

The Role of Rivals in International Organizations: A Review Article

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Abstract

This article reviews *Discriminatory Clubs: The Geopolitics of International Organizations* by Christina L. Davis. After highlighting the many contributions of this pathbreaking work to political science scholarship, it discusses one of the manuscript's core claims: that members of international organizations (IOs) use membership to favor their allies and exclude their rivals. Specifically, it examines a potential tension that leading states may face between keeping rivals out of these organizations for security reasons versus allowing them to join to constrain their behavior and socialize them into the IO's norms. It explores whether consideration of scope conditions, IO reforms, or international regime complexes can help explain IO behavior toward rivals. In doing so, the review suggests productive directions for future work and argues that *Discriminatory Clubs* will spark many exciting and fruitful research directions.

Keywords: geopolitics; international organization; alliances; rivalries; global governance

Discriminatory Clubs: The Geopolitics of International Organizations, by Christina L. Davis, is a pathbreaking book that puts the spotlight on international organizations' (IOs) membership politics. In an age in which IOs face unprecedented challenges yet simultaneously confront critical global issues, understanding the geopolitical dynamics of membership is essential. This book is timely, rigorous, and important and should be read widely by scholars and students alike.

The recurrent role of geopolitics in membership decisions is striking and has profound implications for how global governance works—or does not. Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine highlighted the critical nature of this topic as it shifted which states sought membership and association with each other. The media have detailed events like the fraught process through which Finland and Sweden earned membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, underscoring this book's continued relevance.

In *Discriminatory Clubs*, Davis seeks to make sense of which states join particular organizations and why, asking what determines membership in IOs. She argues that IOs function as “discriminatory clubs” whereby the geopolitical alignment of

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The argument lends itself to several key testable propositions: states maintain discretion over selection at the IO design stage; states form IOs with like-minded partners and other like-minded states are more likely to join later; and states aligned with other members face fewer conditions to enter. The key claim, though, is the second condition that states use IO membership as a tool to include their allies and exclude their rivals.

The argument is rigorously tested using innovative, multimethod empirical strategies. It includes statistical analysis that encompasses a huge swath of IOs, examining how geopolitics shapes membership across disparate IOs. It also hones in on particular IOs, demonstrating how geopolitics matters for prominent organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. The book additionally includes fascinating historical examples from a wide range of countries, including Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, and others.

IO Membership and Security Dynamics

A core claim of the book is that IO membership is endogenous to states' security relationships. This insight has a host of interesting implications that are touched on in the introductory and concluding chapters; for example, Davis suggests we rethink claims that IO membership reduces conflict. If IO members screen for similar security profiles, then it makes sense that members would experience low levels of conflict, but this would not be caused by membership.

Let Rivals In?

Bureaucrats interact with other bureaucrats who may spread their ideology, and then those bureaucrats may be recalled to their home state and slowly reshape the state's self-image. Bureaucrats may even become socialized through their experience operating in recipient countries, becoming more sympathetic to such states.³ Membership may create economic incentives to form closer security ties with other member states.

Even if states remain rivals once they join an IO, IO membership may constrain the rivals from escalation or other suboptimal outcomes. Arms control arrangements or IOs like the United Nations (UN) Security Council arguably fulfill this role. Put differently, an IO could function with the express purpose of constraining rivals. This logic is put on the back burner in *Discriminatory Clubs*, in part because the book deals primarily with economic IOs, and constraining rivals may pertain more to security IOs; yet, it is still worth mentioning as a reason to allow rivals to enter. In contrast, keeping rivals out risks developing IOs that are geopolitically siloed. Doing so could foster competition and reduce the liberal order's strength.

⁵ Erik Gartzke, "The Capitalist Peace," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (January 2007): 166–91.

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Yet rivals do not enter first, at least not generally speaking. As *Discriminatory Clubs* shows, it is far likelier that leading states allow friends to enter and exclude such rivals. Why? *Discriminatory Clubs* points to efforts by leading states to deny material benefits and relational networks to enemies. Contrary to the literature that expects membership to result in peaceful relations, membership could cause a rival to grow and flourish economically, allowing it to become more competitive. Worries may surface that membership will permit the rival to attain economic gains or create “security externalities,” in the terminology of Gowa and Mansfield.⁷ States may wish to stop a rival from becoming more powerful and, therefore, more threatening by denying it entry.

Indeed, Farrell and Newman argue that globalizers' narratives can hide globalization's "systematic fragility and state exploitation."⁸ However, when crises—like the COVID-19 pandemic—occur, powerful states become attuned to globalization's fragility and try to use their power to further their agendas. Other states then push back, and cooperation disintegrates. This fits with a larger literature that shows IOs tend to change in significant ways in the wake of punctuated equilibria, or major shocks. *Discriminatory Clubs* begins to address the role of large shocks; for example, in chapter 6, Davis discusses the role of World War II in Japan's IO calculus. It could be the case, therefore, that such crises exacerbate existing tensions within IOs with a diverse membership and create additional pressure to leave rivals out.

⁶ Allison Carnegie, *Power Plays: How International Institutions Reshape Coercive Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁷ Joanne Gowa and Edward D. Mansfield, "Power Politics and International Trade," *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 2 (1993): 408–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2939050>.

⁸ Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, “Will the Coronavirus End Globalization as We Know It?,” *Foreign Affairs* 16, no. 3 (2020): 1–4.

from policy items it disagrees with, for example. Rivals may try to steer IOs toward their preferred policy agendas, which may differ significantly from those of the other members.

Rivalry within an IO could even lead the IO to slowly collapse. The IO could become gridlocked and dysfunctional. It may turn into a “zombie,” existing in name only, or it could be repurposed.⁹ The IO’s demise could be particularly likely if the leading state’s geopolitical profile shifts, especially if this occurs for a prolonged period. States could relocate their activity to domestic settings, and the global governance project could shrink. States may embrace an ideology that privileges national sovereignty over global cooperation. Such tendencies are exemplified by recent populist movements and other globalization backlashes. Although IO exit is not particularly common, members could also reduce their participation and funding.

To convince leading states to let them in, rivals may undergo reforms or send other credible signals to show their counterparts that they are trustworthy or that they are not as rivalrous as they may appear. Commensurate with this logic, *Discriminatory Clubs* demonstrates that members require rivals to fulfill much more onerous terms than their non-rival counterparts must to become members. Chapter 4 demonstrates that the WTO allowed rivals to enter later and raised the bar on their requirements for entry, and similar dynamics were at play during accession to the EU, as Davis discusses in chapter 7.

However, as was the case in both of these examples, members also worry that even if potential rivals reform to gain entry, they will backslide once they achieve membership.¹⁰ Either a new government may come to power and reverse the reforms, or a leader may have implemented reforms insincerely in the first place. If membership constitutes the large prize for enacting reforms, IO members may only have weak tools left to address backsliding once a state gains membership. Thus, member states may want to leave potential rivals out to keep their rivals as weak as possible and thereby protect the IO’s integrity against potential cheaters.

This was, after all, the tenor of the debate about whether to let China into the WTO, which it joined in 2001. Advocates said that membership would socialize China into the norms of the trade regime, even those related to human rights, and prevent conflict between China and the West. However, opponents worried it would make China more economically competitive, increasing the rivalry between China and the West. And though we have seen the reemergence of conflict between the United States and China, some still argue that it would have been worse or occurred more quickly absent these WTO-induced economic ties.

In sum, a key part of the book’s argument is that IO members grant entry to states they have—or want—deeper ties with but exclude enemies. Yet, are there circumstances under which leading states rush to admit rivals to lock in the aforementioned potential economic and security benefits? When do leading IO members decide that they want alignment with a potential member and, therefore, admit it, versus concluding it is a true rival they wish to keep out? In other words, under what conditions does a leading state select inclusion versus exclusion as its

⁹ Julia Gray, “Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2018): 1–13.

¹⁰ Anna M. Meyerrose, “The Unintended Consequences of Democracy Promotion: International Organizations and Democratic Backsliding,” *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 10–11 (2020): 1547–81.

strategy for dealing with a rival? Relatedly, how can potential entrants credibly signal they are the “right type” of state, and what criteria do leading states use to determine that a state will become less, not more, of a rival upon entry?

Resolving the Tension through Scope Conditions?

One possibility is that the logic of *Discriminatory Clubs* applies predominantly to Western IOs, but less so to IOs developed by powerful non-Western states like China. Perhaps the United States and the EU tend to admit friends and keep out enemies, but non-Western states follow a different logic.

Indeed, some scholars have argued that China either desires broad membership in its IOs to build legitimacy and neutrality, or to bring adversaries into the fold explicitly. For example, Kaya et al. argue that China pursues “remedial multilateralism” rather than “supplementary multilateralism.”¹¹ It defines remedial multilateralism as multilateralism that “privileges countries underserved by bilateral ties...[to] shore up the gaps in the great power’s existing relations,” whereas supplementary multilateralism “reinforces the existing bilateral ties and the sphere of connections or influence the great power already has.”¹² In other words, China uses membership in IOs to court its rivals rather than to keep them out.

A fascinating direction for future work could be to tease out potential differences in leading states’ approaches. Do hegemonic states pursue a strategy of keeping their friends close, whereas revisionist powers adopt an alternative rationale? Or might differing approaches depend on a leading state’s regime type or ideology?

Resolving the Tension through IO Reforms?

Another possibility that is outside of *Discriminatory Clubs*’s scope but which could be a fruitful extension is whether additional options exist besides keeping a rival out, letting a rival in, or requiring a rival to reform to gain entry. Perhaps rather than asking a rival to change before entering an IO, the IO could change. This could occur either instead of or alongside the rival’s reforms.

Such change may be difficult; IOs are notoriously beset by status quo bias and rigidity that push toward a continuation of business as usual.¹³ Many scholars have shown that extreme events, or “punctuated equilibria,” are often needed to catalyze such reforms,¹⁴ though some dispute this.¹⁵ Yet this could be part of the explanation for Davis’s finding in *Discriminatory Clubs* that it takes a long time for rivals to enter IOs: perhaps IOs must first undergo the slow process of reform before their members are comfortable including rivals.

IO reform could also be attractive if a formerly like-minded member becomes a rival for reasons exogenous to IO membership. In such a case, an IO would not have the option of keeping the state out, because it had already joined. It could

¹¹ Ayse Kaya, Christopher Kilby, and Jonathan Kay, “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as an Instrument for Chinese Influence? Supplementary versus Remedial Multilateralism,” *World Development* 145 (2021): 105531.

¹² Kaya et al., “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.”

¹³ Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, “Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence,” *Political Analysis* 14 (2006): 250–67.

¹⁴ Stephen D. Krasner, “State Power and the Structure of International Trade,” *World Politics* 28, no. 3 (April 1976): 317–47.

¹⁵ Allison Carnegie and Richard Clark, “Reforming Global Governance: Power, Alliance, and Institutional Performance,” *World Politics* 75, no. 3 (2023): 523–65.

expel the state, but, as *Discriminatory Clubs* shows, criteria for expulsion are typically vague and undefined. Expulsion is rare because it would “constitute a rejection of continued association and removal of status within international society” (8).

In either case, leading states may push for reforms that could retrofit the IO to better protect it against rivals. For example, suppose members worry that a rival will use IO entry to access sensitive information and steal state secrets or proprietary economic data. Indeed, a huge swath of IOs uses some type of sensitive information; for example, the UN requires sensitive intelligence information to enhance the efficacy of its peacekeeping operations, and the World Health Organization collects sensitive health and scientific information from members.¹⁶

This information collection may not be a problem in an IO composed of like-minded states, because their interests are aligned, but the IO may face pushback if it includes a rival. This has been a concern, for example, at the UN, which has had to contend with a reputation for “leakiness.” Fears of leaks have stymied efforts to incorporate sensitive information into the UN’s activities, and are a common problem for IOs.¹⁷ The U.S. Congress has gone so far as to propose bills prohibiting the sharing of information with the UN, as a result.¹⁸

Potential IO adaptations in response to these issues are numerous. For instance, an IO could adopt additional security provisions, stricter monitoring, classification systems, penalties for inappropriate information disclosures, or other reforms to help ensure against cheating or stealing secrets. Public-facing documents could also feature redactions of sensitive information, and encryption systems could be introduced or upgraded. Many IOs already have such confidentiality systems in place¹⁹; a testable proposition could be that these systems are most common in IOs with a more diverse membership.

In addition to adopting protective reforms, a leading state could decline to involve rivals in certain IO functions. If leading members wish to work with rivals in certain areas but find cooperation too difficult in others, they could create smaller groupings of like-minded states within the IO. The IO could then have both a broad membership and smaller coalitions for specific aspects of its functioning. For instance, the WTO was notorious for formulating policy proposals among like-minded members in “the green room” before bringing the fully formed policy to the broader membership. Similarly, once the Appellate Body stopped functioning in 2019 amid the growing rivalry between the United States and China, an interim appeal arrangement was reached in 2020, which included a diverse group of 50 WTO member states. Under this system, panel rulings on disputes between two members can be reviewed by independent arbitrators in adherence with Article 25 of the WTO’s Dispute Settlement Understanding.²⁰

Other arrangements to manage rivalries between members are also possible. For instance, IOs that include rivals may feature mechanisms to make reneging on

¹⁶ Allison Carnegie and Austin Carson, *Secrets in Global Governance: Disclosure Dilemmas and the Challenge of International Cooperation* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

¹⁷ Matthew Castle and Krzysztof J. Pelc, “The Causes and Effects of Leaks in International Negotiations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2019): 1147–62.

¹⁸ A. Walter Dorn, “The Cloak and the Blue Beret: Limitations on Intelligence in UN Peacekeeping,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 12, no. 4 (1999): 414–47.

¹⁹ Carnegie and Carson, *Secrets in Global Governance*.

²⁰ “Members Hold Informal Talks on WTO Reform,” World Trade Organization, 10 November 2022, accessed 4 June 2024, https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news22_e/gc_11nov22_e.htm.

commitments harder. They may expect rivals to cheat and therefore adopt additional monitoring provisions and penalties for violations before admitting rivals. Violations could be met with fines, authorized retaliation, or expulsion. In the trade regime, as membership expanded beyond the initial association of like-minded states, the rules became much more explicit and strict, as exemplified by the 1995 switch from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to the WTO.

IOs can marshal additional tools and link disparate issues²¹ to make violations or exit more costly, as well. For instance, the EU uses aid, trade, and other policy tools to incentivize recalcitrant states to follow the rules. IOs may try to bribe rivals to remain in the fold and penalize them if they stray from the rules. For example, Brazil received concessions from the EU to remain in the Paris Agreement after their relationship became more rivalrous. The leading state could also redistribute power within the IO to prevent rivals from defecting,²² such as redistributing vote shares or altering consensus-based procedures.

Finally, IOs could put technocrats rather than politicians in charge to enhance the IO's credibility and de-politicize the IO.²³ IOs are staffed by a variety of professionals, including lawyers, economists, and other technocratic officials on the one hand, and political and security appointees on the other. The more a leading state can staff an IO with technocrats who are not affiliated with any specific political party or ideology, the more rivals may feel reassured that the IO will not be used for political ends. Experts can ensure the IO adopts reasonable criteria by which staff is hired and the IO is governed and can help dissuade the IO from favoring specific states.

These potential IO strategies raise several interesting questions for future work. In particular, are IOs with broader membership more likely to adopt confidentiality systems, small groupings within IOs, issue linkage, and/or bureaucratic shifts? Are IOs more likely to do so to tackle specific global problems that require widespread cooperation? When IOs are designed, do we see evidence that designers set up such mechanisms if they anticipate a diverse membership? Are IOs that are created with such mechanisms more effective, legitimate, and successful at accomplishing their mandates? Are IOs that are better equipped with such provisions more likely to admit rivals rather than exclude them?

Resolving the Tension through IO Proliferation?

An additional option that states have to deal with rivalries within an IO is to shift their economic activity away from the IO toward other venues. Perhaps states admit rivals only once they are secure in the knowledge that other IOs exist through which they can conduct their business. That way, should things go awry once a rival enters an IO, leading states have a backup plan.

That option could be particularly attractive in regime complexes where other IOs already exist that serve similar functions but with different

²¹ Christina Davis, "International Institutions and Issue Linkage: Building Support for Agricultural Trade Liberalization," *The American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (February 2004): 153–69; Paul Poast, "Does Issue Linkage Work? Evidence from European Alliance Negotiations, 1860 to 1945," *International Organization* (2012): 277–310.

²² Tyler Pratt, "Angling for Influence: Institutional Proliferation in Development Banking," *International Studies Quarterly* (2021).

²³ Austin Carson and Matthew J. Conklin, "Co-Optation at the Creation: Leaders, Elite Consensus, and Postwar International Order," *Security Studies* 31, no. 4 (2022): 634–66.

membership compositions.²⁴ If such an alternative venue does not exist, Davis, in *Discriminatory Clubs*, suggests the fascinating possibility that states could create one. Indeed, Davis notes that IO inefficiency caused by an overemphasis on geopolitics can lead to the creation of new IOs to address the problems of the old ones, though she also notes that these new IOs may fail for similar reasons.

The dynamic of creating new IOs to address problems of old ones has interesting implications for global governance. IOs are proliferating and frequently overlap with each other in terms of their mission, areas of operation, and membership. The book's argument raises the possibility that this multitude of IOs arises in part because they have different membership profiles.

Perhaps two nearly identical IOs could exist, but one contains rivals and the other only contains like-minded states. The rivalrous IO could be used to generate economic benefits, because IOs tend to provide the greatest benefits for this subset of states,²⁵ and to manage the political effects of the rivalry. The IO of like-minded states could then address areas of common interest, like security issues.

Moreover, some countries may appreciate the ability to “forum shop,” or choose the IO that imposes the fewest conditions and gives them the maximum benefits of participation.²⁶ For instance, states might select a forum for a trade dispute in which they anticipate the highest likelihood of winning their case. In such a scenario, states may choose the IO with the most like-minded profile, expecting that their friends will offer them greater benefits and fewer costs. States may be more likely to trust IOs staffed and run by friendly countries and may thus allow the IO to intrude more into their affairs. Biases against staff and leadership of IOs from friendly states may be reduced.

It may also be easier to reach a consensus and maintain compliance in the like-minded IO while still achieving the benefits of engaging with a rival in the more ideologically diverse IO. Furthermore, having separate IOs may provide an easier solution should rivalries escalate. Rather than have a single IO with a broad membership that then must navigate an increasingly rivalrous relationship, rivals could simply stop working together by shifting their activities elsewhere.²⁷ In an era of decoupling and using economic relations for geopolitical aims,²⁸ this may be an attractive proposition.

Similar IOs with differing memberships may even provide efficiency benefits if they compete with each other. For instance, such IOs may specialize in operating in different countries, perhaps based on whether recipients of, say, aid and loans are more geopolitically aligned with them. This may be advantageous, because IOs with more similar security profiles could understand each other better and thus operate in states within their sphere of influence more effectively. This is similar to how states' home institutions influence the perceived political risk of foreign

²⁴ C. Randall Henning and Tyler Pratt, “Hierarchy and Differentiation in International Regime Complexes: A Theoretical Framework for Comparative Research,” *Review of International Political Economy* 30, no. 6 (2023): 2178–205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2023.2259424>; Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane, “Contested Multilateralism,” *Review of International Organizations* 9, no. 4 (2014): 385–412.

²⁵ Carnegie, *Power Plays*.

²⁶ Marc L. Busch, “Overlapping Institutions, Forum Shopping, and Dispute Settlement in International Trade,” *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 735–61.

²⁷ Jing Qian, James Raymond Vreeland, and Jianzhi Zhao, “The Impact of China's AIIB on the World Bank,” *International Organization* 77, no. 1 (2023): 217–37.

²⁸ Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, *Underground Empire: How America Weaponized the World Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2023).

direct investment. The more similar the home institutions are to the target state, the less perceived risk.²⁹ Such competition may also be more efficient because it reduces the monopoly power of a single IO and can spark fresh ideas. Similar to an economic logic that argues for competition among firms to benefit consumers, competition among IOs may benefit individual member states.

Yet having many IOs engage in the same activities, where the main difference is their membership compositions, might alternatively create duplication and inefficiency, increasing overhead and institutional bloat. For example, recipients of international aid often complain of the different demands placed on them by different donors and the lack of coordination that accompanies aid projects. More funding and effort may be required to accomplish the same task. It might also diminish the degree to which rivals are forced to cooperate, undermining the economic effects of the IO.

Or perhaps such IOs generally compete but still find some areas in which to cooperate based on the issue at hand. For example, they may specialize in problems depending on whether the problems are more conducive for groups of like-minded states or broader membership. Questions about human rights and democracy, for instance, may require IOs with like-minded states, whereas infrastructure projects could be cofinanced or cosponsored by diverse IOs. Or maybe such IOs cooperate primarily over bigger issues that are too challenging to tackle alone while handling smaller issues themselves in the manner they see fit.

The question of whether and when these new IOs are complementary or competitive is an interesting one for future work. Clark argues that IOs are more complementary the more geopolitically aligned they are, yet, in *Discriminatory Clubs*, Davis implies that the entire point of starting a new IO may be to create an IO with a different geopolitical profile than existing IOs.³⁰ Thus, we might expect that these new IOs are more competitive, at least over certain issues.

New IOs may take steps to signal whether they plan to compete or cooperate with old IOs. A new IO started by a rival may seem threatening to the group of states that comprise the old IO. They may anticipate that the rival will use the new IO to advance agendas contrary to their interests. For example, a new IO in the development space could challenge legacy IOs by lending on more favorable terms. Scholars have pointed to the fact that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) does not attach conditions to its loans, whereas the World Bank uses conditionality frequently. The World Bank will have little leverage if states can simply borrow from the AIIB instead.

Yet the architects of the new IO may try to signal their interest in peace and cooperation by demonstrating similar goals and priorities. For instance, Clark and Pratt show that many new IOs are created using treaty language from core liberal institutions to reassure other states.³¹ In the development realm, doing so can help a new IO attract financing and members, and can reduce political opposition. Although doing so comes with costs to the new IO's discretion, this cost makes treaty language

²⁹ Quintin H. Beazer and Daniel J. Blake, "The Conditional Nature of Political Risk: How Home Institutions Influence the Location of Foreign Direct Investment," *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 2 (2018): 470–85.

³⁰ Richard Clark, "Pool or Duel? Cooperation and Competition among International Organizations," *International Organization* 75, no. 4 (2021): 1133–53.

³¹ Richard Clark and Tyler Pratt, "The Art of Emulation: IO Legitimacy and Strategic Treaty Design." https://www.peio.me/wp-content/uploads/PEIO16/submission_163.pdf.

emulation a credible signal. The new IOs additionally could use some of the reform tactics mentioned in previously, including the employment of technocrats.

Conclusion

Discriminatory Clubs is the definitive work on the geopolitical determinants of IO membership. It is a must read for any student of global governance and is bound to spark countless new streams of research. In this review, I have touched on a few considerations related to the role of rivalry in IOs that future work may take into account, but there are surely many more to be explored. For example, a question raised by the preceding discussion is when problematic rivalry leads a major power like the United States to leave the IOs it created, expel rivals from IOs, reform IOs, or shift its activities to alternative IOs. Possible determinants could include the importance to the United States of the problem solved by the IO, the ease with which reforms are possible, the availability of alternative venues, the domestic party in power, or other answers. It could also depend on whether the political tension between the rivals represents an existential threat or a mild annoyance.

Additionally, *Discriminatory Clubs* has many interesting implications for scholarship on IO efficacy and legitimacy that are discussed throughout the book and, in particular, in the conclusion. Indeed, it offers a novel explanation for many findings in economics and political science that IOs are inefficient; the book shows that IOs may trade efficiency for geopolitical benefits. Davis demonstrates that, often, states are accepted based on geopolitics before their economies are ready for the demands of membership. It may then appear that the IO is not effective, but that would be due to a misunderstanding of the IOs' purpose in such cases. This can have the perverse effects of making it harder to reach a consensus and lowering compliance within the IO, meaning that IOs are, in some ways, set up to fail from the start. Yet, as detailed in this review, there are many countervailing effects on efficacy, including the nature of new IOs and how rivals are treated. Disentangling these effects is an important task for future research.

Discriminatory Clubs implications for IO legitimacy are also fascinating and warrant additional work. Do domestic populations consider IOs more legitimate if they are made up of friends and allies? Are they viewed as more legitimate if they are more inclusive or if they favor particular groups? Do these attitudes correspond with political ideology? Does the lack of meritocracy inherent in the IO selection process mean that IOs lack legitimacy? In whose eyes is legitimacy important? These and other questions will surely spark productive debates among scholars and students alike.