (computed by combining dictionaries and calculated variables). Dictionaries/variables are based on a built-in database of 50,000 previously analyzed texts. Unlike other standard textual statistical tools, the dictionaries rely “on linguistic theory culled from a number of social thinkers” and novel “elements of artificial intelligence” (Short and Palmer 2008, 207). DICTION 7.1 processes the textual corpus by searching for the match of the words in its dictionaries, returning raw totals, standardized scores, word and character counts, and percentages as results.

We recognize that DICTION 7.1 and other “off-the-shelf” dictionaries face criticism concerning validity. For example, Dobbrick et al. (2021) argued that enhanced supervised and unsupervised machine learning approaches had outperformed text classifications from the technologies mentioned above. González-Bailón and Paltoglou (2015) found that domain-specific content can diminish the validity and reliability of “ready-to-use” methods. Both studies call for combining off-the-shelf dictionaries with a secondary analysis, such as machine learning, to improve the validity of results. Further, Chan et al. (2021) argued that the “bag-of-words” approach does not consider the order of the words in the text, which can adversely affect reliability. Lastly, textual analysis software can suffer from domain specificity, which could be mitigated by “tuning” the dictionary with respect to the source material. We experimented with creating a “neoliberal discourse” dictionary composed of terms such as customer, client, market, technical, contract, service, etc.; however, the results were not fruitful. Notwithstanding such limitations, adopting DICTION 7.1 software still represents a good balance between accuracy and the possibility of performing a longitudinal investigation on a vast volume of texts. It is worth noting that DICTION 7.1 is particularly well-suited for our inquiry because it is “designed by a communications researcher and focuses on the subtle power of word choice and verbal tone” relying “on linguistic theory culled from a number of social thinkers” (Short and Palmer 2008, 207).

Moreover, we combined this method with principles components analysis and autoregressive moving average models to facilitate a rigorous data treatment. We first scrutinized the 40 DICTION 7.1 dictionaries and variable items to ensure that they could be theoretically linked to hegemony in the GNSO context, as described above. This operation is reported in Table 1. It led to the selection of 13 variables employed in the following analysis. Next, we ran a DICTION test of the data.

Principal component analysis

In the first stage, we analyzed the profile of GNSO on the dictionaries to estimate the extent to which it fits with our expectations of hegemonic power as advanced in Table 1. Further, we compared the GNSO profile with the profile of its constituencies to identify which stakeholder groups have a high influence in shaping the language and tone of GNSO’s meeting discussions. To facilitate these tasks and interpret DICTION’s results, principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted using the software SPSS. PCA is a reduction technique that affords the identification of concept associations, thus increasing interpretability. In addition, it creates “new uncorrelated variables that successively maximize variance” (Jolliffe and Cadima 2016, 2). PCA could be applied to sets of quantitative variables, including dictionary and lexical indices (Arcese et al. 2018; Oliver et al. 2018; Sigley 1997; Stone and Can 2020). In so doing, PCA reduces the number of DICTION’s variables into a few new constructs according to their covariance, which could be interpreted as semantic dimensions structuring discourses within GNSO and its constituencies. In the following stage, we used a panel data approach and autocorrelation moving average models (ARMA) on STATA 17.0 software to analyze the data obtained through textual linguistic analysis.

Calculating HEIN

Hegemonic Power is clearly difficult, if not impossible, to measure. It is a non-observable variable, which means that any indicator used to represent the construct would be a mere approximation, with some level of discrepancy and thus error, which can significantly distort its conceptual reach. To create a statistically supported indicator as a proxy, we apply a latent variable approach (Kline 2015; Schumacker and Lomax 2015), assuming that this is a covariate of the observed variable because it is defined as a predictor that is observable and closely related to the concept under investigation (Kmenta 1997). We call this proxy variable HEIN (hegemony as a latent, dependent variable).

The z-scores measured by Diction 7.1 from meetings of the nine stakeholders held between 2011 and 2020 were tested statistically to determine how hegemony conceptually related to the constructs measured by this software. As latent variables are thought to be the underlying cofactors of multiple observed variables, we began by estimating hegemonic power by

Table 1. DICTION 7.1's variables and hegemony².

N	Name	Type	Dictionary	Terms denoting institutional regularities or substantive agreement on core values. Included are indigenous terms (<i>native, basic, innate</i>) and designations of legitimacy (<i>orthodox, decorum, constitutional, ratified</i>), systematicity (<i>paradigm, bureaucratic, ritualistic</i>), and typicality (<i>standardized, matter-of-fact, regularity</i>). Also included are terms of congruence (<i>conformity, mandate, unanimous</i>), predictability (expected, continuity, reliable), and universality (<i>womankind, perennial, landmarks</i>).	Diction manual description ³	Expected relation with hegemony
1	Centrality	DICTION Dictionary				Positive on Glorification of Status Quo and Participatory Evangelism. Centrality could denote agreement on the current institutional setting.
2	Aggression	DICTION Dictionary		A dictionary embracing human competition and forceful action. Its terms connote physical energy (<i>blast, crash, explode, collide</i>), social domination (<i>conquest, attacking, dictatorships, violation</i>), and goal-directedness (<i>crusade, commanded, challenging, overcome</i>). In addition, words associated with personal triumph (<i>mastered, rambunctious, pushy</i>), excess human energy (<i>prod, poke, pound, shove</i>), disassembly (<i>dismantle, demolish, overturn, veto</i>) and resistance (<i>prevent, reduce, defend, curbed</i>) are included.		Negative on all three dimensions. High Aggression scores could indicate that speakers take strong positions and are prone to engage in conflicts to pursue their own interests and goals.
3	Leveling Terms	DICTION Dictionary		Words used to ignore individual differences and build a sense of completeness and assurance. Included are totalizing terms (<i>everybody, anyone, each, fully</i>), adverbs of permanence (<i>always, completely, inevitably, consistently</i>), and resolute adjectives (<i>unconditional, consummate, absolute, open-and-shut</i>).		Positive on Glorification of Status Quo and Participatory Evangelism. Could be strategically employed within GNSO council meetings to obscure and blur differences among stakeholders, create a sense of shared belonging, or give the impression that consensus on a particular point exists.
4	Satisfaction	DICTION Dictionary		Terms associated with positive affective states (<i>cheerful, passionate, happiness</i>), with moments of undiminished joy (<i>thanks, smile, welcome</i>) and pleasurable diversion (<i>excited, fun, lucky</i>), or with moments of triumph (<i>celebrating, pride, auspicious</i>). Also included are words of nurturance: <i>healing, encourage, secure, relieved</i> .		Positive on Glorification of Status Quo. Could indicate consensus on the status quo and a sense of accomplishment for being part of this governance structure. It could also indicate stakeholders' "customer satisfaction" with how ICANN provides the DNS service.
5	Accomplishment	DICTION Dictionary		Words expressing task completion (<i>establish, finish, influence, proceed</i>) and organized human behavior (<i>motivated, influence, leader, manage</i>). Includes capitalistic terms (<i>buy, produce, employees, sell</i>), modes of expansion (<i>grow, increase, generate, construction</i>) and general functionality (<i>handling, strengthen, succeed, outputs</i>). Also included is programmatic language: <i>agenda, enacted, working, leadership</i> .		Positive on Quiet Politics. Could indicate a market-oriented mindset and frame, inhibiting other discursive orders.
6	Cooperation	DICTION Dictionary		Terms designating behavioral interactions among people that often result in a group product. Included are designations of formal work relations (<i>unions, schoolmates, caucus</i>) and informal associations (<i>chum, partner, cronies</i>) to more intimate interactions (<i>sisterhood, friendship, comrade</i>). Also included are neutral interactions (<i>consolidate, mediate, alignment</i>), job-related tasks (<i>network, detente, exchange</i>), personal involvement (<i>teamwork, sharing, contribute</i>), and self-denial (<i>public-spirited, caretaking, self-sacrifice</i>).		Positive on "Participatory Evangelism". Could indicate an emphasis on participation, collaboration, and networking.
7	Ambivalence	DICTION Dictionary		Words expressing hesitation or uncertainty, imply a speaker's inability or unwillingness to commit to the verbalization being made. Included are hedges (<i>allegedly, perhaps, might</i>), statements of inexactness (<i>almost, approximate, vague, somewhere</i>) and confusion (<i>baffled, puzzling, hesitate</i>). Also included are words of restrained possibility (<i>could, would, he'd</i>) and mystery (<i>dilemma, guess, suppose, seems</i>).		Negative on all three dimensions. High Ambivalence scores may indicate the speaker's difficulty in fully adhering to the status quo. It could refer to speakers raising doubt and challenging prevailing opinions.
8	Blame	DICTION Dictionary		Terms designating social inappropriateness (<i>mean, naive, sloppy, stupid</i>) as well as downright evil (<i>fascist, blood-thirsty, repugnant, malicious</i>) comprise this dictionary. In addition, adjectives describing unfortunate circumstances (<i>bankrupt, rash, morbid, embarrassing</i>) or unplanned vicissitudes (<i>wear, nervous, painful, detrimental</i>) are included. The dictionary also contains outright denigrations: <i>cruel, illegitimate, offensive, miserly</i> .		Ambiguous. A high score on Blame relates negatively to Participatory Evangelism. It may signal that the speaker does not consider participation an absolute value, and she/he is willing to conflict with other stakeholders to denounce their misconduct. At the same time, high scores on Blame relate positively to Quiet Politics to the extent in which they refer to dominant groups blaming dissenting opinions for being inaccurate and inappropriate.

9	Rapport	DICTION Dictionary	This dictionary describes attitudinal similarities among groups of people. Included are terms of affinity (<i>congenial, camaraderie, companion</i>), assent (<i>approve, vouched, warrants</i>), deference (<i>tolerant, willing, permission</i>), and identity (<i>equivalent, resemble, consensus</i>).	Positive on "Participatory Evangelism". Could indicate orientation toward a consensual approach.
10	Insistence	Calculated	This is a measure of code restriction and semantic contentedness. The assumption is that the repetition of key terms indicates a preference for a limited, ordered world. In calculating Insistence, all words occurring three or more times that function as nouns or noun-derived adjectives are identified (either cybernetically or with your assistance). Then, the following calculation is performed: [Number of Eligible Words x Sum of their Occurrences] ÷ 10. For small input files, high-frequency terms used two or more times are used in the calculation.	Negative on Quiet Politics. Most Internet governance issues enter debate and deliberation as high salience issues. However, their complexity requires tenacity to keep the issue in the spotlight for a sustained period. Hence, the natural evolution of an issue is toward low salience: the more attention an issue holds, the more difficult for Quiet Politics to ensue. Despite the participation and inclusiveness rhetoric of multistakeholderism, actual deliberation is limited to a narrow set of topics and points of view.
11	Optimism	Master	Language endorsing some person, group, concept or event or highlighting their positive entailments.	Positive on Glorification of Status Quo. Could indicate a positive evaluation of the current state of affairs of GNSO governance.
12	Certainty	Master	Language indicating resoluteness, inflexibility, completeness and a tendency to speak ex-cathedra	Positive on Quiet Politics. Could indicate that the debate is based on uncontested assumptions and only a narrow range of discourses and arguments are entirely legitimate.
13	Commonality	Master	Language that highlights the agreed-upon values of a group and rejects idiosyncratic modes of engagement.	Positive on Participatory Evangelism. Could indicate common belonging and conformism.

applying the Expectation-Maximization Iterating Algorithm, which implicitly finds the (local) greatest likelihood parameters (Dempster, Laird, and Rubin 1977). This allowed us to estimate HEIN as a latent variable by reducing its measurement error (Kline 2015; Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2004; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2006; Schumacker and Lomax 2015). Namely, we calculated HEIN with Equation (1), fitting it as a covariate of the variables with the highest significant pairwise correlations in the dataset employed in subsection entitled "DICTION 7.1". Analogously, to evaluate robustness, a pairwise correlation selection approach (Carlomagno and Espasa 2021; Ombao, von Sachs, and Guo 2005; Xu et al. 2015) was applied. In Equation (2) below, HEIN was specified along with diverse Dictionary (D), Calculated (C), and Master (M) variables.

Then, the measurement model of HEIN was defined as

$$y = \eta \Lambda_y + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

where y : Observed variables that could serve as proxies of HEIN ; Λ_y : Latent variable representing HEIN ; ε : Measurement error.

Panel data, ARMA, and multilevel models

The chosen models resulted from screening the data following traditional longitudinal methods tests. Accordingly, pooled data was the most adequate model, especially when declaring the data to be a panel in which the order of observations is relevant. Namely, after testing for the fixed effects model, we found that the F test of all groups and subgroups errors were not significantly correlated (Wooldridge 2010). This is equivalent to treating ICANN as a single organization throughout the ten years, but with yearly observations disaggregated at group and subgroup levels. In addition, having HEIN lagged as a covariate makes these models dynamic by definition.

In this sense, the Autoregressive Moving Average Model, ARMA(p, q), refers to the Box-Jenkins model with p autoregressive terms and q moving-average terms (Box and Jenkins 1970; Box et al. 2015):

$$X_t = c + \varepsilon_t + \sum_{i=1}^p \varphi_i X_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^q \theta_i \varepsilon_{t-i}. \quad (2)$$

where

c : Constant term; X_t : HEIN in year t ;

φ_i : Parameters; X_{t-1} : HEIN in year $t-1$;

$\theta_1 \dots \theta_i$: Covariates; ε_i : Error term

The model in Equation (2) describes how previous years could have affected the current HEIN, not only inertially but also by means of other current and past covariate effects; in essence, model (2) separates the drivers of HEIN via the conventional *Caeteris Paribus* condition. Therefore, we have to assume that, if everything else remains unchanged, lagged effects are isolated from current effects. It is also important to underline that causality cannot be tested on (2) or (3.1) and (3.2) below due to the nature of the Box-Jenkins methodology. In any case, the purpose of these models is to discern conceptual relationships, not to find causality.

In a sample of seventy-six observations, covariates were (all continuous variables): Aggression (D), Ambivalence (D), Blame (D), Centrality (D), Certainty (M), Commonality (M), Cooperation (D), Insistence (C), Leveling Terms (D), Optimism (M), Rapport (D) and Satisfaction (D). Only subgroup is a discreet (dummy) variable. Model (2) is represented in Table 5 under the heading ARMA.

The multilevel ARMA in Table 5 is based on Drukker (2014) and Snijders and Bosker (2011):

$$E[Y_{ij} | X] = F \left(\begin{array}{l} \alpha_{00} + \beta_{0j} + \alpha_{10}x_{1ij} + \dots + \alpha_{p0}x_{pij} \\ + \beta_{10}z_{1ij} + \dots + \beta_{p0}z_{pij} + \gamma_{01}v_{1j} \\ + \eta_{ij} + \mu_{1j} + \xi_{ij} \end{array} \right) \quad (3.1)$$

$$E[z_{ij} | W] = G(\delta_{00} + \delta_{10}w_{1ij} + \dots + \delta_{p0}w_{pij} + \lambda_{ij}\eta_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}) \quad (3.2)$$

where $E[\]$: Expected value; $F(\)$ and $G(\)$: Non-linear functions; Y_{ij} : Response variable at sub-group level; $x_{1ij} + \dots + x_{pij}$: Exogenous covariates (X); v_{1j} : Group-level variable; η_{ij} : Latent variable; ξ_{ij} and ϵ_{ij} : Subgroup-level error terms; μ_{1j} : Group-level error term; $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta, \lambda$: Coefficients; $\eta_{ij} \sim N(0,1)$; $\xi_{ij}, \epsilon_{ij}, \eta_{ij}, \mu_{1j}$ are all mutually independent

Analysis

Hegemonic discourses in GNSO council meetings

Table 2 reports the standardized mean (2011–2020) of dictionaries' scores for each stakeholder group. The GNSO profile follows our expectations about a hegemonic discursive order at work. High values of Certainty, Optimism, Satisfaction, Rapport, and Commonality may indicate that discussions within GNSO are reflective of Participatory Evangelism, Quiet Politics and Glorification of Status Quo rhetorical devices. In principle, these devices build a sense of belonging and conformity around a positive evaluation of the status quo and the satisfaction of being part of the current governance system. Instead, a low score in Aggression, Blame, and Ambivalence is consistent with a view that conformity is created not by attacking dissenting views but rather by preventing their occurrence, inhibiting diverging, radical or conflictual arguments.

It is worth noting that GNSO has the highest score on Insistence among all stakeholder groups. This means that when all the constituencies meet and debate within GNSO, the number of discussed topics and arguments tends to be narrower instead of increasing as expected in a heterogeneous group of actors, each bearing different interests, views, and agendas. It suggests that during GNSO council meetings, dominant groups put in place Quiet Politics strategies to focus the debate on their favored topics, avoiding troubling issues. Analyzing the other groups' profiles, we can observe that RySG has the most similar profile compared to GNSO, suggesting that it might have a leading role in shaping the debate within GNSO. Even the profile of ISPCP (ISP and Connectivity Providers, another component of the historic bloc) is in line with the Glorification of the Status Quo. RrSG and BC (clients of registries and Internet service providers) seem relatively less satisfied and more likely to voice their claims and disagreement. The same is

Table 2. Standardized means (2011–2020) of stakeholder groups' scores on dictionaries/variables.

	GNSO	RySG	Rrsg	ISPCP	BC	IPC	CSG	NCSG	NCUC	NPOC
Insistence	1.88	-0.41	0.70	0.44	-0.95	-0.13	-1.28	0.53	0.47	-1.25
Rapport	1.71	-0.22	-1.27	-1.23	-0.13	0.20	0.33	1.50	-0.21	-0.66
Commonality	1.07	1.29	-1.87	-0.15	-0.19	-1.35	-0.19	0.38	0.77	0.24
Certainty	0.91	1.51	0.77	-0.30	-0.76	0.22	-1.58	0.03	0.53	-1.33
Optimism	0.73	1.46	-1.00	1.76	-0.45	-0.29	-0.73	-0.94	-0.71	0.16
Satisfaction	0.46	1.32	-0.51	2.09	-0.71	-0.64	-0.75	-0.50	-0.81	0.05
Centrality	-0.08	1.67	-0.26	-0.47	-1.26	0.46	0.62	-1.03	1.31	-0.96
Leveling Terms	-0.51	2.57	-0.34	-0.61	-0.94	-0.47	0.21	0.56	-0.40	-0.08
Aggression	-0.64	0.74	2.14	-0.76	0.43	0.53	-0.60	-1.39	-0.13	-0.32
Blame	-0.78	-0.98	1.76	-0.77	-0.31	0.80	-0.87	1.29	0.47	-0.60
Ambivalence	-1.07	-1.67	-0.65	0.49	1.65	0.76	0.50	0.75	-0.41	-0.35
Cooperation	-1.35	1.05	0.10	0.56	0.07	-1.85	-0.71	0.25	0.88	0.99

true of IPC, which represents intellectual propriety holders' interests and traditionally claims that employing the DSN to enforce copyright protection would encounter resistance. Civil Society groups (NCSG, NCUC, NPOC) appear as victims of the Participatory Evangelism rhetoric (Rapport, Commonality, Cooperation, Leveling Terms), which inhibit their engagement in an open conflict.

The principal component analysis results confirm that discussions within GNSO and its constituencies and meetings are structured around the three dimensions we hypothesized to be constituting ICANN's hegemonic discursive order. As Table 3⁴ shows, the first component extracted, explaining nearly 25% of the variance, could correspond to the Glorification of Status Quo dimension, represented by high Optimism, Satisfaction, and Leveling Terms scores. The second component (explaining the 19% of variance) could be conceived as the Participatory Evangelism dimension due to its high values of Cooperation, Rapport, and Commonality. Finally, considering that the variables contributing most to defining the third component (17.5% of variance) are Insistence and Certainty, this factor could be interpreted as the Quiet Politics dimensions. It is worth noting that Ambivalence and Blame (which denote the expression of doubts, allegations, and disagreements) define the negative pole of the three dimensions. Blame, as expected, has an ambiguous function. It is negatively related to Participatory Evangelism insomuch blaming activities challenge cohesion and cooperation among stakeholders but is positively related to Quiet Politics since labeling and argument as inappropriate is a way to control the deliberation process.

Table 4 reports the GNSO and other stakeholder groups' means component scores for 2011–2020 on the three extracted dimensions. Again, the data confirm the similarity between GNSO and RySG profiles – the only two groups with positive values on all three dimensions, and with ISPCP, which has a positive score on two of them. These findings indicate that the two

Table 3. Component matrix.

	Glorification of Status Quo	Participatory Evangelism	Quiet Politics
Leveling Terms	.706	-.108	.066
Satisfaction	.857	.273	-.256
Cooperation	-.016	.404	.413
Ambivalence	-.438	-.016	-.554
Blame	-.108	-.413	.306
Rapport	-.262	.667	.321
Insistence	.061	-.285	.553
Optimism	.848	.295	-.329
Certainty	.492	-.359	.681
Commonality	-.097	.856	.366

Table 4. Mean component scores.

	Glorification of Status Quo	Participatory Evangelism	Quiet Politics
GNSO	.18292	.27725	.41850
RySG	.71675	.43413	.32772
ISPCP	.39219	.19565	-.35404
NPOC	-.03100	.24902	-.31345
RrSG	-.08686	-.77838	.26744
IPC	-.15594	-.48103	-.23161
2NCUC	-.15915	.02167	.38126
NCSG	-.22970	-.10621	.29674
CSG	-.29156	.14111	-.49342
BC	-.35634	.02360	-.35364

stakeholder groups best representing the interweaving of technical and economic interest in ICANN governance play a crucial role in shaping the debate according to their preferences within GNSO council meetings.

The results also suggest that the other stakeholder groups within their own meeting and internal discussions are relatively less satisfied and cooperative than in GNSO council meetings. Then, we can suppose that Glorification of Status Quo, Participatory Evangelism, and Quiet Politics are discursive tactics, or rhetorical devices, strategically activated by dominant groups within GNSO council meetings to manipulate and control other stakeholders' groups and steer the deliberation.

Hegemony as latent power over time

According to the F-test in Table 5, the ARMA model is significant at the 1% level, which indicates that, assuming stationarity and applying a robust variance-covariance matrix, past year HEIN plays a role in current hegemonic practices. On the other hand, the Wald test result indicates that the multilevel ARMA shows that the subgroup as a class does not bear any weight on group performance; therefore, we report one-level results at most at the 10% significance level.

As Table 5 shows, our general results show that HEIN has negative feedback over time for the multilevel ARMA only. The previous year's HEIN translated into a decrease of 0.56% in the current year's HEIN. Furthermore, Commonality for the GNSO has the greatest positive effect on HEIN in the ARMA model, such that, for every point increase, HEIN increases by 0.5%. For the multilevel ARMA, the increase is 0.03%, supporting the expected influence on HEIN, which can reduce the perception of differences among stakeholders and encourage uniformity of purpose and perhaps thought. Furthermore, this effect was even more salient for Commonality in general for the multilevel ARMA model, which manifested an even larger positive impact on HEIN at 0.69%.

Table 5. Dynamic HEIN growth models.

HEIN _t	ARMA	Multilevel ARMA
HEIN _{t-1}	-0.0062 (0.0045)	-0.0056* (0.0031)
Aggression _t	-0.0007 (0.0021)	-0.0004 (0.0022)
Ambivalence _t	0.0010 (0.0010)	0.0009 (0.0011)
Blame _t	-0.0003 (0.0049)	0.0012 (0.0035)
Centrality _t	-0.0017 (0.0019)	-0.0018 (0.0016)
Certainty _t	-0.0013 (0.0028)	-0.0012 (0.0024)
Certainty _{t-1}	-0.0010 (0.0009)	-0.0008 (0.0009)
Commgnso _t	0.005* (0.0003)	0.0003* (0.0001)
Commonality _t	0.0065 (0.0044)	0.0069* (0.0025)
Cooperation _t	-0.0062 (0.0045)	-0.0024 (0.0022)
Insistence _t	-0.0004** (0.0002)	-0.0003* (0.0001)
Leveling Terms _t	0.0010* (0.0006)	0.0009* (0.0004)
Optimism _t	-0.0023 (0.0045)	-0.0017 (0.0026)
Rapport _t	-0.0052 (0.0046)	-0.0053 (0.0035)
Satisfaction _t	0.0025* (0.14)	0.0024* (0.0009)
Subgroup _t	0.0133 (0.0093)	
INTERCEPT	2.4303*** (0.2795)	2.3704 0.1548
Prob > F	0.00	
AIC	-332.22	-345.97
BIC	-290.30	-323.77
var(L1[Group])		6.18E-33
var(L2[Group > Subgroup])		2.38E-35
Wald test (χ ²)		0.9119

Note: *10%; **5%; ***1.00%.

We also found that Leveling Terms positively impacts HEIN in the ARMA with 0.10% increase in HEIN for every point increase, and in the multilevel ARMA, the increase is 0.09%. However, this means that words that ignore individual differences among actors aim to build a sense of completeness and assurance. Instead, the terms reflect a sense of totality or inclusiveness, which would blur or obscure differences and promote some sense of unity or belonging.

Moreover, HEIN increased by 0.25% in the ARMA model and 0.24% in the multilevel ARMA for every increase in Satisfaction, indicative of the use of very positive language and a sense of nurturing. Underpinning this covariate is the feeling of accomplishment and consensus on the status-quo.

Lastly, Insistence in the DICTION output was theorized as having a negative effect on Quiet Politics. The more complex a topic, the less time it receives full engagement or attention, thus lessening salience and facilitating the “pushing through” on agenda items

without sufficient critical debate. In other words, higher levels of Insistence should produce lower levels of HEIN. We confirmed this: for every point increase in Insistence, HEIN decreased by 0.04% in the ARMA and 0.03% in the multilevel ARMA.

The Wald test results reported in Table 5 show that the subgroup variables did not play any particular role in producing hegemony. Further, the goodness of fit as interpreted by Akaike's Information Criteria (AIC) and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) statistics indicate that the multilevel ARMA is the more informative of the two models. Therefore, as a growth model, the multilevel (a nested configuration of the groups) demonstrates that subgroups do not affect the generation of hegemony, rendering this a group-level phenomenon. This is indicated by the AIC and BIC yielding values that are more negative in the multilevel ARMA than in the ARMA model. Furthermore, according to the ARMA multilevel, HEIN seems to decrease over time.

Discussion

We hypothesized that hegemonic power could be exerted in multistakeholder governance in one of three ways, through discourses that promoted Participatory Evangelism, Quiet Politics, and Glorification of the Status Quo. Our second stage analysis used autoregressive moving average models with subgroup and multilevel ARMA to identify the statistical significance of key variables that emerged from the DICTION analysis. We aimed to develop tools that enable the measurement of factors relating to the use of hegemonic power in Internet governance discussions and planning. First, we show that our proposed measures are consistent with the conceptual frameworks of hegemonic power in the literature by comparing the DICTION analysis with corresponding definitions of the components in the literature. Next, we apply an exploratory approach to understand how the measures vary across time and between subgroups. Overall, we found sound support for our hypotheses and validity of our measurement.

Our findings show that, indeed, the most prominent stakeholder groups within ICANN do use language as an vehicle of influence. In fact, four DICTION variables, Commonality, Leveling Terms, Satisfaction, and Commonality at the GNSO level, are positively associated with the production of hegemony by the prominent stakeholders. Furthermore, one variable, Insistence, was negatively associated with the production of HEIN. With regard to three modes of hegemonic discourses – Participatory Evangelism,

Quiet Politics, and Glorification of the Status Quo, Commonality and Leveling Terms were positively linked with Participatory Evangelism. Further, Leveling Terms and Satisfaction were positively linked with Glorification of the Status Quo, while Insistence was negatively linked with Quiet Politics.

For Participatory Evangelism, the presence of deliberative and “talk-centric” side of multistakeholderism without establishing effective accountability mechanisms was found statistically plausible in language identified as Commonality and Leveling Terms. Commonality refers to language that emphasizes agreed-upon values and marginalizes or discourages divergence. The fact that this was positively associated and significant both at the subgroup level and at the GNSO level suggests an alignment of objectives across the stakeholders, supporting the notion that all the stakeholders see value in taking part in creation of participation and transparency. Leveling Terms also capacitate the hegemonic power in creating the sense of completeness, assurance, and permanence, reified through performative discourses. The Glorification of the Status Quo is supported through Leveling Terms with resolute adjectives, e.g., language that suggests “open-and-shut” scenarios that work to oversimplify processes in favor of “not rocking the boat”. This pathway to hegemony creates the impression of consensus and thereby comfort with maintaining the status quo. Satisfaction also promotes the Glorification of the Status Quo in that it affirms consensus and creates positive affective states. This suggests that the outcomes of governance debates are applauded and praised as a result of a general state of being rather than the effectiveness of the outcome. It also points to the likelihood of resistance to real policy changes.

The last theorized pathway to hegemony was Quiet Politics, and Insistence was the only associated variable for HEIN. It showed a negative relationship at both the ARMA and multigroup ARMA levels. Given this variable reflects a direct, somewhat confrontational use of language, the salience of DNS issues would remain high when Insistence is present, thus preventing effective use of Quiet Politics – a pathway to hegemonic power.

Conclusion

In our exploratory study we develop a measure of hegemonic power, which by definition is not entirely legible. Our findings show that language in ICANN’s multistakeholderism is used as a rhetoric device to solidify and legitimize existing power asymmetries.

Of course, a complete account of hegemony in ICANN would require a deeper consideration of the institutional setting and mechanisms at work and how they relate to technical design processes. However, our investigation sheds light on the key role played by language and discourse, factors often neglected in Internet Governance studies. As set out in the preceding discussions, our analysis pointed to how language contributes to the construction of hegemonic power warranting organizational control to the stakeholders who have managed DNS from the outset. The language embedded in foundational documents, day-to-day operations, and discursive practices reproduces the dominant groups’ assumptions, schemas, and ideas. This approach gives rise to an institutionalized discursive order that serves the interests of the techno-economic *élite* controlling the domain name market.

Again, a complete account of the role of the language in DNS management would require an in-depth and qualitative investigation of how technical discourses shape the range of possible alternatives and power positions legitimized via technical arguments (Braman 2010, 2011). Nonetheless, identification of rhetorical devices capable of feeding hegemonic power increases our understanding the realpolitik of multistakeholderism. Without mechanisms for providing participants with actual decision-making power and the empowerment of weaker stakeholders, multistakeholder governance forums such as ICANN cannot not satisfy their promise to “democratize” transnational governance. Even if mechanisms, such as Participatory Evangelism, Quiet Politics and Glorification of the Status Quo, could provide some degree of stability and conformity, in the long run, they undermine their legitimization inasmuch they do not allow effective participation of all actors involved in decision- and rule- making. As a result, ICANN cannot solve the tensions it is called to address, and its output is constantly contested, as the recent cases of the .org, .web, and new TLD cases show (Palladino and Santaniello 2021). Therefore, we should question to what extent current ICANN’s multistakeholder practices can address the growing challenge posed by Internet’s development (Epstein and Nonnecke 2016). As Hofmann (2016, 44) pointed out, “a measured ‘desecration’ of the multistakeholder approach in Internet governance which could facilitate a debate about achievements, failures and its reasons, would be a positive effect”. A frank debate on the potentials and pitfalls of multistakeholder governance could help identify innovative solutions to shift from fictional to effective participatory Internet governance practices.

Notes

1. <https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/chart-2012-02-11-en> (accessed October 1, 2021).
2. DICTION 7.1 produces scores related to three types of variables: dictionary, master, and calculated variables. While the main dictionary contains 31 word lists, it also allows the user to make custom dictionaries. The five master variables (Certainty, Optimism, Activity, Realism, and Commonality) are derived from concatenating the 31 dictionary scores. The four calculated variables (Insistence, Embellishment, Variety, and Complexity) are calculated, as opposed to resulting from dictionary matches.
3. Dictionaries/variables descriptions are taken from the DICTION 7.0 manual available at <https://www.dictionsoftware.com/download.php?file=wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DICTION-7-Manual-2-26-14.pdf>. (accessed March 11, 2023)
4. PCA was performed on a matrix with stakeholders' annual meetings (GNSO 2001, 2002; RySG 2001, 2002, etc.) and as variables in DICTION's dictionaries. Cells reported the row scores calculated by DICTION. PCA has been repeated several times, excluding at each passage variables giving none or scarce contribution to the extracted factors (component loadings and components score coefficients) until reaching an optimal solution.

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ORCID

Aaron van Klyton  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4663-9849>
 Mary-Paz Arrieta-Paredes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5632-394X>
 Nicola Palladino  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5472-5814>

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