
1 Introduction

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THE RATIONALE FOR THIS BOOK

Traditionally, much of the focus of the study of politics has focused on formal arrangements and formal institutions, and on the official legislative or implementing acts and decisions that arise from their work. This is even more true for the study of law with its explicit concern with formally binding rules and official sanctions. However, in recent years, the dominant focus on formal institutions, rules and procedures has given way to an increasing concern with informal aspects of politics. This is due in part to a conceptual shift in political science, with a greater attention of scholars devoted to the wider phenomenon of 'governance' rather than being occupied, more narrowly, with government. The 'governance turn' is concerned with precisely those aspects of policy-making that cut across the divide between public and private, that involve non-state actors as well as public office-holders and that lead to non-binding arrangements, voluntary agreements and other kinds of 'soft law', or that revolve around the coordination of actions from a range of different actors (Hooghe and Marks 2001; Bache and Flinders 2004; Borrás and Greve 2004; Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006).

The focus on governance by definition pushes scholars to pay greater attention to the non-formal aspects of politics, and this has coincided with a second development, namely the rising number of empirical studies on the informal dimension of politics, and in an expanding number of fields this has provided interesting research, raising both new questions about the nature of decision-making and offering valuable insights into the 'underbelly' of public policy-making. The variety of work done along these lines is extremely broad, ranging from studies into patterns of clientelism in Western political systems to informal practices in other parts of the world. It involves scholarship from a number of different disciplines including political science, international relations, law, sociology, cultural studies and even anthropology. And it ranges in focus across all territorial levels of governance, from developments at the global level, through regional institutions to the nation-state, regional and local levels (for example, Cohen and Sabel 1997; Cutler et al. 1999; Abbott and Snidal 2000; Pierre and Peters 2000;

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Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Beck and Conzelmann 2004; Bütte 2004; Peters and Pierre 2004).

This growth of research undertaken in this field is remarkable because it has to confront obvious problems of methodology. It may well be difficult for a variety of reasons to study formal institutions and processes, but usually the existence of these is documented in some way, one knows where to find the officials involved and one can obtain evidence of the outcomes of the formal decision-making processes, for example by way of formal legislation. To research informal arrangements is generally a greater challenge given that there might not be any announcements of meetings, or documentation of any outcomes, or information on the participants in any process. As Auel has observed, 'informal influence takes place behind closed doors, which makes it generally more difficult to assess its "success rate"' (Auel 2006, p. 264). It is, in the words of Rodgers, 'shadow-side dynamics of an organization relating to those below-the-surface aspects of organizational life' (Rodgers 2007, p. 40). To some extent, researching informal governance is an attempt at studying the invisible or at least the opaque, and as a result methods have to be fine-tuned to deal with the particular challenges in this regard.

Fortunately, methodological challenges have not deterred scholars from addressing this hitherto under-researched area, and a growing body of research has grown on the various aspects that one can group together under the umbrella of informal governance. However, due to the dispersed nature of this kind of work, the numerous geographical and organizational distinctions and the disciplinary boundaries involved, there has been a limit in terms of bringing the scholarship in this area together and to take stock of the overall significance of the phenomenon of informal governance. For instance, even though there have been attempts to discern what informal governance arrangements might imply for governance in the EU (Stacey and Rittberger 2003; Christiansen and Piattoni 2003), there is thus far a lacunae when it comes to observing and accounting for the practice of informal governance more generally across the globe and within different policy domains.

This is the gap that this volume seeks to fill by bringing together a large number of scholars who have worked on very different aspects of informal governance. One of the aims of this handbook is therefore to take stock of, and to consolidate, the literature on an increasingly important topic. In doing so, it demonstrates the breadth of the field, the variety of approaches applied to its study, and the range of empirical observations arising from it. It includes also contributions that are aimed specifically at the conceptual and theoretical dimension of the study of informal governance, and the normative implications of what we find in the course of such research.

A second purpose is the desire to address the lack of an agreed understanding of what the concept of informal governance might mean, and how it can be researched in different empirical contexts and from different disciplinary and methodological backgrounds. This is based on the observation that despite – or perhaps because of – the popularity and topicality of the subject, there is a lack of an agreed definition of the concept. However, rather than seeking to oversimplify the complexity of the issue, or imposing a single definition on all authors contributing to this book, the idea is instead to explore the different uses that have been made of informal governance and explore from there whether there is potential for greater conceptual clarity in the future.

With this objective in mind, the invitation to the contributors to this volume was to reflect on the role of informal arrangements within their specific area of research. Rather than being given a single common definition of what informal governance might mean, the authors were open to explore and present the definitions and implications of the concept for their respective field of research.

Beyond pooling theoretical and normative reflections on informal governance, the book brings together a wealth of empirical observations. By inviting authors to probe into different disciplinary approaches to informal governance, we wanted to illustrate how the same concept can have some very different implications within different disciplines, while at the same time similar challenges are to be overcome.

The fact that this handbook includes several chapters on the practice of informal governance in Europe is in part due to the fact that this is our own field of research, but it also reflects the recognition among authors that informal governance seems to be prevalent within the EU's policy-making process which in turn has meant that this is a particularly vibrant area of research. The book closes with an overview of informal governance arrangements within a number of policy fields, illustrating that such practices are widespread in many distinct sectors – an effort that will hopefully aid comparison and cross-fertilisation across different domains.

CONCEPTUALISING INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

An important task in bringing together a large number of contributions on the issue of informal governance is the effort to bring a degree of conceptual clarity to the field. What has not been our ambition – and what would not be feasible in the context of the current project – is the application of a single conceptual frame to the different contributions. An attempt to impose a single frame to the diversity of contributions would not only be

impractical, but crucially it would have run counter to our aim of demonstrating in this volume the variety and the range of research that has been undertaken in the area of informal governance. What we can and should do, however, is to try to organise the existing research which so far has constituted a rather unordered universe.

In doing so, it helps by starting with an inventory of the way in which scholars have made use of the concept. Looking across the contributions to this volume and beyond, we take note of the fact that the adjective 'informal' has been attached to a surprisingly large number of terms: a cursory list would include references to politics, arrangements, networks, institutions, organisations, norms, rules, activity or influence all having the capacity to be informal. That indicates that different authors use the concept very differently. In a broader sense, one can distinguish three separate usages: first, the designation of the *framework* within which decisions are taken as being informal (institutions, organisations, networks); second, the identification of the *process* or procedure through which policies are made as being informal (politics, arrangements, activity); and, third, the classification of the *outcome* of any such process as being informal (rules, norms, influence).

In terms of defining the meaning of the concept of 'informal governance', important proposals that have been made in the past by Helmke and Levitsky who 'define informal institutions as socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside the officially sanctioned channel' (2004, p. 727). A similar but still distinct definition has been offered by Christiansen et al. who 'define governance [as] informal when participation in the decision-making process is not yet or cannot be codified and publicly enforced' (2003, p. 6). A further variation on this theme is offered by Harsh who advances that '[i]nformal governance refers to a means of decision-making that is uncoded, non-institutional, and where social relationships and webs of influence play crucial roles [but it] also includes decision-making led by, or occurring entirely within NGOs at all levels' (ch. 24, in this volume). Clearly, authors discussing and analysing instances of informal governance operate with a number of keywords – non-codified, non-governmental, non-sanctioned – while still demonstrating a degree of variation with regard to the relationship that informal arrangements have *vis-à-vis* state institutions.

Another way of approaching the subject can be made by grouping contributions to the literature according to the level of analysis, with some authors focusing on the level of regional and global institutions, others on national politics and yet others on practices at the local level. Another dimension is introduced by scholars who study not any particular territorial level, but who are looking at developments within specific policy

areas in order to understand the way in which informal aspects influence decision-making in individual sectors. And in addition there is also a difference in the way informal governance is conceived in the context of different global regions or with respect to industrialised or developing economies. Hopkin (2001), when probing into the informal governance in Southern Europe for example, sees informal exchange in political life flourishing under two sets of (interrelated) conditions. On the one hand, a tradition of state interventionism through regulation and public spending, coupled with weak judicial oversight of spending decisions, provides the means for party politicians to use state resources for mobilising support through informal exchange. On the other, weak political parties which struggle to mobilise sustained support on the basis of ideological or class identification, and which lack a strong organisational infrastructure, have very strong incentives to exploit the availability of state resources to overcome their organisational deficiencies (*ibid.*, p. 115). With respect to India, on the other hand, informal governance is seen as being outside the structure of the state, by referring to the ‘non-governmental organization of social life in local settings [which] include tribal or other indigenous structures for dispersion of power’ (Ananth-Pur 2004, p. 11). In the case of the politics of transition in Russia, Gel’man (2004) has argued that ‘in the post-Soviet environment informal institutions were a valuable survival resource for individuals during the multiple crises of the 1990s, enabling people to resist the arbitrary rule of the new regimes’ (p. 1023). And with respect to Asia, it has been stated that ‘informal politics consists of the use of non-legitimate means (albeit not necessarily illegal) to pursue public ends. Thus it is conceptually sandwiched between formal politics and corruption’ (Dittmer et al. 2000, p. 229). A simplifying way of providing an overarching take on the uses of informal governance in such different settings is offered by Conrad (2006): ‘Informal is three in one: it is rather crooked in developing countries (corruption, cronyism), it is useful in institutions of international governance (flexibility, efficiency), or it is dubious as part of Western political activity’ (p. 265).

Many of these definitions imply the juxtaposition of informal governance with the formal institutions in place to facilitate policy-making in a given area. As Dittmer (this volume, ch. 8) points out, ‘our definition must embrace the relationship of the informal to the formal from which it is after all linguistically derived’. While some authors operate here with a binary approach to the subject, assuming that formal or informal arrangements are standing in opposition to one another, most actually accept that the two often coexist and some even argue that there is a degree of dependency between them. The latter position is taken by Conrad (2006) who argues that ‘formality and informality can . . . never be divided from their own

deconstruction by themselves or each other' (p. 265). Equally, Dittmer (ibid.) argues that '[t]he relationship of informal politics to the formal political structure is an ambivalent mutual interdependence' (p. 164). A systematic approach is offered by Helmke and Levitsky (2004) when they propose a fourfold typology of informal institutions, distinguishing between those that are complementary, accommodating, competing and substitutive depending on the relationship with formal institutions (p. 729). This is arguably the most encompassing manner in which the relationship between formal and informal arrangements can be presented.

An important dimension in which informal governance is approached by many authors – implicitly or explicitly – is in terms of normative judgement. Clearly, 'informal' is a dimension of politics that often attracts opinion as well as analysis, and the result is frequently negative as the above references to clientelism, cronyism and the like demonstrate. Gel'man (2004), for example, refers to informal governance as the 'unrule of law'. However, normative assessments are surprisingly often rather nuanced and cautious in avoiding black-and-white judgements. Two angles are important here: democracy and efficiency. With regard to the latter, authors have pointed out that informal arrangements can be seen as a 'coping strategy' (Reh, ch. 4 in this volume) in the context of complex bureaucratic arrangements, and as 'a useful method to bypass imperfect old and/or new formal institutions' (Gel'man 2004, p. 1028). Informal outputs – non-binding agreements – have also been seen as 'apparently [achieving] considerable success in attaining [their] objectives across a large number of countries, in a policy area previously notorious for its stubborn resistance to change', as Furlong (ch. 26 in this volume) has observed in the case of European higher education reform. And Lee and Rhyu (2008) assert that 'dense informal networks between public and private sector elites have been identified as a key institutional feature that had underpinned rapid economic development in many East Asian countries' (p. 46).

In terms of the impact on democracy, authors have pointed out that the loss of transparency involved in informal arrangements might be normatively problematic. Access to information and indeed to membership in informal networks may be restricted, and informal governance may involve "unwritten rules", often hardly known to the public' (Meyer 2006, p. 14). Crucially, a normative assessment depends, according to Merkel and Croissant (2000) on the quality of democratic procedures in a given polity: in well-functioning liberal democracies informal arrangements are complementary to formal institutions alongside which these exist, thus creating greater flexibility. But, by contrast, in 'defective democracies' informal arrangements undermine the legitimate formal institutions, transforming and potentially displacing these (ibid., p. 19).

In the light of this discussion, it is fair to say that there are many authors who have approached the subject and made valuable contributions to a growing body of literature in this field. But the vibrant nature of the field and the plurality of scholarship on the subject also means that a dominant accepted conceptualisation remains elusive. Our aim in producing this handbook is to bring this varied scholarship together in a single volume so as to permit researchers an easier access to the different ways in which informal governance can be approached and studied, and to the insights that this has brought about in the study of politics and society.

ORGANISATION OF THIS VOLUME

We have organised the book according to thematic clusters as it seemed to us to be a good way to bring some order into the diverse field of research on informal governance. The book starts off with 'Theoretical and normative perspectives on informal governance' (Part I). As previously mentioned there is a somewhat inflationary usage of the concept but a lack of common ground with regard to its meaning.

In this context, Michael Brie and Erhard Stölting (Chapter 2) deal with theoretical and methodological insights regarding the study of informal institutional arrangements and to develop a categorisation of different forms of informal governance. Hans-Joachim Lauth (Chapter 3) then makes the link between informal institutions and democracy, with the main argument being that informal institutions have grown in relevance for the analysis of new 'third wave' democracies. The author contributes to the conceptualisation of informal governance arrangements by developing an analytical framework which distinguishes between five basic types of informal institutions and their relevance in terms of democracy theory. Christine Reh (Chapter 4) in turn probes more into the normative issues related to informal governance by exploring the performance of informal arrangements along the lines of parameters such as efficiency, accountability and transparency. Finally, in Part I, Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky (Chapter 5) suggest ways of integrating the study of informal institutions into comparative institutional analysis. The framework developed here is based on a typology of different patterns of formal–informal institutional interaction which are then used to explore the reasons and mechanisms behind the emergence of informal institutions, and the nature of their stability and change.

Part II, 'The practice of informal governance across the globe', is opened by Roberta Haar (Chapter 6) who focuses on the relationship between Capitol Hill and K Street lobbyists to delineate how Washington's

informal governance works. The author explores the revolving door phenomena in which lawmakers, congressional staff members and executive branch officials leave public office and become private policy advisers, with often high financial compensation. She also examines how these lobbyists use their personal relationships with their former colleagues to forward policy decisions favourable to their new private employer. The chapter also considers the perceived lack of good policy-making, transparency and accountability in this method of informal policy-making.

From the US we move to Russia by way of the chapter by Vladimir Gel'man (Chapter 7) which examines the politics of informal institution-building. In this quest he has identified the dominance of informal institutions which create obstacles to the rule of law as a major distinction between Russia (and other post-Soviet regimes) and most Eastern European countries. The author presents structural explanations for the dominance of informal institutions in Russian politics and introduces a procedural model of informal institutionalisation in emerging political regimes. Lowell Dittmer, (Chapter 8), who focuses on informal politics in East Asia, underlines the fact that political interaction in the realm of informal or 'behind-the-scenes' politics is at least as common and influential, though not always as transparent or coherent, as formal politics. Dittmer delineates various forms of informal politics within different East Asian political cultures, presents common theoretical principles for understanding how these work and then provides practical examples from countries such as China to complement the analysis. Based on his previous work on the vast array of non-institutionalised and hybrid social activities which dominate urban politics in many developing countries, Asef Bayat (Chapter 9) examines how such practices engender significant social changes in different African states. Jonathan Hopkin (Chapter 10) closes Part II by way of an analysis of the emergence of the cartel party in Southern European countries and actually finds common trends in that as he speaks of a 'tendency of convergence'.

In Part III 'Informal governance and international institutions', Thomas Conzelmann (Chapter 11) discusses the role of non-state actors in international relations more generally by focusing specifically on the way in which transnational networks contribute to the spread of norms and the transfer of knowledge and policy tools. Such transnational networks are seen as important vehicles for the spread of policy and practice not only cross-nationally but also in emergent venues of global governance. Courtney Smith (Chapter 12) examines the prevalence of informal governance practices within the United Nations (UN). She argues that informal processes actually lie at the heart of the politics of the UN. Based on interviews with UN practitioners, the author seeks to show that the vast majority

of decisions made in multilateral fora are the result of private, informal exchanges between small groups of interested parties. Based on this primary research, the chapter develops a framework which can be used to systematically investigate the effect of these informal dynamics. Sieglinde Gstöhl (Chapter 13) conceptualises the G7/8 – the Group of Seven (now Eight) major market democracies cooperating on a regular basis on economic and political issues – as a highly informal institution. In this conception, the G7/8 has been deliberately set up as a highly non-legalised institution. In order to sustain her claim, the author analyses the deliberative, directional, decision-making, delivery and institutional development dimensions of summit performance. Amrita Narlikar (Chapter 14) then looks at the institutions of global economic governance – the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO – and explores how the concept of accountability might best be applied to international economic institutions. The chapter argues that in spite of improvements in accountability, these institutions have not gone far enough in reforming their governance structures. Jonathan Weinberg (Chapter 15) zooms in on a particular case – that of ICANN, the ‘Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers’ – which governs the distribution of Internet domain names, where a global association of private parties is exercising the powers normally attributed to the public or governmental institutions. The author critically examines issues of legitimacy, accountability and openness in the decision-making process of this entity. Otto Holman (Chapter 16) concludes Part III by examining ‘alternative methods’ of achieving policy goals within the EU, that is, the so-called ‘open method of coordination’. In this context he takes issue with the way in which such non-binding agreements at the EU level have an impact on the domestic politics of the EU member states, thus providing an analysis of informal politics in the context of a system of multilevel governance.

Adrienne Héritier (Chapter 17) introduces Part IV, ‘Informal governance and European institutions’ by examining the codecision procedure and its implications for the political institutions at stake, with a special focus on the European Parliament (EP). Ben Crum (Chapter 18) also focuses on the role of the EP but in the area of foreign policy-making, where EU member states have always sought to curtail its formal powers. The chapter illustrates the way in which EU foreign policy-making has nevertheless become ‘parliamentarised’ through informal institution-building. Dorothee Heisenberg (Chapter 19) builds on a quantitative analysis of internal decision-making in the Council of Ministers in order to demonstrate the informal dimension of this process. The author shows how practices of internal decision-making, based on a culture of consensusalism, are essential to an understanding of the workings of this institution.

Jeffrey Stacey (Chapter 20) completes the analysis of the informal dimension of inter-institutional relations in the EU through a study of the EU's executive, the European Commission. The author discusses the strengths and the limitations of the European Commission in influencing EU decision-making through informal politics, especially when it comes to so-called 'informal accords'. Thomas Gijswijt (Chapter 21) demonstrates the significance of historical research in informal political relations. He illustrates the importance of the informal dimension in international politics through a case study of transatlantic relations in the post-war period, highlighting that key political developments of the post-war era not only relied on formal diplomacy and rational decision-making, but also were built on a foundation of personal relationships among decision-makers that were formed through their membership in informal elite networks. Thus, this chapter not only sets out the conceptual choices, methodological implications and the practical limitations, but also the benefits of conducting historical research into networks of informal governance.

By focusing on policy networks in the field of foreign policy Arnout Justaert and Stephan Keukeleire (Chapter 22) open Part V, 'Informal governance within different policy domains'. The objective of this chapter is to examine whether and how concepts and theoretical insights from the policy network and network governance literature can be used to analyse the role of small informal groups of actors in European foreign policy. The central argument advocated by the authors is that there are good reasons to assume, theoretically, that policy networks also play a major role in EU foreign policy and, analytically, that the policy network concept is relevant and useful in the analysis of foreign policy. Alan Hardacre (Chapter 23) develops an understanding of informal networks in the area of financial regulation so as to be able to demonstrate the important role of such networks in influencing decision-making in this area. With a special focus on developments in the context of the European Union, the author examines the respective roles of private and public actors at both the national and the supranational levels and shows how regulatory governance in this field depends on the use of both formal institutions and informal networks. Matthew Harsh (Chapter 24) stresses the fact that the governance of the biotechnology sector is seen to have been largely informal, with strategic decisions being made mainly outside formal decision-making mechanisms of the state. Looking at the bio-safety legislation in Kenya, the chapter addresses the effects that such informal modes of governance have on accountability and open participation of farmers and the public at large.

In order to illustrate the informal nature of decision-making in the

area of economic and monetary policy, Uwe Puetter (Chapter 25) studies the work of the Eurogroup – the monthly informal meetings of the euro area’s finance ministers, the Commission, and the European Central Bank. He demonstrates how the particular working method applied by the Eurogroup impacts on the conduct and outcome of negotiations among ministers, and considers the Eurogroup’s role in historical instances of policy coordination and in the management of the Stability and Growth Pact. Paul Furlong’s contribution (Chapter 26) presents a case study on the process of transnational adaptation in education systems, by way of the so-called ‘Bologna process’. The author sees the significance of this process not only in terms of the reforms that are being agreed and implemented, but also in the justification it provides for varying national strategies of change in major states. These adaptations are driving a broader process of change among a large number of stakeholders, whose capacity to affect the detail of the reform is limited.

Finally, Maarten Vink and Claudia Engelmann (Chapter 27) examine a very different policy domain, that of European asylum politics within the international human rights framework of the Geneva Convention. While increasing policy competence by successive Treaty changes have partly formalised European governance structures, important policy dynamics still depend on an exchange of information by national and European bureaucrats outside formal decision-making structures. This chapter charts these formal and informal dynamics within European asylum governance.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF INFORMAL GOVERNANCE

This handbook does not contain a conclusion because we felt that an attempt to ‘conclude’ on this diverse collection of contributions would not provide meaningful results. Indeed, before one can move on to conclusions about the uses and effects of informal governance across the globe, more systematic approaches to the subject are needed. As the above discussion has demonstrated, and as the subsequent chapters will show in greater detail, the building blocks of a coherent research programme on informal governance are there. While some authors have been developing the theoretical foundations on which such research can be conducted, there is also an emergence of commonly agreed methodological approaches that can be used in order to collect data more systematically. But the challenge of moving from single-country, single-system or single-sector studies to an overarching agenda that would facilitate comparison

across different policy domains or that encompasses different political cultures, still remains. If this book demonstrates that informal governance constitutes a *problematique* that is increasingly addressed through, above all, empirical work, then the key challenge now is for scholars to develop conceptual categories and analytical frames that makes the collection of comparable data possible.

A second agenda is empirical: once there are more generally accepted advances in the conceptualisation of informal governance, then there is also scope to extend the study to areas which have so far escaped the attention of scholars. This is closely tied to the methodological challenge already referred to at the outset. As long as empirical research is directed primarily at issues for which empirical data are more readily available – such as the performance of formal institutions – rather than addressing important questions on which data may as yet be non-existent (as is often the case with respect to informal governance), then it will be hard to make progress in this regard. Empirical research on informal governance is often not only about gathering data, but actually about defining what kind of data is to be collected. The ultimate test is then about gaining access to information about developments that are undocumented and generally lacking in transparency and in which actors tend to have an interest in it remaining so.

The final challenge for research in this area concerns the terms of normative analysis. As the contribution by Reh demonstrates, a sophisticated analysis of the normative implication of informal arrangements in a particular area of governance is valuable and necessary. However, we are still lacking the sort of categories that would allow a more general assessment of informal governance. Answers to questions such as ‘Are informal arrangements detrimental to good governance?’ or ‘What impact do informal arrangements have on the efficiency of public policy-making?’ are as important as they are elusive. The contributions to this volume show that the normative balance sheet is hardly ever straightforward, and that depending on the context of the above questions, they may just as well be answered in the positive as in the negative. The real issue therefore concerns the identification of the conditions under which informal governance is helpful or even essential to the achievement of better outcomes, and therefore desirable, while remaining sensitive to the point at which the lack of formality and transparency induces inefficiencies and turns informal governance from a solution into a problem.

Any normative assessment will have to engage with the question of democracy because democratic standards are *per se* under threat when formal institutions are bypassed or hollowed out in the process of public

policy-making. Not only is scientific research complicated by the presence of informal governance, but public scrutiny and accountability are difficult or impossible if information about the locus of political power, the identity of political actors or the decision-making procedures is not readily available. And the picture is even more sinister when the presence of formal democratic procedures – elections, political parties, parliaments – becomes a façade behind which very different, informal arrangements are hidden which actually determine the allocation of political power.

But the picture is not always black and white, as the case of the European Parliament demonstrates. Here we have a democratic institution that had been *formally* excluded from important aspects of EU decision-making. However, as both Crum and Héritier explain in their respective contributions to this volume, the EP has been able, essentially through *informal* arrangements with other actors, to expand its influence in areas such as the scrutiny of foreign policy and delegated powers, and such informal advances of democratic accountability have generally foreshadowed a subsequent formalisation of arrangements through successive treaty reforms.

On the basis of the present evidence it remains difficult to make sweeping judgements about the impact that informal arrangements may have. A more generalised normative assessment of informal governance is surely desirable, but will have to wait until the research in this area has developed more systematically along agreed conceptual and methodological lines. Until that stage has been reached, it would be wise to remain within the limits of a case-by-case analysis of the normative dimension of particular arrangements. This volume provides ample evidence for the occurrence of informal arrangements in a range of diverse environments, and as the empirical picture is becoming more complete, the opportunities – and the need – for normative assessment also increase.

Ultimately, we should have the aspiration to be able to say under which conditions informal governance is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, even though for the time being, the contributions to this volume simply demonstrate that informal governance *is*. Nevertheless, we believe that this effort of putting informal governance on the map of academic scholarship, of reviewing the range of different uses and effects that informal arrangements have across the globe, and in this way setting an agenda for future research is an important task that this handbook performs. In our view, it provides a valuable starting point for anyone seeking a better understanding of an expanding and important field of study, and also points the way towards the development of a more systematic and comprehensive research programme in the future.

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