

How International Organizations Survive

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Institutions, when they are once created, live their own life.^a

^aGunnar Myrdal, *Two Notes on ERP and East-West Trade*, December 1949

The international order, some say, is in crisis. International organizations (IOs) were meant to have shepherded countries into peace and prosperity. But as voters and governments push back against economic and political integration, the global institutions created to ensure cooperation face backsliding on their principles and erosion of their membership. The very countries that created international organizations seem to be pivoting away from them, as witnessed by the United States' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific partnership; the 25-year failure of the World Trade Organization to conclude a successful negotiation round for liberalization; and the proposed exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, along with pressure in the eurozone and slides into illiberalism from many of its member states.¹

And yet we have been here before — many times, in fact. The unacknowledged history of international cooperation is one of setbacks, false starts, exits, and dissolutions. Disintegration has always been as powerful a force in global order as integration. Even though countries frequently form structures for global governance,

¹On countries withdrawing from IOs, see Vabulas and von Borzykowski (2013). On the WTO, see Tomz, Goldstein and Rivers (2007); Chaudoin, Hays and Hicks (2016). On the EU's crisis of illiberalism, see Johnson and Barnes (2015); on the eurozone crisis, see Copelovitch, Frieden and Walter (2016). On power shifts in some prominent IOs, see Lipscy (2017).

many of these organizations have since been lost to history altogether, with little record that they ever existed. Still others, even if they still exist on paper, drift into morbidity. Others survive in very different forms than what their founders intended.

This reality is easy to overlook. Scholars and pundits alike tend to be more interested in the beginnings of things rather than the endings — and those early days often grab more headlines than the quieter processes of drift or dissolution. In the past century, there has been over a 200-fold increase in the number of IOs — and the founding of IOs is a far happier trend than their day-to-day activities.²

Spirits run high in the early days of an IO's establishment, no matter what countries are involved or what problems they are meant to solve. From Africa to Asia, from economic integration to human rights to environmental cooperation to peace, countries have aimed to set aside past rivalries and work together toward a common goal. And the prospects seem bright at the beginning.³ Countries often mark the formation of international organizations with grand gestures. Ceremonies and photo opportunities surround the signing of the founding treaties; newspapers publish long stories about the organization's debut, and ribbons are cut on the secretariat buildings. International organizations are meant to usher in new eras of cooperation for the countries that join them, and the time of their founding is a moment of optimism.

But what happens after the parties end? Have all of those IOs gone on to implement their missions? How many of them even still exist? Of those that survive, how many continue to hold summits and organize activities? Do heads of state bother to attend the meetings? And even for IOs that remain alive and functioning, how many of them have strayed beyond their initial mandate?

The enthusiasm when an IO is formed can be quick to wane as political realities set in, only to be rekindled during a subsequent burst of IO activity. Take, for example, the various efforts to integrate in Central America, starting with federation attempts in the early 1800s, to a series of organizations in the 20th century. Each effort ran aground soon after it launched. The initial United Provinces of Central America, founded in 1823, only lasted 16 years, but “long before the union was

²The number went from 37 IOs in 1909 to 7,710 in 2017, according to the Union of International Associations.

³Indeed, Balassa (1961)'s seminal theory of regional economic integration projected his concepts onto early efforts in Latin America and Europe, assessing promise for economic cooperation in both regions. The latter region fared far better than the former, of course. For a similar argument with respect to political development, see 2014; 2017, who argues that intellectual leaders in both North and South America had more in common than their subsequent political trajectories might suggest.

formally terminated in 1838 it had already come to an end in fact” Fenwick (1952). Nearly every decade in the 1800s saw a new effort to integrate, none of which fully materialized; similarly, a Central American Court of Justice founded in the early 1900s only functioned for 11 years before it stalled. These attempts renewed after the two world wars, and in 1956 Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal hailed the incipient Organization of Central American States, as “the most successful demonstration of a beginning of economic cooperation between underdeveloped countries” (Myrdal, 1956).⁴ But beginnings proved easier than sustenance, and that organization too ceased operations in the early 1970s, only to be replaced with a series of subsequent organizations that fared little better.

But we lack good frameworks for understanding the full course of an IO’s life. We know a lot about the conditions under which countries form or join international organizations⁵ and quite a bit about how those associations are designed.⁶ However, we understand very little about IO duration and survival: that is, how long IOs last, when they face dissolution, and the conditions that determine their survival if they are on the brink of death. Agency survival and change is extensively studied outside of the field international cooperation.⁷ However, just as in the study of international conflict, where the focus had long been on the inception of wars (Fearon, 1994) and not the end (Ikle, 1971; Morrow, 1994; Goemans, 2000; Slantchev, 2004; Reiter, 2009), the study of cooperation has largely overlooked the question of when and why IOs end, and what other paths are available to them short of demise.⁸

⁴Fourteen years later, Wynia (1970) described the organization as “the underdeveloped world’s most successful regional integration effort.”

⁵This literature is too vast to encapsulate in a single footnote. See (Keohane and Nye, 1977; Keohane, 1984). For a seminal argument, see Abbott and Snidal (1998); additionally, Gruber (2000); Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002); Barnett and Finnemore (2004); VonStein (2005)

⁶On the idea that countries efficiently design IOs to reflect optimal solutions to cooperation problems, see Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal (2001); Koremenos (2005); Baccini, Duer and Elsig (2015). On the notion that IO designs diffuse across regions, see Finnemore (1993); Jetschke and Lenz (2013); Allee and Elsig (2014); Baccini, Duer and Haftel (2015).

⁷See, for example, Weber (1947) on bureaucratic drift; also Kaufman (1976); North (1981); Hrebiniak and Joyce (1985); Lewis (2003).

⁸Strange (1998) asked why IOs never die, but the answers have been partial, usually focusing on single organizations such as the Bank for International Settlements (Bernholz, 2009) or NATO (McCalla, 1996). Schemeil (2013) discusses how once the initial conditions that led to the creation of IOs shift, they should be more likely to die off, but that the majority adapt, either through expanding their mandates and building up networks, a seminal point also made by Carpenter (2000). Gray and Kucik (2017) also look at how agreements fare in the face of leadership turnover in member states, and find that they often go unimplemented. Gallarotti (1991) looks at failures in IO performance with respect to their managerial schemes, and Barnett and Finnemore (1999) look at pathologies in IOs, but those articles do not examine inertia in or dissolution of IOs. Exceptionally, Shanks, Kaplan and Jacobson (1996) analyze deaths among IOs, finding that only two-thirds of the IOs that were on record 1981 remained active in 1992. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2014) also collects data on IO death, finding that states generally have an appetite to create new

This book performs three core tasks in service of understanding how global cooperation rises and falls in the face of conflict. *First*, I introduce the concept of IO vitality, a previously understudied phenomenon that underpins the health of global governance. Vitality encompasses four paths of existence for IOs: death and life, but also change and inertia. An IO can end up on any of those paths for better or worse. Agreement termination can mean either that an IO has failed, or that it succeeded in its goals and is no longer needed; inertia can either mean that an IO is simply put on hold until it can be more usefully deployed, or it can be a pathological outcome of agency drift; change can move an IO toward a more or less fruitful form of potential cooperation.

Acknowledging IO vitality helps us catch a breath in the face of the current global crisis in international cooperation. Although IOs today face overt strains in the form of renegotiations and exits, the vast majority of IOs have always threatened to slip into periods of listlessness. This further complicates what we think we know about global cooperation. We already realize that countries tend to form and join IOs that reflect the types of policies that they were planning to enact anyway (VonStein, 2005), and that powerful countries usually dominate IOs behind the scenes, even if those organizations have formal rules that ought to keep those countries in check (Stone, 2011). Accounting for vitality puts a further wrinkle in our assessment of the constraining power of international organizations — and it makes the current period look less like an exception and more like a rule. Interrogating IO vitality allows us to make a pivot toward asking what makes international organizations survive and remain vital in the face of conflict — not just what they look like when they're formed. And overlooking IO vitality cripples our ability to understand how international cooperation really works.

Second, I introduce a theory of bureaucratic empowerment and actor entrepreneurship to explain these paths of IO vitality. All IOs face crisis at some point. But the IOs that survive those crises — either through adaptation or perseverance — all share two characteristics. One is an entrepreneurial actor that takes the initiative to steer an IO. This view differs from traditional accounts, which tend to focus only on the members of IOs, particularly the most powerful countries. But rather than assuming that the fortunes of IOs rise and fall with the interests of powerful mem-

IOs rather than reform existing ones, and that large IOs with diverse members are more likely to survive. See also Abbott, Green and Keohane (2016), who use the concept of organizational ecology to explain the rise of private organizations at the expense of IGOs. On regime complexes, see Colgan, Keohane and Van de Graaf (2012); Gehring and Faude (2014); Keohane and Morse (2014).

bers, I argue instead that it doesn't have to be the biggest or most powerful one, contrary to popular wisdom (Lake, 1993; Moravcsik, 1999; Lake, 2009). Even within member states, small countries can also take the helm in crisis, ensuing IO survival even if the bigger countries balk. Furthermore, entrepreneurial actors need not be limited to member countries. External actors — including international financial organizations, other international organizations, and outside great powers — can also play an important role in keeping an IO afloat. But the cost of keeping that IO alive can often entail a shift in the organization's priorities and mandate.⁹

The other characteristic is a functioning bureaucracy that, with that country's support, can steer the organization through the crisis. Although many argue that powerful countries always hold the reins in the organizations they design, even exercising influence behind the scenes, I posit that unintended consequences in what I call bureaucratic empowerment can offer windows for an organization to find fruitful avenues for cooperation even in the face of crisis — or, conversely, to lead an IO toward agency slack, when the organization drifts away from the intentions of its founding principals.

The *third* contribution of the book is a raft of evidence — historical and current; quantitative and qualitative; from interviews to archival work — that supports this proposition. I introduce a unique dataset of the vitality of international organizations, paying careful attention to the distinctions that previous efforts have blurred. Based on exhaustive research, I present variation in the vitality of 131 economic organizations over time. The data represent the entire universe of formal cooperative arrangements meant to ensure trade and economic growth among member states, including organizations that only lasted a few short years or that morphed from one form to another. This represents a comprehensive account of state efforts to solve cooperation problems surrounding cross-border trade and development issues, ranging over time from the immediate post-World War II period and covering every region in the world. To supplement the research that was based on news and academic sources, I conducted field research in 13 of those organizations, interviewing staff and policymakers both inside and outside the organizations. These site visits included organizations in Latin America, Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia, allowing me to build a truly comparative perspective on the functioning of IOs around the world.

⁹This concept has echoes in the literature on IO orchestration (Abbott and Snidal, 2010; Hale and Roger, 2014; Abbott et al., 2016) and in the role of private authority in international governance (Green, 2014).

1.1 The Dependent Variable: Vitality of International Organizations

Understanding how global cooperation works in the face of challenges first requires acknowledging a concept that is lacking in much of the existing literature: the vitality of international organizations. We know very little about what explains even the basic contours of IO survival. We know even less about whether an organization lives, dies, adapts, or drifts — what I label vitality. Vitality is a concept that can be generalized to all organizations, but defining it requires a specific examinations of the outputs relevant to the cooperative goal.

This book sets out four paths of IO vitality.¹⁰ I operationalize each by using a baseline economic outputs from the member countries in the form of trade above expectations,¹¹ as well as the level of activity in the organization itself in the form of meetings among bureaucrats and heads of state, supplementing these with further information gleaned from news reports and IO records of change, drift, or deadlock in the IO. The rarest category is *death*; only around 12 percent of IOs formally disband. But it should be noted that the second rarest category is *Life*, which indicates an IO that from the moment of its founding operates in accord with its founding principles on the mission for which it was established. Only 20 percent of IOs in the dataset fall into this category. This suggests that the cooperative harmony presumed by much of the current hand-wringing about international cooperation is not as widespread as many may presume.

The other two categories of vitality comprise about 35 percent each of the remaining sample. *Repurposed* IOs can broaden the scope of their competencies, shift missions altogether, or even rebrand under a new name with a new constellation of member states. But sometimes these changes lead to more efficient cooperation, and other times those changes cannot extricate themselves from the tensions and setbacks that plagued the initial organization, leading to mission creep and further inefficiency (Pollack, N.d.). Similarly, *inert* organizations can in principle simply be operating on hold until they can be effectively deployed to their initially cooperative goal, but in practice IOs in this category often drift into pathological outcomes, driven by bureaucratic agents (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999).

¹⁰This builds from (Gray, 2018), which presented merely three categories — life, death, or “zombie,” which I now categorize as “inert.”

¹¹This is standardized using a gravity model of trade, which relies on the geographic and cultural determinants of the anticipated flows of goods between countries.

Although each of these stages is tied to the effectiveness of a given cooperative setup, an IO's vitality is distinct from its performance.¹² Even before we can understand whether IOs promote cooperation among states, we must first assess whether an organization even functions at a fundamental level of operation as the years go by. Vitality means whether the IO still convenes meetings; whether the necessary member states and bureaucrats attend those meetings, if they are even held. This may sound like a low standard to which international organizations should be held. But many IO initiatives that look good on paper often succumb to an organization's lack of vitality: the Commonwealth of Independent States for many years attempted to launch a program linking transportation networks, but the transportation ministers of member countries neglected to show up at the meetings, and the initiative was finally canceled. In other words, even IO attempts at cooperation may be undercut by their inability to remain vital.

IO vitality and IO effectiveness often correspond, of course. The European Union has hundreds of agencies and departments and employs nearly 7,500 staff in its secretariat in Brussels, in addition to a calendar that boasts thousands of internal as well as intergovernmental meetings per year. By contrast, an organization that had died off altogether — such as the West Indian Federation — could hardly claim to be effective. But vitality and effectiveness can also operate at opposite extremes. Some IOs — such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, or the Caribbean Community — convene regular meetings and conduct various activities, despite widespread complaints that those IOs underperform. There are also IOs that meet relatively infrequently but are still effective: NAFTA limits itself to a single annual congress of its three member states. Thus, although vitality and effectiveness are linked, they are theoretically and empirically distinct concepts, with different explanations.¹³ But IO vitality is an important precondition of effectiveness.

By the same token, understanding IO vitality is not the same thing as looking at whether countries comply with their international commitments.¹⁴ Such accounts

¹²See Gutner and Thompson (2010); Lall (2017). These explanations tend to center on similar factors as the theory here — including member-state interests and institutional structure and staff. However, the explanation provided in this book differs in two important ways. The first is identifying how vitality often occurs at the moment of a shock to cooperation. The second is the emphasis that member-state interests do not center solely on the most powerful states; even smaller states or outside actors can serve as entrepreneurs.

¹³Studies of performance tend to center on alliances between IO staff and other types of non-government actors, including NGOs, private-sector interests or other private actors (Green, 2013), and other IOs (Lall, 2017). Lipsy (2015) looks at how certain policy areas tend to produce institutions that are more or less responsive to change.

¹⁴A vast literature exists on compliance with international agreements (Chayes and Chayes, 1993; Checkel, 2001; Simmons, 2010), although empirical tests tend to center on specific cases — such

usually focus on whether countries uphold their obligations to IOs. But it does not investigate the trajectory of the IO itself as it struggles to respond to member-state compliance. Although examining whether countries exit (Helfer, 2005; Vabulas and von Borzykowski, 2013; Campello and Lemos, 2015) or renegotiate (Haftel and Thompson, 2018) their agreements is relevant to IO vitality, those studies tend to focus on the state-level motivations for dealing with the IO, and not how the organization itself responds and adapts.

Thus, although there are clear implications for vitality on IO effectiveness, the four paths of life, death, inertia, and change do not automatically translate into normatively good or bad outcomes. IO survival inof itself is not always a positive development. International organizations are formed to confront issues that require cross-border cooperation. Under some circumstances, IO dissolution might actually be laudable. An IO that has fulfilled its mission should in principle close its doors, since it succeeded in solving a cooperation problem among countries. The temporary dissolution of the Central European Free Trade Association is one example; with a goal of liberalizing trade among postcommunist countries in the run-up to the European Union, the organization went into a temporary hiatus after its initial members joined the EU. Conversely, one could argue that an IO that never managed to make progress in its mandate should fold, so that it does not tie up countries' resources in a failed endeavor. Take, for example, the East African Community, disbanded by its member states in 1977 in the face of conflicts among member states entrenched disagreement surrounding the organization's ideological underpinnings.¹⁵ In both of these situations, IO dissolution could be viewed not as a failure but rather as an honorable death, since the organization did not overstep its original purpose.

Similarly, IO survival could also be a sign of an organization that had outlive its purpose. It's broadly acknowledged that organizations can fight to stay alive beyond their intended purpose. Bureaucrats want to keep their jobs, and countries want to extract resources from those organizations. This combination can result in an IO that drifts along without disbanding, even despite pressures to dissolve it due to inefficiency and corruption. Of course, IOs can also successfully repurpose in the face of obsolescence; the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, both founded to oversee payments to ensure the reconstruction of post–World War II Europe, found themselves eclipsed by the Marshall Plan. Yet rather than disband,

as the EU (Boerzel, 2005*a*; Levitz and Pop-Eleches, 2010) or the WTO (Elsig, 2010; Peritz, 2018) — or particular issue areas, such as the environment or human-rights treaties.

¹⁵“Disintegration of the Community of East Africa,” *New York Times*, March 6, 1977. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, the organization revitalized in 1993.

the organizations adapted their mandate to address development issues in the global South. But examples abound of IOs that survive to little real effect, criticized for being vehicles of corruption (Hafner Burton and Schneider 2019).

1.1.1 Vitality and the Problem of Selection

Without acknowledging IO vitality, we cannot answer many of the central questions of the study of international organizations. Ignoring IO vitality creates what is commonly referred to as problems of selection.¹⁶ Excluding dead organizations from our studies, or not properly acknowledging inert ones, can cripple our ability to achieve a sound understanding of how international cooperation works.¹⁷

Consider some of the fundamental questions in the study of international cooperation. Arguably, the core issue of scholarly debate is whether IOs matter.¹⁸ Do they promote cooperation between countries? If a country joins or helps form IOs, do those organizations change the country's behavior, putting them on paths that they would not have traveled on their own? Here, if we exclude dead IOs from these studies, focusing only on the ones that remain active, we essentially pick winners. That is, focusing only on live IOs mean that we stack the deck toward organizations that are already successful at staying alive. Ignoring failed IOs will likely lead us to be overly bullish on the prospect of international bodies to promote cooperation.

Conversely, if we include inert IOs into our data without acknowledging their vitality — or lack thereof — the problem becomes one of measurement. In looking at IOs' effects on cooperation, we would be measuring membership in all IOs, but the dead or inert ones could not reasonably be expected to change state behavior. This biases our inferences the opposite way as described above: it means that we add to functioning IOs the ballast of dead ones, which drag down any positive effects of the ones that are alive and functioning. In other words, by throwing dead or inert IOs into large-N studies of international cooperation, IOs overall will look less

¹⁶This problem is recurrent in the social sciences: see Heckman (1976) for an early discussion, along with Geddes (2003) for a comprehensive treatment of how selection problems plague many research designs, with an application to comparative politics.

¹⁷The problem extends as well to international agreements in which negotiations started but never got off the ground in the first place (Janick, 1978; Dimitrov et al., 2007), or in which states chose to cooperate through formal rather than informal organizations (Vabulas and Snidal, 2013; Roger, 2020); take, for example, the lack of a multilateral regime for finance in the way that one exists for trade (Cohen, 1982; Pfister and Suter, 1987) as well as the persistence of informal monetary arrangements that were meant to be temporary (Fioretos, 2019).

¹⁸But see Strange (1983) on how the primary questions of IOs should be about distributional effects.

effective.

In other words, if researchers want to understand the effects of IOs on some cooperative outcome — for example, whether economics organizations promote trade among members, or whether human rights organizations inhibit repression or abuse — but fail to account for dead or dormant organizations in their estimations, the picture can become unclear. It could be that, once dead or comatose organizations are accounted for, the effects of the vital IOs on cooperation are even stronger than researchers previously claimed. On the other hand, IOs may simply be the physical manifestation of countries' cooperative impulses, and even comatose organizations might exhibit some relationship to cooperation, if only because they are the avatars of state willingness to get along. A further possibility would be that, if states are convening regularly under the auspices of IOs, their interactions help them avoid conflict even if the IO itself does not make any noticeable progress toward its goals (Haftel, 2007). IOs are also a fundamental component of many prominent theories of the interaction between world leaders in the international system: IOs are meant to let governments credibly commit to certain policies, allowing them to lock in economic and political reforms. IOs can hardly serve as a guarantor of governments' future behavior if they themselves are not active.

Another core question centers on institutional design. Do certain types of IO designs lead them to be more effective? The selection bias problem is clear here. Imagine two similarly designed institutions, but only one ends up in our studies of international cooperation, and then researchers conclude that that organization's design is instrumental in its performance. If researchers want to investigate variation in design across international organizations — that is, why some IOs are structured a certain way, and others are structured differently — then failing to acknowledge dead or comatose IOs ones will undermine that enterprise. We cannot claim that organizations such as the European Union are optimally designed, if there exist other failed IOs that resemble the EU.¹⁹ If countries willingly select a failed IO template, we need to learn more about what motivates states to select certain designs over others. IO design, that is, may have little to do with whether IOs survive or die.

A third central issue is explaining why states choose to join or form IOs. When scholars tackle this question, overlooking the failed or comatose organizations cannot provide a satisfying answer. If an organization dies off, why did the state sign onto

¹⁹For example, the Andean Community and the South African Development Community both incorporated elements of EU design, such as courts and parliaments, but those institutions matched only in design, not in implementation (Lenz, 2012; Phelan, 2015).

the endeavor in the first place? If an organization has grown moribund, why do states not exit? Assuming that the only decision available to countries is whether to join or stay out of IOs mischaracterizes patterns of international cooperation. States can make attempts to cooperate through IOs that turn out to be unsuccessful for reasons that may or may not be out of their control; they can choose to be active in the reorienting of those IOs to more productive ends, or exit altogether. They can also make the choice to remain nominally in IOs that exist only on paper, in which case researchers looking from the outside in might be fooled into thinking that they had more interest in cooperation than they actually do.

In short, IO vitality is the linchpin of international cooperation. And an IO's vitality is far more complicated than might be suggested at its formative moments. Yet it is largely unacknowledged, hence relatively understudied and little understood in the IR literature.

1.2 The Argument: Vitality, Bureaucratic Empowerment, and Actor Entrepreneurship

The next step is understanding the forces that determine IO vitality itself. The vitality of IOs, and their resilience in the face of crises, is not simply determined by who joins and what the agreement looks like. Unexpected shocks and unintended consequences put strain on an international organization, no matter how good the intentions of their founders or how thoughtful their design. In other words, organizations are a product of both their internal environment (Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Daft and Weick, 1984) of membership dynamics and institutional constraints, as well as their external one of regional and global crises, outside actors, and external pressures.

But even in the face of widespread crises in the international system, some IOs seem better able to weather the shocks than others. World War Two brought an end to the League of Nations, an early effort at multilateral cooperation. But the International Labor Organization — which started out as a sub-agency of the League — managed to stay afloat throughout the war. So it's not the case that global shocks like wars or financial crises destabilize all IOs equally. Some endure, even if they do not have backing from powerful countries, while even ones that look robust on paper might die off. What accounts for these surprising patterns?

Since IOs spring up all over the world, it would be tempting to assume that the ones in rich, well-functioning countries fare the best, whereas the ones in poor and conflict-ridden countries are more at risk. But this isn't necessarily the case. Even stable and prosperous countries have seen their share of collapsed IOs over the past century. The US's two attempts to form NATO-style security pacts outside of Europe were failures,²⁰ and Australia and New Zealand's early effort to form a trade pact with the South Pacific effectively went silent after 10 years of existence. By contrast, even in the face of instability and poverty, some IOs endure: the Caribbean Community and the Arab League are among the most long-lasting of the IOs that encourage trade promotion, even if their successes are erratic. In short, rich countries are not immune to creating IOs that go nowhere, nor are IOs in poor countries doomed to death.

I argue that IO vitality, particularly in points of crisis, stems from an interaction among entrepreneurial member states and bureaucracies. This argument extends the canonical focus on state interests as a linchpin of IO functioning.²¹ But it makes two important moves. The first is to shift the emphasis away from the central role of power, traditionally conceived, in the IO. Scholars typically argue that the fate of IOs — from formation to implementation — hinges on the interest and actions of the most powerful member state in the organization.²² Hegemonic powers in an IO are thought to be pivotal for that IO's functioning, and researchers have noted how strong states can exercise this power both in terms of controlling the formal rules of the IO (Hurd, 2008) as well as through operating informally behind the scenes (Stone, 2011). However, I argue that the powerful countries are not the sole arbiters of an IO's functioning. Any entrepreneurial state²³ can steer the IO in a new and more fruitful direction. A state need not be powerful²⁴ in order to be entrepreneurial. Countries must only exhibit entrepreneurship through the ability and willingness to utilize capacities within an IO, or to steer the organization to new areas.²⁵ In other

²⁰The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization collapsed after 23 years, and the Middle East Treaty Organization fared even worse, uprooting after three short years when a coup ousted the Iraqi monarchy, then changing its name to the Central Treaty Organization, then finally dying off in 1977.

²¹Mearsheimer (1994); Abbott and Snidal (1998); Barnett and Finnemore (2004).

²²For example, Martin (1992); Gruber (2000); Barnett and Duvall (2005).

²³Even an outside such as an external donor can play this role, as will be discussed below.

²⁴On how power does not determine all outcomes in IOs, see, for example, (Schneider and Urpelainen, 2011; Slapin, 2006, 2008; Panke, 2016; McKibben, 2015; Kaya, 2015; Mikulaschek, 2018; Poast and Urpelainen, 2018). Older treatments include Wilkinson (1956).

²⁵In the language of historical institutionalism, this mirrors the concepts of "layering" (establishing new rules on top of old ones) or "conversion" (reinterpreting existing functions or procedures to different ends) (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009; Fioretos, 2011) in the face of so-called critical junctures (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007).

words, in the face of a deteriorating IO, any state can express voice in its reform, rather than exit in actuality or in behavior (Hirschman, 1970).²⁶ This is good news for those who fear the decline of Western powers on the international stage, as it shows that other countries can also successfully take the helm. It also accords with arguments that hegemonic power can be a source of instability, not of stability (Gray and Potter, 2012; Aklin and Kern, 2019). Furthermore, it demonstrates that smaller countries can leave an imprint on IO functioning (Panke, 2010; Schneider, 2011; Poast and Urpelainen, 2018).

This brings us to a further move away from the traditional conception of *state* interests in IOs, which is to include outside actors outside of member states themselves. Other IOs such as the EU, the IMF, or the World Bank; great powers such as the US, the UK, China, or Japan that may have strategic goals in the region; private actors such as firms; or NGOs can often shepherd an organization on the rocks. Even if member states are deadlocked, outside entrepreneurs can keep an IO afloat, often through financing or overseeing projects. The role of private actors in informal or ad-hoc regimes such as the environment (Green, 2014) and international money (Cohen, 1982; Newman and Posner, 2018; Fioretos, 2019). However, the world of formal IOs still remains largely centered on states as the central actors, without acknowledging the role of other actors in any but a peripheral role.²⁷

This does not mean, of course, that an IO in crisis can be utterly revitalized without the participation of powerful countries. The story is more complicated than that. It's rarely the case that IOs function blithely along in good form, with powerful actors constrained by the IO, only to be hit with a crisis and then quickly brought back from the brink. A tiny country or a private actor cannot on its own save the EU from Brexit or steer the WTO away from collapse. Rather, even the most prominent and best-functioning of IOs usually have serious problems of compliance and performance, even when powerful countries are seemingly on board with the goals of the organization.²⁸ But many scholars seem to think that if the IO is still in existence or has not been dissolved, it must be performing the tasks reflected in its original design. In reality, a crisis can present an opportunity to navigate an IO into a more profitable area of a cooperation. Small states cannot, on their own,

²⁶Green (2014) makes a broader argument with respect to international governance in environmental matters: that private actors such as NGOs can play a pivotal role in making environmental cooperation work.

²⁷See Tallberg et al. (2013) on how IOs have opened up to nonstate actors; this insight has yet to be incorporated expressly into the framework of IO vitality.

²⁸See, for example, Chaudoin, Hays and Hicks (2016) and Kucik and Peritz 2018 on the WTO; Boerzel (2001) on the EU.

coerce powerful ones into compliance with international regimes. But under the right conditions, they can — with the help of the IO’s bureaucracy — navigate the IO in a different direction.

The second part of this equation the role of bureaucratic functioning in practice, not just in design — what I call bureaucratic empowerment. Many recent approaches assume that the bureaucracies of IOs simply reflect state interests, along with other aspects of IO design (Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal, 2001; Rosendorff, 2005).²⁹ However, throughout the history of international cooperation, bureaucracies have stumbled into pockets of functioning better or worse. Kindleberger (1955) notes how the economists at the League of Nations always outperformed the other staff; the functioning of the secretariat at CARICOM started out promisingly but deteriorated as conditions worsened in its locale of Georgetown, Guyana³⁰; autonomy in the bureaucracy at ECOWAS, a West African economic agreement, faltered in the agreement’s initial goal of trade promotion but retooled to the more fertile ground of peacekeeping, in which the organization is now a regional leader. In other words, scholars have fixated on the role of state interests in designing IOs, with the assumption that an IO’s fate can be sealed by the decisions states make to set up their bureaucracies. But bureaucracies can take themselves in directions that the founders did not intend (Weber, 1922; Wallerstein, 1966; Mintzberg, 1985; Johnson, 2013; Haftel and Hofmann, 2017).

This makes it imperative to look at the way that bureaucracies function in practice, not just what they looked like when they were set up.³¹ The concept of bureaucratic empowerment incorporates not just the design of the bureaucracy (that is, the degree to which it is empowered to act on its own, without the approval of member states (Pollack, 1997)) but also the quality and reputation of the staff that work there (Carpenter, 2000; Carpenter and Krause, 2012) and the conditions that might bring such staff to a given IO. Those conditions include conditions in the secretariat in terms of geographic distance as well as outside options for those staff. In other words, an IO’s founding design cannot be the end of the story: we also need to look at the degree to which that IO attracts talented staff that are able to establish reputations for competence (March, 2011; Urpelainen, 2012; Parížek, 2017). This brings in theories of management (Kaufmann, 1976), staffing and leadership (Weber, 1947; Selznick, 1957; Cox and Jacobson, 1973; Young, 1991) and organizational sociology (Niskanen, 1971; Meyer and Rowan, 1977; Meyer and Scott, 1992). Such concepts

²⁹See Moravcsik (1999) for a skeptical view of the role of IO bureaucracies in change in the EC.

³⁰Landell Mills report

³¹This is what Haftel (2007) and Hooghe et al. (2016) describe as “implemented autonomy.”

Table 1.1: Paths of Vitality in IOs

		Bureaucratic Empowerment	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Entrepreneurship	<i>Low</i>	Death	Inert/ Pathology/Agency slack
	<i>High</i>	Repurposed/ Mission Creep	Live

are prominent in many studies of agency drift and decline but are less frequently incorporated into IO theory.

Table 1.1 summarizes the possible trajectories for organizations that come from the combination of entrepreneurship and bureaucratic competence, given a shock to the cooperation environment.

Each of these four cells represents distinct paths that an IO can experience. However, it bears repeating that these outcomes can have slightly different shades in terms of their normative implications for cooperation. Death can be a sign of a mission accomplished,³² or it can be an admission of failure; inert organizations can either be lying in wait until they are needed, or they can be captured by bureaucracies and malintentioned states for rents and corruption; IOs can be repurposed toward more or less fruitful areas of cooperation.

The case of Central American cooperation, cited above, can show the interplay of these factors. In 1955, after several failed attempts at federation, Central American countries established a number of institutions as part of the Organization of Central American States (ODECA). Departing from the previously contentious intents to federate, ODECA was founded with the idea that political integration could only be achieved through apolitical means, by gradually eliminating economic and social barriers³³ ODECA was staffed with so-called *technicos*, economists who were able to outline a concrete program of economic liberalization and technical cooperation among member countries. In the earliest iteration of the organization, ODECA’s Economic Council was designed to be subordinate to the group’s Council of Foreign Ministers, but the *technicos* fought for — and received — more autonomy from the political actors. This scores ODECA in this period as “high” on bureaucratic empowerment. At its height, entrepreneurship came from an outside actor, the United

³²Indeed, successful terminations are built in to some agreements; see, for example, Harrison (2012) on survival clauses in bilateral investment treaties.

³³This was an early example of the idea of functionalism (Haas and Schmitter, 1964) and was based partly on the failures of more overtly political endeavors to integrate (Simon, 2017).

Nation's Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), which provided many of the blueprints for economic liberalization among nations after initially establishing import-substituting industrialization (Nye, 1967). Indeed, ODECA's first technical meeting, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras in 1952, not only preceded the "political" meeting of ODECA foreign ministers by several days but was actually held between ODECA *technicos* and the staff of ECLA. Only after four days of meetings with UN staff did ODECA's economic council convene with the rest of the organization (Shaw, 1978).

For around 12 years, the organization achieved significant successes in economic and technical cooperation (Schmitter, 1970), putting it in the "live" category thanks to high entrepreneurship and high bureaucratic empowerment. But already by 1969, the gains from trade were beginning to stagnate, and better-off Honduras and Nicaragua complained that they were effectively subsidizing growth in the poorer members. In 1969 Nicaragua imposed tariffs in a deliberate violation of the agreement, and in that same year war broke out between El Salvador and Honduras. Lacking an entrepreneur once ECLA's authority had been sidelined, the organization remained essentially inert until 1973, until it finally dissolved, not to be revived again until nearly 20 years later. This shows how one organization can move across categories of vitality, given varying levels of entrepreneurship and bureaucratic empowerment.

In sum, IOs must be examined beyond the founding moment in their lifespans. That stage, already explored substantially in IR literature, centers on the beginnings, including negotiation, design, and membership rules. But beyond those initial stages, acknowledging variation in IO vitality also looks at the question of IO survival, and within that category of IO survival, whether or not those survivals work in service of cooperation. In the face of crisis, the resilience of the IO to shocks depends on the symbiosis between the IO bureaucracy and an entrepreneurial agent for change. When confronting a challenge to cooperation, IO vitality stems from the willingness of at least one actor to support the bureaucracies that they set up. If at least one member state — not even necessarily the most powerful or the largest — can back the IO, and if the IO bureaucracy is well-staffed, the IO can continue to make some progress in its original area of focus. But a state cannot revive cooperation on its own in the area of origin if the bureaucracy is weak. More likely, states can steer the preexisting organization into a new area of focus. Nor can an empowered bureaucracy continue its mandate without member support; even strong IO bureaucracies suffer from the problem of being "all secretary and not at all gen-

eral,” as one early observer put it (Rogers, 1945). Without working together with at least one entrepreneurial actor, IO bureaucracies can suffer the classical principal agent problem: the agents can escape from their principal founders, and the organization will exist in a comatose state, with meetings convening but no real purpose or mandate.

I test this argument using both quantitative data and extensive case work gathered from archives, newspapers, and fieldwork to 14 international organizations across the globe. I build a new measure of IO vitality for 131 economic organizations based on not only an organization’s start and end date, but the number of meetings that it regularly convenes on an annual basis as well as progress made toward its goals. This measure indicates that around 40 percent of those IOs have either died off or entered into periods of dormancy — a fact not acknowledged by the vast majority of studies. I also account for member state entrepreneurship using original data on the activities of member states within IOs — not just their membership, as in most studies, but their attendance at meetings, the rank of delegates they send to those meetings, and the proposals they launch within the IO. This measure, in combination with variables for the implemented autonomy of the bureaucracy along with pragmatic indicators for a bureaucracy’s ability to attract quality staff, can show how IOs adapt to changing circumstances in the international system.

1.3 The Importance of IO Vitality to Policy

Recent global events show the imperative of looking beyond IO membership and design, and on to vitality and resilience. The Trans-Pacific Partnership was spearheaded by a powerful global actor, designed with engagement from firms that were going to benefit from the terms in the agreement. But it was upended by the election of US President Donald Trump, whose subsequent target was NAFTA, an organization that scholars had long cited as one of the trade agreement that performed among the best in the world in terms of firm utilization (Chase, 2003). Similarly, the internal party dynamics in Britain that led to the staging of a 2016 referendum led to a vote for the country to leave the European Union, throwing those organization’s dynamics into question. On the other extreme, the citizen uprisings in the Arab Spring reinvigorated cooperation in the region, with IOs such as the Arab Maghreb Union resuming activity after 20 years of dormancy. In short, IOs’ vitality depends on their resilience of to changing circumstances — as mundane as new leadership or

as profound as violent conflict — in their member states and in the world.

Questions of vitality plague international organizations the world over, as countries equally question their membership in IOs with low vitality as well as in those whose leaders convene frequently with little discernible output. Many organizations still struggle to even convene their regular meetings. The Arab Maghreb Union only managed to carry on its duties for five years after its founding in 1989. Already by 1994, according to one analysis, it “was in a state of utter paralysis,” with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi taking the opportunity at an annual summit in Tunis to announce that he would not take over the rotating presidency of the organization.³⁴ After the Arab Spring, it met in 2012 for the first time in 18 years.

Other IOs do convene regularly but with no progress to their goals. Mercosur, a trade agreement founded in 1992 among Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, hit trouble after financial crises in the latter two countries at the turn of the millennium and “now consists of little more than bear-hugs and kisses among companeros,” according to one recent article.³⁵

Even IOs that have a relatively strong history of performance can face domestic pushback. Public backlash against the European Union, for example, has led to exit and resistance from EU voters (Cramme and Hobolt, 2014; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014), with galvanized opponents taking advantage of relatively lukewarm public support for international integration (DeVries, 2018). Such realities have led countries across the world to reconsider their participation in IOs. Especially for small countries, the cost can be substantial; a quarter of the budget of Seychelles is devoted to membership contributions to various IOs.³⁶ In 2013 Azerbaijan spent nearly three times as much on membership in IOs as it did on transport and communications expenses.³⁷ Indeed, one government official in Tanzania charged that the country should withdraw from some of the international organizations of which it was a member, specifically citing the membership dues. “These obligations are overwhelming ... in some organisations, we are required to pay as much as \$300,000 as annual contribution.”³⁸

³⁴“Maghreb Union Revived by Arab Uprisings,” Al-Akhbar, 20 Feb 2012.

³⁵“Mercosur RIP?” *The Economist*, July 12, 2012. The article went on to quote a diplomat involved in the establishment of Mercosur as saying “The founding idea that Mercosur would be an instrument of trade liberalization has disappeared. What we have today is a political and social forum.”

³⁶“Seychelles Pulling Out Soon,” The Indian Ocean Newsletter, 12 July 2003.

³⁷“Public Budget of Azerbaijan,” Trend Daily Economic News, 12 April 2013

³⁸“Tanzania to Quit More International Bodies,” Africa News, August 31, 1999.

Thus, governments, diplomats, and citizens around the world weigh the consequences of IO vitality on the international system. As more and more countries question their commitment to global governance, the record of the many IOs formed for just this purpose must be considered. If IOs vary so drastically in terms of vitality — despite having a common purpose and a similar set of member states — we need to understand the forces that drive IOs to be active in pursuing their goals, and to learn from their failures as well as their successes.³⁹

The theory I propose — of entrepreneurship and bureaucratic empowerment in the face of a shock to cooperation — also provides a bright spot for those concerned about the decline of international order. IOs today face what many think to be unprecedented challenges, as European Union members face crisis, backsliding, and exit; states clamor to renegotiate their international commitments, from trade agreements such as NAFTA to the hundreds of bilateral investment treaties around the globe. Many fear that without the US in a leadership role, the multilateral order will crumble. But this book shows that cross-border cooperation has repeatedly been rescued from what seemed to be certain death. As long as one interested party has the political will to resuscitate the organization, and if it can work together with a competent bureaucracy, IOs can often be revitalized or retooled. This indicates that cooperation today can persist in the face of challenges and backlash, although it may take a slightly different form than what the founders had envisaged.

1.4 Summary and Outline of the Book

Variation in vitality infuses the history of IOs as well as the history of IO scholarship. As the number of IOs spiraled in the post–Cold War era, so too did the volume of IO scholarship. But scholars in this area tended to focus on one of two topics. First was the sheer number of IOs (or number of members in a particular IO) in a given issue area. If a country belonged to 150 different IOs, or if the number of IOs focusing on a particular global problem increased, many scholars took this as evidence that international cooperation was on the rise. The second topic was the design of the agreement itself. Scholars assumed that country delegates spent long hours negotiating the terms of cooperation. Whatever agreement emerged from this process was the countries’ best efforts to come up with details of cooperation

³⁹Many IR scholars discuss how states can learn from the successes of international agreements — see, for example, Elkins, Guzman and Simmons (2008) on how countries learn from successful bilateral treaties — but far fewer look at learning from failure.

that would be as feasible as possible. To that end, the provisions of an agreement were often taken at face value as the empirical manifestation of the cooperation process. Sometimes researchers undertook in-depth studies of single organizations or particular regions that look at the power dynamics and internal struggles of IOs.⁴⁰ But usually such studies are limited to a relatively small number of prominent IOs, such as the IMF or the EU.

Beyond the design of an agreement or the number of countries involved as designers or subsequent members, scholars also focused on what could be described as the first-order effects of international organizations. Wielding new empirical tools as well as comprehensive data, researchers could explore whether countries that signed free-trade agreements saw an increase in the cross-border exchange of goods and services; whether investment treaties prompted firms and individuals to finance ventures abroad; whether human-rights organizations helped spread tolerance and prevent abuse; and whether international agreements to promote peace and stop violence had the effects that they intended.

These types of questions were wholly appropriate for the period of time when IOs were a relatively new feature of the global landscape. But with the number of IOs spiralling every year and the existing IOs growing long in the tooth, it is time to shift the focus to a different set of issues. Now that the many IOs that have been created since the fall of the Berlin Wall are over 25 years old, it is time for a more thorough examination of the many ways in which IOs impact their members as well as the international system.

We cannot assume that the mere presence of IOs, or a formidable-sounding agreement, automatically stands as evidence that states are cooperating. Not all IOs flourish. Some IOs might quietly go dormant; others may be disbanded altogether; others may take on new missions. A focus on vitality precedes evaluations of IO effectiveness. It is difficult to know what makes some IOs perform better than others without first having a grasp on the factors that lead to their vitality. Those factors are not as straightforward as they might seem: it's not the case that richer, more advanced countries always form agreements that survive, or that better-designed agreements have a better chance of survival.

Instead, the key to understanding vitality lies in moving toward a deeper examination of the bureaucracies behind IOs, alongside the workhorse IR explanations of member-state interests and IO design. A complete picture of the multifaceted impact

⁴⁰See, for example, Stone (2011); Kleine (2013).

of IOs requires drawing from comparative and American politics to bring to bear theories of bureaucracy, principal agency, management, federalism, and organizational theory. Even if the founders of IOs mean to set them up in the most advantageous way possible, many factors can contribute to the emergence of an organization that functions differently, even suboptimally. They can rely on an inappropriate template for design; the local or global order may shift in such a way that affects the dynamics of cooperation; individuals in the bureaucracy may end up faltering at their initial mission; changes in the staff may alter the priorities of the bureaucracies; external pressure or financing can tilt the IO toward a new direction.⁴¹ The resilience of bureaucracies in the face of shocks to cooperation determines their subsequent vitality.

A focus on vitality is crucial for the new era of globalization backlash. We cannot let our understanding of international cooperation grind to a halt once we examine those organizations' design, membership, and effects on their chosen area of cooperation. Even successful organizations such as the EU and NAFTA face the threat of exit from the most prominent members. An understanding of IO vitality and resilience in the face of pushback from member state governments is a critical first step toward our conceptualization of effective international governance.

The subsequent chapters will proceed as follows:

Chapter Two: The Evolution of IOs, and IO scholarship Paradigms emerge through a combination of ideas and empirical realities; when the world changes, old paradigms give way to new ones (Kuhn, 1970; Kahler, 1997; Geddes, 2003). This chapter provides a history of IOs and the thinking that governed their rise and fall. I describe how our scholarly understanding of international organizations from a variety of disciplines — economics, management, and international relations — both informed and was informed by the shape and structure of many of the IOs that we currently observe in the world. In particular, I focus on how the paradigm of IO scholarship was informed by the end of the Cold War and the rise of quantitative methods in the social sciences. I use text analysis and machine learning tools to provide an empirical illustration of the paradigms in IO scholarship over time, showing that the turn toward abstraction in the study of international cooperation allowed scholars to overlook practical questions of IO vitality. This chapter also lays out the current conditions that set the stage for this inquiry into IO vitality and durability.

⁴¹Indeed, many of the early templates for international organization stemmed from ideas about federation. Although most of those efforts toward federation remained unsuccessful, the literature on federalism also offers clues toward the success or failure of various integration efforts.

Chapter Three: A Theory of IO Vitality The chapter then introduces theories of principal agency, bureaucratic politics, and management to motivate the agenda for a subsequent set of questions of IOs. Namely, what determines whether IOs survive, die, or thrive? This chapter argues that all sorts of factors — from shifts in the global economic landscape, to changes in the domestic political climate among member states — can cause a shock to the environment for cooperation. Bureaucrats always want to ensure the survival of their organization, even if that IO shifts directions. How the bureaucracies of IOs respond to such shocks can determine their direction — whether they die off, become gutted, or remain vital, either in their initial area of focus or by shifting to more fertile ground for cooperation. This chapter goes more deeply into the theories of organizations from IR, economics, and management. It draws from many different areas of IO impact — including human rights, the environment, investor-state dispute settlement, as well as security economic cooperation — for applications.

Chapter Four: Operationalizing IO Vitality Here I introduce data on IO vitality for 131 IOs since 1900. I contrast these data with other existing metrics and show how vitality presents a wholly different picture of international cooperation than does many of the extant measures. I use new, original data to operationalize the level of activity in organizations as well as their policy outputs. Using Keesing’s World Events, and supplementing this with media reports and archival work, I gathered data on the frequency, topic, and level of representation of meetings in 131 IOs over time, to measure how active the organizations were on a regular basis. I also measure economic output by estimating predicted versus actual levels of trade for member states in a given economic IO. These measures proxy for an IO’s vitality as well as its effective output.

Chapter Five: Updating Our Understanding of the Effects of IOs. This chapter uses the vitality data from the previous chapter to examine some of the findings of previous research about the effects of IOs. Using the data from other prominent studies on IOs, I discuss how a simple binary coding of organizational membership over time overlooks important differences across organizations that cannot be captured by organizational design alone. I show that many of these analyses counted in IOs that had simply gone dark, as well as excluding IOs with similar designs and member state configurations that died out. Once these organizations are included, many of these first-order effects of the benefits of economic IOs on trade, volatility, investment, and even more distant effects such as human rights and economic reform, become destabilized. I discuss the implications for including measures of

vitality in the study of international organizations.

Chapter Six: Who Dies, Who Drifts, Who Survives? Over time, many IOs have attempted to address similar types of cooperation problems, but the IO literature tends to ignore failed attempts at cooperation, focusing solely on the organizations that persist. This omission means that we cannot understand the international and domestic factors that make IOs perform well, holding constant design and membership configuration. This qualitative chapter takes the example of economic and security organizations around the world to look at the many iterations of IOs that were undertaken in various parts of the world to try to promote economic cooperation, without success. Recalling the bureaucratic politics and principal agent theories from Chapter Three, it demonstrates that many of these failed and dormant organizations have had unintended consequences both on their regions as well as on the subsequent design of successor IOs. The chapter looks at IOs formed since World War II in East, South and Southeast Asia.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion The first generation of empirical research of IOs made great strides in understanding the forces behind states joining and designing IOs, as well as their effects on the cooperative problems that they were meant to solve. To take this important agenda further, we need more nuanced data as well as different theoretical tools. This book carves a path forward by drawing on interdisciplinary insights to examine the vitality and unintended consequences of international organizations. This serves as a corrective to earlier studies of IOs, one that is informed by multiple theoretical traditions as well as the empirical realities of how IOs operate. It also has important implications for policy, as heads of state and bureaucrats attempt to navigate the web of international organizations throughout the world today.

Chapter 2

Chapter Two: Selectivity in the Study of International Organizations

Although they sometimes intersected, the fate of [IO] theory and the fate of [IO] practice were never all that closely linked after World War II. ... How and why [can] the doctors be thriving when the patient is moribund? - Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie, 1986

As international organizations falter, researchers and policymakers are turning their attention to the cracks in the multinational order. A tide of populist backlash has shaken faith in the institutions built to govern global interactions. World leaders threaten to renegotiate or abandon international agreements, and suddenly the web of international governance offers fewer assurances for stability than previously thought.

One could be forgiven for thinking that instances like Brexit, the US withdrawal from the TPP, and threats to the WTO look to be a stunning blow for international

organizations. For the past quarter of a century, scholars have insisted that IOs serve as a backstop for swings in domestic politics. Once countries sign on to these organizations, they make a commitment to certain standards of behavior, and even future generations of leaders should be constrained by these promises.¹ How can we currently find ourselves in a situation where this global order seems so gravely under threat? Are international organizations somehow less robust than they initially appeared?

Yet taking a broader view, this pivot — from supreme confidence in the global order, to panic at its potential demise — is not surprising. Any area of scientific inquiry is subject to the rise and fall of particular paradigms — that is, a dominant understanding of a class of phenomena at a particular time (Kuhn, 1970). Such paradigms usually emerge in reaction to failings of previous theories, usually brought to light by new facts or a shift in previous realities. They also tend to come forth — and to stick around — on the backs of particular ideologies; as Sklar (1975) observed, theories “linger for a long time mainly on account of ideological lag.”

This chapter explores the feedback loops among three factors in our understanding of how international cooperation works. All three of these forces ebb and flow. The first is the world itself: the policy and politics of the time shape our picture of international collaboration within any given historical moment. Currently, these are the high-profile withdrawals from and renegotiations of IOs — like the EU, NAFTA, and the WTO — that many had taken for granted as an indelible part of the international fabric.

The second is the dominant ideologies and norms: policy ideas about the optimal form of cooperation can permeate our view of whether IOs are a source of promise or mirage. Today, these take the form of the nationalism and populism that push back against the notion of open borders, economic exchange, and political cooperation. But in previous decades, our conception of international integration was similarly shaped by ideas. After decolonization, many new nations considered federations as well as regional organizations. Concurrently, ideas about the nuts and bolts of international organizations — their staffing, budgets, and headquarters — prevailed as international organizations were first being set up; when those organizations faltered, the pragmatic thinking about IO administration gave way to more abstract ideas about the design of the charters themselves.

The third is the scholarly trends — both in theories and in research methods

¹But see Leeds (1999); Mattes (2012); Gray and Kucik (2017).

— that filter the realities of international collaboration. The single phenomenon of international collaboration has been studied not just in political science but also in economics, law, public administration, sociology, management, and history. The methodologies and ideologies that rose and fell in those disciplines also informed the way in which each field regarded IOs in a given period. They vary not only across fields but, occasionally, within them: different ideological and methodological traditions can dominate policy and academic thinking in different parts of the world.²

Using a text-as-data approach, this chapter shows the interrelationship among discourse and practice in international organizations. I demonstrate the rise and fall of various paradigms and conceptions in IO analysis, benchmarked against the rise and fall of IOs themselves. The ways that we talk about IOs move concurrently with the fate of those IOs themselves. This demonstrates how difficult it is to truly take stock of what we know about international organizations, since its study is a product of the real world and methodological context surrounding it. As (Kahler, 1997) shows, from the 1950s to the 1970s the study of IOs was something of “a backwater” within the field of international relations (p 33), confined mostly to the study of the United Nations (UN) and its specialized organizations. But particularly after the fall of communism, a different paradigm on IOs emerged, one that only recently seems to be rolling back: the linking of membership of all sorts of IOs with a whole host of positive trends, from democratization to investment to economic growth.

The text analysis shows that as IOs declined in influence in the 1970s and 1980s, not only did the number of articles about IOs drop, but those articles shifted to a far more general tone. References to specific IOs dropped dramatically in favor of more abstract theorizing, as did citations to literature in public administration and management — in other words, the literature that gives insights on how IOs actually function on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, research articles in the immediate post-war period discussed many different issue areas in IR — including security, economics, and law — within the context of the international organizations that were tasked with coordinating such issues. That is, researchers tackled international problems through the lens of the organizations meant to overcome those problems. As their record for success waned, those issue areas began to split off from the

²For example, Haas (1990) observed, “Western beliefs about procedure — budgetary, administrative, parliamentary — hold a privileged position in international organizations. This hegemony of Western modes of problem solving results not only from the founding role Western governments played in designing most international organizations but also from the tendency of non-Western delegates, experts, and civil servants to be educated in Western ways and sympathetic, in principle, to Western modes of defining policy issues.”

study of international organizations. Scholarship on, for example, interstate conflict cleaved away from the study of international organizations just as optimism waned about the ability of IOs to prevent conflict.

This serves to illustrate the paradigm shifts within the study of international cooperation. Every field of study is subject to fashions, and there is an understandable ebb and flow to any particular trend in research. Perspectives on the historical patterns of those trends, however, can point the way toward directions for research that are more suited to the current times — and I argue that the time has come for the study of IO vitality.

2.1 A Broader View of IO Death and Change

Unsurprisingly, the past two decades of research on international cooperation have tended to reflect the normative bent of the post-Cold War era of globalization. Just as the number as well as the vitality of IOs have fluctuated across history, the academic and policy sentiment toward international organizations have also risen and fallen over time, ranging from the pessimistic to the sweepingly optimistic. As recently as the 1980s, the study of IOs had faltered, with the field being declared all but obsolete. The fall of the Berlin Wall breathed new life into the agenda for global cooperation, and as states rushed to form and join organizations that spread the world over.

Thus, even though the recent decades have seen a flourishing of research on IOs, a look at the history of IO scholarship reveals an ebbing and flowing not only of the volume but also the tone of the scholarship. At times the topic of international collaboration received a primarily a technocratic and legalistic treatment; at other times, most scholarship was normative or prescriptive in its nature. Scholarship has always reflected not only the global environment for international cooperation but as well prevailing normative and methodological trends in the field, and accordingly the study of IOs has ricocheted from the descriptive to the prescriptive; from legal scholarship to political science to area studies and back again.

In the immediate post–World War II period, for example, the study of international cooperation centered primarily on the workings of the United Nations, from the perspectives of public administration; scholarly attention was given to the hiring practices, staffing, and budgeting of the organization. From the 1950s to the 1970s,

as Kahler (1997) noted, international organizations were “hardly regarded as the most exciting frontiers of research in the field.” This was partially because the IOs in the world Only beginning in the mid-1970s through the 1980s did the scholarship on international cooperation diverge from the realities on the ground. As Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986) wrote in 1986, the study of international cooperation, particularly in the form of regime theory, was inversely related to the functioning of formal IOs, which were struggling to stay afloat.³

Throughout it all, however, scholars have always exercised selectivity in terms of the IOs on which they focus, as well as in their definition of what counts as cooperation. In the post–World War II period only multilateral organizations such as the UN or the League of Nations were classified as meaningful international governance, while other groupings were dismissed as regional — even the EU and NATO, which we now think of as anchor tenants in the study of IOs. Organizations such as the Baghdad Pact and the Common African and Mauritian Organization (OCAM), now omitted from many IR scholars’ datasets, were often discussed in the same breath as the European Economic Community.⁴

The broadening in the mid-1970s of the study of international cooperation to international regimes — which included any broad type of institutionalized cooperative behavior among heads of state, non-governmental organizations, or even private actors — allowed for the furthering of scholarship on international cooperation even when formal IOs were dissolving or stagnating. Thus, measurement and definitions have always mattered in the study of IOs, with repercussions for our subsequent evaluations of whether IOs have meaning.

2.2 Sample Selection in the Study of IOs

As discussed in the introduction, the main questions in IOs center broadly on three topics. The first is whether IO design contributes to that organization’s success —

³They noted as well that this differed from the early days of the study of international cooperation: “In the interwar period, the fate of the field reflected the fate of the world it studied: a creative burst of work on ‘international government’ after 1919, followed by a period of more cautious reassessment approaching the 1930s, and a gradual decline into irrelevance if not obscurity thereafter.” Page 753.

⁴See, for example, Padelford (1954), who equated the incipient “European Defense Community and a European Political Community” along with “the idea of a Pacific Pact resembling NATO, the concept of a Middle East Defense organization, and a possible linkage of Asian States.” Those organizations subsequently became, in order, the EU; the failed SEATO and METO; and ASEAN.

or lack thereof — in ensuring cooperation. The second is whether IO membership influences some outcome: that is, if belonging to IOs help countries avoid war, promote trade, or protect human rights, for example. The third is why some countries join some IOs and not others. None of these important questions can be answered without understanding and accounting for IO vitality.

Conventional approaches to these research questions tend to suffer from a basic problem of research design. As illustrated by the above history, IO scholarship tends to be overly sensitive to the prevailing winds of cooperation observed in the world. In other words, when the League of Nations was ascendant, scholars across disciplines rushed to praise and explain it, while offering hope for future cooperative endeavors. When war broke out, scholars adopted what seems in retrospect to be unwarranted pessimism about the prospects for cooperation. In the 1960s, they picked the most successful examples of regional organizations — or at least, the ones that were new enough to seem successful, but ignored the failures of previous regional cooperation efforts in, for example, Latin America in the early 1900s (Ball, 1969) or the West Indies in the 1950s (Wallace, 1962). In the 1980s, scholars were too quick to disparage the possibilities for both regional and international organization, without knowing that an era of unprecedented globalism awaited them in the next decade.

In the language of research design, what this means is that throughout its history, much of the study of international collaboration suffers from a sample selection problem (Geddes, 2003). This problem starts with the thorny issue of only looking at the IOs that actually formed, rather than those that were proposed, or even those where negotiations began but never concluded. A separate set of theories than the ones proposed here would likely explain this outcome. But assuming that the cooperative universe only begins once an IO is formed does a disservice to the cooperative intentions that many states may have.⁵ To paraphrase Walter (2001), it assumes that certain countries or issue areas are “ripe for cooperation” while others are doomed to conflict. But overlooking failed attempts at negotiation omits contrary endeavors.⁶

The selection problems continue if, even assuming that an IO is formed, re-

⁵In the words of Capoccia and Kelemen (2007), “ignoring the near misses of history would actually deprive scholars of important and interesting negative cases with regard to the outcomes they seek to explain: in other words, it would introduce selection bias into their comparative analyses and consequently arrive at weaker (and possibly flawed) findings.”

⁶As Geddes (2004, p. 13) puts it, “randomization does not guarantee the absence of correlation. If, at a particular time, the universe itself only contains cases that have passed a certain threshold of success because ‘nature’ has in some fashion weeded out the others, then even random or total samples will, in effect, have been selected on the dependent variable.”

searchers seek to explain the design of one type of organization compared with another. We cannot make a strong statement about the optimality of a certain IO design to address a cooperation problem without including in the study dead IOs with similar designs. It is also necessary to take vitality into account: an IO may look a certain way on paper but function very differently — or hardly function at all — in practice. Without knowing both all the available options for an existing institution that didn't get chosen, as well as proposed design institutions that didn't come into existence, it would be difficult to offer a persuasive account of why states selected one IO design compared with another.

Take, for example, the study of legal institutions. Many scholars welcomed the spread of courts and dispute-settlement mechanisms throughout the developing world.⁷ Styled like the European Court of Justice — and indeed, often funded by EU money — these institutions seemed to offer “islands of effective adjudication” in regions otherwise struggling with the rule of law (Alter and Guertzovich, 2009). But scholars have increasingly realized that these courts are rarely used (Phelan, 2015) and that in general countries tend to adopt design templates for institutions without actually adopting their practices in full.⁸ Thus, without examining the vitality of international commitments, strong claims about the merits of institutional design rest on shaky ground.

Omitting vitality from the study of the effects of IOs on international cooperation also creates inference problems on both ends of the spectrum. Simply choosing one IO and studying its effects in a given issue area can tell us quite a bit about IO performance in a given area, and also point to fault lines in our understandings of how particular theories should play out (Geddes, 2003). But when scholars focus on one organization — whether operational, as is the EU, or failed, as the League — they cannot make broader statements about the features of those IOs that might work well in other contexts. In other words, often when scholars want to understand IOs, they select an IO and study it. But selecting organizations that only look one way — either functional or dysfunctional — hampers our ability to draw broader conclusions about the features of IOs that further cooperative behavior.

By contrast, large-N studies can suggest the aspects of IO operations that are the most generalizable across countries and across time periods. However, if researchers fail to properly account for dead or comatose organizations in their dataset — either

⁷See, for example, Alter (2012).

⁸For the “templates” problem in trade agreements, see Jo and Namgung (2012); Gray and Slapin (2012); Allee and Elsig (2014); in investment agreements, see Poulsen (2015).

by omitting them altogether, or mistakenly counting them as alive and functioning — it scrambles our conceptions of what IOs can do for cooperation.⁹ Lumping together failed or failing organizations with the ones that function well may understate the positive effects of the vital IOs on cooperation. Alternately, it might be the case that even if the organizations themselves fail, states conduct cooperative efforts in the shadow of those failures. This would mean that formal IOs might not even be necessary for cooperation, if we observe positive outcomes even in the presence of failed or adrift IOs.

Selecting only a few IOs to study, or failing to acknowledge the variation in vitality in IOs, risks mischaracterizing the nature of international cooperative efforts. By writing off the League as a failure — as did many scholars in the 1930s and 1940s — we overlook the fact that its data-gathering endeavors laid the foundation for the practice of objective national statistics, subsequently taken up by the IMF, the World Bank, and the Bank for International Settlements (Pedersen, 2015). CENTO, a failed alliance in the Middle East which falls out of most scholars' radar, established a railway from Tehran to Turkey, as well as an institute of nuclear science. Similarly, if we fixate on the successes of the EU and its design in isolation, we miss the fact that compliance with EU directives flags (Boerzel, 2005*b*) and that the EU model of governance has had limited success in other regions (Lenz, 2012).

In sum, to have a more complete understanding of the workings of IOs on many levels, scholars need to interrogate the full spectrum of IOs as well as to take into account their fate once they are established. Doing so will give us better leverage on the crucial issues of international cooperation in the current age. With respect to the three research questions framed earlier, we cannot determine, first, whether IO designs effect its success because, in the face of two similarly designed institutions, IO scholars usually only select the more vital one to include in across-IO studies. Second, we cannot assess whether IOs influence some outcome without considering vitality. The problem here is one of measurement. If scholars include even moribund IOs into their assessments, they cannot make consistent claims about anticipated effects without taking vitality into account. Third, it is impossible to understand why countries join some IOs but not others if we omit failed but similarly designed IOs from our studies.

⁹For excellent discussions on selection bias in IR, see Vreeland (2003); VonStein (2005), but also Simmons and Hopkins (2005).

2.3 How the Study and Reality of IOs Evolved Over Time

The following section briefly traces the practical and intellectual paradigms that emerged, fell, and resurged in the study of international collaboration. This is not meant to be an exhaustive overview of the intellectual history of international cooperation.¹⁰ Nor is it meant to be a thorough characterization of the ideas and theories in international cooperation (Chapter Three will discuss many of these theories at greater length). Rather, it is meant to illustrate that engagement with the topic of international cooperation has itself surged and ebbed across various subfields, in keeping with global events. Not only did intellectual developments closely track the actual record vitality in IOs — their birth, death, and inertia — but paradigms themselves grew, retracted, and were declared dead only to rise again. Thus, the scholarship on IOs itself could benefit from a lens of vitality, moving in tandem with the IOs that they seek to explain. Overviews of IO scholarship over the past decades tend to have a flavor of victors' justice, centering on the current surge in IOs without taking into account the ebbs and flows in theory and practice.

2.3.1 Vitality in IOs — and IO Scholarship — Throughout History

Although calls for international governance can be traced back even to the 14th century, with Dante calling for a “world government,” the inception of a body of the work on the topic emerged in the early 1900s. Prior to World War I, there was a distinct split between idealistic visions of global society — as articulated by (Lorimer, 1883) from an international law perspective and Kant (1914) and later by Bentham (1927) from the point of view of philosophy — and more pragmatic writings on technical cooperation in areas such as duties on traded goods. In fact technical cooperation birthed the first IO — a convention to regulate sugar duties, complete with monitoring of its members and enforcement of its provisions (Pigman, 1997). Though it collapsed in 1912, diplomats at the time expressed that “those originally favorable to the convention had hoped that it would have been the first of a series of

¹⁰See Reinalda (2013) for a comprehensive historical treatment along these lines, as well as Kahler (1997); Martin and Simmons (1998) and Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner (1998) for a look at the particular role of the journal *IO* in IPE. For a survey of early 20th century research on IOs, see (Yalem, 1966).

such arrangements for the reduction of excessive customs duties.”¹¹ In the US, before 1917, calls from cooperation came primarily from the perspectives of international law — the civil society group the League to Enforce Peace called for disputes to be settled in an international court, with war being waged on any who did not comply.¹² Thus, even in the inception of the literature on international cooperation, there were substantive differences in the orientation and focus of scholarly writings with the topic, from philosophical to legalistic to technical.

As the League of Nations emerged in the fallout of the Great War, more commentators began to debate the precise form and mission of an organization that would further political — not just technical — cooperation. Indeed, scholarship imitated life, as the birth of the League spawned hundreds of articles examining the organization from political, pragmatic, and legal angles.¹³ Subsequent scholars have characterized the study of IOs in the period of the League’s ascendancy — as well as that of the subsequent United Nations — between 1920 and 1940 as reflecting “an excessive optimism in the ability of international organization to control international conflict” (Yalem, 1966). Outlook mattered here as well: much of the early writing on IOs was not by scholars per se, but rather by diplomats and statesmen, who used their own experiences as the basis for their calls for greater cooperation. Interestingly, much of this writing presaged some of the discussions of bureaucratic autonomy and sovereignty, but at the staff level: policy debated the appropriate national composition of League staff, and whether those employees could be expected to have allegiance to the League or to their home country (Potter, 1945).

However, in the interwar period and in the early 1940s, the scholarly tenor surrounding discussions of international cooperation was understandably grim. In the shadow of the failed League of Nations and the onset of war, after the failure of the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, international cooperation did not incite much enthusiasm. This shift permeated both policy and theory. The League’s collapse left an indelible mark on discussions about cooperation in all realms. In pragmatic terms, former diplomats and staffers conducted elaborate post-mortems on the causes of the League’s demise.¹⁴ In IR theory, Carr (1939) and Morgenthau (1945) launched the

¹¹De Fleuriau 1912, quoted in Pigman 2016, page 107.

¹²Interestingly, this dominant view preceded Wilsonian notions of internationalism. See Wertheim (2012), who writes, “Wilson himself remained coy in public and vague in private about the type of international organization he envisioned. As late as January 1919, the British LNU [League of Nations Union] complained: ‘We are still ignorant of the exact nature and scope of President Wilson’s proposals.’”

¹³See, for example, Ranshofen-Wertheimer (1945).

¹⁴A typical comment in this vein: Sforza (1943) noted that “the pitiable history of the League

debate between realists and “idealists,” which permeated IR for subsequent decades.

To that end, within IR, the study of IOs again “picked winners,” shifting from accounts of the League to the subsequent United Nations. The journal *International Organizations*, founded in 1947, acted as something of a UN bulletin, with a significant amount of real estate in the journal being devoted to a chronicle of UN activities (a practice it only dropped in 1979). In parallel, much of the writing on IOs in the late 1940s surged in the law journals as well, focusing on the constitutional view and the legal basis for various forms of cooperation. Here emerged as well the first systematic study of voting in the General Assembly (McIntyre, 1954).

At the same time, terminology mattered in this era, and international cooperation had a distinct meaning in the postwar period. In the late 1940s, the early stages of political calcification into the Eastern and Western blocs meant that the only endeavors that could be labeled as “international” were the ones that included the Soviets as well as the Western European countries and the United States. The political realities behind this terminology permeated the functioning of IO operations, with controversy emerging over the issue of whether the UN, which strove to be an inclusively multilateral agency, could channel Marshall Plan money for European reconstruction without causing divisions between Eastern and Western Europe. Indeed, even the word “integration” originated in 1949 by the U.S. State Department as a sufficiently vague and apolitical term that would not cause controversy, this time between the US and Europe. Although a few general theories of international organizations emerged in this time — see, for example, Claude (1964); Potter (1965) — theory and practice in regionalism was far more prevalent.

Indeed, what we would now think of as the study of IOs — including the study of the EU and NATO — was in the late 1950s branded in the field as “regional” studies, a field that came into the mainstream not just on the backs of European integration but also in the post-colonial era, as newly independent states sought to pursue development strategies and form economic ties among one another, not just with their former colonists. Functionalist theories, stemming from Mitrany (1943) and expanded by Haas (1965), informed not only the intellectual but also the pragmatic conception of cooperation. Part of these prescriptions stemmed from the political reluctance to envisage global governance in the Cold War era, and instead to focus on technocratic governance. With the 1957 Treaty of Rome and

of Nations, as it vegetated in Geneva, is nothing but a history of the intrigues and betrayals by the dictatorial states remaining in the League for one purpose alone — to ridicule it first, and kill it later” (page 864).

the creation of the European Common Market, following the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952, along with the formation of several early postcolonial regional organizations such as CARICOM, OCAM, and the Arab League, academia and policy alike shifted toward localized governance through technocratic cooperation. But scholars still tended to consider these integration efforts singular: Alger (1970) notes that 80 percent of research on IOs in the 1960s focused on a single organization.

Attendantly, even the rhetoric surrounding technocratic governance in the 1960s carried high ideals with it. One would be forgiven for thinking that the following passage referenced the establishment of a colossal IO: “Ultimately such a Society will be organized; the only question is whether the time is now. Should the answer be ‘yes’ — as the author plainly believes it should be — then much careful thinking and planning by those interested here and abroad is needed. It has been said that “the longest journey begins with but a single step.” Is now the time to take the first step?” But this was written in reference to an IO focused on cooperation in insurance markets.¹⁵

This setting also set the stage for the prominence of economic concepts in the study of cooperation. Economists had a tradition of involvement in IO research, even offering perspective on their pragmatic details. Rostow (1949) wrote a lengthy defense of the UN’s Economic Commission for Europe, and Kindleberger (1955) discussed the role of economists in the League of Nations compared with those in the UN. But the 1950s saw not only the prominence of the notion that economic integration offered a road to peace, as functionalism professed, but also the methodologies of economists applied to the study of IOs. Coase’s (1937) articulation of transaction costs, already — if unwittingly — laid the foundations of many subsequent theories of IO efficiency, and (Liska, 1957) developed the idea of economic equilibria into a structural-functional concept of international organization. March and Simon (1958) also outlined economic theories of organization that would later be taken up by political scientists.

In the 1960s general skepticism toward the ability of multilateral institutions to constrain conflict permeated scholarship and policy, and smaller, more tangible efforts toward cooperation at the regional and technocratic seemed more fruitful. Within the legal tradition, scholarship shifted toward specific issue areas in the matter of international governance, such as human rights and the environment; le-

¹⁵“Has the science of insurance matured to the point that we are ready for an International Society of Insurance? It would seem that this question is a timely one ... Gregg (1959), p52.

gal scholars avoided the broader subject of multilateral governance. In parallel, one scholar in 1970 observed that “specialists in the field of international organization have noted with some alarm a decline of interest among students and foundations in the study of the United Nations system. ... reflect[ing] one reality of postwar world politics: the division of a huge and heterogeneous international system into subsystems in which patterns of cooperation and ways of controlling conflicts are either more intense or less elusive than in the global system.”¹⁶ Still, by the mid-1960s some observers already expressed reservations about the growth of IOs, noting “a startlingly — perhaps an alarmingly — large number of such unions” while noting “a combination of growth with some stagnation” (Potter, 1965).

It is also worth noting that there was no clear received wisdom about the optimal design of IOs. Unlike in recent decades, when organizational design diffuses (Simmons and Elkins, 2004) to such an extent that IOs have acknowledged templates for their design (Lenz, 2012; Allee and Elsig, 2014), “there has so far been no consensus on the necessity for an international organization to possess any specific feature. ... There are no bases for particularly stressing, as a supposedly indispensable feature of such an organization, its possessing a separate personality and an autonomy of will, as is done by certain French authors,” as one scholar put it in 1965.¹⁷ That is to say, there was significant heterogeneity in both the academic as well as in the empirical realities of IOs.

The 1970s saw further fragmentation in IO practice as well as scholarship. Just as international organizations themselves experienced surges and drops in their vitality — with the previously dormant OPEC suddenly able to move national oil prices, and the move of the IMF and World Bank into crisis stabilization — so to did the study of IO experience burst of activity across subfields. In the economic realm, North and Thomas 1970; 1973 paved the way for the rationalist models of international organization that would take root in the subsequent decade. Within the field of international relations, debates continued between the resurgent realists and the regaled institutionalists. (Keohane and Nye, 1977) broadened the definition of IOs away from the strict conception of multilateral organizations such as the UN, to include any type of “regime.” As one observer wrote, “in many globalist writings international organizations tended to blend imperceptibly with other sorts of actors, to the point where the entities being described seemed neither ‘international’ nor

¹⁶Stanley Hofmann, quoted in Rochester (1986).

¹⁷“E.g., Paul Reuter, *Institutions internationales* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), p. 292; and Susanne Bastid, *Cours d’institutions internationales* (Paris: Les Cours de Droit, 1955-1956).” *Ibid*, p. 401.

‘organizations’ in character. ... With this downplaying of the organizational aspects of international organization, the international organization field had almost completely distanced itself from the legal-formal tradition that had once dominated the field” (Rochester, 1986).

As well, already by the 1970s, cracks in the realities of region-led growth led to greater pessimism about the promise of regionalism. This also reflected organizational vitality at the time, as many of the first post-colonial organizations — including many security organizations, such as the Baghdad Pact and SEATO — collapsed or slipped into a moribund state. By 1976 Haas himself wrote that “theorizing about regional integration as such is no longer profitable. ... Regional integration theory is obsolescent.”

By the 1980s, the study of formal international organizations had all but fallen out of fashion altogether. Regime theory was still a going concern, but very few studies approached the actual workings of IOs, favoring instead general treatments of institutionalized behavior rather than the institutions themselves. Even the pre-eminent journal *International Organization* changed its name to reflect a shifting focus away from the study of IOs specifically to adopting a broader agenda of political and economic affairs, because they deemed formal IOs to be “a field of study that had fallen into discredit.”¹⁸ Attendantly, the journal published only around a dozen articles on international organizations in the entire decade of the 1990s.

This again reflected the vitality of IOs in the world at the time. Although a broader focus on regime theory enabled scholars to see cooperation in more places, the actual world of formal IOs looked quite different. The United Nations was deemed to be in crisis; many of the regional organizations in the developing world had collapsed or grown inert; the Iron Curtain still entrenched divisions between east and the west. Even though robust governance continued on some fronts — such as the initiation in 1986 of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, which would lead to the WTO in 1995, and increasing activity in economic stabilization and development from the IMF and the World Bank — overall the landscape for international cooperation looked splintered. Concurrently, despite what would turn out to be significant theoretical contributions to the study of IOs from both an economic and an IR perspective — including North (1984)’s linking of Coase’s transaction cost

¹⁸As Rochester (1986) notes, in 1983 the editorial board of *International Organization*, a journal founded in 1947 specifically for the study of IOs, “gave the new subtitle ‘Journal of Political and Economic Affairs’ what amounted to top billing by reducing the title *International Organization* to *IO*. Although the editor reminded readers that ‘you can’t judge a book by its cover,’ he apparently felt otherwise. The journal seemed to be seeking to dissociate itself from its intellectual roots.

theory to the study of institutions; North and Weingast (1989)'s idea of institutions that could ensure credible commitment to certain patterns of behavior for governments; Ruggie (1982)'s constructivist treatise on embedded liberalism, and Keohane (1982, 1984)'s studies of regime theory — the study of IOs flagged. In fact, even the main advancers of the agenda acknowledged the skepticism they faced in world politics, with Ruggie writing in 1985 “Quantitatively, IGOs are still an expansive force in international affairs ... qualitatively, however, the world of IGOs is not in good shape.”

But the fall of the Berlin Wall changed all this. With the dissolving of the boundaries between East and West, as well as what seemed to be the moral triumph of market-based integration, the practical and the scholarly fields of international organization entered a golden age.

2.3.2 The Study and Practice of IOs After the End of the Cold War

Starting from the early 1990s, enthusiasm about international organizations not only regained its footing. The end of the Cold War cracked open the previously fragmented landscape of cross-border governance, and the 1990s saw an explosion of international organizations (IOs) across a wide variety of issue areas. Former Eastern Bloc countries formed new IOs themselves at the doorstep of the EU, which itself started a massive expansion in membership; world trade talks picked up steam, resulting in the creation in 1995 of the WTO; diplomats in developing countries rushed to sign new agreements for trade, investment, human rights, and other areas of cooperation in anything from sports to culture (Ainsbett and Poulsen, 2016).

This massive shift in world politics brought new energy to the study of international organization, across subfields and disciplines. The pragmatic study of the operation of IOs entered a resurgence within the managerial and bureaucratic fields.¹⁹ Regionalism also experienced a resurgence, with scholars — many in Europe, and informed by the workings of the EU — embarking on the agenda of comparative regionalism, which looked anew at regional integration efforts in the developing world.²⁰ Legal scholars sharpened their teeth on the newly emergent international courts and dispute-settlement mechanisms, as the neutralization of bloc politics

¹⁹See, for example, Chayes and Chayes (1993).

²⁰See Sbragia (2008) for an excellent overview, along with Mansfield and Milner (1997, 1999).

opened the door for international law.²¹ Economists saw international agreements such as the new WTO and the surge of PTAs as ushering in expanded opportunities for world trade; bilateral investment treaties opening the doors for global capital flows; and expanded roles for the World Bank and the IMF in development and stabilization.

In the study of international relations within political science, IO scholarship took a specific normative — and methodological — form. Although qualitative research of IOs — specifically in the constructivist and historical institutionalist approaches — also flourished,²² many research programs shifted to the quantitative study of international politics. Armed with what were then novel datasets and quantitative tools, scholars rushed to explain the dynamics of the creation and design of these IOs. Guided by the founding international relations theories of realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism, the first wave of empirical research on IOs centered on showing whether a country's membership in an international organization could be linked to good outcomes, such as peace, cooperation, and economic exchange.

Political scientists put their attention toward analyzing the first-order effects of IOs, for three main reasons. First, adherence to the core theories in IR meant that researchers focused primarily on proving whether IOs were simply epiphenomenal, or if they actually had independent effects on state behavior. The challenge from the realist school centered on whether institutions actually had impacts on global or domestic outcomes that were distinct from what states would have done absent the IO (Krasner, 1983; Mearsheimer, 1994). Realists argued that if states were simply using IOs as a means of advancing their own interests, then there was little need to study IOs as independent actors, contrary to what institutionalists argued (Keohane, 1984). To that end, much of the theorizing and empirical testing of IOs in the past several decades centered on defending liberal institutionalism against the critiques of realists. Doing so necessitated showing that IOs had effects on outcomes that were distinct from state interests — and first-order effects were the most obvious targets.

Second, the empirical tools and available data limited a deeper explanation of IO effects. The past few decades have witnessed a quantitative turn in political science more generally. Attendantly, empirical tests of IR theories relating to international collaboration focused on easily observable and measurable phenomena. Many initial studies used off-the-shelf metrics of IO formation and membership to examine simply

²¹See, for example, Slaughter (1995).

²²See Checkel (1997); Barnett and Finnemore (1999); Fioretos (2011).

at the number of IOs that a given state had joined in a given year, or the number of IOs that populated a given issue area. Later studies, informed by the importance of institutional design, turned to the language of IO charters as a way of mapping IO influence. Studies of the design of IOs coded the way an organization looked and the areas that it covered (see, for example, (Koremenos, 2013; Dür, Baccini and Elsig, 2014)) but rarely examined changes in the organization over time (although see (Hooghe et al., 2016), where organizational change is accounted for and updated). These empirical tools meant that only the most basic of IO effects — such as their impact on countries’ probability of getting into conflict or their levels of inward investment — could be examined, but not the microfoundations of those effects. But IO membership and IO design were things you could count and code, which made them amenable to the quantitative turn in political science.

Third, and perhaps most broadly, the end of the Cold War ushered in an era of optimism about the prospects for international cooperation. The fall of the Berlin Wall saw a normative triumph of market-based integration and democratization. Both in the academy and in the world around it, spirits ran high for the success of collaboration across borders. The 1990s witnessed remarkable growth in both the number of international organizations of all stripes, as well as the number of states that signed on to these regimes. Some of the most prominent existing IOs also consolidated and expanded. To name just a few examples, the GATT became more institutionalized and inclusive with the formation of the WTO; the European Union greatly broadened its membership as well as its cooperative provisions; many IOs throughout the world added on institutional features such as supranational courts and parliaments. This all added up to a sweeping hubris for international cooperation that both informed and was magnified by academic scholarship. Since good countries seemed to be joining IOs with good-sounding goals, it’s easy to believe in the virtuous circles created by norms, methods, and first-order empirical evidence. As Geddes put it, the appeal of some of these arguments was in part “intuitive, emotional, and ideological. ... When a theory fits with the preconceptions and seems highly plausible, scholars feel less motivated to go to what seems like unnecessary trouble to confirm it and, as a result, fail to unearth facts that would disconfirm it” (p 56).

In recent years, however, researchers have begun to acknowledge some of the cracks in the narrative of IO triumph. Many recent books across a variety of issue areas — security, economics, and human rights — have begun to examine the consequences of the spate of IOs in recent years. Although scholars have long stud-

ied regime complexity as a phenomenon in of itself, with predictions for power and rulemaking the international system,²³ For example, in the area of international security, Hardt (2014) and Hofmann (2013) look at the consequences of rule overlap and mission creep in security organizations. In the area of democracy promotion, Bush (2015) focuses on the competition among organizations and the survival strategies of those organizations. Donno (2013) also looks at the spread of multiple international actors in election monitoring and the negative outcomes that occasionally occur. In terms of trade agreements, Baccini and Urpelainen (2015) argue that what seems to be the primary goal of such agreements — trade promotion — actually rarely comes to fruition, although those agreements do help promote economic reform. In the area of human rights, Ritter and Conrad (2017) look at counterfactuals in the evaluation of international agreements in the upholding of human rights. Studies of development assistance show how humanitarian aid can inadvertently prolong conflict (Narang, 2015; Weintraub, 2016), promote black-market activity (Andreas, 2008), and foster corruption (Hafner-Burton and Schneider, 2017). Although they all target different issue areas, these studies share insights about the ways in which IOs may have subtler effects than the first-order consequences for the cooperation problems that they were meant to solve.

The methods as well have come under scrutiny. Scholars began to question the research design of studies that failed to disentangle positive economic or political trends, good countries, and IO membership. False positives

Other scholars have recently pointed to the possibility that the traditional stories of states joining IOs to solve cooperative problems may be incomplete. Johnson (2013) shows that IO bureaucrats themselves play a substantial role in both the spread and the design of IOs. Green (2014) shows that private actors play a strong role in international regimes that protect the environment. These accounts all suggest that governments may have less agency than the traditional IR theories attribute to them, leaving room for the insights of theories from bureaucratic politics, and the ways in which bureaucracies interact with the interests of member states in the global economy.

²³See, for example, (Aggarwal, 1998; Raustiala and Victor, 2004; Alter and Meunier, 2009).

2.4 Text as Data: The Study of IOs, in *IO*

To get a better understanding of the rhetoric and reality of IO studies, this section takes a first cut at looking at some of the patterns in IO scholarship as it matched global trends. I use text processing tools to get a descriptive sense of the paradigms within IO research and policy over time.

The first step is to find the locus of scholarship on IOs. To this end, I downloaded the full texts of articles²⁴ from the *American Political Science Review*, *American Economic Review*, *Journal of Economic History*, *American Journal of International Law*, *Foreign Affairs*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *World Politics*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Organization Sciences*, and *International Organization*.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, the journal *International Organizations* contains the greatest concentration of articles on IOs. For example, around 13 percent of all *AER* articles mention international organizations; 10 percent in *AJIL*; 9 percent in *AJS*; and 7 percent in *Organization Sciences*. By contrast, around 35 percent of *IO* articles focus on international organizations.

For expediency, I narrow down the analysis to articles in *International Organization*, looking at articles from its founding in 1946 to the present. The journal is presently the leading outlet for research in the subfield of international relations across issue areas, including security and international political economy as well as international organizations (Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner, 1998).

However, as mentioned above, the journal's current broad scope pivots from its initial focus on international organizations. It emerged from the World Peace Foundation, put into place by publisher Edwin Ginn in 1910, with the express aim of circulating more information about the ever-growing number of international organizations: "such a number of international organizations as to leave the student appalled at the pile of documents upon his desk, and the concerned layman totally confused. ... The mere acquisition of facts about these agencies is a difficult matter," proclaimed the opening editorial note.

To that end, the back pages of the journal were devoted to chronicling information, including meetings and reports, about a variety of international organizations. Here too, selectivity in the organizations that were listed had consequences for which

²⁴Full text availability varies by journal; some only have the titles and abstracts available.

²⁵I also plan to use these journals to investigate the importation of concepts around public administration, legal studies, and economics into the study of IOs.

organizations were deemed to “count.” After acknowledging the focus to be on intergovernmental organizations and omitting technical organizations,²⁶ the editors acknowledged that several decisions were based on convenience. The bias away from the study of failed or inert organizations began here, with the chronicles “omitting reference, even by listing, to international agencies which were dormant or which held few important meetings during 1946.” They also acknowledge the gap between intention and practice in their accounts. Although the initial aim was to rely exclusively on official accounts for the listing of the organizations’ activities, “limitations ... partly in shortage of time and staff, but primarily in the difficulty of securing official documents” meant that some of the smaller organizations as well as the War and Transitional Organizations were addressed only through “sporadic newspaper reports which fail to give an adequate picture of the work of the agency.” This echoes the theme of this chapter: that even in the early efforts to provide a comprehensive chronicle of the organizations devoted to ensuring international cooperation, editors made choices that eliminated smaller or less active organizations.

The journal is an important bellwether for our understanding of international cooperation in many ways, starting with its retreat, two decades after its founding, from its initial mission. In 1970, the journal stopped publishing its accounts of the meetings and activities of international organizations. This was ostensibly due to the availability of that information through other outlets.²⁷ But that omission was a harbinger of other changes in the type, content, and tone of publishing. While the earlier articles were often notes by statesmen or diplomats on the workings of international organizations, the 1970s marked the beginning of a shift toward what Cox (1970) described as “scientific” articles, contrasted with the “utopian” ones of previous years. Even though Cox later clarified that he had not intended to privilege one perspective over the other (Cox, 1972), he noted that “separating visions of what ought to be from analysis of what is” might be useful to escape the stalemates in international cooperation.²⁸

²⁶The categories included “1) The United Nations; 2) The Specialized Agencies; 3) Other International Organizations; 4) Regional International Organizations; and 5) War and Transitional Organizations.”

²⁷As an editorial note put it, “The factual summaries of the activities of international organizations were published for the last time in the Autumn 1969 issue. A feature of *International Organization* since its inception shortly after the inception of the United Nations, the summaries undoubtedly filled a major need at the time. However, other sources of information about the activities of these institutions have gradually become available, rendering feasible the elimination of this section from *International Organization* to free space, editorial staff, and other resources for the publication of more critical, analytical, and interpretive material.”

²⁸Interestingly, and relevant to the currently dominant view of state preferences as explanatory of international outcomes, Cox in that same essay criticized the state-centric approach, as follows:

As described above, the journal also changed its name altogether in the 1980s, reducing its title to an acronym to reflect the disfavor with which the study of international organizations had fallen and a pivot to the study of international security and international political economy. However, keep in mind that the journal had covered international conflict and cooperation in the areas of security and economics from its outset. But it did so in the context of the international organizations that were meant to overcome cooperation problems in those areas. In other words, studies of trade cooperation would approach the topic through a discussion of the GATT; discussions of refugee issues would be framed through the challenges facing the UNHCR; the problems of political cooperation would be raised through an analysis of the failures of the League of Nations. It was not until the 1970s that optimism about international organizations waned and *IO* began to publish research that addressed cooperation problems outside of the framework of organizations.

2.4.1 Text Analysis of IO Articles as an Empirical Illustration of Paradigms

This section uses several text processing techniques to provide a visual depiction of the trends in research and rhetoric on international organizations over time. Jstor made available 4373 OCR files of content, containing not only research articles but also contributors and other types of files that are not strictly articles, including the listing of IO activities mentioned above. I performed the analyses below on the research articles only.²⁹

The first task is to separate out the articles published about international organizations compared with other types of articles. This is necessary both as a metric for the trends in IO study over time and as a means of narrowing down the IO-focused articles for closer analysis. This can be achieved through a variety of ways.

“At a time when the exclusively state-centered view appears increasingly inadequate as a frame of reference for understanding some of the important changes occurring in world power relations, it may be advisable to forgo the incestuous pleasures of academic dogmatism and to search, even haltingly, for useful alternatives” (p 156).

²⁹Any corpus of text presents its own challenges in terms of consistency of formatting and streamlining. *IO*'s references and bibliographies were the most challenging aspect in terms of consistency. In the early years, full references were included in footnotes. In later years, there is a separate bibliography section. When the metadata had the references listed or the footnotes listed, I used this information as the basis for the citation list. When the metadata did not include the references or the footnotes, it was usually for the early articles. To get the citation information from these articles, I first extracted the footnotes from the full-text of the articles. I then manually went through the footnotes and separated each citation embedded in them to a new line.

The first is by using JSTOR's provided output of n-grams, which are three-word phrases from the entire corpus of articles. Using text processing, I narrow down the number of articles that have at least 10 mentions of "international organization," "international government," "regional organization," "international institution," or "United Nations."

Figure shows the number of articles about IOs as a share of overall articles in the journal, across time, as a four-issue moving average (the dotted red line). I plot this against data on the cumulative number of economic organizations that started or remained alive (the solid blue line) as well as the number that died (the dotted blue line) in a given year. Note that these numbers only capture formal organizations with secretariats; they do not include bilateral treaties such as preferential trade agreements, the number of which skyrocketed in the past 30 years. The overall share of articles on IOs hits a downward trend between 1980 and 1990 but starts picking up after the fall of communism, as shown by the dotted vertical line marking the year 1990.

The graph only shows IOs that actively disbanded; it does not depict IOs that went stagnant or faced crisis. But particularly in the realm of economic IOs, the 1970s was a trying decade for economic openness and integration, with many countries turning inward and erecting trade barriers. This was also a decade of financial crises, from the closing of the gold window to speculation against the British pound, which led the UK to seek an IMF bailout in 1976. These policies battered international organizations, with stalls in the GATT as well as in the EU. Whatever optimism had pervaded the early studies of IO had been dampened, and the scholarship in this area began to decline as well, until the collapse of communism and the increase of IOs that began in the 1990s.

Of course, the empirical realities of the world of international cooperation were somewhat more subtle than just IO births and deaths. International cooperation took a beating once the advent of the Cold War showed that the United Nations would not have the pacific effects that its founders envisaged, a reality only cemented after Hammerskjold's attempts to assert the UN's autonomy after the Congo crisis. Starting from the late 1950s, the Non-Aligned Movement of primarily developing countries who wished to preserve their sovereignty and territorial independence picked up speed in the 1970s. At the same time, many of the regional organizations that were founded after decolonization — such as CARICOM, the Arab League, and ODECA — were also stalling in the face of political crises in their member

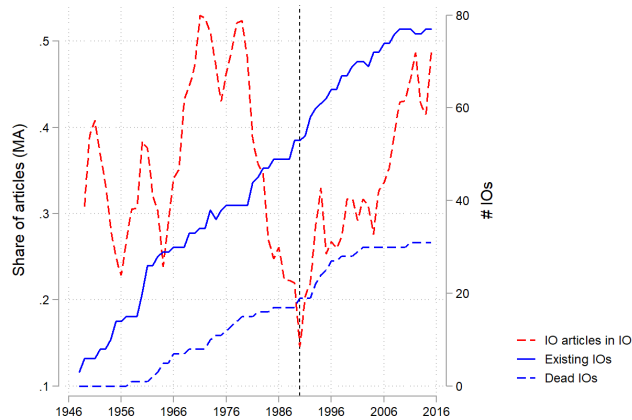


Figure 2.1: N-grams of articles about IOs, and IO beginnings and endings

states. And the US’s abandonment of the Bretton Woods gold-exchange standard of currency convertibility in 1971 ushered in periods of relative closure and isolationism until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This isolationism does not manifest in IO deaths per se, but rather in inertia. NB WILL BE ADDING ‘ZOMBIE’ LINE TO GRAPHS

The next figure uses kmeans clustering, an unsupervised machine learning algorithm, to group articles together in terms of similar words, where data point is a word’s term frequency-inverse document frequency score — eliminating commonly used words, pronouns, or definite and indefinite articles. In this case, I set the algorithm to identify ten centroids and then assigns each word to a centroid, while keeping the clusters of words as small as possible. This produced three separate clusters of various concepts concerning IGOs, four on economic matters, two on security, and one broad and unidentified category. Each article was only assigned to one cluster, meaning that this technique cannot identify when an article might talk about security or economic cooperation but in the context of an IGO, as described above. To that end, it makes a hard distinction among IGO articles and more substantive ones.

The graph shows that using this method, the number of IGO articles declined sharply in the 1980s, with a subsequent surge following the end of the Cold War. Articles about international economic matters had a peak just before the fall of the Berlin Wall, but by the early 2010s, the journal shifted its focus to security articles at the expense of other topics.

Next I take a preliminary look at some of the main concepts in these articles about IOs, with an eye toward illustrating the shift from the pragmatic, functional

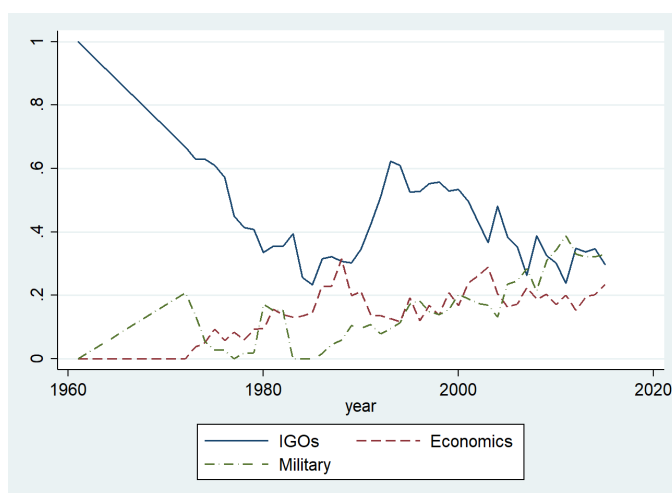


Figure 2.2: Share of *IO* articles on security, economic, and IGO topics (determined through kmeans clustering)

aspects of IOs to the more abstract concepts about cooperation and coordination. As a first cut, I use the three-word n-grams to narrow down a set of common terms used in various approaches toward the study of international organizations. This is not straightforward, as many single words can be deployed in multiple contexts. I cleaned the data for obvious uses of the term that did not refer to IOs (for example, in a selection of IO articles that talked about administration or administrative capacity, I omitted references to “Bush administration” or “Carter administration”). Economic terms are particularly subject to this pitfall, as words such as “model,” “trade,” or “integration” can be used in multiple contexts.

As an illustration, figure shows trends in the use of two categories of terms: ones centered more on public administration (“staff,” “budget,” “secretariat,” and “meeting,” among others), compared with one centered on legal concepts (including “law,” “legal,” and “jurisdiction,” for example). Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, those two conceptions were used to corresponding degrees; the correlation coefficient between those baskets of terms is 0.81. After 1990, however, the correlation drops to 0.20. This is easily visible in the graph, where discussions of the two concepts diverge sharply in the later decades.

Utilizing a different technique for a similar analysis, I next use the full texts of articles and reference lists to look at the rate at which authors tended to cite references from journals across subfields. To do this, I extract the references from all of the journal articles about IGOs, separating them to journals from three categories:

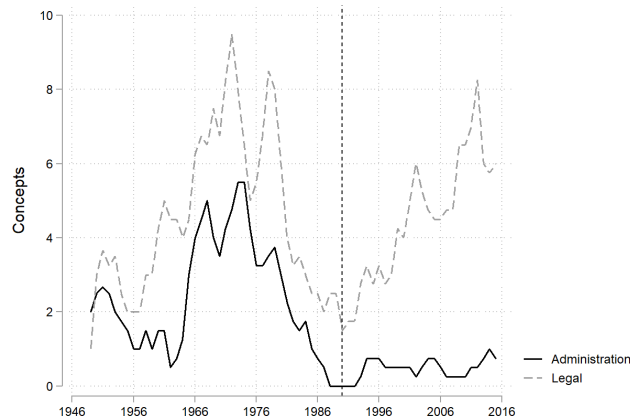


Figure 2.3: N-grams of concepts within articles on IOs, over time

economics, management and administration, and law.³⁰ This form of analysis has its limits: articles in the early decades of *IO*'s existence tended to be light on references at all, particularly the articles that had the “utopian” bent that Cox describes. This journal-centric approach also does not attempt to quantify the subfield orientation of books or newspaper articles. Nevertheless, a tally of the references invoked across time gives a sense of the degree to which analysis of IGOs drew from different disciplines.

NB: This analysis at present only begins in the 1970s because prior to this time period, *IO* organized its articles in a different fashion that requires manual cleaning, which I am currently undertaking.

Starting the analysis in the 1970s starts the clock at a time when pessimism about international organizations had already set in. Furthermore, IGO articles in the period prior to 1970 were heavily focused on the operations and administration of IOs, a trend that had already begun to decline by the end of the 1960s. Thus, this picture is at present incomplete. It is worth noting, however, that citations from other disciplines' journals exhibit considerable variability. Law in particular has exhibited a few sharp peaks (coinciding in part with special issues), and cites to economic articles were particularly high in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with the popularity of using game theoretic models to explain political outcomes.

The shift to abstract theorizing, illustrated by the turn to economic modeling in the 80s, also made itself manifest through the number of articles that invoked particular IOs. Even within research articles about international cooperation, refer-

³⁰This was achieved by compiling a list of relevant journals and obtaining tallies of each journal per article; multiple citations to the same publication within one article were truncated.

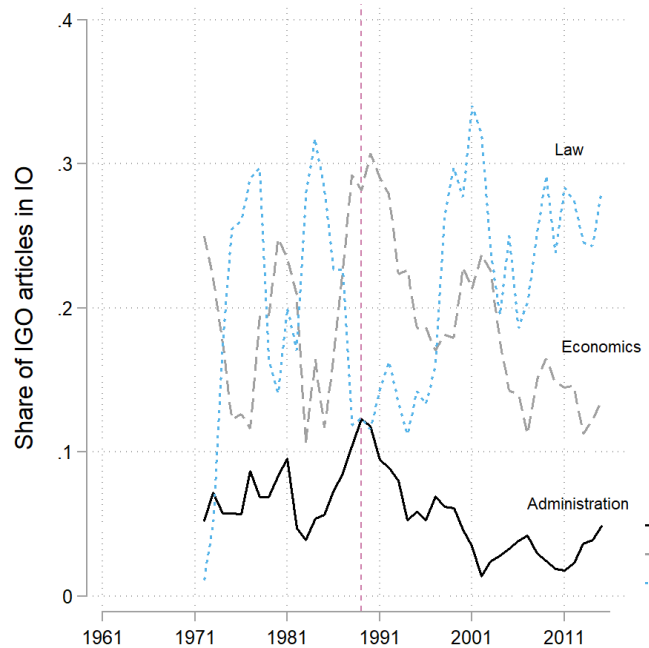


Figure 2.4: Citations to articles in law, economics, and management and administration, as a share of journal citations in a given *IO* article per year.

ences to specific IOs plummeted starting in the 1970s. This meant that the study of international collaboration became divorced from discussions of the actual workings of particular IOs.

The next figure shows mentions of particular IOs in articles within *IO* that discuss international cooperation. I show the total number of mentions within each article and sum those for a given year, with the condition that any given IO must be mentioned in a given article more than three times. This reduces the possibility of over-emphasizing more general articles that simply include lists of IOs in tables of some sort. I segment out mentions to the UN and its agencies from mentions of other IOs.

The height of specificity in IO research occurred in the early to mid-1960s, when many post-colonial regional organizations were just getting off the ground. In the mid-1970s, mentions to particular IOs dropped off substantially, only increasing again in the late 1990s. Nonetheless, even though they picked up again after the end of the Cold War references to actual IOs never reached comparable levels as in the first 30 years of the journal’s existence. UN studies in particular did not recover; they stayed at roughly the same frequency (fewer than ten mentions in any given year) as they did in the mid-1970s. When few IOs are even being invoked by name,

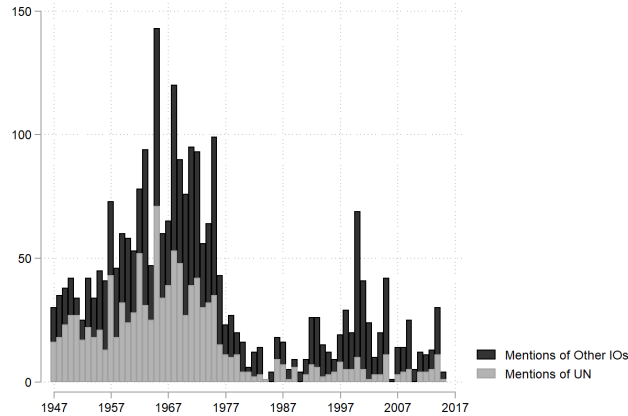


Figure 2.5: Mentions of specific organizations (both the UN and others) cumulatively for *IO* articles per year.

it stands to reason that research would have a disconnect to the way that those IOs work in practice.

These graphs serve to illustrate Geddes’s 2003 assertion that “arguments, theories, and even paradigms tend to rise and fall in rapid succession, leaving behind little to show that they ever existed” (page 4). Extending Geddes further, I hope to show that rather than “need[ing] to start over with every new current event [as] a result of our inability to build on, develop, and extend old theories instead of periodically discarding them,” we can turn back to the earlier theorizing as a foundation for thinking about how to interrogate the practical aspects of IO vitality.

2.5 Conclusion

How is it that IO vitality remains under-addressed in the literature on international cooperation? On the one hand, this oversight is especially puzzling considering that the early history of global cooperation is one of false starts along with organizations that never got off the ground — think of the short-lived League of Nations or the failed International Trade Organization. Even the better-known international organizations today have been subject to lapses in vitality and efforts to repurpose their missions. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, created to facilitate post-war reconstruction in Europe had long periods of inactivity after their founding once the Marshall Plan supplanted their resources, and their missions shifted and intensified only decades later, after the end of the Bretton Woods system. The United Nations was criticised as failed and adrift as recently as the 1980s.

The World Trade Organization, meant to be the first step in an ambitious consolidation of multilateral trade liberalization, has not managed to conclude a successful negotiation round in over 20 years — yet just as its liberalization agenda falters, its dispute settlement arm grows increasingly prominent, with countries at all levels of development bringing cases for adjudication. Taking those realities into account, it could be seen as curious that the IO literature has not specifically examined the question of IO vitality. On the other hand, world events and prevailing norms always shape scholarly inquiry, and the study of IOs is no different.

The subject of international organizations permeates many areas of study, and the insights from one field did not automatically cross over to the others. IOs are themselves complicated and ever-changing organisms that contain many different dimensions. Scholars in fields as disparate as international law, comparative economic development, bureaucratic politics, and management. Add to this regional scholars who were specifically concerned with the study of economic and political development in Europe, Asia, Africa, or Latin America. Add still the focus of substantive areas, including but not limited to human rights, environmental politics, international conflict, international investment, economic development, democratization, trade, communications, standards-setting, and sports. Each of those disciplines has their own research methodologies and paradigms, just as each potential area for cooperation has its own issue-specific complexities and problems, just as still each region and country has its own particular history and culture that inform how countries interact.

Additionally, scholars have deployed a wide spectrum of methodologies and tools toward the study of IOs. Researchers have approached IOs from a sociological perspective as well as a rational choice one, and through the lenses of history and diplomacy. They have produced formal, mathematical models of the interactions between governments and IOs. They have conducted interviews with former and current IO staff, and mass surveys of the general public on their attitudes of IOs. They have produced statistical models of the workings and effects of hundreds of IOs over decades. They have studied single IOs extensively, or multiple IOs in a given region. They have interrogated the conditions under which IOs are set up and opined about their successes or failure. Single IOs such as the European Union have attracted huge amounts of attention, to the extent that they themselves have birthed their own sub-discipline, with hundreds of thousands of books and articles written on that one IO. At the other end of the spectrum, some single IOs — such as the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement — are

almost impossible to find information on, despite still reliably showing up in many scholars' datasets on the effects of IOs on cooperation.

It is to that end not surprising that there is no single theory of IO functioning across these various disciplines and topics. Just as there is no unified theory of government — we know that authoritarian and democratic regimes work differently, as do parliamentary and presidential systems — it would be unusual if there were one central theory that describes IO functioning, regardless of time, place, or topic.

Vitality, however, is a concept that unites all IOs in all fields. However an organization works in practice, at the most basic level, someone has to walk into the building and turn on the lights. And all IOs face threats to their mission and operation, whether from newly reluctant member states or shocks to the global economic and political scene. Thus, conceptualizing IO vitality is a relevant undertaking regardless of one's methodological and substantive perspective.

Once we think of not just IOs themselves but also their study in terms of vitality, the current global landscape looks somewhat less grim. At first glance, the apparent decline in global institutions seems cause for panic. But a closer read of the trends and paradigms surrounding the study of international cooperation offers more reason to be sanguine. Scholars from a wide variety of disciplines — politics, economics, and international law — have always regarded international organizations with both optimism and suspicion. Which of those moods dominates is partially a function of events in the world, which in turn inform the norms and ideas surrounding international cooperation.

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