

How do international organizations change in response to external shocks? The literature on international organizations (IOs) has established that external shocks can produce lasting change at IOs by inducing shifts in the interests of powerful member states or the ideas that underpin an IO's core functions. But how do international organizations change during times of uncertainty when interests and ideas have not clearly changed? I argue that international organizations may exhibit profound shifts in rhetoric or policy in response to external shocks absent consensus among technical staff or pressure from powerful member states. These hard-to-explain changes occur because IOs seek to safeguard their legitimacy in the wake of political or policy shocks. I explore this argument by examining shifts in the International Monetary Fund's rhetoric and policy regarding industrial policy.