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INTERNATIONAL POLITICS *and* INSTITUTIONS IN TIME



EDITED BY | ORFEO FIORETOS

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Orfeo Fioretos

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Heartfelt thanks to Martha Finnemore, Judy Goldstein, and Etel Solingen for the impromptu conversation that encouraged me to look for ways to foster a larger dialogue within IR beyond previous publications. The present volume brings together original chapters with contributions that featured in their first or slightly modified form in the *Handbook*. I thank Oxford University Press for agreeing to let the latter reappear here. I am especially indebted to the nine authors who contributed original chapters to this volume and who in the process significantly expanded the purview of discussions about historical institutionalism in IR far beyond their modest beginnings a decade ago.

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This volume takes stock of existing contributions that historical institutionalism makes to IR and aims to stimulate more conversations in the future. There is no pretense, however, that the volume has exhausted the many potential contributions of historical institutionalism in IR. On the premise that an open-ended prompt would generate the most demanding scrutiny and set the stage for further explorations, authors were invited to choose their preferred themes when considering the tradition's current and future contributions to IR. The volume includes scholars who explicitly identify with historical institutionalism, others who do so more implicitly, and yet others who work mostly within other traditions and find value in keeping them in conversation with one another. And in that spirit, and because it would not exist without it, this volume is dedicated to the institution of collegiality.

Orfeo Fioretos
Philadelphia
June 2016

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Part I

Introduction

1

Institutions and Time in International Relations

Orfeo Fioretos

International institutions have become ubiquitous features of modern politics. The contemporary era is governed by an ever increasing multitude of formal and informal international institutions that shape the behavior of states in virtually all policy areas. From large formal organizations like the United Nations, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and an expanding set of regional organizations, to some 250 other intergovernmental organizations, thousands of treaties between states, as well as untold numbers of informal practices and shared understandings, the contemporary international system is saturated by institutions. This system has developed in fits and starts and through gradual changes to become increasingly dense and complex with time. As it has evolved, the system has elicited much interest from the International Relations discipline (IR), which has produced thriving research programs that explore the causes and effects of international institutions across a variety of areas, including the security, economic, social, legal, and environmental domains.

Contemporary research programs in IR took form in the context of an “institutional turn” in the social sciences in the 1980s when scholars across disciplines turned their attention to exploring the origins, evolution, and effects of institutions across a wide array of contexts (e.g. March and Olsen 1983; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Hall and Taylor 1996). For IR, the institutional turn served to reorient much inquiry. From having been a discipline with a primary focus on international distributions of power and operating with relatively static understandings of state interests, IR came to emphasize institutions in mediating power relations, in shaping state behavior and preferences, and in defining the nature of international political authority.

Three decades later, IR remains heavily shaped by the institutional turn, and scholarship maintains a strong focus on understanding the origins and consequences of the institutions that structure international affairs.

The growth of institutionalist research notwithstanding, scholarly engagement with diverse analytical traditions has lacked balance in IR. When political scientists renewed their interest in the study of institutions, IR scholars were part of debates that led to the emergence of a variety of new traditions of institutional analysis. Like other subfields of political science, IR initially devoted great resources to refining the contributions of a rationalist variety of institutionalism. However, unlike other subfields where a historical variety of institutionalism emerged as the main counterpoint to the rationalist variety, the counterpoint in IR was anchored in sociological traditions of analysis. In relatively short order, rationalist and sociological approaches, often dueling each other, captured the analytical epicenter of IR (e.g. Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998). By contrast to other subfields, the third historical variety of the new institutionalism was almost entirely absent in IR for the better part of three decades.

This volume probes the value of giving greater attention to historical institutionalism (HI) and to establishing more balance in the intellectual division of labor that has characterized institutional analysis in IR. Recognizing that analytical sparring between traditions is important for disciplinary growth, yet wary of the consequences of grand debates that privilege two competing perspectives, the volume illustrates how historical institutionalism both in collaboration with and as a relatively discrete tradition and counterpoint to other traditions advances IR's disciplinary goals. These goals include revealing novel facts about the workings of international politics, accounting for sets of empirical anomalies not explained by other traditions, and fostering awareness of a series of temporal phenomena that shape international politics in a densely institutionalized world. From this perspective, failing to sustain balanced inquiry among institutionalisms incurs opportunity costs to IR, including forgoing more complete and nuanced explanations of the factors that contribute to the origins, stability, and change of international institutions.

There are analytical and empirical aspects to the argument that there are costs from imbalanced inquiry. Analytically, the present volume makes the case that developing and integrating ideas that were contained in early institutionalist studies in IR (before the field became characterized by two dueling institutionalist perspectives) with recent advances by historical institutionalists in other subfields provides opportunities for identifying endogenous mechanisms and processes that impact the causes and consequences of international institutions. Empirically, the volume makes the case that historical institutionalism fosters significant insights into why particular institutions exist and

persist over time, why patterns of institutional change vary, and why the international system has become more complex over time.

The chapters that follow are authored by a range of voices—by scholars who place themselves squarely within the historical institutionalism tradition, to contributors with strong affinities who avoid the label, to researchers who have worked in the rationalist and sociological institutional veins and see opportunities for collaboration among traditions. To probe the contributions of HI, authors consider the value of giving greater weight to the analytical and empirical components the tradition brings to IR. While one part of the volume maintains a focus on analytical issues involved in the study of states and institutions across time, a second part features chapters with eyes on empirical developments in international cooperation. Across the two sections, authors detail what historical institutional inquiry contributes to enduring questions in IR such as the sources of state sovereignty, foreign policy, international order, and diverse patterns of cooperation. The volume contains chapters in which authors revisit the conventional wisdom on the origins of major international institutions, such as those defining the nuclear non-proliferation regime, the Bretton Woods system, the international trade regime, and human rights revolutions. Chapters further refine explanations and understandings of contemporary international political developments in the security, economic, legal, health, environmental, and regulatory domains.

In a concluding chapter, Robert O. Keohane reflects on the origins and promise of historical institutionalism in IR. Under a broad institutionalism umbrella, Keohane was an early and forceful voice in IR who urged scholars to look beyond distributions of material capabilities in analyzing the origins and effects of international rules and conventions for the behavior of states and the evolution of international political authority. Though work in IR that followed Keohane tended toward the rational choice variety of the new institutionalism or sought out the sociological institutional tradition as a counterpoint, a great deal of his work pre-dating the coinage of the term “historical institutionalism” fits well under that label as it is today generally understood. Keohane concludes that historical institutionalism holds particular value for explaining patterns of institutional persistence and encourages scholars to explore bridges between traditions and to refine historical institutionalism through further analytical and empirical engagement.

This introduction proceeds in four sections. The next section offers a brief intellectual history of the institutional turn in IR, followed by one devoted to the analytical foundations of historical institutionalism. The third section situates the contributions of the following chapters in the context of empirical research into state sovereignty, international order, foreign policy, global governance, and developments across a wide range of international political

institutions. A conclusion considers the metrics that are used for assessing historical institutionalism's contributions to IR and identifies areas for future consideration.

New Institutionalisms in International Relations

The institutional turn that began to sweep through the social sciences in the 1980s redirected inquiry in profound ways. The new institutionalists were scholars who privileged rules and conventions in explaining social, economic, and political outcomes.¹ They distinguished themselves in particular from materialist theories in that they attributed importance to rules and conventions as causal factors that shaped the preferences of political actors, their room for action, distributions of power, and more. Much attention was directed at institutions central to the state, their structure and evolution as well as to how societies evolve and normative priorities become widely adopted. A great deal unified this inquiry, including the importance scholars placed on accounting for how problems of social exchange are solved and states of nature (anarchy) avoided. They emphasized that institutions are human creations (not the result of impersonal structural forces) and that they generally are the product of processes in which people organized into groups compete and cooperate to define the terms of future constraints. In theorizing the effects of institutions in shaping social, economic, and political processes, institutionalists favored middle-range theory.² While they are often distinguished from scholars stressing materialist or ideational factors in explaining the nature and evolution of political authority (who and what defines the structure and content of institutions, etc.) the role played by such factors is in actuality rarely denied by institutionalists. The potential causal role of institutions is indeed at the center of institutionalist inquiry, as the term suggests, but very frequently the ambition of new institutionalists is to identify what role institutions in *interaction* with material and ideational factors play in shaping processes and outcomes at the center of political science inquiry. The "spirit" of the new institutionalism, write James March and Johan Olsen in a retrospective, "is to supplement rather than reject alternatives" (2006, 16).

Despite a great deal of unity among new institutionalists, differences quickly became apparent in the analytical toolboxes that scholars embraced (Hall and Taylor 1996; Immergut 1998). Many worked within a rational choice institutional tradition that privileged the analysis of how diverse problem structures associated with timeless coordination and collaboration problems impacted the rules and conventions that societies employ. Scholars working in the sociological institutional tradition focused much attention on

deepening understandings of how patterns of socialization, organizational routines, and shared understandings impact patterns of cooperation and conflict. Meanwhile, historical institutionalists refined an analytical toolbox that helped them gain insights into how temporal mechanisms and processes, such as path dependence and feedback effects, impact political outcomes over time.³

The embrace of institutional analysis by IR scholars had parallels to other subfields. Like other subfields where early formulations evolved in contrast to materialist theories, such was also the case in IR. Before the 1980s, IR placed strong explanatory weight on material factors, especially on distributions of power in accounts of when and how states maintained stability in the international system. The realist tradition held a dominant position in the field and argued that international institutions were reflections of the preferences of the most powerful states and had little if any independent effect on state behavior (e.g. Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 1994). By the mid-1980s, a significant number of scholars critical of realism had formulated propositions about the workings of international politics that positioned institutions in an analytically central place.⁴ While they accepted that powerful states had outsize influence in shaping the international landscape, they rejected the idea that institutions were mere handmaidens of the powerful and thus epiphenomenal to the conduct of states. They wondered why states would create different designs, hold diverse preferences over their structure, and invest great resources in establishing and maintaining institutions if the latter lacked importance. And they wondered why institutions prevailed when distributions of power and normative preoccupations changed, as well as why institutions produced so many unintended consequences and discord if political action was driven by carefully calibrated rational calculations or the institutions reflected widely accepted practices and norms (e.g. Keohane 1984; Ruggie 1993). In the words of Keohane and Martin (1995, 76), institutional theory in IR was a response to the “disjuncture between established realist theory and the stubborn, persistent fact of extensive, increasing, and highly institutionalized cooperation.”

Informed by an earlier generation of IR scholarship that examined international history, law, and organization (e.g. Haas 1964; Hoffmann 1960), institutionalists broadened inquiry, especially into considering the effects of institutions for state behavior over time. Studies of foreign policy explored the role of institutions in shaping spatial and temporal differences in government priorities and choices (e.g. Katzenstein 1978; Ikenberry 1988). Scholars interested in international cooperation came to work with a larger empirical scope than had typically been the case in IR, devoting great attention to the growing variety of intergovernmental and transgovernmental institutions that emerged with deepened levels of international interdependence

(e.g. Keohane and Nye 1977; Hopkins and Puchala 1978; Young 1980). Rather than seeing institutions as vessels that simply reflect distributions of power or as vehicles that aggregate the preferences of many states, institutionalists suggested that rules and conventions could transform international politics to become much less full of discord than the world portrayed by realists.⁵ From this perspective international stability is possible not because power is highly concentrated or evenly shared, but because institutions help states overcome a variety of contracting problems that reduce uncertainties surrounding the scarcity of security and enhance the prospect that benefits of mutual adjustment and interdependence are secured.⁶

IR institutionalists departed from realism in the assumptions they made about states' interests and the claims they made with respect to the origin and consequences of institutions. In a series of works, Robert O. Keohane articulated an original and powerful defense of institutionalism in IR. Drawing on liberal strands of thinking, the emphasis was moved from conceiving of states in realist terms as entities motivated chiefly by incentives to exercise or accumulate power, to conceiving of states as having self-interests in cooperating with each other.⁷ An interest in cooperation meant in turn that states had motives to establish efficient means to secure promised gains and limit the prospective losses of mutual reliance and exchange. Those means were "international institutions," which were understood to be primarily formal rules that states adopted to coordinate their affairs.⁸

Working under the designation of "neoliberal institutionalism," Keohane and colleagues spurred a rapid ascent of institutional research in IR. Though he himself expressed some unease with a strictly rationalist approach, much of the work following Keohane explicitly worked to refine that approach.⁹ Cooperative arrangements of many types, mostly formal, took center-stage as empirical regularities meriting explanation. Scholars began pointing to institutions as analytical categories that explained why states frequently behaved in ways that were anomalous from a realist perspective. Now classic collections such as *International Regimes* (Krasner 1983) and *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (Oye 1986) extended and refined arguments about the role of international institutions. Two decades after its beginnings, a research program had emerged that met standards of intellectual coherence and that contributed to a "progressive" problem shift in IR, meaning that it successfully supplied novel understandings of international politics and explained sets of empirical anomalies unaccounted for by other traditions (Keohane and Martin 2003).

In developing their propositions about the role of institutions in international affairs, IR institutionalists drew extensively on three strands of research in economics. One strand was the literature on collective action (e.g. Olsen 1965), which informed studies of the conditions under which

states would be more likely to cooperate (e.g. Snidal 1979; Oye 1986). It propelled interest in game theory within IR and focused on identifying the conditions under which sovereign states could surmount suboptimal outcomes, especially when these were the product of rational self-interest. A second strand on which IR institutionalists drew was the “new economics of organization” literature, which focused attention on the role of transaction costs in the calculations and investments individuals make when operating under different constraints (e.g. Williamson 1975). This strand moved center-stage in institutionalist IR as researchers sought to resolve the puzzle of why sovereign states would agree to a diverse set of international constraints in their efforts to overcome collective action problems (e.g. Yarbrough and Yarbrough 1990). Extensive attention was given to the nature of information that is available to states and how the problem structure of particular international relations shaped the institutions that were adopted (Stein 1983; Rittberger and Zürn 1990).¹⁰ Decades after its beginnings, this literature continues to inform research on relational contracts in international affairs and the rational design of international institutions (e.g. Lake 1999; Koremenos, Snidal, and Lipson 2001; Koremenos 2016).

Finally, early IR institutionalism was informed by a third strand based in economic history. Motivated by explaining long-term developments in societies, this literature focused on articulating what role institutions played in making some results more or less likely, such as patterns of economic growth and innovation (e.g. Davis and North 1971; North and Thomas 1973). Scholars in this strand were skeptical that institutions could be quickly adapted when external circumstances changed. They advanced propositions with respect to why institutions remained resilient when conditions changed and about the mechanisms through which this happened. While the other two strands operated with strict and bounded rationality models and placed the focus on agreements at one point in time, economic historians theorized the endogenous origins of various positive feedback effects that served to reinforce institutions over time. Sunk costs, coordination and learning effects, which were the product of institutions, were identified as critical elements in generating path-dependent trajectories (David 1985; Arthur 1994; North 1990). From the perspective of this strand of analysis, particular international institutions could be stable over longer periods of time, not because they solved collective action problems more efficiently than alternatives or were less costly to operate than alternatives, but because barriers to or losses from change could be great and potentially grow over time.

Despite early forays into the third strand of institutionalism associated with economic historians and despite being encouraged early on to avoid over-emphasizing other strands, the former did not take root widely within the emerging IR institutionalist research program. This marked a divergence from

the evolution of institutionalism in other subfields where the third strand was central in the development of historical institutionalism. In the comparative and American politics subfields, scholars used the opening of the institutional turn to deeply immerse themselves in studies of temporality and the role of institutions in shaping political developments over longer periods of time (e.g. Hall 1986; Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992; Skowronek 1992). Building on the work of economic historians, they refined understandings of path dependence, critical junctures, and other temporal phenomena that shape politics. In the process, they developed critiques of the rational choice and sociological approaches in their subfields, in particular of what were perceived to be incomplete theories of preferences and an over-emphasis on stable order at the expense of recognizing the overlapping and contested nature of institutions (e.g. Pierson 1993; Thelen 1999; Katznelson 1997; Orren and Skowronek 1993).

In IR, by contrast, the most pointed critique of a growing rational institutionalist literature came from scholars exploring the role of social collectives and shared understandings in shaping state behavior (e.g. Katzenstein 1996; Wendt 1999; Checkel 2005). Operating under the larger umbrella of constructivism in IR, a sociological variant of the new institutionalism suggested that international politics was neither primarily shaped by material considerations nor that the choice of international institutions was typically the product of states carefully weighing alternative designs. Rather, ideas, norms, knowledge, argumentation, and deliberation were posited to be the factors that shaped state preference and behavior (e.g. Finnemore 1996; Finnemore and Sikkink 2001; Risse 2000). States were said to be guided by “logics of appropriateness” and by efforts to conform to international norms, not by the “logics of consequence” produced by formal rules and referenced by rationalist approaches (see, e.g., March and Olsen 1983; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Within a decade, the sociological tradition had established itself as the main counterpoint to the rationalist paradigm in IR. By the 50th anniversary of *International Organization*, the journal most closely associated with institutional research, IR scholars were urged to recast the major axis within the discipline from one between general theories of IR (realism vs. liberalism) to one between rational and constructivist approaches (Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998).

There is little doubt that the division of labor that emerged between IR’s rational and sociological institutional research programs brought dividends to the discipline. IR became empirically richer as it both deepened and broadened the scope of study, as well as analytically more sophisticated as it devoted explicit attention to identifying the mechanisms that produced particular institutions. Research projects explored the role of expertise and transnational actors, the sources behind diverse forms of multilateralism, patterns of

legalization, the sources of socialization, when states delegate powers internationally, how international organizations operated in conjunction with other international actors, and more.¹¹ These projects often echoed earlier “grand debates” in IR in devoting particular attention to rational and sociological approaches.

The limited growth of historical institutionalism in IR following the institutional turn is surprising on many levels. IR has a long record of engagement with historical inquiry. Texts that have been foundational to the discipline were written by historians (e.g. Thucydides 1972 [431 BC]; Carr 1939) and historical methods and material were integral in shaping the IR discipline after 1945 (see Knutsen 1992; Elman and Elman 2001; Lawson and Hobson 2008). The new institutionalists were well versed in their discipline’s relationship to historical inquiry, which prior to the dominance of systemic paradigms such as neorealism may have been the most prominent mode of inquiry in the discipline. The early interest among IR institutionalists in the economic history strand was thus natural. And yet, explicit historical institutional inquiry in IR was virtually absent in IR in the wake of the institutional turn.¹²

Different reasons have been suggested for why the historical variant of institutionalism took root in other subfields but was effectively sidelined within IR during the early stages of the new institutionalisms turn. One possibility is that historical institutionalism may be subsumed within other approaches (e.g. Stein 2008; Lawson 2006). This implies that other subfields may be mistaken in treating historical institutionalism as a distinct tradition of inquiry, or that the domain of IR is unique in not benefiting from such inquiry. The former implication appears misplaced given the significant growth the tradition has experienced in other subfields, while the latter appears premature in the absence of extensive empirical inquiry. Henry Farrell and Martha Finnemore (Chapter 7) offer a second perspective stressing subdisciplinary divides when suggesting that the historical variant was sidelined in IR because unlike in comparative and American politics where much attention was given to the state in creating (domestic) order, IR as a field started from the premise that no central legitimate authority existed in the international system (anarchy). From this vantage point, IR scholars were less open to considering the contributions of historical institutionalists because the latter were generally perceived to be committed to a focus on the state.¹³ In a third interpretation, the relative absence of historical institutionalism is understood as a legacy of disciplinary practice within IR where theoretical contributions are often discussed in the context of “great debates” and the ease with which the rationalist and sociological institutionalist approaches could be grafted onto existing divides in IR (Fioretos 2011). Thus, the rationalist tradition was easily aligned with realist and modified realist theory placing emphases on self-interested states, while sociological institutionalism

could be tethered to constructivist theory and research on how norms and patterns of social interaction shape the behavior of states.

Notwithstanding disagreements over historical institutionalism's presence in IR after the institutional turn, emerging scholarship demonstrates that it holds great promise for the discipline (e.g. Farrell and Newman 2010; Rixen, Viola, and Zürn 2016). The extent to which this promise will serve to restore balance in institutionalist inquiry within IR in the future will depend on the extent to which historical institutionalism furnishes analytical foundations that help IR scholars generate yet richer and more nuanced inquiry into the causes and consequences of international institutions.

Foundations of Historical Institutionalism

The analytical foundations of historical institutionalism in political science are found in a toolbox that puts the stress on concepts with temporal properties and on processes and mechanisms that impact the origin, stability, and change of institutions over time.¹⁴ This toolbox has evolved with time as engagement with particular concepts has been refined and new empirical realities have come to shape inquiry. One of the concepts closely associated with historical institutionalism's toolbox and that illustrates this development is *path dependence*. It is only one of many concepts central to historical institutionalism, but its familiarity across the social sciences facilitates a brief overview of historical institutionalism's evolution across two generations of political science research.

Institutions are said to be path-dependent once it becomes ever less likely that alternatives will take their place (North 1990, 92–6; Pierson 2004, 17–22). Interest in path dependence emerged in the context of efforts to explain why particular designs stay in place over extended periods of time, even after their original impetus is no longer present or they are inefficient by comparison to alternatives. The iconic illustration in academic discourse has been the story of the QWERTY keyboard, which became a universal standard despite being one design among many and despite exhibiting several inefficiencies (David 1985; Diamond 1997). Politics is not keyboards, of course, and there is only so far that the QWERTY example can take analysis in the social sciences. Nevertheless, the underlying reality that institutions persist after their original causes are no longer present or persist when more efficient alternatives exist are empirical phenomena with which political scientists are very familiar. Such realities urged caution among many institutionalists with respect to the functionalist tones of the rational choice tradition and spurred interest in path dependence and related

concepts. The same caution was also central in fostering skepticism among institutionalists with respect to the ease with which new institutions can be created and old ones efficiently adapted.

March and Olsen (1983) compare analytical traditions with respect to their understanding of “historical efficiency.” Whether a tradition of political analysis expects history to be efficient or inefficient may be understood in terms of the conditions under which institutions are successfully adapted to new circumstances, in particular those invoked in explaining their existence. In simple terms, one may say that materialist theories expect the character of institutions to change when distributions of material resources change. In the world of international relations where, among other cases, the UN Security Council and the Bretton Woods organizations have experienced limited change in the wake of major shifts in global distributions of material resources, history indeed appears to be relatively inefficient.¹⁵ Meanwhile, from the perspective of rational choice theory, historical efficiency implies that unintended consequences should be uncommon and that changing assessments over the relative efficiency of alternatives will generate new designs over time. This implies that international cooperation should become less dysfunctional and entail less overlap and redundancy over time. Yet, unintended consequences appear neither to be uncommon, nor trivial in shaping international politics (e.g. Lebow 2010, 88, 97). And judging from the frequency with which international organizations raise concerns about redundancies, greater efficiency does not appear to be the dominant trend in global governance (e.g. Shanks, Jacobsen, and Kaplan 1996; Hale, Held, and Young 2013).

In theorizing the sources behind high levels of stability in institutions, scholars focused on different sets of mechanisms with particular attention to those involved in various forms of path dependence. From one perspective, path dependence is understood as the product of situations in which the thresholds for change are very high, such as in the case of constitutions that are essentially designed to make it all but impossible to muster enough political support to overturn them.¹⁶ As a consequence, designs are for all intents and purposes “locked in,” meaning that nothing short of a shock to the system would push institutions onto a different path. This perspective lends itself well to the study of some institutions, especially of the “parchment” variety such as constitutions (Carey 2000), but potentially also to international organizations with strongly codified rules of voting and representation that impose high barriers to rewriting rules. However, the view of path dependence as a product of lock-in mechanisms lends itself less well to explaining cases where formal barriers to change are low, when institutions are defined by informal practices, or stakeholders whose support is needed to sustain an institution can easily defect.¹⁷

For lock-in models of path dependence, nothing less than a radical shock to the system will set it on a new path. The first historical institutionalism generation worked with punctuated equilibrium explanations where the sources of change were found in sudden, big, and unexpected—or exogenous—events that quickly undermined the viability of existing institutions (e.g. Krasner 1984). Wars and economic depressions feature extensively in such accounts and capture a not uncommon pattern in the political world, namely that there often are periods during which things radically change and longer periods of relative stability between them. Yet, far from all political ruptures lead to profound changes in institutions. Studies discovered that the model of discontinuous change associated with punctuated equilibrium explanations masked many continuities in institutions across ruptures, and could neither account for why some designs changed and others did not, nor why the former type bore particular imprints that generally owed much to previous ones. In comparative politics, for example, studies noted that varieties of capitalist models featured many continuities across cataclysmic ruptures in the twentieth century (Hall and Soskice 2001; Thelen 2004). And in IR, studies identified positive feedback effects that served to recreate a liberal political and economic international system in the same period (Ikenberry 2001).

A second generation of historical institutionalism scholarship deepened inquiry into patterns of *continuous* change as a means of resolving what from other theoretical vantage points were anomalous regularities. This literature emphasized endogenous positive feedback effects in accounting for path dependence and sought to explain why institutions were resilient both between and across two or more ruptures. Positive feedback effects are mechanisms that *increase* the attractiveness of existing arrangements over time, and may be due to coordination, learning, and network effects that emerge as a product of institutions facilitating repeated interaction among political actors (Arthur 1994; North 1990; Pierson 2004, 20–2).

The shift towards a focus on continuous models of change fostered an interest among political scientists in the sources of varied patterns of incremental change (see Conran and Thelen 2016). Observing that both institutions that impose barriers to change and those that provide positive feedback effects may affect patterns of continuous change, diverse patterns of incremental change were identified.¹⁸ If barriers to change are low, patterns of institutional *displacement* are possible in which existing institutions are disbanded and new ones are added in their place. When barriers to change are low and discretion is high, incremental change will occur in patterns of institutional *conversion* in which existing rules remain in place but are strategically redeployed and reinterpreted. If actors are neither able to dislodge extant designs nor add new ones, patterns of institutional *drift* may feature in

which actors opt to no longer be bound by existing designs and thus effectively alter their effects. Finally, where barriers to change are high and institutions targeted for change are characterized by low discretion for actors, incremental change will predominantly entail institutional *layering* as those seeking change are unable to dislodge old designs but are successful in adding new ones, effectively creating an institutionally denser setting.

The shift to continuous models of change and typologies of incremental change helped historical institutionalism scholars move from an early emphasis on static models of path dependence to more dynamic models. It also served to renew interest in the origins of path-dependent sequences. In definitional terms, path dependence is the product of *critical junctures*, which are periods of time during which processes are set in motion that reduce the likelihood that alternatives will take root (Capoccia 2016). If change is not a product of ruptures and punctuated equilibrium models mask continuities, then it is crucial that a stronger understanding exists of what exactly it is in the period preceding the beginning of path dependence that causes the latter. Conceiving of critical junctures as relatively short periods of time during which the room for agency and contingency temporarily grows, scholars developed dynamic models of when institutions would be characterized by change or continuity (see Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). Furthermore, by distinguishing between “permissive” conditions that ease the constraints on action and make critical junctures possible and “productive” conditions that generate a particular outcome during the juncture, scholars offer tools to identify the factors that cause specific outcomes to be path dependent (see Soifer 2012).

By contrast to punctuated equilibrium models in which the sources of change are exogenous and rarely theorized, the critical juncture framework stresses agency and the prospect that outcomes can serve to alternately reinforce existing or produce new designs. The 2008 global financial crisis is an illustrative case. Following an unexpected and huge economic shock, demands for radical reform were extensive. What emerged, however, was a battery of incremental changes to global economic governance that in many cases served to consolidate institutions and organizations, including many that were deeply implicated in causing the crisis (Moschella and Tsingou 2013). Recent studies stress distribution of material resources and ideas in explaining the continued adherence to neoliberal economic policy after the crisis (e.g. Drezner 2014; Schmidt and Thatcher 2013). Institutional accounts bring further attention to such inquiry by explicating how enduring differences in national economic management and institutions that gave strategic advantages to groups with large stakes in pre-crisis designs thwarted radical change across national and international financial systems (e.g. Lall 2012; Fioretos 2016). Studies also found that some of the most important

innovations to come out of the crisis associated with the Group of 20 (G20)—including the transformation of the Financial Stability Forum into the Financial Stability Board and the addition of a new intergovernmental layer in the form of a leadership summit—were not so much a direct response to the 2008 crisis as much as the adaptation of blueprints originating in the late 1990s in the context of a different crisis (e.g. Helleiner 2014; Reisenbichler 2015). From this vantage point, while the 2008 crisis generated the permissive but not the productive conditions necessary for radical change in national and international regulatory institutions, it did create the productive conditions for a small coalition of governments to secure agreement on international innovations that had failed a decade earlier.

If an objective for historical and other institutionalists alike is to expand knowledge about constitutive and potentially constitutive moments (critical junctures) that cause particular pathways to be followed, then attention to timing and sequence is crucial in determining whether temporal mechanisms are in play. When something happens (timing) may determine what options are available and are eventually selected, which ideas are legitimate and illegitimate, as well as what the contextual conditions look like that impact the prospects that institutions follow one or another path. Similarly, how reforms during a period of political openness are staggered (sequence) may impact the degree to which support can be built and thus how likely it is that extant designs will be displaced or new ones layered on top of existing ones. Studies find, for example, that the relatively early development of international administrative capacity in the European Union (timing) and the manner in which the European Commission structured international negotiations (sequence) allowed the EU to “punch above its weight” and secure international agreements that were originally opposed by more powerful partners (Posner 2010). Such instances are temporally bound, though not necessarily a consequence of lock-in or positive feedback mechanisms. So-called reactive sequences in which tightly coupled action–reaction chains are set in motion at a particular moment and where the sequence of political events determines a rapid succession of other events are a third scenario under which path-dependent outcomes may emerge (see Mahoney 2000).

The analytical foundations of historical institutionalism have evolved as scholars have sought to account for an assortment of empirical developments. In the process, the criticism that the new institutionalisms are better at explaining stability than patterns of change has become notably less apposite in the case of historical institutionalism. A steady process of analytical probing and empirical research has served to refine understandings of the sources and consequences of change and moved inquiry to become more dynamic and sensitive to the interactions of agency and the structured behavior that institutions induce. An expanded and refined toolbox has enabled historical

institutionalists to expand the empirical purview of study, from more nuanced accounts of the origins of specific institutions to why many remain stable while others change in a particular fashion.

Contributions to the Study of States and International Cooperation

IR scholars have developed a keen interest in understanding the proliferation of international institutions in recent decades. A great deal of the reasons behind this proliferation can be explained with reference to rationalist and sociological theories focused on the demand for solutions to international contracting problems and on the responses to new international ideational and normative trends. Contributions to this volume show that other dimensions are better understood through historical institutional lenses, such as the reality that international institutions central to global governance have persisted over time despite major shifts in global distributions of power during such junctures. Or that the logic of institutional proliferation is highly constrained by temporal dimensions like the ordering of previously adopted solutions and that patterns of change are mostly incremental and predominantly of a layered variety.

In his contribution, Stephen Krasner (Chapter 2) shows that despite many challenges over the ages, state sovereignty remains resilient as the foundational element of the modern international system. Krasner traces this reality to the emergence of a system of state sovereignty that took form after 1648 and that was steadily reinforced over time, to the extent that it has become materially as well as normatively more unattractive with time for political leaders to replace it with some alternative. John Ikenberry (Chapter 3) strikes a similar tone in his discussion of continuities in international order, especially after 1945. Through a set of institutions that generated positive feedback effects to the United States, its commitments to that order were reinforced and enabled the United States to shape a dense system of international security and economic institutions. Though developed for a different era, the institutions underpinning this system have bound rising powers like China and serve to redirect its priorities to become more status quo-oriented than would have been the case in the absence of that system. Yet, Ikenberry also underscores that settlements after major wars can be momentous events in international politics that often redirect “the type of ‘politics’ that states pursue” (Chapter 3, 66). For this reason, Ikenberry argues that a full appreciation of how the international system operates requires analytical and empirical scrutiny of the processes and mechanisms that produce continuous and discontinuous change.

One way in which continuities may be fostered across critical junctures is through informal institutional layers of cooperation among public officials beyond the intergovernmental level. As Abraham Newman (Chapter 4) documents, growing levels of interdependence over the past four decades have been managed by incrementally adding and adapting a host of informal transnational and transgovernmental institutions. The unprecedented fashion in which institutions are imbricated across levels of governance has made it apt to speak of a “new era of interdependence” (Slaughter 2004; Farrell and Newman 2014). Transnational institutions may be of particular importance during critical junctures such as those that followed the end of the Cold War and the 2008 global financial crisis when there is a premium on coordination to secure information about the intentions and capabilities of counterparts in the public and private sectors (Wallander 2000; Baker 2010). As Newman notes, however, while such institutions may engender positive feedback effects and become more deeply entrenched in some cases, they can also be the vehicles through which actors dissatisfied with a status quo build cross-national coalitions that are strong enough to transform existing arrangements.

International institutions can produce positive as well as negative feedback effects. In an increasingly dense global institutional environment, the potential sources of the latter are many and their consequences potentially radical. Negative feedback effects may be the product of situations where institutions that were once highly valued have lost their attraction because they are too difficult to adapt given prior choices. In such cases, institutions may lose legitimacy and the political space may expand and make significant change feasible. Tine Hanrieder and Michael Zürn (Chapter 5) point to situations in which international organizations experience declining legitimacy and in which mismatches in distributions of power foster change in global governance. Focused on the area of global health governance, they show that so-called path-dependent reactive sequences—tightly coupled action–reaction sequences—have the capacity to alter the trajectory of global cooperation. These sequences are endogenously generated and serve to undermine existing practice. Hanrieder and Zürn note further that parallel developments in which some institutions are reinforced and others undermined are a significant factor for higher levels of fragmentation in global health governance. This has affected entities like the World Health Organization which now must coordinate with a much larger number of organizations than was historically the case, a process which in turn has served to reinforce the layered nature of global governance in this area.

Chapters in the volume demonstrate the contributions that historical institutionalism makes to IR as a discrete tradition of analysis, and several also underscore that historical institutionalism may serve as a complement to

other traditions of analysis. Rather than an estranged tradition or one that duels with others, historical institutionalism may provide building blocks for more nuanced answers within other traditions (Hall 2010; Zürn 2016). Joseph Jupille, Walter Mattli, and Duncan Snidal (Chapter 6) argue that historical institutionalism helps scholars in the rationalist tradition expand their repertoire beyond strict rationality models to identify the conditions under which states will move from using an existing design and selecting from available alternatives to opting to change existing designs or create new ones. An integrated institutionalist framework, they argue, is best placed to formulate dynamic explanations of the multitude of empirical regularities that characterize international commerce, from the earliest courts of commercial arbitration in nineteenth-century Egypt to the modern-day WTO. Henry Farrell and Martha Finnemore (Chapter 7), meanwhile, suggest that historical institutionalism would benefit from being more open to the insights of sociological institutionalism. They examine developments in the IMF and the European Central Bank to suggest that the ideational consensus that characterizes much of the staff in these organizations may be the glue that helps states stay coordinated during periods of significant market uncertainty. Because ideas have temporal properties (the preoccupations of the time they emerged, etc.) and the institutions through which they are promulgated do too, ideas may become durable across space and time despite significant challenges to their legitimacy. Farrell and Finnemore argue that in the absence of a global state, historical institutionalists have much to gain from sociological institutionalist insights into the role that international organizations play in instilling particular norms among states, while the latter tradition stands to gain a better understanding of temporality from the former.

Among areas of international relations where institutions are generally expected to exercise the least influence on state behavior is the domain of international security. Yet, as Etel Solingen and Wilfred Wan (Chapter 8) show, many logics explored by historical institutionalists outside the security domain apply also there. They point to temporal ordering, critical junctures, and path dependence as elements central to the security strategies countries adopt and to explain why the nuclear non-proliferation regime has been characterized by significant continuity. While East Asian countries adopted outward-oriented economic strategies and were able to build domestic political coalitions that facilitated cooperative regional relations and were in turn reinforced by the latter, countries in the Middle East opted for inward-looking economic strategies which served to create domestic divides that spurred regional conflict. Meanwhile, in the case of nuclear non-proliferation, Solingen and Wan point to high barriers to change stemming from the founding of the non-proliferation regime and to endogenously generated processes that have favored incremental adjustments to the regime over time. As Solingen and

Wan underscore, if historical institutionalism can assist in explaining why states adopt different security strategies and why these are enduring, as well as why international security cooperation in the nuclear domain has remained durable despite major changes in distributions of power and weapons technologies, then there is strong reason to expand historical institutionalist inquiry in the international security field to other areas that have been thought to be relatively immune from the impact of temporally bound mechanisms and processes.

In the economic domain where the importance of institutions is more readily acknowledged by scholars, historical institutionalism offers tools to probe conventional understandings of the reasons states engage in international commerce. The latter are based in materialist theories of foreign policy that point to the nature of economic factor endowments in deriving the policy preferences of domestic groups to explain why governments adopt particular policies (Lake 2009). In such accounts, institutions figure as mechanisms that aggregate the preferences of diverse constituencies. This is a “reductionist gamble” (Oatley 2011) that presents limitations because it overlooks the possibility that institutions themselves may be causes that shape the policy preferences and behavior of political actors over time. Historical institutional studies can help fill gaps that are left from reductionist gambles. While early contributions in this vein focused on the structure of economic models and of state–society relations in shaping foreign economic policy (e.g. Katzenstein 1978; Ikenberry 1988; Fioretos 2001), recent studies carefully trace the evolution of policy choices to identify the moments when and mechanisms through which institutions shape economic strategy. Judith Goldstein and Robert Gulotty (Chapter 9) draw on a large primary archive to revisit conventional accounts of American and international trade openness. Pointing to the impact of the timing and sequence of specific policy and institutional choices in determining the evolution of US and international trade policy, they depart from a large literature that attributes patterns of economic openness to material divisions within societies. They find that relatively rigid institutional constraints dating to the period before World War II shaped US trade policy after the war and that positive feedback effects made the United States steadily less prone to reverse its commitment to economic openness, concluding that trade policy “is a quintessential example of historically directed outcomes” (Chapter 9, 196).

Eric Helleiner (Chapter 10) also leverages historical institutional analysis to revisit a common understanding of international cooperation—the creation of the iconic Bretton Woods international monetary and financial system. The conventional account of the 1944 conference in Bretton Woods focuses on the competing ideas of the United States and British delegations and distributions of power as World War II drew to a close. Closely engaging the primary

archive, Helleiner finds that central elements of the agreement at Bretton Woods stemmed from institutional blueprints originally developed to stabilize currencies in Latin America during the late 1930s. Through a series of incremental innovations overseen by the US Treasury after the Great Depression, especially as Latin American economies struggled for solvency in the late 1930s, the preferred solutions and distributions of power within the US government were largely entrenched before 1944. Helleiner adds that if the iconic moment in the founding of the liberal international economic system, the Bretton Woods conference, had incremental origins and effects, then there is little reason to expect innovations in the international monetary and financial systems after 2008 to be any less incremental.

Kathryn Sikkink (Chapter 11) similarly revisits common understandings of a major development in international affairs—the emergence and consolidation of international institutions for the protection of human rights in the course of the twentieth century. Sikkink challenges interpretations of their institutionalization as a product of a relatively short period centered on the 1970s when human rights campaigns in the Global North gained broad political support. Instead, she finds the roots of international human rights protections in the 1940s and in the Global South, and argues that it took the better part of half a century for these to become institutionalized. Because of greater numbers of stakeholders and the lasting legacies of world historical events that interrupted processes through which international institutionalization takes place, Sikkink shows that the politics surrounding the creation of international rules are often characterized by great indeterminacy. As a consequence, she suggests that critical junctures will generally have longer durations in the international than in national realms. This has important implications for future research, including the type of research designs scholars use to identify the causes and consequences of particular institutions. If critical junctures are longer in the international setting, then it is paramount that researchers examine the empirical record over a longer temporal horizon for the presence (and absence) of the permissive and productive conditions that determine the shape of institutions.

Karen Alter (Chapter 12) extends the analysis of international human rights institutions in a study of the sources behind the proliferation of international courts in the post-Cold War period. Alter argues that the Cold War was a critical juncture during which a set of institutional and ideational changes gradually produced a profound shift in international jurisprudence from a “state-contract” approach to a “rule of law” orientation. Examining the interplay of agency and constraints posed by global, regional, and national institutions, she argues that the accumulation of incremental changes, facilitated by three critical junctures since the early twentieth century, has slowly produced a system of international law that all legitimate governments feel

bound to observe and respect. Understanding the sources of transformational change in the international legal landscape, Alter thus concludes, is facilitated by an historical institutional toolbox that assists researchers in identifying when and which mechanisms serve to push institutions along particular pathways.

If champions of international human rights protections have celebrated eventual successes after long periods of slow reform, those promoting reforms within the IMF and the World Bank have had fewer reasons to cheer. Manuela Moschella and Catherine Weaver (Chapter 13) document the slow and limited nature of reforms within the Fund and the Bank, even as these have faced a “tripartite crises of relevance, effectiveness, and legitimacy” (Chapter 13, 275). The primary reasons are found in voting rules and other institutions that impose high barriers to change. These have made it difficult for reformers to push through major changes even when there has been broad consensus that such reforms are necessary to enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the Bretton Woods twins. Institutions governing decision-making among member-state representatives exhibit strong path-dependent features which make more gradual policy shifts within these organizations appear too small to prevent future calls for radical change, effectively reinforcing a historically inefficient arrangement with few prospects for transformative change.

As old designs have persisted and new ones have been added, the system of global governance has become more complex over time. Steven Bernstein and Hamish van der Ven (Chapter 14) note that in the world of global environmental politics there has also been a mixture of big steps following historical junctures, such as the 1992 Rio Summit, and small incremental additions to the international regime. The latter has made significant progress in international cooperation elusive, which has meant that many problems associated with climate change, deforestation and biodiversity loss have become more difficult to solve over time. Bernstein and van der Ven point out that the sources of such gridlock are many, including historical legacies that made institutional reform difficult, poorly aligned national interests due to diverse regulatory traditions and entrenched identities, as well as a global context in which past structures have been too weak to generate sufficient momentum through positive feedback mechanisms to overcome the apparent gaps in global governance. The collective result has been that areas of global governance have become more complex over time, featuring overlapping structures of governance that work partially to undermine and partially to reinforce each other. Gradually, this dynamic has produced more layered and complex arrangements that belie logics of efficient adaptation and underscore the importance of recognizing the role of temporally contingent factors in shaping global environmental governance.