

The Oxford Handbook of HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

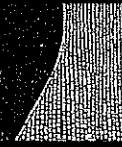
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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

HISTORICAL

INSTITUTIONALISM

Edited by
ORFEO FIORETOS
TULIA G. FALLETI
and
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The Editors

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

ORFEO FIORETOS, TULIA G. FALLETI,
AND ADAM SHEINGATE*

POLITICAL Science in the early twenty-first century is characterized by several robust traditions of institutional analysis. To a much greater extent than a generation ago when scholars debated *whether* institutions mattered in shaping politics, the discipline is now defined by multiple approaches to determining *how* and *when* institutions shape political developments. Since the 1990s, historical, rational choice, and sociological varieties of institutional analysis have experienced significant growth in their empirical scope and analytical sophistication. While the three versions of the “new institutionalisms” in Political Science have areas of overlap, they offer different solutions to central challenges that have confronted students of politics over the ages, including how to better understand and explain the complexity of the political world. Former American Political Science Association President Elinor Ostrom remarked in her Nobel Prize lecture that “When the world we are trying to explain ... is not well described by a simple model, we must continue to improve our frameworks and theories so as to be able to understand complexity and not simply reject it” (Ostrom 2010, 436).

Historical institutionalism is a research tradition that examines how temporal processes and events influence the origin and transformation of institutions that govern political and economic relations. Since it emerged in dialogue with other institutionalisms, scholars in the tradition have been consistently committed to Ostrom’s goal of improving our understanding and explanations of complex political phenomena. This commitment is evident in historical institutionalism’s empirical profile, analytical toolbox, and methodological choices. Empirically, historical institutionalists have focused on enhancing political scientists’ understanding of the origins, evolution, and consequences of humanly created institutions across time and place. While early studies

emphasized “big questions” (Pierson and Skocpol 2002, 696–698)—such as the origins of the state, the consequences of revolutions and wars, persistent social inequalities, and economic crises—the tradition’s empirical purview has grown considerably in the past 25 years as scholars have studied virtually all types of institutions, big and small, at the local, national, and international levels.

This volume takes stock of the growth in the scope of historical institutionalism across multiple subfields of Political Science. In comparative politics, historical institutionalism has been particularly influential and shapes research agendas in a widening array of substantive areas, from research on the modern state, capitalism, law, and economic development to the study of political regimes, political parties, organized societal actors, and public policy. It is central to the study of American political development, focusing on the elusive character of the American state and the legacy of struggles over race and citizenship that animate much of US politics. In the area of European politics, historical institutionalism now informs the study of political parties, the power of organized interest groups, the attributes of welfare states, and the process of European integration. Finally, in international relations (IR) historical institutionalism has influenced contributions on state sovereignty and foreign economic policy, as well as research in international security, international political economy, international law, and global governance.

Analytically, historical institutionalism is distinguished by a conceptual toolbox that draws attention to the role of temporal phenomena in influencing the origin and change in institutions that govern political and economic relations. Scholars emphasize how temporally defined phenomena such as the timing and sequence of events generate formal and informal institutions and how their emergence and change impact public policies and distributions of political authority. Such emphases have helped scholars revisit conventional understandings of both the origin of major institutions as well as articulate why institutions often persist after their original impetus is no longer present. Focusing on temporal phenomena, like critical (historical) junctures and path-dependent trajectories, has helped scholars reveal the far-reaching consequences that institutions may have for the nature of political power and for the strategies, preferences, and identities of actors over time. Attention to temporal phenomena has also helped scholars bridge accounts of political history as a series of punctuated changes followed by high levels of institutional stability with theories of incremental change to explain the sources of complex, overlapping structures of political authority.

The empirical and analytical growth of historical institutionalism has been facilitated by a pluralistic methodological profile. By resisting sharp trade-offs between nuanced empirical accounts and general theories that hold across time and space, historical institutionalists have refined qualitative and comparative research methods to study how processes that unfold over long periods impact distributions of power and policy outcomes. An ambition to study “forests as well as trees” (Pierson and Skocpol 2002, 711) has encouraged historical institutionalists to widen their use of Political Science methodologies over time to include statistical, formal, and interpretive methods

as means of striking a balance between explaining general phenomena and understanding specific patterns of political development.

As the world again struggles to understand the origins and effects of economic crises, social revolutions, redistributions of global power, and persistent social inequalities, historical institutionalism is poised to make new contributions. The chapters that follow explore how historical institutionalism has revisited conventional wisdoms, resolved long-standing empirical puzzles, and opened new areas of inquiry in Political Science. They discuss the tradition’s contributions to the study of politics, areas where it complements other approaches of institutional analysis, and the extent to which historical institutionalism itself has responded to criticisms directed its way. This introduction sets the stage for those chapters by first detailing the crystallization of historical institutionalism and some of its core features before identifying empirical, methodological, and analytical frontiers in this growing tradition of political analysis.

THE EMERGENCE AND CRYSTALLIZATION OF HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

Historical institutionalism has deep roots in Political Science. Attention to temporal phenomena, including the role of timing and sequence, is evident in classic works in comparative political economy that examined how the emergence of capitalism and the development of democracy shaped the diverse trajectories of nation-states (e.g., Polanyi 1944; Gerschenkron 1962; Moore 1966). Beginning in the 1980s, as efforts to reinvigorate the state as an object of study dovetailed with a renewed interest in institutions, scholars developed a conceptually more precise understanding of the causal impact of history and institutions on political life. Efforts to “bring the state back in” combined an ontological claim about the state as an object of inquiry in Political Science with a theoretical claim about historical processes and events that shaped the administrative capacities and organizational routines of national bureaucracies (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985; see also Nettl 1968; Nordlinger 1982). By the early 1990s, historical institutionalism emerged as a distinct tradition of institutional analysis that addressed an expanding array of topics in Political Science.

The crystallization of historical institutionalism was part of a new turn in the study of institutions in Political Science and the social sciences more generally. Rejecting elements of behavioralism, pluralism, and Marxism that treated formal arrangements of political authority as arenas of group competition or as epiphenomenal of economic relations, the new institutional turn brought attention to how institutions ordered political life through a variety of mechanisms that constituted actors and constrained their behavior (March and Olsen 1984). But as work proceeded to develop more precise analytical tools to study these mechanisms, important differences emerged in how scholars

conceived of institutions as well as the role of actors within them (Hall and Taylor 1996; Immergut 1998; Thelen 1999). Whereas some scholars focused on the material interests that created or sustained institutions through the formation of coalitions, other scholars examined the cognitive dimension of institutions, for instance how a set of rules or policies reflected particular ideas or beliefs. At the same time, scholars emphasized different levels of analysis with some focused on macro-structures and institutional assemblages like the welfare state or national economic systems in shaping political outcomes, while other scholars privileged micro-level factors such as how institutions solved collective action problems among rational actors.

Figure 1.1 graphically represents the three new institutionalisms by aligning them along two central dimensions of social science analysis: the macro-micro continuum, and the material-cognitive continuum. Whereas the horizontal axis ranges from an emphasis on structure to a focus on actors, the vertical axis ranges from an emphasis on interests or material resources in politics to a focus on ideas or the role of human cognition.

The figure situates historical institutionalism as it developed in the 1990s in relation to the rational choice and sociological institutional approaches of the time. Scholars working in the tradition of rational choice institutionalism (upper right quadrant) adopted an interest-based, actor-centered approach that conceived of self-interested individuals as selecting institutions based on a set of exogenously given preferences. Institutions were understood to generate stability, or structure-induced equilibrium, by limiting the range of alternatives actors confront (Shepsle 1981). Scholars attentive to the contextual effects of time and place expressed skepticism with how rational choice institutionalism understood the origins and consequences of actor preferences. Rather than fixed and given exogenously, historical institutional scholars argued that temporal processes may generate and reinforce actor preferences, power relations, and patterns of resource

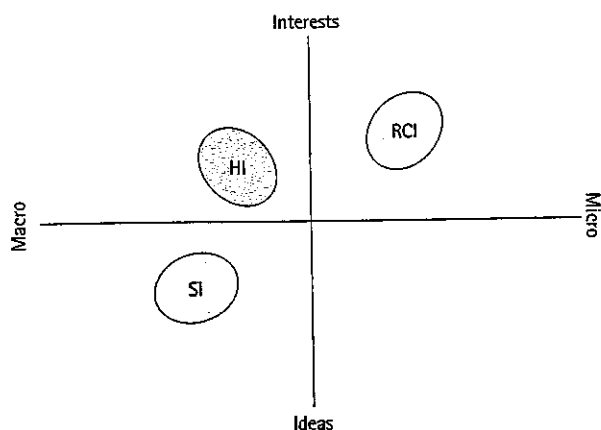


FIGURE 1.1 The Three New Institutionalisms (c.1995).

Note: HI=Historical Institutionalism; RCI=Rational Choice Institutionalism; SI=Sociological Institutionalism.

allocation. From this perspective, rationalist models of utility maximizing individuals were ill-equipped to explain the broad array of institutional arrangements governing politics, including those that had unintended and unanticipated consequences. Seeking to explain variations in institutional designs, scholars trained their eyes on the effects of institutions over time, including their consequences on the formation of preferences and the composition of coalitions that formed the basis of political authority.

The 1992 publication of *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Perspective* was an important turning point in the new institutionalisms debate (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992).¹ More than simply coining the term historical institutionalism, the contributors to the volume set to work developing an analytical toolbox for the study of history and politics. This toolbox connected history and politics in theoretical terms, rather than in the empirical and methodological terms which had been the dominant approach among political scientists until then (Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992; Pierson 2000). Understood as the rules, norms, and practices that organize and constitute social relations, institutions were examined for their role in creating constraints and opportunities for political action, in distributing political power, and in shaping political preferences over time. The latter was of particular interest as scholars examined the relationship between institutions and political agency.

Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo underscored in the introduction to *Structuring Politics* that “one, perhaps *the*, core difference between rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism lies in the question of preference formation” (1992, 9, emphasis in the original). Arguing that institutions shaped individual goals, they noted that institutions often altered preferences and with that the structure of coalitions in ways that could have transformative effects on policy. They explored the role of organizations in shaping such coalitions beyond “aggregate[ing] the endeavor of many individuals” and for their potential role in “ultimately alter[ing]” the preferences of political groups (Hall 1986, 233). In Steinmo’s words, “[n]either interests nor value have substantive meaning if abstracted from the institutional context in which humans define them” (Steinmo 1989, 502). Historical institutionalism, then, placed emphasis on the endogenous (institutional) origins of preferences by offering a more structural rendering of the world than rational choice, one in which institutions and organizations, not individual-level traits were the primary building blocks in accounting for political preferences and outcomes.

In exploring the institutional foundations of preferences, historical institutionalists sought a balance between macro- and micro-level theories. While crediting historical institutionalism for its critiques of the “atomistic and anything-goes orientations” of rational choice approaches, Ira Katznelson (1997, 85) expressed concern that the tradition could be sacrificing the theoretical arsenal and parsimony of structural approaches in the sociological tradition. Too contextual an analysis, he suggested, could lead scholars to overlook the impact of large and slow-moving structural processes in favor of idiosyncratic causes. Katznelson (1997, 104) overcame his skepticism, however, and concluded that by adopting a relational perspective that saw “particular clusters of preferences, interests, and identities ... not just as causes; but as causes as well as products,”

historical institutionalism was “crossing the divide between structure and agency without ... eliminate[ing] the heuristic distinction between the two.”

Some of the early historical institutionalist work highlighted the role of ideas in shaping the preferences and goals of political actors and organizations. Several authors in *Structuring Politics*, for example Peter Hall, Desmond King, and Margaret Weir, explored the conditions under which specific political and economic ideas influenced the policy and institutional choices of different countries. Viewing institutions as carriers of ideas that guide action by shaping how individuals and organizations see the world and define their preferences, the emphasis on ideas provided a link between institutional structures and cognitive factors. This link helped scholars resolve a range of puzzles in Political Science research, including why social democratic parties experienced divergent trajectories in interwar Europe (Berman 1998), why liberalism took different paths for much of the twentieth century in the United States and Europe (Blyth 2002), why economic openness persisted despite demands for closure (Goldstein 1994), and why states extended significant governing authority to international organizations (Ikenberry 1992).

The focus on ideas stood in contrast to the materialist and micro-level emphases in rational choice institutionalism and bore a resemblance to sociological approaches exploring relations among political actors and processes of institutional formation and reproduction through cognitive factors such as norms, roles, and repertoires. Like historical institutionalism, the sociological variant (lower left quadrant in Figure 1.1) shared a commitment to detailing the structural role of institutions in shaping political relations. However, the latter placed greater emphasis on cognitive processes such as isomorphism (or mimicry) in which individuals internalize routines or practices perceived as legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For early scholars of historical institutionalism, this approach had some limitations. The emphasis on norms and routines was seen to leave too little room for strategic or calculated behavior, and thus risked treating actors like cultural “dopes” who simply enacted organizational routines. The emphasis on cognitive processes in sociological institutionalism was also thought to leave too little room to study power and political contestation. Because an institution was defined by what actors accepted as legitimate and appropriate behavior, historical institutionalists warned that sociological variants paid insufficient attention to the politics and contestation over the structure of institutions themselves (Hall and Taylor 1996, 954).

Through the 1990s, historical institutionalism developed in relation to the rationalist and sociological alternatives. Hall and Taylor (1996) note in their review of the new institutionalisms that the historical variant accepted an eclectic mix of the “calculus” approach embraced by rational choice scholars and the “cultural” approach of sociologists. But they quickly added: “eclecticism has its costs,” particularly in terms of “specifying the precise causal chain through which ... institutions [affect] the behaviour they are meant to explain” (Hall and Taylor 1996, 950). This prompted scholars within historical institutionalism to distance themselves from core elements of each alternative and to stake out a position that moved away from the methodological individualism of rational choice and that at the same time was more materialist than sociological institutional variants. Whereas rational choice scholars understood institutions as equilibrium outcomes that

emerge from actors’ goal-oriented behavior within a specified set of rules, historical institutionalists emphasized how configurations of institutions created in the past structure politics in the present and in ways that often run counter to the interests or preferences of individuals. At the same time, influential scholars within historical institutionalism downplayed (or in some cases rejected outright) the cognitive dimension of institutions. They argued that institutions reflect distributions of material resources and that once established, institutions may continue to structure political affairs and distribute governing authority long after initial conditions do not hold (Skocpol 1995, 105; Thelen 1999). The outcome of scholars’ engagement with other traditions during the crystallization of historical institutionalism was that much of the early work placed an emphasis on structural and materialist features.

In articulating the limitations of alternative approaches, historical institutionalism crystallized around a set of claims about the ontological status of institutions and the influence of temporal processes. Scholars argued that institutions were not merely effects of the distribution of preferences or the structure of political constellations at a given moment in time, but that over time institutions also became potential causes behind preferences and patterns of political contestation (Pierson 1993; Katznelson 2003). Scholars further emphasized that causally relevant conditions may interact in varied ways across time and space to produce distinct outcomes that are not anticipated by traditions employing different ontologies (Hall 2003). Historical institutionalists therefore encouraged researchers to pay greater attention to contextual conditions and to study whether, when, and how the same causal mechanisms yield different outcomes across time and space (Falletti and Lynch 2009). These ontological claims, or “fundamental assumptions about the causal structures of the social or political world” (Hall 2003, 374), meant that historical institutionalists resisted a focus on proximate causes because it risked truncating causal narratives at the expense of revealing the original causes of political outcomes. Instead, they favored research designs that covered relatively long time periods and that would ensure that proper attention was given to the interaction and contextual effects that produced distinct patterns of politics across time and space (e.g., Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003).

The ontological claims of early historical institutionalists made them methodologically committed to in-depth study of events and cases. They favored methods of agreement and difference among a small number of cases to identify the causal role of institutions. Instead of using historical narratives to illustrate theoretically deduced propositions, historical institutionalists used narratives to identify the mechanisms that shaped political contestation over time. Cognizant that an appreciation for complexity often implies a sacrifice in generalizability (Ragin 1987, 54), and not content with establishing correlation between historical and political phenomena, the methodological enterprise became one of uncovering, through careful study of the empirical record, the mechanisms that linked cause and effect. Historiographical modes of inquiry, counterfactual analysis, and process-tracing informed these efforts and have remained hallmarks of the tradition (e.g., Carpenter 2001; Farhang 2010; Ahmed 2012).

The ontological claims and methodological profile of historical institutionalism are apparent in the conceptual toolbox scholars have relied on as they explore the world of institutions. This toolbox has grown over time, and includes temporal concepts such as critical junctures and path-dependence that have long informed contributions of historical institutionalism, as well as newer concepts like interoccurrence and modes of gradual institutional change that have helped scholars refine understandings of the complexity of politics.

Critical Juncture and Path Dependence

In *Shaping the Political Arena*, Collier and Collier (1991) made an early contribution to the historical institutionalist tradition by highlighting the causal effects of critical junctures. Drawing from previous comparative political studies (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan 1970), Collier and Collier defined critical juncture “as a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies” (1991, 29). While they did not see institutions as having a generative role in shaping the origins of a critical juncture, Collier and Collier argued that variation in the unfolding of critical junctures across contexts held the key to explaining divergent political legacies and outcomes across countries. They stressed the importance of specifying the *duration* of the critical juncture as well as the effecting historical legacies (1991, 31–34), and highlighted that the *timing* of the critical juncture, in relation to other developments, was consequential to subsequent politics. How long critical junctures last (attention to time) as well as when they occur in relation to other events (attention to order and sequence of events) are part of their historical institutional account of political regime outcomes in Latin America. Unlike other types of historical causes, Collier and Collier maintained that critical junctures generate legacies that can reproduce themselves without the enduring presence or recurrence of the originating causes. In the language that would quickly take root, critical junctures marked the beginning of path-dependent processes.

Scholars debate the extent to which critical junctures themselves can be explained by reference to institutions or to other antecedent causes (Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Slater and Simmons 2010), and the degree of agency that stems from these critical moments (Capoccia, this volume). Considering the agency effects of critical junctures, Capoccia and Kelemen (2007, 348) argue that critical junctures are best understood as periods of time that are significantly shorter than the path-dependent processes resulting from them. If critical juncture periods are conceived of as very long periods, the substantial influence of agency that is expected in these periods will be constrained by re-emerging institutional constraints. Capoccia and Kelemen therefore suggest that greater attention be paid to the role of agency and to the *permissive* conditions behind the opening of a specific juncture for this furnishes fuller understandings of how and when political actors depend mechanisms of reproduction, create new institutions, or modify existing ones.

Soifer (2012) adds analytical precision with a distinction between the *permissive* and the *productive* conditions of critical junctures. Permissive conditions are necessary

conditions that loosen institutional or structural constraints on agency or contingency and thus provide the temporal bounds of critical junctures (Soifer 2012, 1574). Productive conditions, on the other hand, act within the context of the permissive conditions to bring about change. They are aspects of the critical juncture that shape initial outcomes and that are subsequently reproduced when the critical juncture comes to a close. In Soifer’s account, the emergence of import substitution industrialization (ISI) in Latin American countries in the mid-twentieth century is explained with reference to permissive conditions (collapse of world trade during the Great Depression and World War II), productive conditions (economic nationalist ideas), and a mechanism of reproduction (new political coalition among bureaucrats, domestic elites, and organized labor).

Critical junctures feature extensively within historical institutional scholarship because they may be initial markers of path-dependent processes. After the openness of the critical juncture moment, which enables relatively free agency, a process or sequence of events ensues in which institutions exert their causal force. In the ISI example, once the economic nationalist ideas of Latin American economists shaped policies as a consequence of the permissive conditions generated by the Great Depression and World War II, the corporatist institutions that the emergent populist coalitions of the 1940s and 1950s had created kept the ISI model in place (Soifer 2012), even in the face of major subsequent economic crises (O’Donnell 1973).

Perhaps no concept is more closely associated with historical institutionalism than path dependence. The concept originates in economics (David 1985; Arthur 1994) and has been incorporated extensively into historical institutionalism ever since scholars sought answers to why institutions persist, even after they are no longer efficient. While scholars share a basic understanding of the concept as describing a situation in which reversing a trend (or path) becomes more difficult over time, they have emphasized different causal mechanisms behind such patterns. In one approach, path dependence is understood as self-reinforcing processes “involving positive feedback” (Pierson 2004, 20). From this perspective, it is when extant structures are the source of increasing returns and generate positive (or self-reinforcing) feedback effects to political actors embedded within them that departures or deviations from an existing path become less likely over time (Pierson 2004, 21). Attention to the timing and sequence of developments becomes crucial in such cases since the causal impact of early events is significantly stronger than subsequent events. In Falleti’s (2010) study of decentralization reforms in Latin America, for example, the ordering of different types of decentralization policies (administrative, fiscal, and political) in a sequence of reform is highly consequential for political outcomes because early events carry more causal weight in shaping end results.

A second approach to path dependence highlights the role of historical contingency. While in the first approach political actors may purposefully sequence reforms in order to secure desired outcomes, other accounts note that early events that trigger path-dependent processes may even be accidental. Understood as a stochastic process in which the origin of a path dependent process cannot be explained by reference to available theories,

attention to contingency provides a foundation for exploring how apparently random, accidental, and small events can have major consequences over time (Mahoney 2000; Mahoney and Schensul 2006, 461). In his study of political regimes in Central America, Mahoney (2001) argues that immediate political contingencies, namely a liberal-conservative elite split during the liberal reform period of the late nineteenth century, explain the choices made by presidents with regards to commercialization of agriculture and the role of the state in the economy and society. Where the split existed (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua), the military expanded and presidents pursued radical policy packages with high levels of state coercion, extensive communal land expropriation, and established large-sized agricultural estates. By contrast, where the elite split did not emerge (Costa Rica and Honduras), presidents pursued reformist policies that entailed less state coercion, partial communal land expropriation, and smaller estates.

Mahoney (2000) suggests that path dependence may result from sequences that are characterized by a tightly coupled reaction and counter-reaction dynamic that originates in a contingent breakpoint. What makes reactive sequences path-dependent is not the fact that the direction of the early steps is followed (in fact it is not). Instead, reactive sequences are path-dependent because they begin from contingent events and are followed by closely linked reaction and counter-reaction events that can transform and even reverse the direction of the early steps (Mahoney 2000, 526). The social movements and the contentious politics literatures offer good examples of these type of sequences, such as when political pressure from social movements (a reaction) causes a direct response by the government or state (counter-reaction), which in turn leads to further reactive and counteractive dynamics (e.g., McAdam 1982; Riofrancos 2014).

The extensive attention given to critical junctures and path-dependent processes has led to characterizations of historical institutionalism as a tradition that has favored explanations of change that rest on notions of history as a process characterized by punctuated equilibria, followed by long periods of institutional stability (e.g., Peters, Pierre, and King 2005; see also Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Such characterizations may accurately capture the emphases of specific studies, but overlook that scholars in the tradition have long placed an emphasis on accounting for slow processes of gradual change and overlapping structures of authority rather than on rapid changes and stable orders.

Intercurrence and Modes of Institutional Change

At least since *Structuring Politics* underscored the importance of examining the politics of institutional dynamism (Steinmo et al. 1992, 16–18), and Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek (1994) encouraged scholars to move beyond the “iconography of order,” change has been a central focus in the historical institutionalism tradition. Skeptical of accounts of American politics that contrasted periods of relative stability in electoral coalitions with punctuated moments of change, or critical elections, Orren and Skowronek (1994) introduced the term *intercurrence* to capture the ongoing character of institutional creation, reproduction, and change. Questioning representations of

political systems as fully formed entities that emerged at one moment in time, they noted that polities typically are comprised of numerous institutions and policies created at different times, each operating according to its own temporal logic. From this perspective, the non-simultaneity of institutional creation generates “mosaics” of institutions and layered structures of authority that cannot be fitted under descriptions of stable or neatly integrated political orders. Intercurrence describes a condition whereby the “accumulation ... of competing controls within institutions of government” are such that “the normal condition of the polity will be that of multiple, incongruous authorities operating simultaneously” (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 108). As a result, institutions or policies are sometimes ill-fitted to one another or govern according to contradictory imperatives.

The notion of intercurrence, even if not labeled as such, informs studies of American political development that explore how conflicts between multiple institutions and governing arrangements influence the dynamics of American politics. According to Lieberman (2002, 701), for example, American politics is characterized by a “variety of ordered institutional and ideological patterns each with its own origins, history, logic, and pace.” Change occurs as the friction between institutions and ideas generates incentives and opportunities for individual political action. As an example, Lieberman points to the rise of affirmative action. Race-based remedies emerged in US employment law despite the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which espoused a race-neutral or color-blind view of discrimination and purposely gave the responsible federal agency very limited enforcement powers. The gap between color-blind ideals and weak institutions invited presidents, bureaucrats, the courts, and various interest groups to fill the breach, resulting in a new set of administrative rules, legal doctrine, and employment practices that gave rise to affirmative action policies.

Attention to the dynamic features of complex institutions is also characteristic of the rapidly growing literature on gradual institutional change. Pointing to the layered quality of institutions and the varying levels of discretion they give individuals to interpret and enforce rules, this literature brings attention to differentiated patterns of institutional growth and the causal mechanisms that produce variations in patterns of incremental change (Sheingate 2014). In distinguishing such patterns from studies of punctuated equilibria and stable orders, Mahoney and Thelen (2010b, 15–22) build on their own (Thelen 2004; Streeck and Thelen 2005) and related historical institutionalist scholarship (Hacker 2005; Schickler 2001) to give particular prominence to four modes of gradual institutional change: *displacement* or the removal of existing rules and the introduction of new ones; *layering* or the introduction of new rules on top of or alongside existing ones; *drift* or the changed impact of existing rules due to shifts in the environment; and *conversion* or the changed enactment of existing rules due to their strategic redeployment. A team of researchers in comparative and American politics finds these patterns of change to be common and identify when incremental modes of change reinforce national and local polities and when they lead to transformative outcomes (Mahoney and Thelen 2010a). Similar dynamics are found in IR, where studies document the role of incremental change in gradually remaking international political and economic institutions (Fioretos 2011a; Farrell and Newman 2014).

By differentiating between modes of gradual change, scholars bring attention to how “everyday” political contests—from small amendments or defection from existing practice, or the reinterpretation and opposition to existing understandings—shape the structure and effects of institutions over time. From this perspective, slow-moving processes of gradual change rather than singular historical break points may be the source of radical change (Pierson 2003). Studies of events that have been characterized as sudden ruptures, such as the global financial crisis of 2008, suggest that these may best be understood as the cumulative outcome of processes of incremental change over several decades. For example, a steady process of market liberalization, supported by an expanding consensus on the advantages of minimal market intervention, created a growing financial market place without a corresponding increase in effective regulatory authority at the domestic or international levels before the crisis (Helleiner 2011). Responses in the aftermath to the crisis, in particular why these failed to meet demand for radical reform, have also been understood in terms of incremental change and attributed to *pre-crisis* institutions that constrained *post-crisis* reforms (e.g., Carpenter 2009; Moshella and Tsingou 2013).

The literatures on gradual institutional change and intercurrency have expanded the analytical toolbox of historical institutionalism and in the process provided new means for understanding and explaining the complexity of the political world. Rather than encouraging scholars to focus on a single institution (or order) abstracted from the broader context in which it operates, these literatures push scholars to identify the points of connection between institutions created or changed at different times and for different purposes. As analytical tools, they thus help historical institutionalists draw attention to temporal and contextual factors that shape agency, including how and when actors exploit the tensions and contradictions between overlapping institutions or institutional layers to promote new or defend existing forms of power and authority.

DEVELOPMENTS AND FRONTIERS IN HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

Its growing empirical scope, methodological pluralism, and expanding analytical toolbox has helped to historical institutionalism consolidate its position as one of the three major traditions of institutional analysis in contemporary Political Science. Although scholars in the tradition are united around the importance of studying temporal effects, differences nevertheless exist in the perspectives of its practitioners. There is continued debate among scholars about the degree of dynamism within institutions, the role of actors in institutional accounts, and the relative weight of interests and ideas in the formation of preferences and the explanation of outcomes. Such debate is a mark of a dynamic research agenda and demonstrates that the development of historical institutionalism continues. As scholars debate these issues, opportunities exist to adopt new analytical techniques and methods, to integrate historical institutionalism

more closely with related social science disciplines, and to further expand its empirical scope.

Conceptual Debates and Frontiers

Scholars of historical institutionalism have pushed beyond the structural-materialist core of the tradition to yield new insights into the origin, evolution, and transformation of institutions. They have grappled with questions about the relative importance of interests or ideas in institutional accounts (Lieberman 2002). They have stretched the boundaries of historical institutionalism beyond its early contributions by developing more actor-centered approaches (Sheingate 2003; Berk, Galvan, and Hattam 2013; Büthe 2015), as well as how ideas and beliefs structure the way actors interpret the world around them (King and Smith 2005). And they have expanded the boundaries in more structural and materialist directions: Hacker and Pierson’s (2010) account of “winner-take-all” politics in the United States, for example, examines how the privileged few effectively captured American institutions in ways that bend public policy toward the material interests of the super-rich. Figure 1.2 illustrates the tradition’s growth heuristically, with the shaded areas representing new frontiers within historical institutionalism that extend beyond its original focus.

Figure 1.2 suggests several points of connection between historical institutionalism and other approaches. Historical institutionalists initially criticized rationalist approaches for treating preferences as exogenous to institutions and more sociologically oriented approaches for relying too extensively on macro-structural conditions in accounting for preferences. Instead, they emphasized that careful attention needed to be paid to the interplay between structure and action. This point has become widely

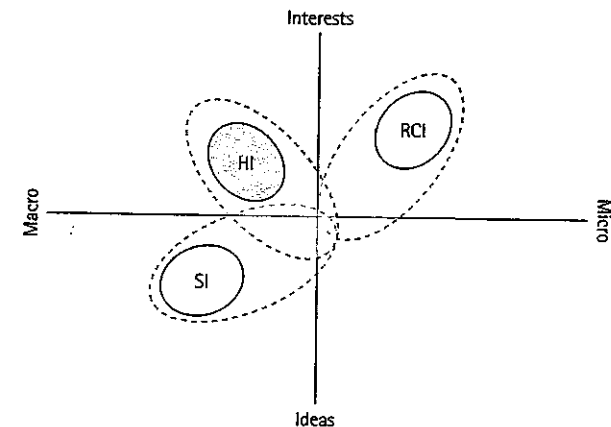


FIGURE 1.2 Frontiers of Institutional Analysis.

Note: HI=Historical Institutionalism; RCI=Rational Choice Institutionalism; SI=Sociological Institutionalism.

accepted among scholars in other traditions and opened room to create new links with other traditions of institutional analysis. In *Preferences and Situations*, for example, Ira Katznelson and Barry Weingast (2005, 1–2) note that a “productive erosion of boundaries has developed” between the historical and rational choice institutionalism, which fosters more common understandings of “how a given institutional milieu both constrains and shapes the repertoire of available preferences.” Avner Greif and David Laitin (2004) consider the same intersection in exploring how features of institutions can be self-reinforcing in the short term, but become subject to a gradual and endogenous transformation over the long run. Key to their argument is the concept of a quasi-parameter, which is a set of cognitive beliefs about the world that guide individual behavior. Institutions are stable where such beliefs are robust; that is, they dictate behavior in a wide range of circumstances and in self-enforcing ways. If these beliefs erode, as when situations arise where beliefs cease to provide a course of action, individuals will “experiment or risk deviating from past behavior,” resulting in a process of gradual change (Greif and Laitin 2004, 639).

There is an affinity between Greif and Laitin’s concept of quasi-parameters and historical-institutionalist modes of gradual change that examine how incremental innovations in rules or their application transform institutions or their effects. Greif and Laitin, however, provide less of an account of institutional *change* than of institutional *breakdown* as the capacity of beliefs to direct behavior weakens over time (Thelen 2004, 30). As a consequence they are unable to distinguish empirically between elements of institutions that are durable from those vulnerable to change (Mahoney and Thelen 2010b, 6). Historical institutionalist work on gradual models of change offer tools to solve that problem and demonstrate the value of embracing the study of long temporal processes when improving explanations and understandings of complex patterns of institutional change.

Historical institutionalism is also well-positioned to engage more directly with sociological approaches to institutions. The sometimes fraught relationship between scholars focused on the material and cognitive dimensions of institutions (see Blyth, Helgadóttir, and Kring, Chapter 8, this volume) may be partly mended by considering how ideas render material considerations legible through processes of communication, coordination, and persuasion. As Figure 1.2 suggests, there is a sizable area of overlap between historical and sociological institutionalism, a multi-disciplinary connection that began with efforts to “bring the state back in” and continues with the ongoing work in comparative historical analysis (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Mahoney and Thelen 2015). Within this area one may locate recent work on the evolution of American political parties that explores how party organizations acquired new routines and resources through investments in computer technology and information databases (Galvin 2012; Chapter 18, this volume). Work on the politics of social policy explores how ideas and institutions interact as a neoliberal embrace of the market combined with a paternalistic view of the poor produced a highly punitive set of social programs in the United States (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).

The promise of exploring areas of overlap between historical and sociological variants of institutionalism extends beyond national borders. Farrell and Finnemore (Chapter 34, this volume) argue that greater consideration of ideas and norms is particularly important for historical institutionalism within IR because the international system is not as densely institutionalized as domestic politics and effective means to enforce policies are often lacking. Devoting greater attention to how ideas and norms are embedded within international institutions may enhance understandings of the origin of state preferences and why cooperation takes different forms in the modern international system. Work demonstrating how the communication of ideas furthers actors’ strategic goals by constraining alternatives, focusing attention, and persuading others may help historical institutionalists gain better understandings of the conditions under which international policy priorities and institutions change (e.g., Blyth 2013; Schmidt 2008; Jabko 2012). Areas of overlap, then, are invitations to continue the exploration of when ideational and material understandings of institutions must be considered side by side in order to gain greater understanding of the complex realities that define politics nationally and internationally.

Methodological Developments

Contemporary historical institutionalism maintains a strong commitment to refining its use of research methods in Political Science. This commitment has been spurred on by two research challenges. The first concerns how to determine which of several theories is accurate when they predict similar outcomes. For the new institutionalisms, this equifinality challenge is a question of identifying the extent to which the mechanisms at the center of alternative explanations were present (or absent) in ways that can be said to have caused a specific outcome under some conditions, but not other ones (Hall 2003). As a tradition of middle-range theory that is heavily mechanisms-oriented, resolving this challenge has encouraged historical institutionalists across sub-fields to deepen and refine their use of qualitative methods to leverage historical archives. Galvin (2010) and Carpenter (2001), for example, embrace historiographical methods to offer fine-grained analyses of why the American presidency and bureaucracy followed distinct paths, Ziblatt (2009) and Ahmed (2012) do it to detail the origins of federalism and electoral systems, respectively, and Helleiner (2014) to revisit arguments about the origins of the modern international economic system.

A second challenge that has led historical institutionalists to refine their use of qualitative methods concerns how to identify which of multiple potential historical events gave rise to an outcome. Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu (2009) ask how one determines which of two or more potential critical junctures is the source of the outcome of interest. Here it is not so much a question of which type of cause is in play, but where in a sequence of events the cause is located. Since when an event takes place may be material for whether other events take place at all, historical institutionalists have sought to refine how they study sequences to better adjudicate which events are proximate in causing political

outcomes. Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu's (2009) "method of sequence elaboration," for example, assists researchers in identifying which of many potential necessary and sufficient causes are the ones that caused events by situating these within different temporal contexts. What Caraway (2004, 455) terms "sequential episodic analysis" and Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010) call a "structured episode" method similarly encourage researchers to carefully analyze distinct episodes in a chain of events in order to ascertain whether purported causes were consistently present and whether they had the anticipated effect. The episodes oriented approach is consistent and complementary with the classic emphasis in historical institutionalism on evolutionary paths, while also making it possible to identify whether any and which of many events mattered in shaping particular trajectories.

While historical institutional research has retained a particular affinity for qualitative methods associated with historiography and process-tracing, researchers have come to embrace a wider array of methods with time. Some of its practitioners have been central to the growth in multi-methods research in Political Science, with studies combining large data-sets and careful process-tracing to improve the precision of case selection and causal inference (Lieberman 2002; Farhang 2010). This has allowed studies to account for a range of empirical patterns, including why the evolution of legislatures has been characterized by "disjointed pluralism" over time (Schickler 2001), and why the structure and strategies of organized interest groups take different forms when facing similar challenges (Martin and Swank 2012). Similarly, a growing body of work employing behavioral methods of survey research and qualitative ethnographic studies have successfully traced policy feedback effects and other institutional legacies to give nuance to diverse patterns of political participation, citizenship, and social relations (Campbell 2003; Mettler and Soss 2004; MacLean 2010).

Incorporating new theoretical insights and refining methods in historical institutionalism could spark additional innovations and new intellectual bridges. For instance, there is an affinity between actor-centered approaches to historical institutionalism and agent-based ones using computer simulations of actors operating under various conditions and constraints in order to probe how actors' decisions produce, reproduce, and transform institutional arrangements over time (Lustick 2011; Lewis and Steinmo 2012). Similarly, network analysis offers a way to incorporate insights from evolutionary theory by examining how relationships among actors are generative of social structures (Farrell and Shalizi 2012). Discourse analysis offers the opportunity to explore a different intersection by providing access to interpretive methodologies that may assist historical institutionalists to better understand how the ideational framing of normative judgments impact support for institutions (Schmidt 2008; Riofrancos 2014). Finally, as Steinmo (Chapter 6, this volume) explores, careful incorporation of experimental methods can help scholars examine previously taken-for-granted assumptions about how institutions structure behavior and how, in turn, individual behavior supports or undermines institutional stability.

Empirical Extensions

From methodological and conceptual refinements, and from greater exchange with other traditions of analysis, come opportunities to extend the empirical scope of historical institutionalism. The vast majority of historical institutionalist work focuses on formal institutions, understood as written and enforceable rules, such as those associated with political constitutions and regulatory frameworks. It is apparent, however, that informal institutions—unwritten understandings and practices—also can have strong consequences for political behavior and preferences (Helmke and Levitsky 2006; Tsai 2006). Political scientists have acknowledged that such institutions matter, but have yet to give such structures their due attention. The importance of considering the role of such institutions is particularly great in the study of developing countries where formal institutions often are relatively weak and informal ones appear more important in structuring social relations (Tsai, Chapter 16, this volume). But also in contexts where formal institutions are plenty is more attention to informal ones warranted. Historical institutionalist theories of incremental change are well-suited for such an undertaking since they include consideration of the informal institutions that are used to negotiate reforms to formal institutions.

Historical institutionalism additionally holds potential for the study of other dimensions of politics that also lack immediate visibility, including institutions that are the source of the structural power that political coalitions wield to secure their preferred policies. Understood generally as the ability to shape the cognitive realities of individuals, structural power often resides in institutions that produce policy biases and that give political groups mobilizational advantages in seeing their preferred policies enacted. Pierson (Chapter 7, this volume) argues that historical institutionalism's emphasis on studying slow-moving processes and constellations of overlapping institutions provide the means to reveal where biases come from and how they are reproduced over time. Recent scholarship in IR points in a similar direction and encourages scholars to look beyond the role of powerful states in shaping the policy prescriptions of international organizations to more carefully study how international bureaucrats mobilize biases with enduring effects for the strategies used by governments (e.g., Barnett and Finnemore 2004). As researchers take on the challenge of explaining why inequalities endure domestically and internationally, despite the availability of new resources and norms of more even distribution, historical institutionalists are well-placed to expand understandings of when and why structural power persists and how it begets other inequalities over time.

Future research may also correct the imbalance that has existed between the study of patterns that lead to the reproduction of institutions and those that may undermine designs. Although initially conceived as a mode of gradual institutional change (Streeck and Thelen 2005), the concept of institutional exhaustion has received much less attention in the literature than layering, conversion, displacement, or drift. Recently, this has begun to change as scholars pay closer attention to how institutions

gradually unravel. Jacobs and Weaver (2015) bring attention to how the increasing costs of a policy can undermine crucial sources of institutional support among powerful actors while, at the same time, lead to the perception among mass publics that a failed policy is in need of reform. Busemeyer and Trampusch (2013) explore similar patterns in the context of changing systems and priorities in systems of human capital formation. Attention to exhaustion and other kinds of self-undermining dynamics is also relevant for scholars interested in authoritarian transitions as regimes that initially appear to be quite durable weaken over time as members of a revolutionary cadre die off and key mechanisms of institutional reproduction gradually erode (Levitsky and Way 2013).

Historical institutionalism may also continue to broaden empirical research agendas by serving as a bridge between subfields. Such a bridge has long been in existence between the comparative and American politics subfields and been a source of greater understandings of political developments across countries. More recently it has served as bridge between these subfields and IR (Katznelson and Shefter 2002; Fioretos 2011a). For example, studies have used the tradition to explain the origins of states' preferences over forms of international cooperation, then analyze the effects of the timing and sequence of reforms in determining international bargaining outcomes, and how international institutions impact domestic policy priorities (Farrell and Newman 2010; Fioretos 2011b; Posner 2010). As globalization fosters an increase in the institutions that structure relations among states and these reach more deeply into how domestic polities are managed, historical institutionalism holds much promise for explaining the origins and effects of the complex institutional realities that link international and domestic politics in the twenty-first century.

Finally, the scope of the tradition may be extended by widening the empirical reach of what is conventionally understood as "temporality." The tradition has devoted particular attention to the causal effects of the timing and sequence of reform, and has yet to explore at greater length the potential causal impact on politics of variations in the duration, tempo, and the acceleration of institutional change (Grzymala-Busse 2010). Yet the duration of events may impact time-horizons and discount rates; the speed of change may affect the nature of learning and deliberation; and the extent to which change is accelerating or not may be important for the type of causal mechanisms that are active over time (e.g., tipping points, cascades). To fully identify the potential impact of these temporal factors, future studies may focus on identifying whether and how repeated policy failures or successes impact later reforms, what role institutions play in the tenacity with which historic veto actors and losers from past reform impact patterns of institutional durability and change, and the reasons for why the adoption of new local or global norms vary across time and space. While the baselines used to evaluate the impact of temporal phenomena may vary across areas of research, a richer understanding of such phenomena holds great promise for future studies seeking to formulate nuanced understandings of why complexity remains an enduring feature of modern polities.

CONCLUSION

Within a generation, historical institutionalism has become a large and diverse analytical and empirical research tradition in Political Science that has tackled core puzzles in the discipline, reinvigorated the study of institutions and history, and developed new areas of research. It is firmly established in areas of research within Comparative, American, European, and International Politics. It is both empirically rich and analytically sophisticated, eschewing convenient trade-offs between these two sides of the social science coin. The chapters that follow very amply demonstrate the growth and vibrancy of historical institutionalism since it crystallized a generation ago. Indeed, and somewhat ironically, the strongest testament to its growth is the reality that not even a comprehensive volume such as this one can fully cover all relevant analytical and empirical developments in the tradition.

The remainder of the volume is divided into five parts, each collecting a set of contributions on distinct aspects of historical institutionalism. Part II details conceptual and methodological foundations of historical institutionalism. Contributors revisit what is meant by "structured politics" (Peter A. Hall, Chapter 2), explore insights into patterns of institutional change (James Conran and Kathleen Thelen, Chapter 3), the role of critical junctures (Giovanni Capocchia, Chapter 5), the exercise of political power (Paul Pierson, Chapter 7), and the relationship between ideas and interests (Mark Blyth, Oddný Helgadóttir, and William Kring, Chapter 8). They further discuss methodological developments in historical institutionalism (James Mahoney, Khairunnisa Mohamedali, and Christoph Nguyen, Chapter 4), including how scholars in this tradition wrestle with causality and make productive use of experimental designs (Sven Steinmo, Chapter 6).

The next four sections are devoted to major subfields within Political Science. Part III explores historical institutionalism's contributions to research in comparative politics, and includes chapters on a wide range of political constructs with empirical illustrations from all corners of the world. It was within comparative politics that historical institutionalism first emerged as a distinct approach to study the effects of institutions on politics. The volume highlights topics that since then have been at the core of the comparative historical institutional agenda, such as the study of the modern developmental state (Atul Kohli, Chapter 9), democratization (Rodrigo Barrenechea, Edward L. Gibson, and Larkin Terrie, Chapter 11), political parties (Rachel Beatty Riedl, Chapter 13), and organized labor (Teri Caraway, Chapter 15). This section also includes chapters on topics that have more recently entered the comparative research agenda, such as the study of competitive authoritarianism (Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, Chapter 12), the origins of state capacity (Hillel David Soifer, Chapter 10), non-state provision of social welfare (Melanie Cammett and Aytuğ Şamsız, Chapter 14), and informal institutions (Kellee Tsai, Chapter 16).

In Part IV, contributors explore historical institutionalism in American politics, which has been a major incubator for this approach in Political Science. Often associated with the study of American political development, historical institutionalism has both informed and been informed by the study of the United States. The chapters in this volume continue this tradition by examining the distinctive character of the American state (Desmond King, Chapter 17), the organization of political parties (Daniel Galvin, Chapter 18), the central role of courts (Sarah Staszak, Chapter 19), and the evolution of social policies (Alan Jacobs, Chapter 20). Alongside the focus on American political institutions and policies, the contributions also illustrate how historical institutional approaches address core questions of the American polity, past and present, such as the central place of racial politics, and the yawning gap in income inequality, and the rise of mass incarceration (Paul Frymer, Marie Gottschalk, Chapters 21 and 22, respectively). Together, the chapters illustrate the ongoing vibrancy of research on historical institutionalism and American political development.

Many of the early contributions to historical institutionalism focused on developments in Europe. As European polities have become more internationalized, especially through a lengthy process of European integration, scholars have integrated comparative and international politics to a very significant degree. Chapters in Part V explore areas of research that are tethered relatively closely to national political developments as well as areas that include a very significant dimension of international cooperation. They explore the evolution of European states (Daniel Kelemen, Chapter 23), democracy (Sheri Berman, Chapter 24), institutions of social insurance (Julia Lynch and Martin Rhodes, Chapter 25) and religion (Anna Grzymala-Busse, Chapter 28), business (Pepper Culpepper, Chapter 27), finance (Richard Deeg and Elliot Posner, Chapter 26), market regulation (Mark Thatcher and Cornelia Woll, Chapter 30), as well as supranationalism in the European Union context (Tim Büthe, Chapter 29).

Finally, Part VI explores the contributions and promise of historical institutionalism for research in International Relations across a set of topics, including state sovereignty (Stephen D. Krasner, Chapter 31), global orders (G. John Ikenberry, Chapter 32), and international organizations (Henry Farrell and Martha Finnemore, Chapter 34). Chapters in this section also explore institutional developments in international security cooperation (Etel Solingen and Wilfred Wan, Chapter 33), international law (Karen J. Alter, Chapter 35), trade (Judith Goldstein and Robert Gulotty, Chapter 36), finance (Eric Helleiner, Chapter 37), and other areas of global regulation (Abraham L. Newman, Chapter 38). Together, they detail the contributions that historical institutionalism makes to perennial and new questions in International Relations, while also outlining agendas for future work on international political developments.

Across multiple subfields of Political Science, historical institutionalists have answered enduring empirical questions to the discipline as well as solved new complex puzzles by refining an analytical toolbox and methodological strategies to systematically and rigorously research politics and institutions in time. Since it crystallized as a tradition of political analysis in the early 1990s, its empirical scope has grown greatly to include new areas of research at the local, national, and international levels of politics.

If the past holds lessons for the future, it is that future scholarship will continue to gain from refining analytical concepts, probing new methods, and expanding the empirical horizons of historical institutionalism.

NOTES

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1. Steinmo dates the actual coining of "historical institutionalism" to 1989: "The term came out of a small workshop held in Boulder, Colorado in January 1989" (Steinmo 2008, 136, n. 1). Overviews of the tradition's emergence are found in Thelen 1999; Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Sanders 2006.

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PART II

FOUNDATIONS
