Should We Leave Behind the Subfield of International Relations?

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Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 2015. 18:481–99

First published online as a Review in Advance on December 17, 2014

The *Annual Review of Political Science* is online at polisci.annualreviews.org

This article's doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-053013-041156

Keywords

international relations, subfields

Abstract

This article considers whether political science should abandon the subfields of American politics, comparative politics, and international relations (IR), for new subfields of conflict, political economy, institutions, and behavior. The focus here is whether the field should abandon IR. The article lays out the arguments in favor of abandoning IR, describing scholarly trends that cross conventional subfield lines and are pushing to dissolve IR. Next, it argues that the costs of abandoning IR exceed the benefits, as new subfield divisions would remove some artificial walls but create new ones. Abandoning IR might undermine objective theory testing, would disadvantage the study of international system and structure, and would undermine the ability of political science to inform foreign policy debates. The article concludes by recommending that the field keep IR and its current subfield boundaries but that the walls between subfields should be kept low and porous.

INTRODUCTION

Most political science departments in the United States contain at least three empirical subfields—American politics, comparative politics, and international relations[1] (IR)—in addition to other subfields, such as political theory and methods. On the surface, this set of subfields seems stable and widely accepted, reflecting a natural division of political interests: a focus on the politics of the United States itself above the politics of any other nation, and then a separation between the politics within other nations and the politics between nations. However, there are scholarly trends in political science that are pushing against these boundaries, and against the boundaries of the IR subfield in particular. Growing scholarly communities engage in research that overlaps at least two of the traditional empirical subfields. Conflict scholars are combining together intrastate and interstate conflict, and are decreasingly interested in interstate conflict. Institutions scholars are beginning to explore together national (that is, American and comparative) and international institutions, examining commonalities among a variety of kinds of institutions previously distinguished as American, comparative, or international. There is a growing trend toward combining comparative and international political economy into a single field of political economy. And scholars increasingly see political behavior regarding foreign policy as not conceptually distinct from other forms of political behavior.

Should the traditional subfield boundaries be redrawn to better represent these trends? This article addresses this question, focusing in particular on whether the IR subfield should be abandoned and its pieces allocated to new subfields of conflict, institutions, political economy, and political behavior. Although the reasons for abandoning the IR subfield would likely apply equally well to the American and comparative subfields, this article focuses on only the implications of abandoning IR.[2]

Some may shrug off the question of subfield rearrangement, given the tremendous inertia behind contemporary subfield divisions and the collective action problems that would attend a transition to new subfields. However, such a transition is at least possible, its desirability notwithstanding. The biological sciences at some universities in the past 25 years have abandoned entire *fields*, such as anatomy, histology, and physiology, in favor of new field divisions (Christakis 2013). The social sciences have created space for new fields in the past few decades, such as women's studies, African-American studies, Latino/a studies, and others. Subfield divisions within sociology have evolved. And, as discussed below, there is already some subfield experimentation within political science. In short, such a transition is feasible enough that it deserves discussion on the basis of its intellectual merits.

This article argues that although the barriers between subfields should remain low and porous, it would be a mistake to abandon the IR subfield for these suggested new subfield divisions, for four reasons. First, although redrawing the subfield lines would remove artificial subfield lines that lay across some research agendas, it would impose new artificial lines across other research agendas. Second, creating an institutions subfield would make it more difficult to assess objectively institutionalist theory. Third, abandoning the IR subfield would impede research on international system and structure. Fourth, abandoning IR would undermine the ability of political science to inform makers of foreign policy.

The remainder of this essay contains five parts. The first section discusses subfields broadly. The second section focuses on the IR subfield. The third section describes the current scholarly

[1] The subfield of IR is also sometimes called international studies or world politics (Brecher 1999, p. 214).

[2] Of course, there are other approaches to abandoning IR, such as absorbing IR into the existing subfields of American and comparative. Many of the points in this essay would speak to this and other possible approaches.

trends that threaten to pull IR apart. The fourth section argues that abandoning IR would be a mistake. The final section concludes.

SUBFIELDS

Subfields are arbitrary divisions within fields of scholarly studies, which are themselves arbitrary divisions within the sea of intellectual endeavor. Philosophy of social science pays little attention to subfields, making no epistemological argument as to whether a field should have subfields, how many subfields a field should have, or where subfield lines should be drawn. Disciplines place subfield divisions purely instrumentally as means of advancing knowledge, pursuing pedagogical ends, or achieving other goals.

The primary function subfields serve is the provision of categories to advance research and teaching, especially to point to a finite set of related, principal questions of inquiry. The basic assumption is that scholarship advances when scholars are operating as a community, reading, reviewing, and building on each other's work. This is the insight within Polanyi's (1962) "republic of science" model. Fields and subfields define the boundaries of scholarly community, facilitating the kind of interaction that advances knowledge.

That said, subfield lines are seen as informal rather than legalistic boundaries. They do not establish jurisdiction and block scholars in one subfield from drawing on or publishing in other subfields. As the eminent sociologist Talcott Parsons (1937, p. 759) stated in the 1930s, "For concrete empirical research, it is clearly impossible to adhere to any neatly separate fields. The empirical scholar will follow his problems wherever they may lead and refuse to be deterred by any signs which read, 'Foreign Territory.'"

Pushing Parsons' point farther, one might conclude that the dividing effects of subfields are sufficiently counterproductive that we might be better off abandoning subfields (or even fields) entirely. This is too extreme a position, for research, pedagogical, and strategic reasons. For research, the absence of subfields might purchase creative opportunity at too high a price paid in intellectual continuity and community. Subfields encourage scholars to build substantively defined bases of knowledge, allowing the entire field to benefit from the gains of scholar specialization just as economies gain from worker specialization. The field is better off with a collection of specialists deeply knowledgeable in specific areas than with a collection of generalists who each attempt to master the breadth of political science. Subfields identify important and enduring questions that link together streams of research both spatially and temporally, and help generate new ideas. Identifying central questions forces differing theoretical approaches to confront each other, stimulating conceptual debates and the development of alternative explanations of the same empirical phenomena. The IR subfield's focus on the causes of war and peace has nurtured many important theoretical debates, such as rational deterrence versus psychological approaches and domestic politics versus realist approaches. Absent a subfield's identification of crucial questions, intensive and constructive scholarly debate would be less likely to emerge. Enduring subfields also encourage the construction and maintenance of critical scholarly institutions, such as journals, book series, professional associations, and annual conferences.

Subfields have pedagogical functions, as well. They prepare graduate students to enter defined research communities, and they present limits on the amount of knowledge a student has to absorb in order to qualify for a PhD. Subfields provide structure for undergraduates, signaling to them central research questions and theories and demonstrating how certain sets of questions are conceptually connected. For example, undergraduates can be shown in an IR class that the same set of abstract concepts about international institutions can shed light on both the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the World Trade Organization.

Subfields advance the organizational interests of academic departments. Departments serve as agents for the university administrations as principals. Administrations need departments to tell them how many faculty lines they need and in what intellectual areas. Most colleges and universities, especially outside of top-20 research departments, allocate faculty hires in response to student demand. Administrations assume that departments have two different sets of shirking incentives: to ask for more faculty lines than they need to meet student demands, and to hire faculty who meet the faculty's scholarly interests rather than the teaching needs of the department. Enduring subfields are one mechanism that reduces shirking, as subfields force departments to explain in greater detail exactly what teaching needs will be met by a particular hire. Reduced fear of shirking in turn makes administrations more willing to approve department requests for faculty lines. Without subfields, it is more difficult for a department to tie credibly a faculty hiring request to a specific teaching need, making administrations more hesitant to authorize searches.

Subfields also serve departments' strategic and budgetary needs by signaling undergraduate students. The share of scarce resources that universities are willing to allocate to political science departments reflects at least to some degree the success political science enjoys in attracting students to its classes and to its major. Subfield arrangements can affect the ability of fields to attract undergraduate students, because the subfield divisions help communicate to students the content of the field and thereby affect enrollments. This is especially true for political science, as most political science departments do not offer a single "introduction to political science" class, but rather subfield-based introductory classes. "Introduction to American politics" classes tend to attract students interested in the law and electoral politics. "Introduction to comparative politics" classes tend to attract students interested in the politics of particular regions or countries. "Introduction to IR" classes tend to attract students interested in foreign affairs. Notably, political science undergraduate enrollments, with the conventional subfield divisions, have in recent decades been strong. From about 1976 to 2010, there have been more political science and government majors at US colleges than economics, history, or sociology majors. Political science has maintained and increased its enrollments over time, with an increase from 2001 to 2011 (**http://www.apsanet.org/files/DSP%20Data/Data%20on%20the%20Profession/PSMajors0001,0809,1011APSA.pdf**). In contrast, humanities majors have decreased from 13% of all majors in 1970 to 7% in 2013 (Flaherty 2013).

THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBFIELD

It is natural for disciplines occasionally to examine and perhaps revamp their subfield or even field divisions. Anthropology settled on its four main subfields—cultural anthropology, physical anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology—over a period of several years (Adams 1998). Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, sociologists discussed the implications and potential dangers of the multiplication of specializations and subfields within their field (Zhao 1993). Although many leading subfields in economics have been stable since at least the 1920s (Diamond & Haurin 1995), the specialty of behavioral economics has received increasing recognition by the field, especially since the 1990s (Hosseini 2003).

What is the status of current subfield divisions within political science? On the surface, there is enduring stability with three main empirical subfields—American, comparative, and IR—alongside the subfields of theory and methods, as well as other sometimes overlapping subfields such as public law and public policy. Although there is not a widespread, formal definition of IR, most political scientists recognize it to be the study of politics across national borders, inclusive of the processes that determine the choices of political actors pertinent to

IR, such as state foreign policy formation. IR has been recognized as a subfield for decades. It received closer attention especially after World War I, as some reacted to the "War to End All Wars" by advocating the greater study of the causes of war and peace. The first Department of International Politics, at the University of Aberystwyth in Britain, was founded in 1919 with this motivation (**http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/interpol/about**).

World War II both encouraged the study of international politics and highlighted the divide between international and national politics. In the United States, the impetus came from recognition that the oceans no longer provided America with safety from global threats and that American national security demanded both an engaged foreign policy and careful study of politics between nations. After World War II, IR was seen as integral to the field of political science and the practice of foreign policy and as an appropriate subject for the application of the scientific method. In his 1949 Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association, Quincy Wright (1950, p. 2) declared the importance of IR to the field of political science: "People await with a blind fatalism the approach of atomic war. . . .Has the science of politics anything to offer in this situation? Initially we stumble on the insistence by many that a science of politics is impossible. That position can hardly be taken by this Association."

A burst of IR scholarship in the late 1940s and 1950s saw IR as an area of political science clearly distinct from national politics. Early realist works such as Morgenthau's (1948) *Politics Among Nations* and Waltz's (1959) *Man, the State, and War* emphasized ideas that seemed relatively specific to the subfield of IR, such as international anarchy and the balance of power, perhaps in part to demonstrate IR as conceptually distinct from American and comparative politics. There were early discussions about the status of IR as a distinct field of study, considering whether or not IR should be an entirely separate field of social science (Manning 1954). Scholars in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Herman Kahn, Karl Deutsch, Glenn Snyder, Thomas Schelling, Bruce Russett, J. David Singer, and Albert Wohlstetter, continued to focus on IR-specific questions such as nuclear weapons, international alliances, polarity, arms races, and deterrence.

As the 1960s gave way to the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, however, IR scholars began to incorporate ideas from outside the subfield and outside political science entirely. However, at this stage the motivation was to draw on a broader array of ideas to enrich the theoretical soil of IR; virtually all recognized that IR was a distinct and important subfield. A variety of works, such as Jervis's (1976) *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, imported ideas from social and cognitive psychology to challenge the rationalist model of state decision making. Allison's (1971) *Essence of Decision* incorporated ideas about organization politics. This era also saw the emergence of work relating national politics to foreign policy choices, including democratic peace work (Russett 1993). Emerging institutionalist scholarship (Keohane & Nye 1977, Keohane 1984, Axelrod & Keohane 1985) often drew on economics to present arguments as to how regimes and international institutions might have nontrivial impacts on state behavior and international economic stability. The most important constructivist work presented its mission as drawing on a variety of theoretical ideas, many from sociology, to develop a form of constructivist theory intended in turn to "theorize about the international system," that is, explain international relations and not politics in general (Wendt 1999, p. 1).

Throughout this time period, there was general acceptance of IR as an important subfield in political science. The status of IR as a subfield was reified in 1979 by Waltz's landmark realist work *Theory of International Politics*. In it, he argued that IR is a qualitatively distinct subfield because there is no international counterpart to the "standard of legitimacy" asserted by national governments, and in particular the national governments' monopoly on the "*legitimate* use of force" (Waltz 1979, pp. 103–4; italics in original). Very occasionally, scholars have challenged

IR's status as a separate subfield within political science, including Rosenau's (1968) suggestion that a new subfield of comparative foreign policy be created, and Friedrich's (1966) and Alger's (1963) suggestion that IR might not be a conceptually distinct subfield. But these challenges were isolated.

Political science today formally upholds IR as a distinct subfield. Of the top 25 political science departments in the United States, 23 report on their websites that they have an IR academic division or subfield.[3] In the early 2000s, one major department abandoned its IR subfield but has since readopted it. The American Political Science Association recognizes IR as a main subfield (**http://www.apsanet.org/content.asp?contentid=202**). The flagship journal in the field, the *American Political Science Review* (*APSR*), describes itself as publishing work from throughout the discipline, and in categorizing the discipline mentions the subfields of American politics, comparative politics, IR, theory, public policy, and public administration (**http://www.apsanet.org/apsr**).

CHALLENGES TO THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBFIELD

Although on the surface it would appear that the IR subfield is stable and enduring, there are important scholarly trends that question its boundaries. Scholars are increasingly producing research that straddles traditional subfield divisions between IR, comparative, and American. Whereas in the 1960s–1980s IR scholars would borrow ideas from American and comparative politics to explain IR phenomena, in recent years a growing number of scholars from all three of these subfields go beyond borrowing and instead see American, IR, and/or comparative applications of general theoretical puzzles and solutions. These trends occurred alongside a movement within IR away from a focus on traditional theoretical paradigms (see Lake 2010).

The remainder of this section describes four of these scholarly trends. Each of these trends—in conflict, institutions, political economy, and political behavior—is an argument for hiving off a component of the IR research agenda, combining it with elements from other traditional subfields, and creating a new subfield.

Conflict

Around 1990, conflict scholars began to shift away from a near-exclusive focus on interstate conflict to look at other forms of conflict, especially conflict involving at least one nonstate actor. Part of this shift was driven by global events. The year 1990 of course saw the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the substantial reduction in the possibility of war between the United States and the (former) Soviet Union. Some scholars went so far as to forecast the end of great power war (Mueller 1989, 2004) or great power geopolitics more broadly (Van Evera 2008), the latter perhaps in part because of the emergence of American unipolarity.[4] Growing concerns about ethnic conflict stimulated a long wave of research on ethnic and civil conflict (e.g., Kalyvas 2006, Weinstein 2007), as well as peacekeeping (Walter 2002; Fortna 2004, 2008; Doyle & Sambanis 2006). The 9/11 attacks gave great impetus to the study of terrorism (Shapiro 2013), and the decade-long conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan encouraged the study of insurgency and

[3] Rankings from the 2013 *US News and World Report* rankings of political science departments. Departments signal their subfields in different ways, sometimes through official letters of welcome from department chairs, sometimes through graduate program requirements, and sometimes through categories of faculty.

[4] Pinker (2011) argues for the long-term decline of all forms of violence, not just interstate war.

counterinsurgency (Kalyvas & Balcells 2010, Kocher et al. 2011). Many of these manifestations of conflict included interstate elements, such as international peacekeeping in civil wars, third parties conducting counterinsurgency campaigns, and civil wars escalating to interstate conflicts (Saleyhan 2009).

One aspect of this trend is belief by some scholars that the theoretical division between interstate conflict and intrastate conflict may be artificial. In the early 1990s, scholars applied theories originally developed to explain interstate conflict to intrastate conflict. For example, Posen (1993) used the security dilemma to explain the outbreak of intrastate conflict. More recently, scholars have observed that conventional military operations can be employed in either interstate or intrastate conflict, as can guerrilla and counter-guerrilla tactics (Stam 1996, Kalyvas & Balcells 2010). Coercive airpower, bombing campaigns to compel changes in actor behavior, can also be used in either interstate or intrastate conflicts (Pape 1996, Kocher et al. 2011). Scholars have also developed single theories to explain governments killing civilians in intrastate and interstate wars (Downes 2008), conflict mediation in intrastate and interstate conflicts (Beardsley 2011), intranational and cross-border terrorism (Shapiro 2013), and other phenomena.

Perhaps the most significant IR theoretical trend since 1990, the development of the bargaining model of war, also allowed for the unification of interstate and intrastate conflict under a single theoretical banner (Reiter 2003). In the first major article laying out the ideas of the model, Fearon (1995) focused on interstate war. Fearon posited that because conflict is always costly, actors have an incentive to bargain rather than fight. The occurrence of conflict can be attributed, according to Fearon, to problems of information, commitment, and/or issue indivisibility. Several works on interstate conflict built on Fearon's model (e.g., Goemans 2000, Reiter 2009, Weisiger 2013).

Scholars soon realized that Fearon's conceptual framework need not be limited to interstate conflict. Scholarship began to appear that applied the bargaining model of war to intrastate conflict as well (Fearon 1998, 2004; Cetinyan 2002). One quantitative empirical study (Cunningham & Lemke 2013) aimed to show that bargaining factors affect interstate and intrastate conflicts in similar ways. Scholars demonstrated that information problems can contribute to intrastate as well as interstate conflict. One way that peacekeepers can help peace endure after conflict is by increasing transparency between former combatants, both governments and nongovernment actors (Lindley 2007).

Civil war scholars found the commitment insight to be relevant. Fearon himself (2004; see also Reiter 2009) argued that commitment credibility problems made civil wars especially long. Walter (2002) proposed that one reason peacekeeping missions work is by reducing commitment credibility problems. Powell (2004) presented a general treatment of the commitment credibility problem, developing the insight to cover not only interstate and intrastate conflict but also nonviolent political conflicts, such as legislative struggles.

Scholarship has applied the concept of issue indivisibility to interstate and intrastate conflicts. Goddard (2009) proposed that domestic political strategies create issue indivisibility problems and applied that concept to conflict within the British empire over the status of the colony of Ireland. Hassner (2009) framed issue indivisibility within a theory of sacred spaces, applying the insight to both interstate and intrastate conflicts, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem and the Indo-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir.

Comparativists interested in violent conflict have also challenged the IR/comparative subfield divide. After 1990 comparativists grew increasingly interested in violent conflict within states, although certainly intrastate conflict had a place within comparative before then. Some of the most important work on intrastate conflict in the 2000s was published by scholars who probably consider themselves comparativists (or, at least, as much engaged in comparative as in IR), including

Varshney (2002), Kalyvas (2006), and Weinstein (2007). Blurring the lines further, development economists have published an array of important work on internal conflict (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler 2004, Miguel et al. 2004, Blattman 2009, Besley & Persson 2011).

Not surprisingly, journals have moved away from a very heavy focus on publishing interstate conflict scholarship and toward a more balanced approach, publishing both interstate and intrastate conflict scholarship. Specifically, from 1988 through 1990, *APSR* published 19 articles on IR or conflict [excluding pure international political economy (IPE) papers] and one article on intrastate conflict. In 2010–2012, that *APSR* ratio of 95% interstate to 5% intrastate had changed radically, as there were 8 articles on interstate conflict and relations (53%) and 7 articles on intrastate conflicts (47%). A similar pattern was seen in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (*JCR*). In 1988–1990, of the *JCR* articles on either interstate or intrastate relations and conflict, 79% were on interstate, 21% on intrastate. By 2010–2012, the interstate coverage dropped by nearly half, to 46% interstate and 54% intrastate. Currently, much (though not all) of the conflict scholarship is housed within IR, including much of the intrastate conflict literature. That is, scholars who produce intrastate conflict scholarship tend to study as IR grad students, attend IR conferences such as the Peace Science Society and International Studies Association meetings, get hired to take IR jobs, and publish in nominal IR journals like *JCR*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Organization*, and *Journal of Peace Research*.

The above-described trends might suggest the creation of a conflict subfield. Such a subfield would house all theories of conflict, intra- and interstate, and encourage the development of general theories that apply to all forms of conflict. A conflict subfield could provide a single "tent," avoiding the artificial comparative/IR divide and advancing scholarly progress.

Political Institutions

For decades, the reigning assumption of many IR theories has been that international politics occurs in an environment of anarchy, whereas comparative and American politics occur in contexts of hierarchy, an insight reinforced by Waltz (1979). Neoliberal institutionalists recognized a core reality of anarchy but believed that the consequences of anarchy could be ameliorated by the voluntary actions of states to form and comply with international institutions (Keohane 1984).

This international anarchy/national hierarchy categorization has experienced a number of challenges, especially since about 1990. One of constructivism's central propositions in the 1990s was that anarchy is not an inevitable constant in global affairs but is rather a social construct (Wendt 1999). Lake (2009a) presented a different challenge to the international anarchy/national hierarchy assumption, arguing that international politics, like national politics, is characterized by consequential hierarchical relationships.

An additional set of challenges has resulted from recognition that international law is more consequential than traditionally recognized, and at least sometimes operates in ways beyond the older understanding of institutions facilitating cooperation under anarchy by creating longer shadows of the future, increasing transparency, and linking issues (e.g., Oye 1986). Keohane et al. (2000) presented a theoretical framework for understanding international judicial institutions, observing that some institutions, such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), have begun to embed themselves in domestic political legal systems. They predicted that compliance with the decisions of such courts will be more likely than anarchy-based IR theory forecasts.

A broader challenge to the traditional anarchy/hierarchy distinction is that institutional scholars are beginning to see important commonalities between national political institutions and international institutions. Principal–agent models, originally applied in political science to explain bureaucratic politics, are now employed in IR to understand international institutions such as

the United Nations (Chapman 2011), the World Trade Organization (Elsig 2011), and the International Monetary Fund (Stone 2008), as well as in other IR areas like currency policy (Bearce 2003) and terrorism (Shapiro 2013). Judicial scholars are developing general theories of judicial behavior, covering American, international, and non-US national courts (Carrubba & Clark 2012), as well as applying concepts developed in US courts literature, such as the use of precedent to explain the behavior of international courts such as the ECHR (Lupu & Voeten 2011).

Scholars studying the European Union have been especially aggressive in developing theories that ignore the comparative/IR divide. They increasingly view EU judicial bodies such as the ECHR and European Court of Justice as courts explicable by broader theories of judicial behavior, rather than as international courts conceptually distinct from national courts. Scholars are taking a similar tack in evaluating other elements of the European Union. For example, legislative models examining dynamics such as logrolling and roll call voting have been used to explain EU legislative behavior (Kardasheva 2013, Carrubba et al. 2006).

Staton & Moore (2011) presented a challenging critique of the traditional anarchy/hierarchy distinction, focusing on judicial institutions and power. Alongside the point that compliance with international law is more routine than anarchy-oriented IR theories might allow, they also argued that national institutions and laws do not always experience the kind of apolitical, routine enforcement and compliance that the traditional anarchy/hierarchy distinction assumes. For example, clashes between branches of national government often occur outside of a context of clear rules and institutionalization, and can be thought of as occurring within an environment of anarchy or near anarchy. They argued for the theoretical unity of judicial behavior across courts in each of the subfields.

A related research agenda concerns networks, arguably a form of political institutions. Network theory has in the past been applied more frequently in sociology, but has been increasingly applied in IR in areas such as nuclear proliferation, human rights, trade, international conflict, and terrorism (Hafner-Burton et al. 2009, Maoz 2010, Murdie 2014). There is an argument that network theory better fits within a subfield of institutions than within the IR subfield. Political networks operate both within states and across state borders, making them relevant for both national and international politics. Further, the informal nature of networks nicely complements the more formal nature of rule-based international institutions such as the World Trade Organization or European Union, both theoretically and to the degree that networks and formal institutions as political actors often engage each other, such as networks pressuring rule-based institutions.

Many scholars whose critiques challenge traditional theoretical approaches do not call for abandoning the IR subfield, often arguing for example that IR should be more open to borrowing ideas from other subfields (e.g., Milner 1998; Staton & Moore 2011, p. 555). However, this new scholarship points to the possibility of creating a new subfield of institutions, inclusive of institutions within and between states and inclusive of both rule-based institutions such as courts and more informal institutions such as networks. Such a subfield would be a home for scholars studying essentially the same conceptual puzzles regarding agency and delegation, commitment credibility, preference aggregation, coordination and collective action, and institutional formation and change, as applied to institutions in international, American, and comparative contexts.

Political Economy

Before 1990, scholars interested in the politics of economic interactions usually categorized themselves either as international political economists, generally interested in trade, international institutions, and international finance, or as comparative political economists, generally interested in

development and national economic policies. This distinction was never terribly rigid, however. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, dependency theory provided an international, structural explanation of economic development.

The last several years have seen a growing convergence between international and comparative political economy. Unlike the trends in conflict and institutions, it has not been driven by theoretical similarities between international and comparative political economy (IPE and CPE). For example, there is not really a domestic counterpart to international currency regimes and movements of exchange rates or the international management of international trade, given that within nearly all countries there is a single currency and completely free trade. Rather, the motivation behind the convergence is a sense that IPE areas such as trade and currency flows cannot be explained without reference to domestic political and economic forces, and CPE areas such as development and national macroeconomic policies cannot be explained without reference to the global economy. Keohane (2009, pp. 37–38) summarized this convergence bluntly, stating that "during the last 20 years, IPE has been increasingly difficult to distinguish from comparative political economy, or CPE." The emergence and flourishing of the European Union has also pushed together IPE and CPE. Some scholars have begun to describe the new paradigm of open-economy politics (OEP), an approach fusing insights from comparative politics, IR, and economics to fashion a comprehensive explanation of political economy (e.g., Lake 2009b).

Other scholars push farther than the OEP agenda, critiquing the OEP's assumption of the unit independence of the state. Farrell & Newman (2014) argue for a new perspective based on recognition of political interdependence. They stress that transnational interactions in a world of global economic interdependence shape both domestic and international politics.

These trends might suggest the creation of a new subfield of political economy. Out of the top 25 political science departments in the United States, five recognize political economy as a companion subfield alongside IR and comparative, with one additional department recognizing political economy and conflict but not IR as subfields.

Political Behavior

IR scholars have long been interested in various forms of political behavior, especially the determinants of public opinion on foreign policy issues. Scholarship on public opinion in IR has been used to develop ideas about the "rally 'round the flag" effect, the effect of casualties on public opinion, and other topics (Mueller 1973). However, this strand of IR literature could be seen as simply a special case of broader ideas about the determinants of public opinion on specific policy issues or the national leader's performance (see Baum 2003, Berinsky 2009, Baum & Groeling 2010). Relatedly, IR scholarship presumes that leaders are concerned about public opinion because increases in public disapproval can increase the odds that a leader will lose office, but this could be viewed as merely a special case within the broader study of the determinants of leader selection and reselection, topics long of interest to Americanists and comparativists (e.g., Vavreck 2009). The growing interest in neuroscience, physiology, and political behavior certainly spans traditional subfields and promises to make predictions about IR-relevant political behavior (e.g., Rosen 2005, McDermott et al. 2011, Holmes 2013). In short, these elements of IR exploring political behavior could be hived off and combined with other political behavior elements from American and comparative to form a subfield of political behavior. This new subfield could develop general theories about political behavior, drawing on media, neuroscientific, signaling, and other theories, and these theories might be applied in a variety of national settings and to an array of different policy areas, including foreign policy.

Summary

Though few have openly made the recommendation,[5] these four trends could be seen as recommending the abandonment of American, comparative, and IR, to replace them with subfields of conflict, political economy, institutions, and behavior. The core motivation is that doing so would remove artificial boundaries that bisect research agendas and provide better categories that would more effectively advance contemporary research.

Assessing whether American or comparative politics should be abandoned is beyond the scope of this article. The next section assesses whether the IR subfield should be abandoned, accounting for the trends described above.

WHY ABANDONING THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBFIELD WOULD BE A MISTAKE

Leaving aside the logistical and collective action problems of implementing a major shift in the subfields, should we replace the current subfields with new divisions of conflict, political economy, institutions, and behavior? From the perspective of the IR subfield, there are four major shortcomings.

Creating New Divisions

Rearranging the subfields would mean that some areas of scholarship, such as conflict and political economy, would no longer cross subfield lines and would be neatly kept within single subfields. However, doing so would also cause some areas of study that are currently within the IR subfield to straddle (new) subfield lines. That is, if the critique is that the traditional subfields impose artificial divisions on scholarly research agendas, it must be recognized that any new subfield divisions might impose new divisions as they removed existing divisions. Consider three clusters of research that would straddle the new subfield lines.

The first is the relationship between political economy and conflict. There is a long-standing and continually evolving literature on the relationship between economic interdependence and interstate war (e.g., Lupu & Traag 2013), and a renewed scholarship on the relationship between national political economy and war (McDonald 2009, Colgan 2013). There is also a growing literature on economic mobilization for war and the financing of war (e.g., Kreps & Flores-Macias 2013, Shea 2014, Poast 2015). Scholars are also beginning to explore how economic costs mediate public support for war. These clusters of scholarship have been pursued within IR, and in the new arrangement would be split between the subfields of political economy and conflict.

The second area concerns the effect of domestic political institutions on conflict. The 1990s and 2000s saw an intense focus on the democratic peace and related ideas such as how democracies might fight wars differently. This research agenda continues to be fruitful. Some new work uses experiments to shed new light on older questions (Tomz & Weeks 2013). Other work explores new questions, such as whether democracies are more or less likely to safeguard the rights of prisoners of war during wartime (Wallace 2012; see also Morrow 2014) and the relationship between

[5]Lake (2010) frames his argument as a recommendation for reorienting rather than abandoning the IR subfield. Farrell & Newman (2014, p. 353) cast their interdependence research agenda as a means to better study "both international relations and comparative politics." But some have argued that existing divisions between social science fields should be scrapped and replaced with new field divisions (Christakis 2013).

authoritarian political institutions and conflict (Weeks 2014). This literature would no longer fit within IR, and would straddle the new subfields of conflict and institutions, as well as perhaps behavior.

The third area is international institutions. One of the major accomplishments of the subfield of IR has been the generation of a body of theoretically rigorous scholarship developing a unified set of ideas as to how international institutions might affect the behavior of nation-states. IR theory has made predictions in both political economy and conflict, focusing on such concepts as shadow of the future, issue linkage, and monitoring (Oye 1986). Dissolving the subfield of IR would mean that that body of research would cover three subfields: institutions, political economy, and conflict. This would be regrettable, as some of the best work on international institutions marries institutional theory with deep knowledge of the IR area in question, whether in political economy or conflict (e.g., Mansfield & Reinhardt 2008, Fuhrmann 2012, Morrow 2014).

A last point is that some scholarly clusters that straddle the traditional subfields would straddle the new subfield divisions as well. Gender scholarship and diffusion scholarship would still cross multiple subfields, as they do now. Human rights now straddles comparative and IR, and in the new subfields would straddle institutions, conflict, and perhaps behavior.

Undermining Objective Theory Testing

One of the new subfields, institutions, is basically equal to a theory or set of theories proposing that institutions affect behavior. Equating a theory to a subfield would be a departure from the current subfield arrangements, as none of the current three empirical subfields correlates with a single theory. As noted, IR for decades has been especially open to different theoretical approaches.

Perhaps the central theoretical debate within IR for the last century has been the role of international institutions: whether they matter, and if so, how they matter. The IR subfield has proved a useful tent for permitting debate between, on one hand, realist and other scholars who are more skeptical of the significance of institutions, and on the other hand, liberal and other scholars who are more optimistic about the significance of institutions. However, giving institutions their own subfield would make open debate about institutions more difficult. Debates over the relevance of institutions would now cross subfield lines instead of theoretical lines. In particular, scholars would be less likely to consider this debate objectively, as for scholars in the institutions subfield, conceding the empirical irrelevance of institutions would amount to conceding the irrelevance of the subfield, a move with grave professional consequences.

Some might propose that these concerns are irrelevant because the field has concluded that international institutions do in fact matter. However, a sizeable amount of empirical literature sheds doubt on the empirical impact of international institutions, especially in the area of conflict. Institutional provisions such as peacekeeping and demilitarized zones do not make peace following interstate war last longer (Lo et al. 2008). Quantitative studies cast doubt on the proposition that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has slowed the spread of nuclear weapons (Fuhrmann 2012). International treaties might not improve the treatment of prisoners of war (Wallace 2012; see also Morrow 2014). The Missile Technology Control Regime has not slowed the diffusion of ballistic missiles (Mettler & Reiter 2013). One of the few empirical studies conducting a field experiment to assess the impact of international institutions casts doubt on likely compliance rates of corporations with international rules (Findley et al. 2013). In short, the empirical evidence suggests at least the possibility that international institutions enjoy qualitatively different levels of compliance than do domestic institutions.

International System and Structure

IR should endure as a subfield because questions regarding international system and structure are unlikely to find appropriate, supportive intellectual homes in other subfields. Because the IR mix of Powell's (1990) three system types—markets, networks, and hierarchy—is qualitatively different from the mix of these three types in national politics, notably with a healthier dose of market forces (anarchy), there needs to be an IR subfield. Anarchy is the default, baseline condition that characterizes international politics, and factors such as international institutions, networks, and social factors may ameliorate anarchy. Conversely, hierarchy is the default, baseline condition that characterizes national politics, anarchy being the exception rather than the rule. Relocating the pieces of IR system and structure scholarship to new subfields would remove the opportunity to study IR as a unique kind of system. Further, it is not clear exactly where IR system/structure factors such as polarity, the balance of power, and identity would be located without an IR subfield.

Some might propose that the study of international system and structure is essentially dead, especially since the end of the Cold War. International power politics or at least great power politics is outdated in the twenty-first century, perhaps because of the emergence of American unipolarity or because networks and institutions account for the lion's share of international politics (Slaughter 2005), so most of what is important about international system and structure could be included within a subfield of political institutions. As noted above, however, some evidence casts doubt on the efficacy of at least some institutions, especially conflict-related institutions. The decline of American relative power since the 1990s might give pause to those believing that unipolarity makes great power politics moot (Layne 2012). Contemporary developments such as Russian aggression against Ukraine and Chinese expansion in the South China Sea might also give pause to those forecasting the death of great power politics or geopolitics (Mead 2014).

Notably, international structure and system has received significant scholarly attention in the past few years. Unipolarity has attracted scholarly attention (Ikenberry et al. 2011, Monteiro 2014). Broader scholarly interest in the IR consequences of different global distributions of material power has also been renewed, with new theoretical ideas and the application of new empirical methods (Braumoeller 2013). There are other, vibrant strands of research that get at different elements of international system and structure in various ways, including the study of world regions (Katzenstein 2005), the global diffusion of norms (e.g., Htun & Weldon 2012), networks, the role of international nongovernmental organizations (Murdie & Hicks 2013), and others. Oatley (2011) stressed the insufficiency of OEP's heavy focus on the domestic determinants of foreign economic policies, arguing that systemic factors must be accounted for to provide complete explanations of phenomena such as trade tariffs, speculative currency attacks, and exchange rate regime choice. This and future research on international system and structure has a home in IR, and would be split into pieces or become homeless if the IR subfield disappeared.

Informing Foreign Policy Makers

Political scientists can inform policy makers in two sets of ways. First, they can offer answers to narrower questions, such as: Do election monitors reduce fraud (Hyde & Marinov 2014)? Do development projects reduce support for insurgents (Berman et al. 2011)? How should states design international institutions? Second, political scientists can tackle larger questions, both scientific and normative. What is the nature of the world order? What should American grand strategy be? Scholars should not underestimate the importance of this second category. For decades, political scientists and other academics have shaped foreign policy debates, both indirectly through the

public sphere and sometimes more directly by holding high political positions, such as president, secretary of state, and national security advisor,[6] as well as lesser positions in the foreign policy bureaucracy; academics have held high positions at the Departments of State, Treasury, and Defense, positions on White House and vice presidential staffs, ambassadorships, and membership in the National Security Council.[7] Political scientists also teach at both undergraduate and postgraduate war colleges and rotate through leading foreign policy think tanks such as the Brookings Institution, Council on Foreign Relations, and RAND.

Twenty-first-century US foreign policy greatly needs active, sophisticated debates over several large issues. American hard and soft power continues to decline, especially in comparison to powers such as China, Brazil, and India. America faces the possibility of renewed great power competition with Russia and China. The exact nature of the anarchy/hierarchy hybrid of the European Union is still unknown, evolving, and important. America needs to understand how to navigate through the ever-thickening global ecosystem of international institutions and other networks. And America needs a grand strategy to deal with the threats posed by the combination of failed states, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). These issues all point to the largest of questions: How engaged should the United States be with global affairs?

A subfield of IR is better equipped to nurture these large debates than would be individual subfields of conflict, institutions, political economy, and behavior. Effective thinking about grand strategy requires simultaneously accounting for all of these pieces. Higher levels of defense spending might permit greater American involvement in violent conflicts abroad, but at what price to American prosperity? Can the United States count on international institutions such as the United Nations and International Atomic Energy Agency to address effectively very serious security threats like WMD proliferation and failed states? Indeed, the subfield of IR has provided a forum for grappling with larger issues of foreign policy for decades, and can continue to do so going forward. None of the new subfields really provides the right kind of big tent to permit this ongoing dialogue.

Last, it is especially important that an IR subfield continues to provide a home for this kind of debate because of the decline of the study of diplomatic and military history in the academic field of history. The study of diplomatic and military history has provided and will continue to provide crucial insights on major foreign policy issues. The percentage of historians who study diplomatic history fell by more than half from 1975 to 2005 (Nickles 2011), a trend likely to continue as the bleak academic job market in history is especially discouraging for potential graduate students interested in diplomatic and military history. Going forward, history is much less likely to support scholars who think very broadly about contemporary American foreign policy, such as Henry Kissinger, Paul Kennedy, and John Lewis Gaddis. A subfield of IR can and should help fill this gap.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The principal suggestion here is an ambitious one: to maintain the current subfield divisions, but not to let these divisions inhibit new research. As argued here, abandoning the current subfield of IR would be too costly. It would leave some research agendas straddling new subfield lines, it

[6] Academics who have held these positions include Woodrow Wilson, Henry Kissinger, Condoleezza Rice, and Anthony Lake.

[7] Some of the many political scientists who have held these roles include Peter Feaver, Dan Drezner, Anne-Marie Slaughter, Joseph Nye, Samuel Huntington, Michael McFaul, Aaron Friedberg, Eliot Cohen, Colin Kahl, Stephen Rosen, Kenneth Pollack, Morton Halperin, Raymond Tanter, and Stephen Krasner.

would jeopardize the objective assessment of international institutions, it would leave homeless the study of systemic and structural questions, and it would undermine the field's ability to address certain foreign policy questions. That said, the field needs to keep the walls between its subfields low and porous and to think about subfields as means of encouraging and organizing research rather than as lines of jurisdiction.

Building on this last point, political science is moving away from the "clean" subfield model it embraced in past years, with a small number of relatively distinct subfields. It seems unlikely to go down the path of sociology, creating and recognizing an increasing number of relatively narrow and distinct subfields. Rather, new and exciting directions in political science seem to be less about hiving out completely new fields of study begging for their own subfields, and more about recognizing commonalities across subfields.

What do these trends mean going forward? The good news is that journals and publishers have demonstrated their unwillingness to be constrained by traditional subfield boundaries, focusing instead on publishing work that they and reviewers find innovative, important, and well executed. The rest of the field should think about specific actions that could prevent subfield boundaries from being destructively inhibiting. First, scholars working on research programs that span subfield lines can ensure that scholars within the research program use common conceptual terms, employ similar methodologies, and strive to build coauthor teams that include scholars from multiple subfields (Graham et al. 2014). Second, graduate programs should be flexible enough to include both students whose interests are more traditionally IR and students whose interests cross subfield lines. This may mean allowing flexibility in course or exam requirements. Third, when hiring new faculty, departments should avoid being too restrictive about what an "IR" hire might be. Specifically, they should be open to hiring scholars whose interests straddle traditional subfield boundaries, especially if they would meet departmental IR teaching needs. Fourth, when junior faculty come up for tenure, departments need to be flexible in judging their scholarly contributions. When departments evaluate candidates for tenure, they frequently compare those candidates to scholars of similar (professional) age with common scholarly interests. Departments need to frame that comparison properly, understanding that sometimes the best comparison is with a research community that spans two or more subfields.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For thoughtful comments and feedback, thanks are due to Bear Braumoeller, David Davis, James Fearon, Joseph Grieco, Danielle Jung, John Mearsheimer, Shawn Ramirez, Eric Reinhardt, Mark Risjord, Allan Stam, Jeff Staton, and Stephen Walt. All opinions are exclusively my own.

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