

The History of Institutionalism

- After World War II, studies of institutions focused on organizations dealing largely with how well they were fulfilling their stated goals, in addition to the extent to which international politics would *allow* them to fulfill their stated goals. International institutions were believed to have an (admitted marginal) impact through their proliferation of international norms, by bringing domestic policies under greater global scrutiny.
- In the late 1950s, institutional studies continued to focus on organizations, but turned to internal dynamics. Taking inspiration from Americanists (those "catastrophically boring" types ☹), institutionalists started looking at voting patterns and influences upon them, even as they cautioned that voting in an international organization meant something very different from voting in a domestic legislature.
- Gradually, however, following another thread of Americanist thinking, institutionalists started to think about the structure and patterns of influence upon international institutions. This led to a more transgovernmental approach considering alliances between international bureaucrats and domestic interests.
- Ernst Haas picked this up with his "neo-functionalism," arguing that individuals and interest groups interacting transnationally lead to pluralist communities, and a growing belief in the effectiveness of international organizations. The emergence of survey research as a means of garnering data about individual attitudes greatly facilitated Haas' research program. But alas, the results were never linked back to actual outcomes, the data suffered from (self-)selection bias, and did not lead to consensus on international attitudes.
- In the 1970s swooped down the concept of "international regimes," understood as "rules, norms, principles and procedures that focus expectations regarding international behavior," (97). Institutionalists were less concerned with the agency aspect of organizations, and the distributive aspect of international norms took up its temporary throne, only to be ousted questions about the creation and transformation of international regimes. Soon, international regimes were invoked as tools for understanding international cooperation more generally.
- This set the stage for Bob Keohane, who argued that regimes reflected efficient solutions to market failures, using an approach oriented towards states as rational actors. Left for future generations were questions of how (and whether) institutions can be linked to state behavior, the relevance of transnational coalitions, and the significance of domestic politics.

To Domestic Politics or Not

- Martin and Simmons offer two thumbs up to the possibility of incorporating non-cooperative game theory into studies of international politics, believing that the assumptions of rational, strategic, and opportunistic actors flailing around in the absence of an enforcement mechanism fit the international arena quite well.
- M&S suggest that questions of institutional design, that is, how states construct institutions could be incorporated into studies of international institutions. They divide such studies into those focusing on problems of information and those focusing on problems of distribution.
- Studies focusing on problems of information stress the role of institutions as providers of information, and examine the conditions under which institutions can provide credible information, highlighting the effects of particular policies
- Studies focusing on distributional problems do not take information as problematic, and focus on state negotiators as actors with different tastes, who logroll sticky deals across different issues. Committees and agenda-setting rules develop as means of addressing the problem that the exchange of votes is not always simultaneous. In this tradition, institutions are treated as the product of the choices of rational states.

Whither Neo-Liberal Institutionalism?

- Studies of strategic interaction identify types of cooperation problems that states tend to face independent of their particular preferences, including cheating and distributional conflicts.
- A useful divide generated by rational-functional institutionalists is that between collaboration and coordination. Collaboration problems are created when there are short-term incentives to defect, and when there are other obstacles to arriving at optimal solutions, and are resolved when states find ways to reach the Pareto frontier and bind themselves to contracts. Coordination problems, that is, those with multiple equilibria, may be resolved with the simple designation of a focal point. Studies of coordination problems have generated predictions both about the effect of institutions on state behavior, and about incentives for states to delegate authority to institutions.
- Some, led by Steve Krasner, have pointed out that efficiency alone does not accurately describe collaboration and coordination problems. More specifically, he has asserted that institutionalists have yet to give a good story explain the resolution of multiple equilibria situations, arguing that they often resort to the distribution of state power. M&S argue that this doesn't tell the whole story, pointing to the possibility of issue linkage through institutions, and noting that institutions can represent locked-in equilibria from which states do not deviate despite changing distributions of power.
- Rather than seeing domestic politics only as a source of preferences, M&S would prefer to see a more interactive theory of domestic politics and international institutions develop, that recognizes that institutions alter domestic incentive and power distributions, and that different domestic actors will prefer international institutions to domestic ones.
- M&S propose a convergence-divergence typology to understand how institutions matter. Convergence theories draw largely from the functionalist tradition, describing institutions as means by which states accomplish goals that they are unable to achieve on their own, often on account of domestic political structures. M&S urge functionalists to examine further the domestic political

situations that cause states to turn to international institutions, citing monetary and trade policy as examples of issues which have often been delegated to international institutions. Divergence theories describe situations in which institutions tend to bolster differences in state practice (they refer to Anne-Marie Slaughter, who has suggested that liberal states are more likely to create and abide by a liberal international institution, especially in the arena of human rights). Although convergence theories fall within the functionalist framework, explanations for institutions that generate divergent behavior are not yet so grounded. M&S note that the absence of incentives for cooperation might explain divergence, but also suggest that a better explanation may lie in domestic politics, and how certain interest groups grab “hooks” provide international institutions.

- In short, M&S believe that institutional theories need to focus more on specific causal explanations for institutional effects, and think that the most promising direction is in that of domestic politics.