

Informal Governance in World Politics: Introduction

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Overview

Throughout the 20th century, states were at the center of global governance. International regimes and formal intergovernmental organizations (FIGOs) were the dominant modes of cooperation among nations (Krasner 1983, Keohane 1984, Abbott and Snidal 1998).

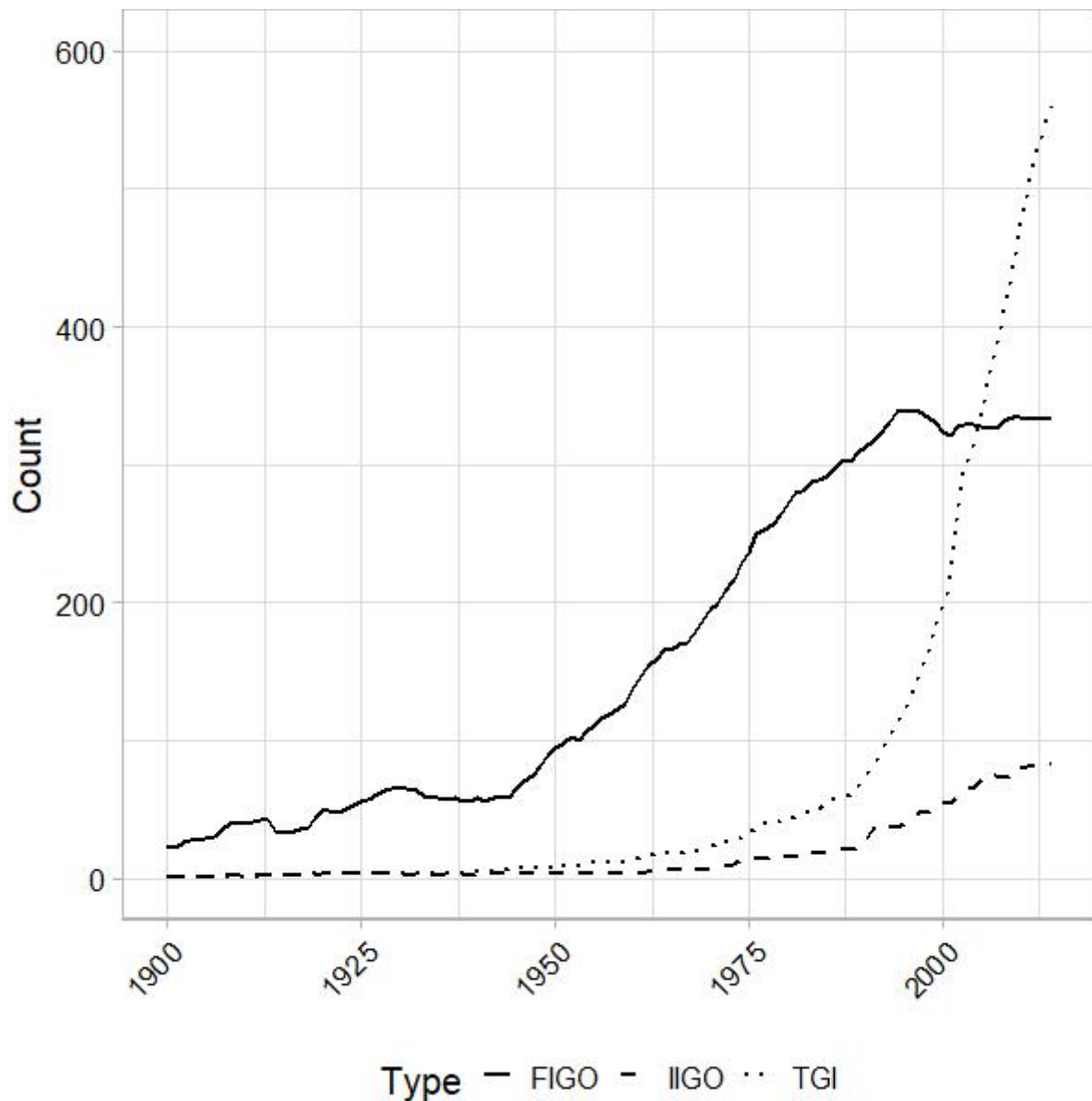
Centralization, hierarchy, and formalization through law and treaty-based agreements were the hallmarks of international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Abbott et al. 2000, Koremenos et al. 2001).

Yet, beginning in the 1980s and accelerating in the 1990s, states have increasingly turned to governance through informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, 2020) and transnational public-private governance initiatives (TGIs) (Abbott and Snidal 2009, Westerwinter 2021), among other institutional forms, to structure their interactions and to govern cross-border problems. IIGOs are organizations in which states meet regularly to make policy and coordinate behavior without a formal secretariat or institutional structure (Vabulas and Snidal 2013). Examples include the various G groups (e.g. G8 or G20) (Gstöhl 2007, Cooper and Pouliot 2015) and the Proliferation Security Initiative (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2009). In TGIs, by contrast, states work together with business actors and non-profit non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to govern problems that no actor alone has the knowledge, resources, or legitimacy to address effectively (Abbott and Snidal 2009).

Examples include the World Commission on Dams (Dingwerth 2007) and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers' Association (Avant 2016).

This turn toward informal forms of cooperation constitutes a broader trend in world politics that manifests itself beyond individual cases. Based on a new dataset that we introduce in greater detail below, we observe that the number of informal institutions, specifically IIGOs and TGIs, has been growing rapidly since the 1990s, both in absolute terms and even more relative to FIGOs (see figure 1).

Figure 1 FIGO, IIGO, and TGI growth

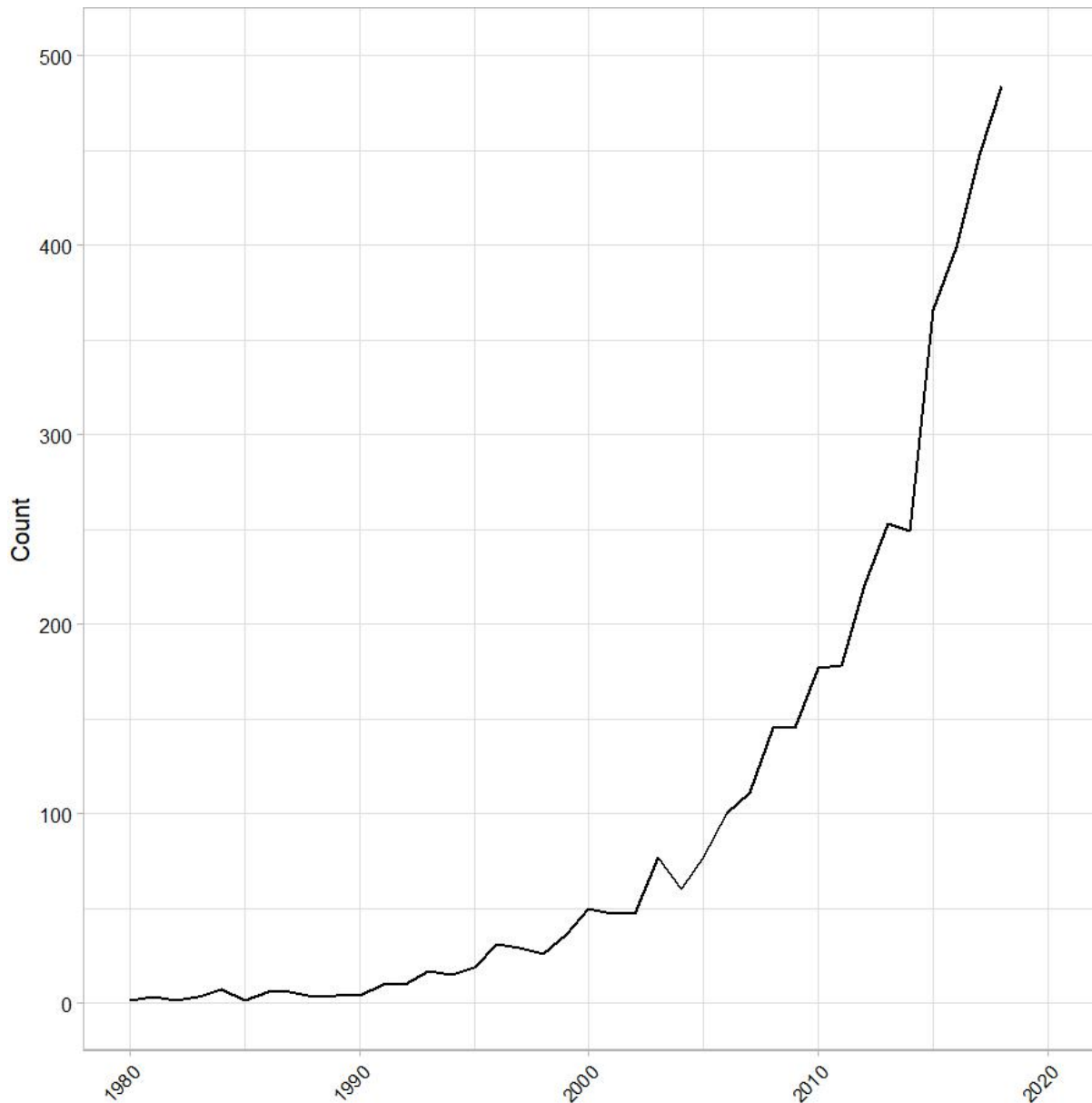


Despite this recent surge in informal cooperation in world politics, research has until recently largely focused on formal institutions, such as FIGOs and international treaties (Abbott and Snidal 1998, Goldstein et al. 2000, Koremenos et al. 2001, Barnett and Finnemore 2004, Hawkins et al. 2006, Koremenos 2016, Pratt 2018).¹ FIGOs and treaties are, however, only part of the complex patchwork of contemporary global governance (Lake 2010, Barnett et al. 2016, Kahler 2018). A sole focus on these forms often provides inadequate, if not entirely

¹ For extensive reviews of the literature, see Haggard and Simmons (1987), Martin and Simmons (1998, 2012), and Keohane and Martin (2003).

misleading, descriptions of the games that actors play in world politics (Achen 2006, McKeown 2009, Stone 2013, Kleine 2013). For example, the informal rules of the game played in the WTO depart substantially from its formal treaty provisions (Steinberg 2002). Likewise, in the EU, the legislative co-decision procedure between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers consists of an ensemble of formal and informal procedures that interact with one another in multiple ways to shape the interactions of member states and EU institutions (Farrell and Héritier 2003). As these examples indicate, while formal rules are important features of global governance, in many situations informal practices may override, substitute, or complement formal provisions. As a result, contemporary global governance can often not be fully understood by examining formal institutional structures alone. Understanding how world politics actually works requires a focus on informal governance.

Figure 2 Informal governance in the social sciences, 1980-2020



Notes: The data includes all articles published in social science journals (including political science, law, economics, sociology, management, and other disciplines) listed in the Web of Science database between 1980 and 2020 which have one of the following terms in their title, abstract, or text: Informal politics, informal governance, informal arrangement, informal institution, informal agreement, informal network, informal group, informal coalition, informal practice, informal process, informal rule, informal procedure, informal structure, informal organization, informal norm, informal bargaining, informal negotiation, informal regulation, informal standard-setting, soft law, and soft regulation.

Recent work in political science, economics, and international law has accordingly begun to examine informal governance as a mode of international cooperation (Stone 2011, 2013, Christiansen and Neuhold 2012, Pauwelyn et al. 2012, Kilby 2013, Kleine 2013, Hardt 2014), producing a rapidly growing number of studies in the social sciences (see figure 1). In addition to individual instances of informal governance, research has begun to consider the nature and effects of interactions among informal governance arrangements and between

informal and formal institutions (Abbott et al. 2015, Andonova 2017, Green and Auld 2017, Westerwinter 2021). Yet despite this increase in scholarly attention, many questions related to the creation, design, functioning, and effects of informal governance in world politics remain underexplored.

In the broadest sense, informal governance refers to rules, norms, and institutional structures, procedures, and practices that are not enshrined in the constitutions or other formally constituted rules of treaty-based international organizations. Informal governance can be based on a variety of configurations of public and private actors, ranging from purely intergovernmental cooperation to public-private arrangements, to instances of governance that rely primarily on private actors, and to governance complexes (Abbott and Faude 2021, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter 2021) or assemblages (Bueger 2018) that include multiple institutional forms. In this volume, we focus on informal governance arrangements that involve states as one or the only type of participant. Examples include informal intergovernmental organizations, such as the G8 (Vabulas and Snidal 2013); transnational public-private governance initiatives of states, business actors, and NGOs, such as the Kimberley Process (Haufler 2010); and international customary law (Verdier and Voeten 2015).

This broad definition provides a useful starting point for studying informality in world politics. It helps us to focus on how informality differs from the formal institutional forms which have historically been the center of attention in global governance research. To be sure, our definition mainly states what informality is *not*; others have approached the definition of informality similarly (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, 2020, Roger 2020). Yet our definition provides a broad conceptual lens that does not close off alternative formulations prematurely, and therefore maximizes the opportunities for comparisons and conceptual innovations. These opportunities are important both for the collective effort of this edited volume and for the research program on informal governance in world politics more generally, given its relatively early stage of development. The chapters in this volume engage with our definition, using it or amending it to the specificities of their empirical cases and theoretical foci, producing productive inquiries and new findings.

Existing work – like that on the WTO and EU discussed above – largely focuses on informal governance *within* FIGOs (Steinberg 2002, Prantl 2005, McKewon 2009, Stone 2011, Kilby 2013, Kleine 2013, Vreeland and Dreher 2014, Hardt 2014, 2018), but the phenomenon is broader. Informal governance *outside* FIGOs is an important alternative to formal governance

structures, and the two influence each other in diverse ways (Keohane and Nye 1974, Abbott and Snidal 2000, Raustiala 2002, Kahler and Lake 2009, Biersteker 2014, Abbott et al. 2015, Andonova 2017, Abbott et al. 2018, Fioretos 2019, Westerwinter 2019).

For example, states may prefer to cooperate using informal agreements because informality increases flexibility and speed, and reduces contracting costs relative to formal treaties and organizations (Aust 1986, Downs and Rocke 1987, Lipson 1991, Abbott and Snidal 2000, Prantl 2005, Sauer 2019, Abbott and Faude 2020). Furthermore, informal governance outside FIGOs can be a deliberate strategy of both strong and weak players, which seek to bypass unfavorable formal structures and enhance their bargaining positions (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, Avant and Westerwinter 2016). Informal cooperation can also be a strategic instrument to explore cooperative endeavors in relatively empty institutional spaces, or to create new cooperative arrangements in densely institutionalized settings (Abbott et al. 2016, Westerwinter 2021). States and other actors may also use informal governance to manage institutional complexity caused by the proliferation and overlap of formal institutions (Fioretos 2021) or to address novel policy challenges for which incumbent institutional forms are not suitable (Bueger 2018).

In sum, while scholarship that focuses on formal intergovernmental organizations often neglects informal forms of cooperation altogether, work on informal governance within FIGOs tends to overlook informal governance outside formal arrangements. Both research programs can benefit from incorporating IIGOs, TGIs, and other informal governance modes into their models. Moreover, neglecting the co-existence of formal and informal international cooperation makes it impossible to examine the interactions and trade-offs that occur between different modes.

This edited volume begins to fill these research gaps. Specifically, we focus on three sets of research questions:

- First, what forms of informality inside and outside FIGOs can we identify? What do these different forms look like? Who participates in them? What are the commonalities and differences among them?
- Second, is the shift toward informal modes of global governance actually happening on a large scale? If so, what forms does the shift take, and what temporal trajectories can we observe? Are some issue areas changing more, or more rapidly, than others?
- Third, what are the major drivers of the shift to informal governance? Are there functional demands for the governance of particular problems that treaties and FIGOs

address insufficiently or not at all? Do states desire flexibility in times of uncertainty? Or are the distribution of power and the interests of powerful players the major driving forces? Do technological innovations influence the shape of informal governance? What role do domestic political processes play? Are different types of informality shaped by different driving factors? How do causal factors interact in shaping the choice of informal institutional forms?

This introduction provides theoretical, conceptual, and empirical background and guidance for the exploration of the three sets of questions that motivate our inquiry. The following three sections are structured around those questions. First, we develop a typology of informality that distinguishes informality *of*, *within*, and *around* global governance institutions. This typology highlights the differences and commonalities among three major forms of informality that have typically been studied in isolation. Our typology opens up opportunities for productive comparisons across types and facilitates comparative empirical research.

Second, we introduce new data on the recent growth of IIGOs and TGIs in the international system, as compared to the trajectory of FIGOs. These data enable us to document the rise in governance informality, in comparison to FIGOs, more systematically and in greater detail than existing case studies have done.

Third, we outline a set of factors that are potential drivers of the growing importance of informal modes of global governance, drawing on the chapters of this volume and other extant research. We treat these as candidate explanatory variables.

Fourth, we introduce the other contributions to the volume. The individual chapters present innovative analyses of informal governance of, within, and around formal institutions, yielding new theoretical and empirical insights. Together with this introduction, they constitute a major advance in our understanding of governance informality. The final section outlines an agenda for future research on informal governance in world politics.

Three types of informal governance

Informality in contemporary global governance appears in a variety of forms. Based on the recent governance literature and the chapters in this volume, we can identify three broad forms: Informality *of* institutions, *within* institutions, and *around* institutions. Each form reveals a different aspect of the phenomenon of informality, and they are inter-related in important ways.

First is the emergence of informal governance institutions. The expansion of new institutional forms—including IIGOs such as the G8 and G20 (Puetter 2006, Snidal and Vabulas 2013, Cooper and Pouliot 2015, Roger 2020), transgovernmental networks of domestic regulators, such as the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision (Raustiala 2002, Slaughter 2004), TGIs such as the Kimberley Process (Abbott and Snidal 2009, Westerwinter 2021), and others (Abbott and Faude 2020)—means that it is no longer possible to discuss global governance in terms of treaties and FIGOs alone. Informal institutions that bring together diverse public and private actors have grown rapidly since the 1990s and are today an established element of the global governance architecture (Lake 2010, Abbott et al. 2016, Avant and Westerwinter 2016).

These diverse informal institutions have in common that they are not established by interstate treaties. Rather, they are based on informal agreements, memoranda of understanding, declarations, vision statements, or other types of founding documents (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, Westerwinter 2021), and sometimes lack any founding document. Yet, some degree of formality often emerges over time. Abbott et al. (2018), for example, discuss how transgovernmental networks such as the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision may be structured and operate just as formally as some FIGOs. In this volume, Vabulas and Snidal, Reinsberg, and Westerwinter also show how informal institutions, such as the Kimberley Process, may adopt organizational structures that display a considerable degree of formality. Indeed, many formal institutions were once informal (Tieku 2019). This does not imply, however, that formalization, like legalization, is inevitable.

Several contributions to this volume analyze the emergence and salience of informal institutions. Snidal and Vabulas show how IIGOs have increased in number and importance. They demonstrate considerable variation across IIGOs in terms of institutional design, and develop theoretical arguments that explain how states use informal organizations to enhance cooperation. Carlson and Koremenos show that absolute monarchies, a specific type of autocratic regime, cooperate with one another using informal arrangements rather than formal treaties. They argue that absolute monarchs strategically choose informal modes of cooperation because the secrecy those modes make possible maximizes the mutual private benefits state leaders can reap from cooperation. Finally, Westerwinter documents the rapid growth of TGIs, and the wide variation in state participation within them. He develops an explanation for states' use of TGIs based on domestic politics; he finds that economic power, democracy, and domestic NGOs are key drivers. The data presented in these and other chapters provide concrete measures of the scope and significance of informal institutions in

world politics, something that case study and issue-specific approaches have struggled to achieve (Barnett et al. 2016).

Second, and somewhat more established in the literature, is the use of informal modes of governing *within* both formal and informal institutions. Most research on this type of informality has focused on informal arrangements, understandings, practices, or norms operating within FIGOs (Steinberg 2002, McKeown 2009, Stone 2011, 2013, Kleine 2013, Vreeland and Dreher 2014, Hardt 2014, 2018). These include internal routines, procedures, and structures that range from informal communication networks to methods of reaching consensus to habitual ways of selecting leadership. Yet informal practices are likely to be even more common in informal institutions, which frequently lack constitutionally prescribed bodies and procedures.

This aspect of informality is featured in several contributions to the volume, including the chapters by Michaelowa, Michaelowa, and Bagchi on climate change; Reinsberg on foreign development assistance; Kersting and Kilby on US influence within the World Bank; and Hardt on knowledge networks within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Kersting and Kilby, for example, argue that the exertion of informal influence by the US over multilateral World Bank assistance is driven by the extent to which particular presidential administrations face Congresses with diverging preferences. In such situations, executive leaders prefer using informal influence in the World Bank over bilateral aid to pursue their foreign policy goals because it is more effective and less costly in domestic political terms. Their empirical analysis provides compelling evidence in support of this hypothesis. Similarly, Hardt investigates what factors determine the structure of informal knowledge networks within FIGOs. Using evidence from NATO, her study suggests that individuals who possess moderate levels of power but occupy central positions in knowledge networks can successfully shape governance outcomes.

Third, diverse informal institutions and networks exist *around* institutions of global governance. Often associated with transgovernmental initiatives or discussions of the “third UN” (Weiss et al. 2009), the literature on institutional communities includes work on transgovernmental networks (Keohane and Nye 1974, Raustiala 2002, Slaughter 2004, Bach and Newman 2010), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), epistemic communities (Haas 1989, 1992), pluralistic security communities (Deutsch et al. 1957, Adler and Barnett 1998), transnational public-private partnerships (Börzel and Risse 2005, Andonova 2017), and issue campaigns (Carpenter 2010). Much, but not all, of the literature

concentrates on emergent issue domains, framing issues, addressing novel policy challenges, placing issues on global policy agendas, and implementation. Recent sociological research on ideationally homogenous transnational policy communities (Djelic and Quack 2010) and International Relations scholarship on transnational policy networks (Biersteker 2014) integrates these institutional aspects into broader communities and networks.

While informal institutions, such as IIGOs and TGIs, often involve regular meetings and sometimes include secretariats and other formal structures, the networks and policy communities operating *around* formal and informal organizations are less structured. They tend to be based on shared expertise rather than institutional membership, have less-specified boundaries and less stable memberships, and are more likely to convene in *ad hoc* meetings. They also tend to play a greater role early in the development of the governance of emerging issue domains, and need constant maintenance to remain relevant.

This aspect of informality is represented in the chapter by Biersteker on the role of transnational policy networks in facilitating policy reforms at the UN Security Council. It also features in Kahler's analysis of complex governance structures, Reinsberg's investigation of informality in development assistance, and Michaelowa, Michaelowa, and Bagchi's chapter on climate change. Informality around governance institutions is also the focus of recent work on the impact of informal groupings on multilateral negotiations (Pouliot 2015; Onderco 2020) and the role of informal contact groups in post-conflict peacebuilding and crisis management (Prantl 2005, 2006; Whitfield 2010; Sauer 2019). For example, in his work on the role of permanent representatives in multilateral diplomacy, Pouliot (2015) demonstrates how informal networks among permanent representatives, operating in parallel to the formal structures and procedures of FIGOs, shape how negotiations are conducted and which decisions are made. Similarly, Onderco (2020) highlights the importance of informal networks of states for multilateral negotiations within the non-proliferation regime.

Distinguishing informality of, within, and around institutions broadens the analysis of informal governance in world politics beyond extant work on informal governance within formal organizations. We view our typology as a useful conceptual starting point for studying different types of informality in world politics, including their sources and consequences, in a comparative way. The distinction is useful for descriptive purposes because it allows for more fine-grained mappings of informal governance than are possible when concentrating on any one type in isolation (Gerring 2012).

The typology is also a powerful tool for generating and testing theoretical arguments. Focusing on the specificities of the three types of informal governance allows researchers to identify their particularities more sharply and to build more nuanced theories about the factors that lead to their emergence and proliferation. This is particularly important for specifying the causal mechanisms that link explanatory factors to the rise of informality. For example, power concentration might be conducive to some types of informality, but not to others, such as those based on expertise. Similarly, the domestic political institutions of states may affect different forms of informal governance in different ways (Kersting and Kilby, Carlson and Koremenos, Westerwinter).

Alternative categorizations of informality in world politics are certainly possible. For example, one could focus on distinguishing specific aspects of informality, such as informal structures and practices (Pouliot), which can be compared across institutional forms. Such differentiations are useful conceptual lenses tailored to particular research interests. We focus in this volume on comparing different types of informality in world politics in order to facilitate a broader comparative research agenda that moves beyond inquiries about individual types in isolation. Our typology sharpens our understanding of the differences and commonalities of informality *of*, *within*, and *around* international institutions and enables us to examine how these differences and commonalities are related to different explanatory variables.

Our typology also enables scholars to address the normative aspects of informality in global governance with greater specificity and broader empirical range. Formal institutions may be more capable of delivering procedural justice, as Viola argues in her chapter. Informal practices (such as always appointing a US citizen as President of the World Bank or an EU citizen as head of the IMF) can translate into disproportional institutional power, just as informal practices of never calling for formal votes can negate the potential unit veto of member states in institutions governed by consensus. The chapters highlight important implications of informality for the legitimacy and accountability of global governance, and outline avenues for future research geared towards exploring these implications more systematically.

From formal to informal global governance?

The institutional architecture of global governance has undergone dramatic changes in recent decades. The number of informal institutions, specifically IIGOs and TGIs, has been growing

rapidly since the 1990s, both in absolute terms and even more relative to FIGOs. We base our exploration of the growing importance of IIGOs and TGIs in world politics on a new dataset that allows for the comparative analysis of FIGOs, IIGOs, and TGIs over time and across issue areas (Westerwinter 2021a, 2021b).²

Numbers

Starting with IIGOs, we observe that, while in 1990 there existed only 28 IIGOs, their number increased to 82 by 2014.³ This corresponds to a growth of about 193 percent. TGIs experienced even more rapid growth. From 74 in 1990, by 2014 their number increased by about 655 percent to a total of 559 (see figure 1). These growth rates are consistent with the proliferation of informal global governance institutions that do not involve states as participants. Abbott, Kauffmann, and Lee (2018: 10), for example, report that 116 transgovernmental networks have been created since 1990, while only 15 existed before 1990. Likewise, Abbott, Green and Keohane (2016: 248) find that “private transnational regulatory organizations” formed by different combinations of civil society and business actors have proliferated in the past decades.

Although the absolute number of FIGOs (313) was still higher than that of TGIs (74) in 1990, by 2005 TGIs had become the most frequent form of cooperation in the data. In addition, between 1990 and 2014, the growth of FIGOs slowed dramatically, to a rate of about seven percent (see figure 1). Importantly, the flattening out in the growth of FIGOs co-occurred with the beginning of the sharp increase in the number of IIGOs, and even more of TGIs, in the late 1990s.

Issue areas

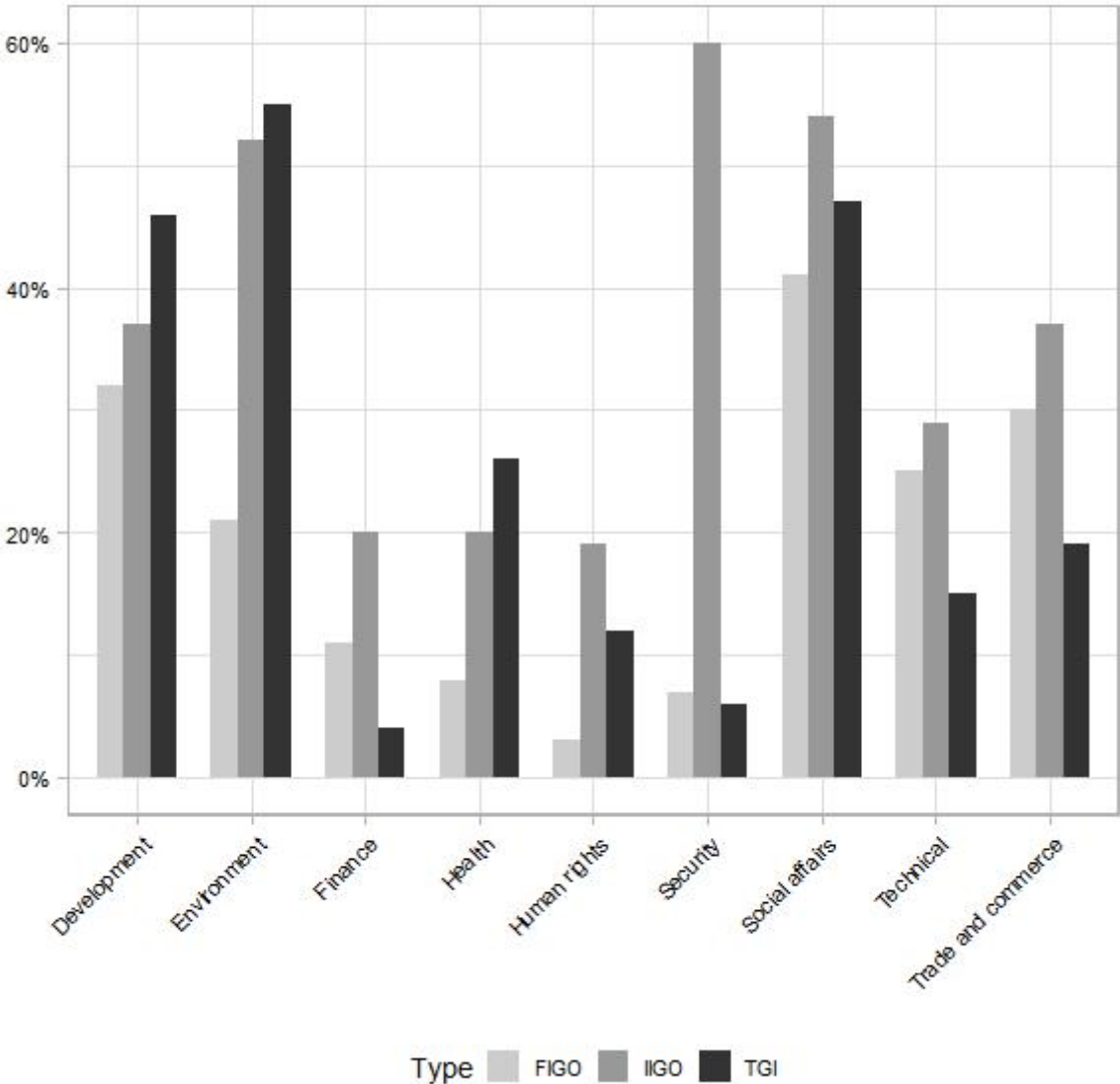
While the recent growth of IIGOs and TGIs is striking, it is not universal. Some issue areas witnessed more of a turn towards informal governance than others. Among TGIs, about 55 percent of all initiatives are concerned with environmental issues, including climate change and energy; 46 percent deal with development.⁴ Forty-seven percent address social problems, and 26 percent deal with health. Smaller numbers of TGIs also operate in other issue areas, including trade and commerce, human rights, technical issues, finance and security.

² Westerwinter (2021a, 2021b) describes in detail how the data were collected and presents additional descriptive statistics.

³ The identification of IIGOs is based on Vabulas and Snidal (2013, 2020).

⁴ The percentages across issue areas do not sum to 100 because issue areas are not coded as mutually exclusive. One FIGO, IIGO, or TGI can operate in more than one issue area.

Figure 3 FIGO, IIGO, and TGI issue areas



The picture looks different for IIGOs. Here 60 percent of the organizations in the database address security issues, 54 percent social problems, 52 percent environment issues, and 37 percent trade and commerce; 37 percent deal with development problems, 29 percent with technical issues, 20 percent with financial problems, and about 20 percent with health. FIGOs, by contrast, are most prominent in the areas of social affairs, development, trade and commerce, and technical issues (see figure 3).

Thus, the issue concerns of IIGOs and TGIs are not equally distributed, and are not limited to the areas of environment, health, and human rights. They are also increasingly important for

states that seek to address economic and security problems. In other words, informal institutional arrangements are an important instrument of governing in many issue areas of world politics.

Growth trajectories

The growth trajectory of informal modes of global governance, as well as their absolute numbers, has varied across issue areas. The creation of TGIs addressing the environment, development, and social affairs can be traced back to the 1970s. The growth rate increased slowly in the 1970s and 1980s, and then exponentially in the 1990s. We observe a similar growth pattern for TGIs operating in the health, technical, trade and commerce, and human rights areas, although here growth started later and its rate has remained below that in environment, development, and social affairs. In finance, security, and human rights, the rate of TGI growth has remained low until today (see figure A-1 in the online appendix).

A different pattern emerges for the growth trajectories of IIGOs. Here, organizations that govern development, finance, and security issues emerged as early as the 1960s, and their numbers have increased considerably since then. IIGOs focused on environmental, social, trade, and technical problems have also increased rapidly in recent years, but this development only took off in the 1980s. IIGOs in the health and human rights areas appeared later, and their growth rates have overall remained lower than in the other issue areas (see figure A-2 in the online appendix).

The growth of FIGOs was most pronounced in the fields of development, environment, social affairs, technical, and trade and commerce, but has flattened out or even decreased slightly since the 1990s. FIGO growth has remained slower and lower in the finance, health, human rights, and security areas (see figure A-3 in the online appendix).

State participation

Another source of variation in informal global governance institutions is the pattern of state participation. Starting with TGIs, a small number of states, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands, participate in a large number of TGIs. Other states, including Russia, China, Brazil, and India, as well as many African and Latin American countries, are much less involved. However, along with the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany, Kenya and South Africa were among the top twenty TGI participant states in 2014 (see figure A-4 in the online appendix).

A different picture emerges for state participation in IIGOs. Here, countries such as China, Russia, India, and Brazil are among the most frequent participants (see figure A-5 in the online appendix). The twenty nations that are most frequently involved in IIGOs include China, Indonesia, South Africa, and Poland. Compared to both TGIs and IIGOs, the pattern of state participation in FIGOs is more balanced and universal, with a larger number of states being members of a larger number of organizations (see figure A-6 in the online appendix).

Explaining the informalization of global governance

Informal governance can be a strategy. States (and transnational actors) may select informal forms of governance because they perceive them as the best way to structure particular interactions and to govern particular problems, allowing them to achieve their objectives (whether substantive, political, or organizational) to the greatest extent possible. As with any strategic choice, the selection of informal modes of governance takes place in situations characterized by particular constraints and opportunities, which shape the costs and benefits that can be derived from available institutional designs.

Potentially, then, the decision to govern border-crossing problems using informal rather than formal modes of cooperation can be shaped by a large number of variables. In this section, we draw on the broad literatures on international cooperation and global governance to identify candidate explanatory variables, and consider how these may affect the emergence of informal global governance. Specifically, we draw on five major streams of theorizing on institutional choice in world politics—functionalist, power-oriented, domestic politics, non-state actor-based, and assemblage theories—and derive from them specific variables that may help us to better understand variation in informal global governance institutions.

The contributions to this volume use these independent variables, and others drawn from the same and other families of theory, to explain why states choose to govern informally. In their analysis of the rise of multi-stakeholder governance in the development domain, Reinsberg and Westerwinter explore the explanatory power of functionalist, power-oriented, domestic politics, and institutional context arguments. They find that the different theoretical strands, rather than being competing explanations, complement each other in explaining the proliferation of informal institutional arrangements. Westerwinter examines the factors that shape state participation in TGIs. His results suggest that domestic regime type, economic power, and internationally active NGOs affect countries' decision to participate in transnational governance initiatives.

Carlson and Koremenos focus on the relationship between domestic politics and informal cooperation among governments. They show that absolute monarchies are more likely to cooperate through informal agreements than democracies or pairs of states with different regime types. Kersting and Kilby also give pride of place to domestic politics, examining how it interacts with power in shaping informality within FIGOs. Focusing on US influence in the World Bank, Kersting and Kilby examine how domestic veto players with foreign policy preferences different from those of the executive create incentives for the executive to cooperate internationally through informal channels, allowing it to achieve its goals more effectively and at a lower cost.

The importance of particular factors is likely to vary across issue areas and types of informality. In addition, it is likely that in concrete empirical cases, a combination of causal factors located at different levels of analysis, rather than individual variables in isolation, drives the selection and specific design of informal governance arrangements.

Functional considerations

The first wave of research on informal modes of global governance adopted a functionalist perspective, emphasizing the relative efficiency advantages of informality in solving collective action problems (Aust 1986, Lipson 1991, Abbott and Snidal 2000, Raustiala 2002, Prantl 2005, Benvenisti 2006, Kleine 2013, Koremenos 2016, Sauer 2019). Advocates of this perspective cite the greater speed and flexibility and the lower contracting costs of informal governance as major drivers of its proliferation (Aust 1986, Lipson 1991, Abbott and Snidal 2000, Raustiala 2002, Kleine 2013, Sauer 2019, Abbott and Faude 2020).

These benefits have become increasingly important as the transaction costs of international cooperation have increased. Throughout the 20th century, the number of states has increased steadily. According to data provided by the Correlates of War (COW) Project, while only 45 states existed in 1910, this number increased to 75 in 1950, then further to 165 in 1990, and finally to 195 in 2014.⁵ As the number of states rises, the costs of reaching international agreements increase (Oye 1985, Axelrod and Keohane 1985, Kahler 1992). More and more states with stakes in global problems demand access and seek to shape outcomes.

At the same time, the heterogeneity of state preferences has increased, especially in the wake of the waves of decolonization and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Preference heterogeneity further complicates reaching international agreements (Oye 1985, Kahler 1992).

⁵ Correlates of War Project. 2017. "State System Membership List, v2016." <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/state-system-membership>, accessed: 26.05.2021.

The same is true for governance through FIGOs. As the number of member states increases, governance slows down and often comes close to a standstill. Trade negotiations in the framework of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and later the WTO are a case in point (Hale et al. 2013).

States can reduce these transactions costs by shifting action from cumbersome, formal intergovernmental treaties and organizations to smaller, more informal arenas. The diverse preferences and ideas that must be considered in seeking solutions to problems can be managed and altered more easily, in turn reducing the costs and time required to reach agreements. Thus, if the creation of informal governance arrangements is a functional response to the increasing costs of governing, then we should expect informal structures to be relatively small clubs of like-minded states, rather than large, universal membership organizations.

The speed and flexibility with which informal organizations can be negotiated and adapted are particularly appealing for states confronted with problems characterized by uncertainty about the state of the world: A condition in which the future benefits and costs of particular forms of cooperation are not easily predicted. Such uncertainty makes governance structures difficult to design, because the problems and available solutions are poorly understood and subject to frequent change (Koremenos et al. 2001, Thompson 2010, Kleine 2013). Uncertainty can be scientific or technical, but it can also relate to political or economic issues. For example, the states that collaborate in the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission initially knew little about how fishing techniques affect dolphin mortality, and had no precise idea how to accomplish their shared goal of preserving Eastern Tropical Pacific tuna stocks and protecting dolphins. This uncertainty made devising specific policies and organizational structures difficult and prompted institutional experimentation (de Búrca et al. 2013).

Incorporating flexibility measures, such as termination or sunset clauses, in formal intergovernmental agreements and organizations can facilitate cooperation under uncertainty (Kucik and Reinhardt 2008, Helfer 2013, Koremenos 2016). Importantly, however, while flexibility provisions in FIGOs are typically designed to allow responses to unforeseen exceptional circumstances, the speed and flexibility of IIGOs and TIGIs result from the fact that their rules and procedures deliberately remain informal (Aust 1986, Lipson 1991, Abbott and Snidal 2000). This is a more fundamental feature than flexibility clauses. It enables actors to continuously learn and redefine the problems they face, and to readjust the processes needed for solving them quickly (de Búrca et al. 2013). This makes it easier to reform

governance procedures, and even to change the actors involved, as new information about the problem and potential solutions becomes available (Reinsberg et al. 2017). Informal institutions are thus well-suited to deal with problems and issue areas characterized by persistent uncertainty about the state of the world.

In sum, from a functionalist perspective, the number of states and transnational actors involved in governing, the heterogeneity of their preferences, and the increasing technical and political complexity of problems (which increase governors' uncertainty about the state of the world) are candidate explanatory factors for the growing importance of informality in world politics. In this view, if informality is used by states to reduce the number of actors involved in governing, we would expect increases in the number of states involved in a cooperative effort to be negatively associated with the likelihood of informal global governance. If, by contrast, informality is a response to the high transaction costs of cooperation with large numbers, then we would expect an increase in the number of states to have a positive effect on the likelihood of informal governance. We also expect preference heterogeneity and uncertainty about the state of the world to have a positive effect.

In this edited volume, Reinsberg and Westerwinter explore the effect of both number of states and preference heterogeneity on the likelihood of TGIs being chosen as instruments of cooperation in the development area. Their results indicate a negative effect of the size of cooperating groups and a positive effect of preference heterogeneity on the choice of informality.

Power

Power-oriented theories of international institutions suggest that the creation and design of global governance arrangements are a direct result of the preferences of powerful players (Krasner 1991, Garrett 1992, Gruber 2000). Consequently, as the distribution of power among states and transnational actors changes and/or the preferences of powerful players change, shifts in the institutional architecture are likely to occur.

The same factors are said to be at play with informal governance arrangements. States use informal institutions to project power and realize more favorable outcomes (Stone 2011, 2013, Westerwinter 2013, Avant and Westerwinter 2016). The resulting institutions are not always, perhaps not even most of the time, efficient responses to collective action problems (Moe 1990, Krasner 1991). We therefore expect that a state's decision to choose informal modes of cooperation reflects political processes that underlie bargaining over institutional design.

Research on informal governance within FIGOs suggests that informal rules and procedures are a strategy of powerful states with substantial institutional capacity, such as the US or the EU, to secure their control over organizational operations in times when their preferences are strongly implicated (Stone 2011). In exchange, major powers transfer to weaker states disproportionate formal control over operations during ordinary times. In other words, formal procedures within FIGOs for information-sharing, agenda-setting, proposal-making, and voting weaken the relationship between structural power and control over outcomes, distributing power more widely among participants (Stone 2011). Powerful players then use informal governance to bypass these formal constraints (Steinberg 2002, Stone 2011, Kilby 2013).

In similar fashion, informal governance outside FIGOs may be a strategy of powerful players to achieve outcomes in line with their preferences. Compared to FIGOs, informal international institutions impose fewer constraints on power and thereby increase the returns to power. This creates incentives for powerful players to favor informal arrangements (Vabulas and Snidal 2013).

Informal institutions rarely grant formal access or voting rights to weaker actors. In fact, they rarely grant them to any actor. Thus, they leave powerful actors freer to dictate policy by exploiting their superior agenda-setting power and bargaining leverage (Steinberg 2002). Recognizing these advantages, powerful states have strong incentives to participate in informal institutions, particularly in situations where their preferences are strongly affected.

According to this logic, we should expect that powerful states and transnational actors will be more likely to participate in informal institutions, because they can expect to benefit most from the influence and room for maneuvering that informal rules and procedures provide. However, informal governance structures may also be a source of power in their own right. Informal institutions empower their participants by providing them direct roles in global governance: for example, TGNs empower bureaucratic actors, while TGIs empower societal actors (Abbott and Faude 2020). Informal institutions may also empower otherwise weak players, such as small states and NGOs (Vabulas and Snidal 2017, Avant and Westerwinter 2016). As a consequence, such actors may be particularly inclined to promote and join informal institutions, as a way to improve their bargaining position.

In sum, from the perspective of power politics, the power of the actors involved in addressing a particular problem is a potential explanatory variable for the selection of informal institutions. Existing research provides examples of both strong and weak actors opting for

informal strategies, and several of the chapters in this edited volume explore the existence and directionality of this possible causal relationship. Westerwinter, for example, finds that economically powerful countries are more likely to become involved in TGIs. Similarly, Reinsberg and Westerwinter show that cooperation in the development area is more likely to take the form of TGIs as the economic power of the countries involved in the cooperative effort increases. Kersting and Kilby find that governments of powerful countries exert informal influence in FIGOs, and their incentives to do so are shaped by the domestic political context in which they operate.

Domestic politics

Domestic politics is another candidate driver of informality of, within, and around global governance institutions. Of particular relevance is a state's political regime type. The governments of democratic states must adhere to a range of legal-procedural requirements for policy-making (Tsebelis 1995). These apply not only to domestic policy-making, but also to international policy-making (Mansfield and Milner 2012). Executives must consult legislatures when forming foreign policy preferences; must seek legislative approval of treaties; and must negotiate the domestic implementation of international commitments with the political opposition and interest groups from all sectors of society (Simmons 2000, Dai 2005, Mansfield and Milner 2012).

At a time when many international policy problems are of a daunting complexity, technically and politically, these domestic requirements can be the source of considerable costs for state executives (Snidal and Thompson 2003). Throughout the policy process, the executive must achieve agreement with both international and domestic veto players, making it more difficult to realize policies close to its own preferences (Milner 1997, Milner and Rosendorff 1997, Martin 2000). This is of particular relevance when veto players have preferences on particular issues that differ from the executive's own (Milner 1997, Lupu 2015).

One way for democratic leaders to reduce these costs, and to realize policies closer to their own preferences, is to opt for modes of international cooperation that are less demanding in terms of domestic politics than FIGOs and treaties. Informal international institutions require less or even no involvement of domestic veto players in the making and implementation of foreign policy. The rules created by informal institutions do not take the form of treaties, and therefore do not require approval by domestic legislatures (Aust 1986, Lipson 1991, Abbott and Snidal 2000). Informality is also associated with reduced visibility, reducing the likelihood that domestic opponents will take note of and respond to the executive's actions

(Greven 2005, Stone 2011). In addition, informal institutions are often characterized by selective participation, excluding troublesome actors (Westerwinter 2013). In sum, informality creates informational and access advantages for executives vis-à-vis domestic opponents, and makes it more difficult for opponents to follow and influence the executive's actions.

While these factors create incentives for *democratic* governments to participate in informal institutions, those incentives are likely to be weaker for *autocratic* governments. In autocracies, the formal legal requirements that governments must observe in designing and implementing foreign policy are, all else equal, less elaborate and demanding than in democracies. National parliaments often have little power vis-à-vis executives; legislative approval of international agreements is often not required; and domestic veto players are either absent or have preferences in line with those of governments. As a consequence, all else being equal, the benefits to autocracies from participating in informal international institutions are less pronounced than those reaped by democracies: Autocrats already enjoy many of the domestic politics benefits of informal cooperation. However, as Carlson and Koremenos discuss in their chapter, autocratic regimes may have other reasons to use informal modes of cooperation especially when interacting with other autocracies.

A focus on domestic politics thus suggests two additional candidate explanatory variables, domestic democracy and domestic veto players. We expect both to support the choice of informal modes of governance. As countries become more democratic and/or have a larger number of domestic veto players capable of obstructing government policy, informality becomes increasingly attractive to executives. Many of the contributions to this edited volume discuss the role of domestic politics in states' choice of informal global governance.

Reinsberg and Westerwinter as well as Westerwinter find that domestic democracy promotes the choice of TGIs, whereas Kersting and Kilby find that the existence of domestic veto players with opposing foreign policy preferences incentivizes the executive to pursue its foreign policy goals using informal governance instruments. By contrast, Carlson and Koremenos show that absolute monarchs are more likely to cooperate with each other through informal, secretive agreements, suggesting that domestic regime type may affect different types of informality differently and that the relationship between domestic politics and informal global governance requires more nuanced theorizing.

Non-state actors

Non-state actors have become increasingly important for global governance (Hall and Biersteker 2002, Avant et al. 2010, Green 2014). It is difficult to measure accurately the number of non-state actors active globally. One proxy is the number of international NGOs (INGOs). Data from the Yearbook of International Organization⁶ reveals exponential growth in the number of INGOs across countries, beginning in the early 20th century.

Global problems are complex both technically and politically, and no individual actor controls the knowledge and resources required to effectively and efficiently deal with them (Avant et al. 2010). In addition to states and intergovernmental organizations, business actors and NGOs often possess essential expertise (Abbott and Snidal 2009). NGOs may also contribute to the mitigation of democratic legitimacy problems, by voicing the interests of stakeholder groups that otherwise lack access to governance processes.

One way to incorporate the resources of businesses and NGOs in governance is to open up FIGOs for their formal participation (Tallberg et al. 2013). Another way is to create institutions that allow for collaboration between states and non-state actors on a more equal footing, notably TGIs (Westerwinter forthcoming). Some TGIs bring together governments, business, and NGOs to create and implement rules and standards to govern the negative consequences of corporate and state conduct, as well as other problems. In contrast to traditional state-based governance forms, in TGIs non-state actors are not only the objects of governing, but stand at the center of the governance process itself, including decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and enforcement (Abbott and Snidal 2009, Avant et al. 2010, Abbott and Faude 2020).

In sum, the growing importance of informal modes of global governance may be driven in part by non-state actors attempting to create institutional structures that allow them to participate more actively in decision-making and implementation. Such participation integrates the expertise and other resources of non-state actors, and can contribute to the effective, efficient, and legitimate provision of global public goods. We expect that, as the number of non-state actors operating in a specific governance area grows, the tendency to choose informal means of cooperation that allow for their inclusion will become stronger.

In his contribution to this edited volume, Westerwinter argues that one reason why democracies are more prone to become involved in TGIs is that domestic non-state actors, such as business and NGOs, can create domestic demand for transnational governance, to which governments can respond by joining TGIs (see also Abbott and Faude 2020). His

⁶ <http://www.uia.org/yearbook>, accessed: 26.05.2021.

empirical finding of a positive effect on state participation in TGIs from both domestic democracy and the number of internationally-operating NGOs in a country supports this argument.

Governance assemblages

Recent research in international political sociology has focused on the emergence of “assemblages” of global governance (Latour 2005; Sassen 2006; Abrahamsen and Williams 2009; Bueger 2018; Sullivan 2020; Leander 2021). Governance assemblages describe “how heterogenous elements come together and are made to cohere and hence form a distinct type of order” (Bueger 2018: 618). They are the product of relations among actors, material objects, technologies, and practices (Jackson and Nexon 1999; Leander and Waever 2018). As a result, governance assemblages are not only informal, but are also inherently unstable and often ephemeral.

Christian Bueger describes the counter-piracy assemblage as an experimental space “in which actors are more concerned about devising problem solutions than ensuring compliance with formalized rules” (Bueger 2018: 623). Bueger argues that the Best Management Practices developed to address Somali-based piracy created a new political space, the High Risk Area, to coordinate the interests of both public and private actors, a space that subsequently became a location of contestation. The counter-piracy assemblage engaged FIGOs such as the IMO and UN Security Council, rival state actors including the navies of the US, Russia, and China, private industry actors such as shipping companies and their insurers, university-based scholars, and international lawyers.

Gavin Sullivan applies assemblage theory to map the effects of the UN’s Al-Qaida/ISIL list (Sullivan 2020). In this case, another novel challenge, the threat of global terrorism after September 2001, produced an assemblage of actors who constructed informal rules and practices to constrain non-state actors from engaging in acts of terrorism by placing them on lists. These included lawyers litigating in national and international courts, scholars in a transnational policy network seeking to reform UN sanctions, policy entrepreneurs in the UN Secretariat, permanent members of the UN Security Council, UN panels of experts, special rapporteurs for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, private financial sector compliance officers, and providers of software to facilitate private sector compliance. Sullivan finds the normative consequences of this assemblage highly disturbing, contending that the new security measures and data infrastructures threaten to erode human rights and transform the legal order in far-reaching ways (Sullivan 2020: 305).

These works suggest that, in addition to functional needs, power, domestic politics, and non-state actors, the novel nature of the governance problems that need to be addressed may be a driver of informal governance. In an increasingly interdependent world, challenges such as contemporary piracy, terrorism, or effective policing in states with limited institutional capacity cannot be effectively addressed by traditional formal institutions. Informal institutional arrangements based on contributions from diverse public and private actors may help fill these governance gaps (Reinicke and Deng 2000; Abbott and Snidal 2009; Avant et al. 2010; Avant and Westerwinter 2016; Abbott and Faude 2021), relying more on output than on input legitimacy. As the number of unanticipated and novel transnational challenges continues to grow, then, we would expect the choice of informal means of cooperation to increase in parallel. The cyber domain is an area in which technological innovation routinely exceeds the capacity of states to address emergent problems without private sector participation. Existing formal institutions were not created to address these novel problems and often compete amongst themselves for the authority to address them in an increasingly crowded institutional space occupied by both formal and informal institutions.

In his contribution to this edited volume, Biersteker argues that a transnational policy network of expertise emerged informally *around* existing institutional structures to address the legitimacy challenges facing the UN Security Council once it began to make individual sanctions designations. The Council initially gave little thought to the due process rights of listed individuals, resulting in legal challenges around the world. Elements of the governance assemblage described by Sullivan operated informally to facilitate a hesitant institutional adaptation at the UN: the creation of the Office of the Ombudsperson.

Contributions to the edited volume: Findings and conjectures

Many analyses of global governance either ignore informality altogether or focus only on informal governance within FIGOs, creating a gap between the theories and practices of world politics. Building on the pioneering works cited above, the contributions to this edited volume take informality in world politics seriously. They develop new theoretical arguments about the emergence of different types of informal governance. Using new, innovative data, they demonstrate that diverse modes of informal governance inside and outside of FIGOs have grown in numbers and importance in nearly all issue areas of world politics. In doing so, the contributions apply our typology of informality of, within, and around international institutions to chart new theoretical and empirical ground.

We have grouped the chapters around those three types of informality to facilitate comparisons across and within types. Kahler, Carlson and Koremenos, Vabulas and Snidal, Michaelowa, Michaelowa, and Bagchi, and Westerwinter examine different types of informal forms of cooperation among states as well as states and non-state actors. Kersting and Kilby and Hardt investigate informality within FIGOs. Reinsberg and Westerwinter, Biersteker, and Viola focus on different aspects of informality around global governance institutions.

As noted above, the chapters also begin to uncover the driving forces underlying the growth in different types of informal global governance, drawing on functionalist, power-oriented, domestic politics, non-state actor, and assemblage explanations. Kersting and Kilby identify power and domestic politics as major explanations for informal influence within the World Bank; Carlson and Koremenos link domestic politics and informal agreements among governments; Reinsberg and Westerwinter test functionalist, power-oriented, and domestic politics arguments about the selection of informal governance in the development area; Westerwinter explains state participation in TGIs based on variation in domestic politics, power, and the presence of internationally active NGOs; and Biersteker considers how assemblages reform informal practices of the UN Security Council. Together, the chapters unveil and explain central parts of the institutional architecture of global governance that traditional analyses have overlooked.

Turning to the individual articles, Miles Kahler develops the concept of complex governance, which represents a change in the governance role of national governments. The scope of complex governance varies by issue area and region. He argues that in contrast to static functionalist models, a model of when and why complex governance emerges and proliferates in the late 20th and early 21st centuries requires incorporation of globalization and its evolution as major driving forces. Kahler uses the innovative theoretical lens of complex governance to show that the future of globalization will continue to shape the choices of newly influential actors, such as emerging economies, among informal and formal global governance alternatives.

Duncan Snidal and Felicity Vabulas open the section on informal governance institutions. They examine how states use IIGOs, such as the G-groups, to deliberately pool decision-making without delegating authority to an agent to implement, enforce, or adjudicate their agreement. They identify this logic of “soft pooling” which allows states to make collective decisions that are not legally binding – although they may be binding in other ways – and without authorizing international agency as an important driver of the growing prevalence and

importance of IIGOs in world politics. They identify two design features of IIGOs that provide the basis for “soft pooling,” consensus norms and specific administrative structures, and use the IIGO 2.0 dataset to examine overall trends and to provide examples of these distinct yet understudied organizational characteristics that allow states to bind themselves to cooperative arrangements while maintaining a high degree of sovereignty.

Oliver Westerwinter expands the analysis to instances of informal cooperation among public and private actors. Using a unique dataset of 636 TGIs established between 1885 and 2017, he demonstrates the rise and proliferation of these public-private governance arrangements across time and issue areas and uncovers patterns of variation in terms of the governance tasks, participants, and institutional designs of TGIs. He also explores how domestic politics, power, non-state actors, and other factors influence states’ involvement in TGIs and finds that democratic countries are especially prone to join TGIs, but that this effect varies across issue areas. He explains this with the increased demand for and supply of transnational governance participation in democracies that results from the involvement of NGOs and business actors in domestic governance. This lends support to the argument that democracies have incentives to cooperate through informal institutional forms, but offers the role of domestic non-state actors as an additional causal mechanism.

Axel Michaelowa, Katharina Michaelowa, and Chandreyee Bagchi assess the development of informality in international climate policy in two ways. First, they examine whether informal organizations meaningfully contribute to climate change mitigation. Second, they consider what role informality plays at the procedural level under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Examining the emergence of TGIs and IIGOs in climate change governance, they find a “formality-informality cycle,” in which rules and procedures are rendered more flexible and hence more efficient in one period, but then are rendered less flexible in a subsequent period. They find examples of this cycle in several negotiation episodes within the UN climate change regime.

In the fourth and final chapter on informal international institutions, Melissa Carlson and Barbara Koremenos focus on informal cooperation among governments as an alternative to FIGOs and formal treaties. They develop a theoretical argument centered on domestic regime type to explain variation in states’ use of this type of informality of international institutions. Carlson and Koremenos set out to explain the low levels of formal cooperation between authoritarian monarchies. They argue that, rather than failing to cooperate, authoritarian monarchies frequently do cooperate with one another, but do so informally. The limited rule

of law in absolute monarchies, especially the prevalence of unilateral and non-transparent policy making and implementation, engenders an absolutist logic, leading executives to prefer similarly personalist and secret informal agreements when interacting with other absolute monarchs. Based on statistical analysis and a case study of informal, secret cooperation among the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, they find that jointly absolute monarchic dyads have higher levels of informal cooperation than jointly democratic dyads and dyads of mixed regime types. By contrast, where authoritarian monarchies enter into agreements with other regime types, they rationally and strategically accept the formal design mechanisms necessary for efficient cooperation. Carlson and Koremenos shed important new light on the relationship between domestic regime type and informal global governance and show that also autocratic regimes can have incentives to use specific types of informality when entering into international cooperative arrangements.

The section on informal governance within formal institutions includes the chapters of Erasmus Kersting and Christopher Kilby and Heidi Hardt. Erasmus Kersting and Christopher Kilby explore how power considerations in interaction within domestic politics can spur informality within FIGOs. They examine whether US presidential administrations exert greater informal influence within international financial institutions when they face an uncooperative Congress, and thus have less domestic control over bilateral aid. Reexamining four empirical studies of US informal influence within the World Bank, they demonstrate that informal influence is greater in years with divided US government. Thus, their analysis indicates that power helps to explain the use of informal governance within the World Bank. However, it is not power per se, but its interaction with the domestic political configuration which drives the US's use of informality in the World Bank. Compared to previous studies, this provides a richer picture of when and why the US exerts influence in multilateral settings, and an alternate explanation to persistent questions about the role of international organizations in the international political economy. Their analysis is also an insightful example of how different explanatory factors can interact in shaping the selection of informal governance instruments.

Heidi Hardt explains how elites in FIGOs share knowledge about errors, even without job descriptions that require them to do so. The chapter employs process tracing tests, social network analysis, and structured interviews with 120 NATO elites. Hardt finds that elites share knowledge about strategic errors through informal structures: Transnational interpersonal networks. Elites use these networks because of an inability to report errors anonymously. In the networks, a handful of trusted elites – “knowledge guardians” – circulate

frank accounts of the past. Hardt elucidates a new form of informality in FIGOs, demonstrates the importance of networks for FIGO knowledge management, and reveals that elites from powerful member states (other than the US) are central to NATO's knowledge networks.

In the section on informal governance around formal institutions, Thomas Biersteker demonstrates the existence and functioning of transnational policy networks (TPNs) as an important example of informal governance around FIGOs. TPNs are constituted by individuals who share a common expertise, a common technical language to communicate that expertise, and broadly shared normative concerns, but not a common institutional setting nor agreement on specific policy goals. Biersteker defines how the concept of TPNs differs from related concepts in the literature, and argues for its synthetic advantages in addressing individual agency and power dimensions of transnational policy formation. A heuristic case explores the activities of the TPN engaged in creating the Office of the Ombudsperson at the UN, which secured protection for individuals targeted by UN sanctions despite the initial opposition of all permanent members of the Security Council. The chapter concludes with reflections on the utility of TPNs in other emergent policy settings.

In their contribution, Bernhard Reinsberg and Oliver Westerwinter examine when states choose informal governance arrangements in the development domain. They show that since the end of the Cold War, international development cooperation has increasingly become informal. They consider functionalist, power-oriented, domestic politics, and institutional context-oriented explanations for the use of informal governance institutions in the form of TGIs. Their analysis is based on a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Importantly, their quantitative analysis employs a selection model that takes into account the drivers of the creation of new international institutions when examining the factors that facilitate the choice of a TGI design. In both their quantitative and qualitative analysis, the authors find consistent support for functionalist, power-oriented, domestic politics, and context-oriented arguments. Their analysis shows that different theoretical perspectives are complementary rather than competitive when it comes to explaining states' choice of informal global governance arrangements.

Opening the concluding section, Lora Viola shifts the focus away from the extent, the causes, and the functional consequences of informal governance to address their implications for procedural justice. She asks how, through what mechanisms, and under what conditions informal institutions can give otherwise marginalized actors a voice in resolving disputes, allocating resources, and making decisions. She argues that informal institutions can enhance

the voice of underprivileged states and increase their control over collective decisions. She critiques arguments that focus on functional benefits such as flexibility and low sovereignty costs, which biases them against seeing the justice potential of informal institutions. She develops a sociological argument to explain how informal institutions create positive resource and relational effects to increase procedural justice. She finds support for her argument using evidence from informal groups at the WTO, BRICS, and G20.

Finally, in her concluding reflections Lisa Martin discusses some of the questions that the contributions to this edited volume leave unanswered, and identifies elements of an agenda for future research on informal governance in world politics that are complementary to those we present below.

In sum, there is consensus among the authors on the substantive importance of informal governance in world politics. This is striking given the broad range of issue areas and institutional forms the contributions consider. Taken together, moreover, the contributions broadly support our argument that the phenomenon of informal governance in world politics is broader than informal practices and norms within formal organizations: They aptly demonstrate the rise and proliferation of informality of and around global governance institutions, as well as within them.

There is less agreement, however, on the underlying causes of these developments. All five sets of candidate explanations identified in this introduction—functional considerations, power, domestic politics, non-state actors, and assemblages—find support in the contributions. Importantly, however, most authors find evidence in support of more than one explanation. This suggests that explanations based on different theories of global governance are complementary, rather than competing, in explaining states' choices of different types of informality.

In addition, the chapters identify additional insights, puzzles and conjectures regarding the rise of informal global governance and how to study it; these provide a strong basis for future research. We summarize the most interesting of these here.

First, the contributions offer insight into the rise of informality in world politics. In addition to the informal exercise of state power within FIGOs, the contributions provide compelling evidence that additional types of informal governance have proliferated and become important in a broad range of issue areas. Compared to extant case studies and issue area-focused analyses, the evidence they provide allows for systematic, cross-issue area assessment of an important type of global governance. Given the lack of prior large-*n* data on informal global

governance, these are important descriptive inferences that will help to advance research (Gerring 2012). Important puzzles that emerge from these descriptive assessments include why we observe an increase in the informality of international institutions only in the 1990s and not before, and why the proliferation of informal governance is more pronounced in some issue areas than in others.

Second, while power is an important driver of informal governance, the picture is more complex than previous work suggests. International power disparities can interact with domestic factors in shaping informal governance, and power also matters for the choice among forms of informality. There is also evidence in the wider literature in support of the hypothesis that informal governance arrangements can be strategies of weaker players, including both weak states and NGOs (Vabulas and Snidal 2013, Avant and Westerwinter 2016). Informal institutions provide NGOs with the possibility of increased influence in the governance of problems they care about. As a result, they may lobby their governments to act through informal institutional arrangements. An important task for future research, then, is to examine in greater detail the conditions under which informal global governance is used as a strategic tool by powerful players or weaker ones. Research will also benefit from more nuanced theorizing of the interaction of power and other variables.

Third, domestic politics clearly matter for the selection of informal modes of governance, but informality has different implications for different actors. Informal governance has relatively limited transparency to actors that are not involved (Aust 1986, Lauth 2000, Greven 2005, Stone 2011). It thus has the potential to limit participation and make it more difficult to hold decision-makers accountable (Herz and Hoffmann 2019). However, informality may also enhance access and participation by actors such as NGOs and business groups, who often face difficulties in becoming involved in FIGOs (Andonova et al. 2017).

Informality also has significant implications for countries with different domestic political regimes. While autocratic leaders may prefer informal cooperation for its secrecy and lack of transparency and participation, governments of democracies may also find the secrecy and non-transparency of informal governance attractive, particularly when they face strong domestic veto players with policy preferences that diverge from their own. Democratic regimes may also choose informal institutions because they allow for increased participation by non-state actors who seek to become directly involved in global governance.

In short, the same features of informality may attract particular regime types for different reasons; while one type may use one mode of informality for one reason, it may use a

different mode for a different reason. This suggests that a fruitful area for future research lies in more nuanced theorizing about the relationship between domestic politics, particularly domestic regime type, and different forms of informality in world politics.

Fourth, the chapters make important methodological contributions. Most existing studies of informality in world politics are based on one or a small number of cases (Prantl 2006, Stone 2011, Kleine 2013, Hardt 2014, 2018), or focus on particular issue areas, such as climate change (Bulkeley et al. 2014), sustainable development (Andonova and Levy 2003), or energy (Szulecki et al. 2011). As a consequence, findings are likely to suffer from problems of selection bias, and it is questionable to what extent results can be generalized. In addition, existing research often neglects selection problems, i.e., the fact that we only observe the design of institutions actually created. By contrast, the contributions to this edited volume introduce and analyze new, large-*n* datasets, with information on different forms of informality, in multiple issue areas, and for extended time periods. Importantly, some contributions take selection effects into account when analyzing the drivers of informality. Their results shed important new light on existing case study findings, and open new avenues of research on informal governance. In addition, the papers show that combining quantitative and qualitative methods and data can reveal important insights about informal governance.

Finally, the chapters in this edited volume address the well-known difficulty of measuring informal governance arrangements, which often leave limited public paper trails (Christiansen and Neuhold 2012, Koremenos 2013, Hardt 2014). The contributions suggest a variety of methods for measuring informality: From an indirect strategy of exploring the enforcement of conditionality, speed of loan disbursement, project ratings, and timing of loan disbursements in the World Bank, to participant observation within a transnational policy network, to using event data to generate a measure of informal cooperation, and a new dataset that captures whether FIGOs and TGIs have independent secretariats, specified decision-making procedures, monitoring, enforcement, and dispute settlement mechanisms.

Thus, based on innovative data, the contributions indicate ways in which researchers can distinguish empirically between informal and formal global governance, and can explore differences in the degree of informality across institutions. The latter, in particular, provides a starting point for developing more fine-grained, continuous measures of informality that allow researchers to move beyond categorical measures and operationalize the intuitive idea that informality is a continuous rather than a binary phenomenon (Vabulas and Snidal 2013).

Conclusions: A research agenda on informal global governance

The goal of this edited volume is not to provide or test a single theory of informal global governance, but rather to provide a set of analyses that speak to a common set of theoretical, empirical, and methodological questions. More broadly, the goal is to advance the emerging research agenda on informality in world politics, and the chapters in this volume suggest multiple avenues for future research beyond those just indicated. We conclude by highlighting three.

First, while we set out to map and explain the proliferation of three distinct types of informality in world politics (of, within, and around international institutions), the contributions suggest that more nuanced theorizing of informality and its drivers is needed. Ideal types of informality provide a good basis for identifying different aspects of a broad phenomenon and for developing hypotheses about their emergence. However, as Lisa Martin rightly observes, this approach also impedes inquiry into variation within broad types.

For example, the contributions demonstrate rich variation among IIGOs and TGIs in terms of governance tasks, issue areas, participation, and institutional design. They also show that informal and formal design elements may be combined within the same institution. With respect to the drivers of informality, the contributions find that different aspects of domestic democracy, such as veto players, participatory governance norms, and non-state actor involvement, are linked to different aspects of informality. They also show that autocratic regimes may choose informality for the same reasons as some democracies do. These are important insights that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of informality in world politics. Similarly, more nuanced theorizing may prove fruitful with respect to power-oriented theories, functionalist claims, and other theoretical arguments.

The contributions similarly suggest a need for more fine-grained data. While they collectively present innovative and systematic quantitative and qualitative data, more is needed. In particular, in addition to detailed cross-section data on different types of informal institutions, researchers would benefit from collecting time-series cross-section data to explore the factors that account for the rise of informality over time. Likewise, more detailed and tailored qualitative data based on primary documents, interviews, and participant observations will be needed to subject nuanced theoretical arguments about the drivers of informality to systematic empirical tests.

Second, while this edited volume demonstrates the proliferation of different types of informality in world politics, it is critical to examine systematically the implications of this

proliferation for the effectiveness and legitimacy of global governance. Existing works suggest that informal governance has the potential to strengthen both effectiveness and legitimacy (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Reinicke and Deng 2000). However, the lack of access and participation for relevant actor groups often characteristic of informal cooperation also has the potential to undermine their effectiveness (by excluding important expertise and resources) and their democratic legitimacy (by excluding relevant voices) (Abbott and Snidal 2009, Westerwinter 2013, 2016).

Thus, the normative consequences of informal cooperation are an important topic for future research. Can informal modes of international and transnational cooperation deliver, effectively addressing global problems? Or are they empty shells with little if any impact? What is their impact on the inclusiveness of global governance? Do they empower weaker actors, such as NGOs, small states, and rising powers? Or do they merely manifest and reinforce existing distributions of power? Do they improve the transparency and accountability of contemporary global governance institutions, or do they further weaken them? Is their lack of transparent input legitimacy offset by their performance output legitimacy?

Finally, a logical next step from the analyses in this edited volume is to consider interlinkages across different types of informal and formal institutions. Due to the rapid proliferation of diverse informal and formal modes of institutionalized cooperation, today's global governance includes a broad range of institutional forms with different sets of state and non-state participants (Lake 2010, Avant et al. 2010, Avant and Westerwinter 2016). These forms overlap and intersect in multiple ways, forming institutional complexes of interdependent and interacting organizations (Raustiala and Victor 2004, Abbott 2012, Abbott and Faude 2021, Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Westerwinter 2021). Reinsberg and Westerwinter begin to explore how institutional design choices are shaped across organizational forms. Building on this and other work in this volume should help scholars to explore the consequences of institutional context on institutional design choices.

Taken together, this research agenda promises to bring about a more sophisticated understanding of the emergence and effects of different types of informal global governance institutions. Such research will also inform theories of international cooperation more generally, as these currently focus disproportionately on formal treaties and organizations. Finally, this research agenda can lead to a better understanding of the complex

interdependencies among different types of formal and informal institutions, and for the creation, design, and consequences of contemporary global governance arrangements.

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