

The Jervis Forum

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Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas, *Exit from International Organizations: Costly Negotiation for Institutional Change*. Cambridge University Press, 2025. ISBN: 9781009532280.

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 Introduction by Erik Voeten, Georgetown University

Few subjects in the study of international institutions have moved as rapidly from the academic margins to the center of public debate as the withdrawal from international organizations. For decades, this research focused primarily on why states create, join, and delegate authority to multilateral institutions. Exit was generally treated as an infrequent and largely peripheral phenomenon. That perspective is no longer sustainable. On 7 January 2026, the United States directed its withdrawal, in a single presidential memorandum, from sixty-six international organizations and arrangements,¹ while a series of high-profile suspensions and withdrawals elsewhere has made exit central to contemporary debates about global governance. It is tempting to view these developments as evidence that the postwar institutional order is coming undone. Prominent commentary has done exactly that.²

Against this backdrop, Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas have produced *Exit from International Organizations: Costly Negotiation for Institutional Change* (Cambridge University Press, 2025). As the three reviewers make clear, it is the most comprehensive treatment of International Organization (IO) exit to date. Drawing on an original dataset covering nearly 500 cases across 534 international organizations and 198 countries between 1914 and 2022, the authors make two important contributions. They analyze withdrawals, which are voluntary departures initiated by states, and suspensions, which are imposed by other members within a common analytical framework, treating both as forms of membership cessation. More importantly, they argue that exit is best understood not as the endpoint of institutional breakdown but as a costly bargaining strategy. Extending Albert Hirschman's classic exit-voice-loyalty framework,³ they contend that governments threaten or undertake withdrawal when voice has failed, using the prospect of exit to induce institutional change.

This perspective yields several findings that challenge conventional wisdom. The authors argue that exit has not become steadily more common over time. Roughly two-thirds of withdrawals are motivated by efforts to renegotiate institutional arrangements rather than by populism or nationalism. Among the 145 withdrawal threats identified between 1980 and 2022, ninety-one percent were never carried out, while roughly half of the states that ultimately left later rejoined. Rather than marking institutional collapse, exit is generally rare, reversible, and embedded in bargaining processes. The statistical analysis is complemented by case studies of withdrawals, such as including the United States from the International Labor

¹ The White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Withdraws the United States from International Organizations That Are Contrary to the Interests of the United States," 7 January 2026.

² See, for example: Daniel W. Drezner, and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Trump's Year of Anarchy: The Unconstrained Presidency and the End of American Primacy," *Foreign Affairs*, 20 January 2026, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/trumps-year-anarchy>; Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. 2025. "The End of the Long American Century: Trump and the Sources of U.S. Power," *Foreign Affairs* 104:4 (2025): 68-79.

³ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1972).

Organization, Japan from the International Whaling Commission, and the United Kingdom from the European Union, and suspensions involving Honduras, Syria, and Guinea. Together, these cases illustrate how preference divergence, shifts in bargaining power, and institutional design shape both the likelihood of exit and its consequences.

The reviewers are themselves leading scholars of institutional change and international cooperation, and each engages the book from a distinctive perspective. Julia Gray approaches the book from the perspective of international political economy and her own influential work on organizational “zombies,” institutions that persist formally while gradually ceasing to fulfill their original purposes.⁴ She praises the book’s careful documentation of exit, its theoretical treatment of withdrawal as bargaining, and its analysis of reputational costs. At the same time, she asks whether visible exits provide a sufficiently representative window into the health of international cooperation. As she memorably observes, formal withdrawals may resemble “celebrity divorces” in that they are highly visible but unrepresentative of the everyday strains that characterize most institutional relationships. Gray suggests that dissatisfied states often pursue subtler strategies, including redirecting cooperation to informal institutions, hollowing out organizations from within, or simply allowing them to stagnate. These quieter forms of contestation, she argues, may ultimately matter more for the vitality of international organizations than formal withdrawal itself. She also questions the assumption that IOs begin as effective bargains, suggesting instead that many are designed to manage problems for which no fully satisfactory solutions exist.

Laurence Helfer, whose scholarship has shaped our understanding of treaty withdrawal and exit from international legal regimes,⁵ likewise regards the book as a landmark contribution. He particularly highlights its decision to analyze withdrawals and suspensions together, its attention to “face-saving” exits, its treatment of exit as a multi-stage process, and its unusually broad empirical scope. His principal reservations concern the legal dimensions of withdrawal. Most importantly, Helfer argues that lawful withdrawal from an organization should be distinguished from violations of membership obligations, since the legal and reputational consequences of these actions differ. He also calls for greater attention to the legal architecture governing exit, including withdrawal clauses, notice periods, and domestic constitutional constraints. Examples ranging from South Africa and the International Criminal Court to Brexit and congressional constraints on NATO withdrawal illustrate how domestic institutions often shape governments’ ability to leave international organizations.

⁴ Julia Gray, “Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations,” *International Studies Quarterly* 62:1 (2018): 1-13.

⁵ Laurence R. Helfer, “Overlegalizing Human Rights: International Relations Theory and the Commonwealth Caribbean Backlash against Human Rights Regimes,” *Columbia Law Review* 102:7 (2002): 1832-1911; Helfer, “Exiting Treaties,” *Virginia Law Review* 9:7 (2005): 1579-1648; Helfer, “Treaty Withdrawals in a Turbulent World: A Retrospective on Exiting Treaties,” in *Leading Works in International Law*, Donna Lyons, ed., (Routledge, 2023): 67-84.

Stefanie Walter, whose work on Brexit has transformed our understanding of the broader implications of withdrawal from regional institutions,⁶ also views the book's combined treatment of withdrawal and suspension as an important innovation and describes the underlying dataset as an invaluable resource for future research. Her comments focus on three broader questions. First, she argues that domestic political dynamics receive less attention than they deserve. The Brexit negotiations, for example, cannot be understood without considering party competition and domestic political incentives. Second, she asks whether exit should ultimately be viewed as a bargaining strategy or as evidence that bargaining has failed. The framework is compelling for withdrawal threats, she argues, but less obviously so for completed exits, which, the book itself shows, rarely achieve meaningful institutional reform and often end in renewed membership. Finally, Walter emphasizes that international organizations and remaining member states possess strategic agency of their own. Exit is not simply something that happens to organizations; it also reshapes the incentives and strategies of those who remain.

Taken together, the reviews point toward a common set of questions that extends beyond the book itself. Each highlights dimensions of institutional contestation that receive less attention in the authors' framework: alternatives to exit, domestic political and legal constraints, and the strategic responses of organizations and remaining members. All three also ask how well historical patterns can guide us in understanding a political environment that may differ fundamentally from the one captured in the book's data.

Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas engage these critiques in a thoughtful and generous response. Rather than treating them as objections, they largely view them as opportunities to extend their research agenda. They readily acknowledge the importance of alternative forms of institutional contestation and note that ongoing work examines disruption through changes in IO funding. They likewise agree that domestic political institutions deserve greater attention, while emphasizing that their book deliberately foregrounds international dynamics that previous scholarship has often overlooked.

In responding to the individual reviews, the authors clarify several aspects of their argument. They reject a sharp distinction between bargaining strategy and bargaining failure, emphasizing that exit is a process whose outcome remains uncertain until withdrawal is completed. They stress that their theoretical framework is relational rather than state-centered, allowing organizations and other member states to exercise strategic agency. Responding to Helfer, they explain that their analogy between withdrawal and noncompliance concerns how political actors interpret these actions rather than their legal equivalence. They also note that debates over withdrawal from organizations that lack explicit exit clauses remain unresolved in international law and that several of Helfer's examples concern treaties rather than international organizations. In response to Gray, they argue that their theory generates probabilistic rather

⁶ Ignacio Jurado, Sandra León, and Stefanie Walter, "Brexit Dilemmas: Shaping Postwithdrawal Relations with a Leaving State." *International Organization* 76:2 (2022): 273-304; Walter, "Brexit Domino? The Political Contagion Effects of Voter-endorsed Withdrawals from International Institutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 54:13 (2021): 2382-2415.

than deterministic predictions and maintain that the combination of statistical and qualitative evidence provides meaningful opportunities for empirical evaluation.

The exchange concludes by returning to the contemporary moment that motivates this symposium. The authors note that only five of the sixty-six institutions identified in the 2026 US announcement are formal intergovernmental organizations of the type examined in the book. Waiting periods, domestic political change, and the reputational costs of withdrawal all caution against treating every announced exit as inevitable. At the same time, they acknowledge that current developments may challenge several assumptions that have long underpinned the scholarship on international organizations, including growing emphasis on sovereignty, skepticism toward multilateral institutions, and declining confidence in the liberal principles that shaped much of the postwar order.

That tension between continuity and change animates this symposium. *Exit from International Organizations* provides the strongest empirical and theoretical account to date of why states leave international organizations and what those decisions accomplish. Whether the patterns documented in the book continue to characterize an evolving international order is the question that runs through the essays that follow. Readers will find not only an assessment of an important book, but also a productive conversation about institutional contestation, domestic politics, organizational agency, and the future of international cooperation. I thank the reviewers and the authors for contributing to that conversation.

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strategies through foreign lobbying. Her research is published in the *Review of International Organizations*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Global Perspectives*, *Global Policy*, *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Politics* and multiple edited volume chapters. She has been awarded a Seaver College Endowed Professorship and the Howard A. White Award for Excellence in Teaching. Her earlier research received a best paper award from the American Political Science Association and has been supported by the World Bank, the National Science Foundation, and the International Studies Association.

Erik Voeten is the Peter F. Krogh Professor of Geopolitics and Justice in World Affairs at Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service and Government Department. He is the director of the Mortara Center for International Studies. He has published widely in prominent journals on the role of international institutions and law in international affairs and, more recently, the political economy of the energy transition. His book, *Ideology and International Institutions* appeared with Princeton University Press in January 2026. He is a past editor of the academic journals *International Organization* and *Research and Politics* and the *Monkey Cage Washington Post* blog.

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Stefanie Walter is Full Professor for International Relations and Political Economy at the Department of Political Science at the University of Zurich. Her research examines distributional conflicts, political preferences and policy outcomes related to globalization, financial crises, and international organizations. Recent projects focus on the backlash against globalization, perceptions of the changing world order, and the responses to non-cooperation. Her work has been published in journals such as the *Annual Review of*

Political Science, American Journal of Political Science, Comparative Political Studies, and International Organization. She is the author of *Financial Crises and the Politics of Macroeconomic Adjustments* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and co-author of *The Politics of Bad Options* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

 Review by Julia Gray, University of Pennsylvania

Exit from International Organizations is a rigorous and timely contribution to the study of international institutions. At a moment when high-profile withdrawals and suspensions draw our attention to IO membership politics, this compelling book offers the most comprehensive empirical account to date of state exit and suspension across international organizations (IOs) and over time. Drawing on a new dataset covering 534 IOs and 198 countries from 1913 to 2022, the authors challenge alarmist narratives about the collapse of international cooperation and instead advance a nuanced theory of exits as a bargaining strategy rather than a terminal act.

The book's central claim is that we can best understand exit and suspension from IOs as negotiated political processes embedded in institutional contexts, in contrast to prevailing arguments that IO withdrawal stems from populism, nationalism, or globalization backlash at the country level.¹ States, the authors argue, often threaten or enact exits when mechanisms of voice have failed, using withdrawal or suspension to induce institutional change. The authors argue that exit is costly, reputationally consequential, and frequently reversible. For these reasons, it is both rare and imperfect as a tool of reform.

The book makes three major contributions. First, it meticulously documents the frequency and timing of exit and suspension, supplemented with engaging and rich case detail: for example, the discussions of French president Charles de Gaulle's 1965 "empty chair" EC exit threat (81-82), and Cuban President Fidel Castro's denouncement of the Organization of American States as the "Yankee Ministry of Colonies" (238). The authors know their data, and it shows: the depth of their empirical engagement strengthens the credibility of the account, as detailed evidence appears at every stage of the analysis. Second, it theorizes exits as products of bargaining under institutional constraints; this stands in contrast to alarmist views about threatened or actual exit as the death knell for global governance. Third, it seeks to show that exit and suspension carry reputational and cooperative consequences for the states involved and suggests that such consequences can even leave the cooperative landscape better off, particularly since many states subsequently find their way back to the very IOs they once fled.

At the same time, the book raises a set of deeper conceptual and empirical questions about selection, institutional design, observability, and the microfoundations of exit that point toward a broader research

¹ See Richard Clark and Allison Carnegie, *Global Governance Under Fire: How International Organizations Resist the Populist Wave* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2026); Stefanie Walter, "The Backlash against Globalization," *Annual Review of Political Science* 24:1 (2021): 421-442; Walter, "Brexit Domino? The Political Contagion Effects of Voter-Endorsed Withdrawals from International Institutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 54:13 (2021): 2382-2415.

agenda on membership change² and institutional vitality.³ Observed exits of formal IOs may be more akin to a celebrity divorce than to everyday relationship blues: they can be revealing about extreme cases but are an incomplete guide to the overall vitality of international cooperation.

The theoretical core of the book is an elegant extension of Albert O. Hirschman's exit-voice-loyalty framework to international institutions.⁴ In the authors' view, IOs begin as beneficial arrangements; that is, they largely deliver under the terms of the initial negotiated contract. But things change. Preferences diverge, power shifts, or institutional mandates evolve informally.⁵ States can voice concerns internally, but when this fails, threatened or realized exit becomes a bargaining strategy. When states head for the door, this alters expectations about future cooperation and can accelerate negotiations by confronting other members with a counterfactual institutional future.

Empirically, the authors show that exit is infrequent, often temporary, and clustered around periods of bargaining. Two-thirds of withdrawals in the dataset were motivated by attempts to negotiate change, not by populism or nationalism. Half of withdrawing states eventually returned. These findings significantly advance the literature by demonstrating that, contrary to the optics, exit and suspension are part of the everyday politics of IO membership. The authors' mastery of the data is apparent: they integrate rich empirical detail into the theoretical claims at every stage.

Exits can also be relatively low stakes. As the authors show, a substantial share of observed withdrawals occur when states leave one organization in order to join another that supersedes it, for example, departures from the Central European Free Trade Agreement or the European Free Trade Area in the course of accession to the European Community. Other exits take place in settings where organizations are already in the process of collapse, such as the League of Nations or the Central Treaty Organization. The authors also document that many exits occur in commodity organizations, whose narrow mandates and cyclical relevance make membership turnover relatively low salience.

² See Christina Davis, *Discriminatory Clubs: The Geopolitics of International Organizations* (Princeton University Press, 2023); Daniela Donno, Shawna K. Metzger, and Bruce Russett, "Screening out Risk: IGOs, Member State Selection, and Interstate Conflict, 1951–2000," *International Studies Quarterly* 59:2 (2015): 251–263; Jana von Stein, "Do Treaties Constrain or Screen? Selection Bias and Treaty Compliance," *American Political Science Review* 99:4 (2005): 611–622.

³ Julia Gray, "Life, Death, Inertia, Change: The Hidden Lives of International Organizations," *Ethics and International Affairs* 34:1 (2020): 33–42; Julia Gray, "The Life Cycle of International Cooperation: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Review of International Organizations* 19 (2024): 641–664.

⁴ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1970). For another application, see Alexandros Kentikelenis and Erik Voeten, "Legitimacy Challenges to the Liberal World Order: Evidence from United Nations Speeches, 1970–2018," *Review of International Organizations* 16:4 (2021): 721–754.

⁵ See Zoltán I. Búzás and Erin R. Graham, "Emergent Flexibility in Institutional Development: How International Rules Really Change," *International Studies Quarterly* 64:4 (2020): 821–833.

At first glance, the chapters on suspension and the consequences of IO-imposed sanctions may appear to shift attention from state-initiated exit to organizational responses to poorly behaving states, an area that is often treated in a distinct enforcement and compliance literature.⁶ Within the book's bargaining framework, however, their inclusion is both logical and illuminating. If exit represents a state's most visible strategy for pressuring an institution, suspension and sanctioning represent the IO's parallel response when cooperation breaks down. Because IOs can't dissolve themselves out of spite (in other words, IOs have no "exit" option), suspension becomes one of the IO's most easily observable tools available for "voice" and attempting to recalibrate bargaining positions. Read this way, the sanctions chapters neatly extend the book's core argument by showing that both states and institutions operate in an environment of mutual dissatisfaction.

One challenge raised by the book's laudable breadth is that the theoretical framework is asked to do a great deal of work at once. Across nine hypotheses, many of which have multiple sub-conjectures, the analysis spans causes of exit, threats, suspension, reputational effects, cooperative consequences, and post-exit behavior. While this richness is a strength, it sometimes comes at the expense of theoretical focus. For example, the arguments about preference divergence and power are intuitive, but they raise an important threshold problem: how dissimilar is too dissimilar, and how much power is sufficient, for exit or exit threats to become likely, and how would we know *ex ante*? Many states exhibit meaningful preference differences without ever approaching withdrawal, which suggests that the relationship may be highly nonlinear. When combined with the fact that actual exits and public exit threats remain rare events, this creates a risk that some hypotheses are difficult to falsify: almost any observed exit can be *post hoc* reconciled with some form of preference divergence, bargaining failure, power shift, cost assessment, or institutional constraint. This does not undermine the value of the empirical exercise, but future work might benefit from sharper theoretical priors about where dissatisfaction should cross into observable exit behavior in the setting of formal IOs.

Indeed, one of the book's most careful moves is its acknowledgment of selection bias and observability. This insight opens a deeper question that the book touches on but does not fully explore: selection operates not only on states, but also on the chosen form of cooperation as well as membership rules.⁷ Observed exit is the outcome of a filtering process shaped by institutional design. Some IOs make exit easy; others make it prohibitively costly. Some organizations allow suspension; others lack enforcement mechanisms altogether. This raises the possibility that observed exit additionally reflects the institutional affordances of particular IOs. While their empirics account for withdrawal provisions in some IOs, they do not fully address the

⁶ Abram Chayes and Antonia Handler Chayes, "On Compliance," *International Organization* 47:2 (1993): 175-205; Sara McLaughlin Mitchell and Paul R. Hensel, "International Institutions and Compliance with Agreements," *American Journal of Political Science* 51:4 (2007): 721-737.

⁷ Christina L. Davis and Meredith Wilf, "Joining the Club: Accession to the GATT/WTO," *The Journal of Politics* 79:3 (2017): 964-978.

possibility that conflict in some IOs, such as the ones that are too reputable or too difficult to disengage, may be redirected into noncompliance or informal disengagement.

As the authors acknowledge, coding exits themselves as well as mentions in the news of exit threats necessarily captures only public and formalized statements and excludes implicit or privately conveyed exit signals that are communicated through diplomatic channels.⁸ This limitation has both empirical and theoretical implications. From a measurement perspective, observable exit threats likely represent only the visible subset of a much broader engagement toolkit, making it difficult to assess how frequently states rely on exit or threats to get what they want out of IOs. Reliance on news sources also introduces temporal and geographic asymmetries, because public reporting has been far more comprehensive in recent years in some, but not all, countries. This raises the possibility that earlier or less visible forms of exit bargaining, especially in Global South countries,⁹ may be systematically undercounted.

A related selection issue follows from the book's focus on formal IO membership. By design, the analysis does not extend to disengagement from treaty-based cooperation, to informal or sub-organizations, or from institutionalized regimes that lack a clear membership boundary; this is a reasonable scope condition. Yet some of the most consequential forms of contemporary disengagement occur precisely in these spaces. No state has formally exited the WTO, for example, but cooperation has been re-routed through a proliferation of bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements, and core institutional functions, most notably the Appellate Body, have been deliberately incapacitated.¹⁰ Here too, focusing on formal exit from formal organizations captures the most visible and codified form of disengagement.

Indeed, the book's findings implicitly point to a wider menu of strategies through which states manage dissatisfaction with international cooperation, as the conclusion discusses. States need not exit to weaken or reshape institutions. They may "quiet quit" by reducing attendance,¹¹ downgrading representation¹², or

⁸ See Allison Carnegie and Austin Carson, "The Spotlight's Harsh Glare: Rethinking Publicity and International Order," *International Organization* 72:3 (2018): 627-657.

⁹ Jeff D. Colgan, "American Perspectives and Blind Spots on World Politics," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4:3 (2019): 300-309. See also Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas, "Public Support for Withdrawal from International Organizations: Experimental Evidence from the US," *Review of International Organizations* 19 (2024): 809-845.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Kucik, Lauren Peritz, and Sergio Puig, "Legalization and Compliance: How Judicial Activity Undercuts the Global Trade Regime," *British Journal of Political Science* 53:1 (2023): 221-238; Krzysztof Pelc, "Institutional Innovation in Response to Backlash: How Members Are Circumventing the WTO Impasse," *Review of International Organizations* 20 (2025): 1209-1241.

¹¹ Julia Gray, "Life, Death, or Zombie? The Vitality of International Organizations," *International Studies Quarterly* 62:1 (2018): 1-13. See also Inken von Borzyskowski, and Felicity Vabulas, "When Do Member State Withdrawals Lead to the Death of International Organizations?" *European Journal of International Relations*, 30:3 (2024), 756-786; Felicity Vabulas and Inken von Borzyskowski, "Member State Exit in the Life Cycle of IOs," in Julia Gray, ed., *The Life Cycle of Global Governance* (University of Michigan Press, 2026), forthcoming.

¹² Alexander Baturo and Julia C. Gray, "The Incentives of Leaders in International Organizations: Evidence from the UN General Assembly," *International Interactions* 50:1 (2024): 138-167.

withholding resources.¹³ They may redirect cooperation into linked or parallel IOs,¹⁴ sub-organizations, or informal clubs¹⁵ that bypass existing institutions. They may tolerate stagnation while preserving formal membership to avoid reputational costs. They may appoint ineffective or politically constrained bureaucrats to international secretariats, hollowing out capacity from within.

From this perspective, exit is best understood as a high-visibility, high-cost option within a broader strategic repertoire. If vocal, exit attracts attention and reputational consequences, but disengagement avoids both. The book's finding that exit is rare and often temporary is thus entirely consistent with a world in which countries manage dissatisfaction through less observable channels. Theoretically, the choice between public and private threats is itself strategic, as the authors acknowledge. Powerful states may prefer implicit threats that preserve flexibility and avoid reputational or domestic audience costs, while weaker states may resort to public ultimatums precisely because they lack leverage behind closed doors. As a result, observed exit reflects not only dissatisfaction with institutional outcomes but also how states manage bargaining across domestic and international arenas. The most consequential exit threats may therefore be those that leave little public trace.

A final issue raised by the book concerns a deeper assumption shared by much of the IO literature: that international organizations begin as reasonably effective or optimal bargains.¹⁶ But many IOs address deeply intractable cooperation problems, such as coordination under uncertainty, distributive conflict, or sovereignty trade-offs, for which fully satisfactory institutional solutions may never have existed. In such contexts, cooperation is often incremental, technocratic, and politically unglamorous. Multilateral gains, if they occur, are often difficult to claim as visible wins domestically. If we view IOs as persistently imperfect, rather than deteriorating from an initially optimal equilibrium as the authors argue, then exit threats may reflect frustration with the limits of multilateralism itself rather than realistic efforts to improve cooperative outcomes.

This perspective also has implications for the rational design literature. Much of that work emphasizes how states contract against uncertainty by building flexibility, such as escape clauses, review provisions, and

¹³ Erin R. Graham, *Transforming International Institutions: How Money Quietly Sidelined Multilateralism at the United Nations* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

¹⁴ Anderw Lugg, "Re-contracting Intergovernmental Organizations: Membership Change and the Creation of Linked Intergovernmental Organizations," *Review of International Organizations* 19:3 (2024): 545-577.

¹⁵ Charles B. Roger, *The Origins of Informality: Why the Legal Foundations of Global Governance Are Shifting, and Why It Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2020); Charles B. Roger and Sam Rowan, "Analyzing International Organizations: How the Concepts We Use Affect the Answers We Get," *Review of International Organizations* 17:3 (2022): 597-625; Felicity Vabulas and Duncan Snidal, "Cooperation under Autonomy: Building and Analyzing the Informal Intergovernmental Organizations 2.0 Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 58:4 (2021): 859-869.

¹⁶ See, for example, Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions," *International Organization* 55:4 (2001): 761-799.

sunset periods, into the institutional design.¹⁷ The empirical reality documented in this book suggests that dissatisfaction persists even in the presence of such mechanisms, and that uncertainty may be harder to contract away than often assumed. This could imply that exit threats may be a structural feature of cooperation rather than evidence of design failure.

The chapters on the costs of withdrawal and suspension also raise a deeper question about what exactly is at stake when states exit IOs. The authors interpret reputational and cooperative penalties as evidence that IOs function as credible hand-tying devices, such that withdrawal signals reneging on meaningful commitments. An alternative reading, however, is that these costs reflect the signaling properties of membership rather than the substantive value of cooperation itself. But market and third-party responses to IO participation may be only loosely connected to material institutional effects. For example, borrowing-cost benefits associated with IO membership often stem from investor heuristics and herd behavior rather than concrete policy change or functional gains delivered by the organization.¹⁸ From this perspective, the costs of withdrawal that are documented in the book may say less about the efficiency of international cooperation than about the fragility of reputational equilibria in global audiences.

At a broader level, *Exit from International Organizations* forces readers to confront an interpretive question about the state of international cooperation itself. On one reading, the book offers a fundamentally optimistic account. Situated firmly within the rational design traditions, the authors portray IOs as institutions that work reasonably well. Exit threats are rare, and actual exits are rarer still. When states do leave, they often return, and when they return, they frequently face improved terms. From this perspective, the empirical weight of the book delivers a reassuring message: international institutions remain resilient, and even conflict over membership ultimately reinforces cooperative equilibria.

Yet the same empirical findings could potentially sustain a more ambivalent interpretation, especially when read alongside a growing literature on contestation, bureaucratic politics, and institutional life cycles.¹⁹ That

¹⁷ See Barbara Koremenos, “Contracting around International Uncertainty,” *American Political Science Review* 99:4 (2005): 549–565; Jeffrey Kucik and Eric Reinhardt, “Does Flexibility Promote Cooperation? An Application to the Global Trade Regime,” *International Organization* 62:3 (2008): 477–505.

¹⁸ Julia Gray, *The Company States Keep: International Economic Organizations and Investor Perceptions* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Julia Gray and Raymond P. Hicks, “Reputations, Perceptions, and International Economic Agreements,” *International Interactions* 40:3 (2014): 325–349.

¹⁹ For just a few examples, see: Jonas Bunte, Geoffrey Gertz, and Alexandra O. Zeitz, “Cascading Noncompliance: Why the Export Credit Regime Is Unraveling,” *Review of International Political Economy* 29:5 (2022): 1395–1419; Allison Carnegie and Ricky Clark, *Global Governance Under Fire: How International Organizations Resist the Populist Wave* (Princeton University Press, 2026); Maria Debre and Hylke Dijkstra, “Institutional Design for a Post-liberal Order: Why Some International Organizations Live Longer than Others,” *European Journal of International Relations* 27:1 (2021): 311–339; Maria Debre and Hylke Dijkstra, “Are International Organisations in Decline? An Absolute and Relative Perspective on Institutional Change,” *Global Policy* 14:1 (2023): 16–30; Valentin Lang, Lukas Wellner, and Alexandros Kentikelenis, “Biased Bureaucrats and the Policies of International Organizations,” *American Journal of Political Science* 69 (2024) 1486–1504; Phillip Y. Lipsky, *Renegotiating the World Order: Institutional Change in International Relations*

exits are infrequent may stem more from observability than state satisfaction. If we accept the authors' argument that exit is costly and reputation-damaging, then states have strong incentives to express discontent through less visible channels. From this vantage point, exit may be the least common strategy *because* it is the most visible. The apparent stability of IO membership may thus coexist with widespread, low-grade disengagement that falls below the observable threshold of formal withdrawal.

Decades of IO scholarship have assumed that states join institutions to solve collective action problems, lock in reforms, and generate mutually beneficial gains, which is the starting point of the book. The prevalence of exit threats, even if they are rare, costly, and often ineffective, suggests a more ambivalent reality. States may receive the benefits of cooperation but finding them politically insufficient, unevenly distributed, or incompatible with changing domestic constraints.

This tension raises a further question about how the book's findings relate to contemporary debates. Is exit, as the authors suggest, evidence of efficient bargaining in a system that continues to deliver value? Or does the rarity of exit reflect the fact that states increasingly undermine institutions without leaving them, through strategies that are less costly and more politically palatable than withdrawal? The book's careful documentation of when states choose the most visible option only sharpens the puzzle of why so many others choose quieter paths instead, and what the consequences are.

Overall, the book's core message sits somewhat uneasily with the character of recent US exits. Some would argue that these recent withdrawals appear far more hostile, and that their novelty is in their willingness to call the value of cooperation itself into question. As such, the present moment may mark an unnerving departure from the historical record that the book documents so carefully.

(Cambridge University Press, 2017); Henning Schmidtke and Tobias Lenz, "Expanding or Defending Legitimacy? Why International Organizations Intensify Self-legitimation," *Review of International Organizations* 19 (2024): 753-784; Avery Schmidt, "Treaty Withdrawal and the Development of International Law," *Review of International Organizations* 19:4 (2024): 785-808; Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, "Death of International Organizations: The Organizational Ecology of Intergovernmental Organizations, 1815-2015," *Review of International Organizations* 15:2 (2020): 339-370.

 Review by Laurence R. Helfer, Duke University

Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas have published a definitive account of withdrawal and suspension from international organizations (IOs). The authors compiled a comprehensive dataset of nearly 500 cases of formal exit (both unilateral withdrawals and suspensions by other IO members) involving 198 states and 534 IOs between 1914 and 2022. They leveraged this data in numerous complementary ways, developing a theoretically nuanced, institutionally sophisticated, and empirically grounded account of why states voluntarily quit, or threaten to leave, IOs that they previously joined, and why other members use suspensions, or threats thereof, to push recalcitrant states to change their behavior. The result is an important and timely contribution to the study of how states negotiate within and outside of international institutions.

This review essay is comprised of four sections. Part I summarizes the book's main arguments. Part II explains the authors' many insightful contributions to international law and international relations scholarship and to understanding the infrequent, but nevertheless legally and politically consequential, phenomenon of withdrawals and suspensions from IOs. Part III identifies a few conceptual ambiguities and omissions from the authors' analysis, most notably highlighting the legal, institutional and reputational distinctions between a state's exit from an IO and the breach of its membership obligations. Part IV concludes by briefly reflecting on the future of IO exit in the current geopolitical climate.

I.

Exit from International Organizations argues that “exit” is not an episodic pathology of contemporary multilateralism, but a durable and strategically informed feature of institutionalized international cooperation. The book's first major contribution is empirical: as noted above, the authors have collected an original dataset that spans more than a century and distinguishes two distinct exit pathways: withdrawals (voluntary, state-initiated IO departures) and suspensions (involuntary, temporary exclusions imposed by other IO members). The dataset confirms the claim made in earlier scholarship that “withdrawals are a regularized component of modern treaty practice—acts that are infrequent but hardly ... isolated or aberrant events.”¹ Contrary to the assertion made by some scholars that recent IO withdrawals reflect the decline of multilateralism or the rise of nationalist populism,² von Borzyskowski and Vabulas show that the incidence of IO exit has not increased over time and that even recent, high-profile withdrawals should be seen against the background of an institutional ecosystem in which exit and exit threats are deployed as strategies for organizational bargaining and enforcement of international norms.

¹ Laurence R. Helfer, “Exiting Treaties,” *Virginia Law Review* 91:7 (2005): 1579-1648, 1602.

² E.g. Stefanie Walter and Nicole Plotke-Scherly, “Responding to Unilateral Challenges to International Institutions,” *International Studies Quarterly* 69:2 (2025): sqaf022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqaf022>.

The second major contribution is theoretical and supplies the book's central through-line: exit is best understood as a costly strategy for negotiating institutional change. Part 1 develops the logic that formal IO exits, whether threatened or implemented, impose costs on both the departing state and the organization, including loss of influence, foregone cooperation gains, material and reputational harm, and increased uncertainty. Because exits entail such costs, they are rarely a first-best option. Yet precisely because exiting is costly, it can function as a credible signal of dissatisfaction and demand for change, turning withdrawal (or the plausible threat of departure) into a useful bargaining tool when "voice" and other forms of influence fail to deliver desired institutional reforms. That same logic carries through to the distinction between withdrawals and suspensions: withdrawals are a bargaining tool by a dissatisfied member state; suspensions are a sanctioning-and-bargaining move by remaining IO members seeking to punish the target country and induce domestic change or compliance with international commitments. Across both forms, the authors conceptualize exit not as a one-shot event but as a process involving justification, escalation, bargaining, and sometimes a return to membership.

Part 2 applies this framework to withdrawal. The core claim is that most withdrawals are attempts to renegotiate an IO's substantive rules or procedures, such as policy goals, finances, leadership, or membership criteria, rather than to abandon an institution as such. The book's descriptive evidence is central here: among the rationales for withdrawal, a large majority can be categorized as seeking change rather than ending cooperation. The large-N analysis connects withdrawals to preference divergence (operationalized as dissatisfaction with an organization's direction) and to shifts in bargaining power (due to rising or declining influence of different IO members). Three withdrawal case studies deepen the analysis. They trace how domestic politics, credibility dynamics, and institutional bargaining influence whether withdrawal threats become real exits, whether exits produce concessions by other members, and whether interstate cooperation is reconfigured through alternative institutions arrangements rather than simply terminated. Throughout, the authors contrast their findings with alternative hypotheses that attribute withdrawals to a backlash against globalization, nationalist populism, or expansion of IO authority, revealing that these accounts fail to predict the withdrawals observed in the data.

Part 3 applies the same analytical approach to suspension. The authors treat suspension as a form of institutional sanctioning and bargaining: suspensions and suspension threats publicly stigmatize the target and impose reputational costs, while creating leverage to negotiate behavioral change. The data reveal that suspensions are far less common than withdrawals and are historically patterned, with many post-Cold War suspensions tied to IOs that promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Domestic political backsliding (due to coups, flawed elections, and/or systemic violations of human rights) is often the trigger for suspension efforts, but whether or not the target state is cast out depends on bargaining and institutional context. Suspensions are more likely where an IO's membership and normative density create the political will and legitimacy for sanctions, and less likely where the target is geopolitically insulated by alliances, controls natural resources, or has other forms of bargaining leverage.

At the same time, suspension often fails to produce meaningful domestic political reforms. Change depends on institutional leverage, coalition unity among remaining members, and the target's ability to

withstand or circumvent pressure. Three case studies illustrate this scope condition, revealing how similar suspensions yield different outcomes depending on regional politics, cohesion among IO members, and strategic recalculation over time. As with withdrawals, alternative accounts of suspensions do not do as much explanatory work once the sanctioning and bargaining dynamics are modeled.

The book's conclusion weaves these threads together to explore the implications of IO exit for global governance. The authors' overarching message is that exits and exit threats rarely signal an end to interstate cooperation. Instead, they often mark moments of contestation and renegotiation within an increasingly complex institutional landscape. By pairing a large-N dataset and diverse case studies with a bargaining-centered theory, the manuscript offers a corrective to crisis narratives that are built on anecdotal evidence. It also provides a unified framework for understanding withdrawals and suspensions as costly negotiating tools as well as empirically grounded expectations about when and how exit is likely to occur.

II.

International law and International Relations scholars have devoted increasing attention to analyzing exits from IOs and treaties. Studies have documented diversity in the form and content of withdrawal and suspension clauses, suggesting that such clauses are rationally designed to promote cooperation and deter defection.³ Other studies have examined which states actually invoke these clauses, the reasons for their departure, and the consequences for international law and politics.⁴ These works include both large-N empirical analyses as well as case studies of specific issue areas, including human rights, criminal law, investment, trade, climate change, arms control, and drug regulation.⁵

³ E.g., Barbara Koremenos and Allison Nau, "Exit, No Exit," *Duke Journal of Comparative and International Law* 21:8 (2010): 81-120; Barbara Koremenos, *The Continent of International Law: Explaining Agreement Design* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Konstantinos D. Magliveras, *Exclusion from Participation in International Organisations: The Law and Practice Behind Member States' Expulsion and Suspension of Membership* (Kluwer Law International, 1999).

⁴ E.g., Frederick Cowell, *The Law, Politics and Theory of Treaty Withdrawal* (Hart, 2023); Hylke Dijkstra, Laura von Allwörden, Leonard Schütte, and Giuseppe Zaccaria, *The Survival of International Organizations: Institutional Responses to Existential Challenges* (Oxford University Press, 2025); Antonio Morelli, *Withdrawal from Multilateral Treaties* (Brill, 2021).

⁵ E.g., Frederick Cowell, "Exit Clauses in Regional Human Rights Systems," *International Organizations Law Review* 15:2 (2018): 388-410; Anna T. Katselas, "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in Investment Treaty Arbitration," *Nebraska Law Review* 93:2 (2014): 313-369; Michael Wabwile, "South Africa's Proposed Exit from the Rome Statute: Alternative Perspectives," *African Journal of Legal Studies* 11:2-3 (2018): 117-140; Shalanda Helen Baker, "Climate Change and International Economic Law," *Ecology Law Quarterly* 47:1 (2016): 53-106; Neil Boister, "Waltzing on the Vienna Consensus on Drug Control? Tensions in the International System for the Control of Drugs," *Leiden Journal of International Law* 29:2 (2016): 389-409; Joellen Pretorius and Tom Sauer, "When is it Legitimate to Abandon the NPT? Withdrawal as a Political Tool to Move Nuclear Disarmament Forward," *Contemporary Security Policy* 43:1 (2022): 161-185.

Exit from International Organizations makes several important additions to this literature. Arguably the most novel contribution is the decision to examine withdrawals and suspensions together (13-14). As the authors explain, the two phenomena “are both forms of membership cessation, that often have similar motivations (i.e., negotiating institutional and policy change), and both result in negative reputational and cooperative consequences” (35). This framing enables the authors to compare the negative outcomes for states that voluntarily leave an IO as well as states that are pushed out, usually temporarily (51, 232), while also accounting for the different objectives and bargaining dynamics that animate each action.

Pairing withdrawals and suspensions also illuminates an understudied interaction between the two phenomena: states that decide to quit an IO before or soon after they are pushed out by other members. The book identifies several such “face-saving” departures, including withdrawals by Greece (in 1969) and Russia (in 2022) from the Council of Europe (238, 307-308); Nicaragua’s decision to quit the Organization of American States in 2021 (49-50); and withdrawals by Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso in the wake of sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States in 2024 following military coups in all three countries (239-240). Analyzing these events solely as withdrawals or suspensions overlooks important aspects of these controversies.

Another contribution is the division of exit into three distinct phases: “the stage of threatening to leave, the reasons that states provide for withdrawal, and the likelihood of return after withdrawal” (69). Exposing the micro-foundations of exit supports the authors’ central claim that withdrawals and suspensions are negotiated processes, with distinctive predictors and foreseeable consequences for both departing countries and remaining IO members (138, 186).

The focus on the initial phases of exit, which involve threats and the responses to them, fills a notable gap in the literature. Identifying threats of withdrawal and suspension raises conceptual and empirical difficulties. First, what qualifies as such a threat? The authors adopt a conservative approach, defining withdrawal threats “as occurring when the state (embodied by the head of government or state, or a member of the cabinet/executive branch) *publicly and explicitly* states that the country is considering ending its IO membership” (80, italics in the original). Finding threats that meet this definition is challenging because primary sources that might reveal such threats are sparse and uneven.⁶ The authors turn instead to press releases, news articles, and other secondary sources, ultimately identifying 145 threats of withdrawal between 1980 and 2022 (81).

Analyzing these incidents reveals a striking fact: 91 percent of threats are never implemented (81). Why not? The data reveal that “states often back down from withdrawal threats for one of three reasons: states realize

⁶ With regard to threats of suspension, the empirical challenges are even greater. Many such threats “happen behind closed doors for more discreet diplomacy” and there is no “uniform documentation of meeting minutes across all IOs” (205, 206). Lacking “systematic information to garner generalizable insights about suspension threats,” the authors provide a case study of one institution—the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF)—that provides public information on threats to suspend its members (205).

that the costs of withdrawal would be too high, states realize that IO change is unlikely even if they exit and they are better off having a seat at the table, or (some of) the desired IO change occurs” (70). A similar logic helps to explain another surprising fact, that about half of the states that quit an IO later rejoin the organization (68). These findings map terrain that has been insufficiently explored in prior studies. They also reinforce the book’s principal claim that exit threats, actual withdrawals, and returns to IO membership involve negotiated processes whose outcomes depend upon the objectives and relative power of the exiting state and other IO members.

Last, the book includes a diverse range of examples and illustrations. These go significantly beyond recent and high-profile withdrawals and suspensions from well-known IOs by large and powerful nations and include many instances of exit from lesser-known regional organizations by states in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (67, 191, 202-205). This diversity not only adds context and color to the book’s principal findings, it also gives readers confidence that the multiple ways that the authors present the data they have gathered, from descriptive accounts and regression analyses to the catalogue of state justifications for withdrawal and suspension (87, 194-95), are representative of the universe of IO exits over time, across regions, and for countries at different levels of development.

III.

Exit from International Organizations is the culmination of several years of research by the authors. As the capstone of an extensive body of work in international relations,⁷ the book is as successful as it is ambitious. From a legal perspective, however, the authors’ analysis includes a few conceptual ambiguities and omissions that should be clarified in future research.

First and most important, the book conflates the consequences of lawfully quitting an IO as compared to flouting the legal obligations of membership. The authors assert that voluntary IO departures “occur when states do not honor aspects of an IO commitment,” which “violate[s] the norm of *pacta sunt servanda*—the notion that agreements must be kept” (53). Disregarding this principle, the authors contend, “affect[s] whether other states trust the withdrawing state to uphold commitments in the future. For example, other countries may “be more hesitant to join future treaties with a state after it has withdrawn from an IO” (56-57).

⁷ Prior publications by the authors in peer review journals include: Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas, “When is Withdrawal from International Organizations Deadly?,” *European Journal of International Relations* 30:3 (2024): 756-786; Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas, “When Do Withdrawal Threats Achieve Reform in Intergovernmental Organizations?,” *Global Perspectives* 4:1 (2023): 1-18; Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas, “Credible Commitments? Explaining IGO Suspensions to Sanction Political Backsliding,” *International Studies Quarterly* 63:1 (2019): 139-152; Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas, “Hello, Goodbye: When Do States Withdraw from International Organizations?,” *Review of International Organizations* 14:2 (2019): 335-366.

This approach does not adequately differentiate the material, cooperative, and reputational consequences of unilateral withdrawal from the consequences resulting from a state's violation of its obligations as an IO member.⁸ Most instances of exit are internationally lawful acts: they invoke a formal mechanism, one which is often specified in an IO's founding charter and authorizes a state to unilaterally end its membership simply by following the usually quite minimal procedural conditions, such as prior notice to the secretariat or other members, that the charter specifies.⁹

The lawfulness of most withdrawals has important material and cooperative consequences. Exit enables a withdrawing state to cease cooperation with other IO members while avoiding, or at least minimizing, the costs of future violations. For example, a state that follows the procedures for withdrawal can no longer be targeted with IO-authorized sanctions; nor can the remaining members exercise their right under international law to engage in reciprocal noncompliance.¹⁰ The remaining states can, of course, seek to exclude the departing state from the benefits of IO membership, but their ability to do so depends upon the type of activities that the organization regulates and whether they generate positive or negative externalities for non-members.¹¹

Withdrawal also has distinctive consequences for a state's reputation for compliance with other international obligations. The lawful, formal and public characteristics of exit, as well as its relatively infrequency, suggest that a withdrawing state will suffer limited harm to its standing as a law-abiding country. As *Exit from International Organizations* convincingly demonstrates, withdrawal threats and completed withdrawals are costly signals for raising concerns about an IO's mandate, mission, or leadership (63). A state that takes these concerns seriously, invokes procedures agreed to by all members, offers justifications for its actions, and explains the conditions under which it will resume cooperation, projects a kind of respect for IOs and their rules. This is especially so where it is possible to profess adherence to those rules in principle while ignoring or violating them in fact.

On the other hand, some IO exits are politically consequential and likely create more pervasive harm to a state's reputation for honoring its international commitments and as a partner for future cooperation.¹²

⁸ For an analysis of the many distinctions between withdrawal from an international agreement or IO and a violation of international obligations of membership, see Laurence R. Helfer, "Treaty Withdrawals in a Turbulent World: A Retrospective on Exiting Treaties," in Donna Lyons, ed., *Leading Works in International Law* (Routledge, 2024): 67-84; Morelli, *Withdrawal from Multilateral Treaties*, 47-51.

⁹ Although von Borzyskowski and Vabulas mention the lawful nature of most IO withdrawals in a few places (56, 110), they do not do so consistently and without considering the distinctive consequences of exit and breach for their theoretical claims and empirical findings.

¹⁰ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, articles 60, 70, 1155 U.N.T.S. 331 (May 23, 1969); Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, Supp. No. 10, U.N. Doc. A/56/10 (Nov. 2001).

¹¹ Helfer, "Exiting Treaties," *Virginia Law Review* 91 (2005): 1602.

¹² Helfer, "Treaty Withdrawals in a Turbulent World," 69, n.9; Averell Schmidt, "Damaged Relations: How Treaty Withdrawal Impacts International Cooperation," *American Journal of Political Science* 69:1 (2025): 223-239.

Examples include withdrawals from IOs that establish key pillars of a multilateral legal order (such as the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (EU)¹³); withdrawal threats accompanied by systematic criticism of an IO and calls for other states to abandon it (such the proposal for mass withdrawal by African countries from the International Criminal Court,¹⁴ and the coordinated denunciation by the EU and its member states from the Energy Charter Treaty¹⁵); and the simultaneous unilateral disengagement from multiple IOs and global and regional cooperation venues (such as the January 2026 Executive Order by President Trump withdrawing the United States from 66 IOs, treaties, and multilateral initiatives¹⁶). Also relevant to reputational and cooperative costs is whether a state withdraws to pursue a unilateral approach to interstate relations or instead aims to shift cooperation to another IO with different substantive or membership rules.¹⁷

A second point concerns the analysis of withdrawals from IOs that do not explicitly authorize exit. The authors' dataset indicates that only 39 percent of IO charters include a withdrawal clause (92), and that more than 28 percent of unilateral withdrawals have occurred from organizations that lack such a clause (101). This empirical observation provides the basis for their claim "that the presence of a withdrawal clause likely has no effect on withdrawal" (75), an alternative explanation they find unsupported by descriptive accounts and regression analyses.

These findings, however, are based on an erroneous understanding of international law. The authors assert that "[e]ven when such [exit] provisions are not included in individual IO charters, withdrawal is legal under the VCLT [Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties]" (26). This is not the case. The VCLT Article 56(1) contains a carefully worded clause that governs this precise situation:

A treaty which contains no provision regarding its termination and which does not provide for denunciation or withdrawal is not subject to denunciation or unless: (a) It is established

¹³ Amelia Hadfield and Nicholas Wright, "Fog in Channel? The Impact of Brexit on EU and UK Foreign Affairs," *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, Brief 13 (June 2021), https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFFiles/Brief_13_2021_0.pdf.

¹⁴ Laurence R. Helfer and Anne E. Showalter, "Opposing International Justice: Kenya's Integrated Backlash Strategy Against the ICC," *International Criminal Law Review* 17:1 (2017): 1-46.

¹⁵ Luca Pantaleo, "The EU's Withdrawal from the Energy Charter Treaty between Treaty Law and International Responsibility Issues," *The Journal of World Investment & Trade* 26:5 (2025): 981-998.

¹⁶ Withdrawing the United States from International Organizations, Conventions, and Treaties that are Contrary to the Interests of the United States (6 January 2026), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2026/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-international-organizations-conventions-and-treaties-that-are-contrary-to-the-interests-of-the-united-states/>.

¹⁷ E.g. Diana Panke, Lukas Grundseld, and Pawel Tverskoi, "Exit from Regime Complexity? Regional International Organizations under Scrutiny," *Global Studies Quarterly* 5:1 (2025): ksae078, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksae078>.

that the parties intended to admit the possibility of denunciation or withdrawal; or (b) A right of denunciation or withdrawal may be implied by the nature of the treaty.¹⁸

Article 56(1) creates a rebuttable presumption that states are precluded from unilaterally exiting from an IO that lacks an explicit withdrawal clause. However, scholars continue to debate the circumstances under which this presumption may be rebutted, including whether founding member states implicitly contemplated the possibility of withdrawal, the types of IOs whose nature implies a right of unilateral exit, and the evidence needed to overcome the presumption.¹⁹

A third and somewhat related omission is that the content of explicit IO withdrawal clauses, as well as implicit understandings about the right to exit, often influence whether, when, and how a state decides to withdraw. Two examples illustrate this point. The first Trump administration was unable to leave the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, a multilateral treaty supported by the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), due to the treaty's three-year waiting and one-year notice periods.²⁰ As a result, the United States remained bound by the Paris Agreement until after the 2020 presidential election, and the Biden administration later rejoined the treaty. This outcome may explain the decision of the second Trump administration to withdraw from the UNFCCC in January 2026.²¹

The second example concerns the United States' January 2025 notice of withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO Constitution lacks an exit clause. However, the US Congress adopted a proviso as a condition of joining the organization in 1948, reserving the right to withdraw with one year's notice—provided that the United States paid in full its dues for the IO's current fiscal year.²² Since the Trump administration has not made this payment, it is uncertain whether the UN Secretary-General (the

¹⁸ Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, article 56(1). The identical provision appears in Article 56(1) of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties between States and International Organizations or between International Organizations (adopted March 21, 1986), 25 International Legal Materials 543 (1986).

¹⁹ E.g. Egon Schwelb, "Withdrawal from the United Nations: The Indonesian Intermezzo," *American Journal of International Law* 61:3 (1967): 661-672; Joseph H. H. Weiler, "Alternatives to Withdrawal from an International Organization: The Case of the European Economic Community," *Israel Law Review* 20:2-3 (1985): 282-298; Kelvin Widdows, "The Unilateral Denunciation of Treaties Containing No Denunciation Clause," *British Yearbook of International Law* 53:1 (1982): 83-114.

²⁰ David A. Wirth, "While Trump Pledges Withdrawal from Paris Agreement on Climate, International Law May Provide a Safety Net," *Lawfare*, 2 June 2017, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/while-trump-pledges-withdrawal-paris-agreement-climate-international-law-may-provide-safety-net>

²¹ Sue Biniaz and Jean Galbraith, "Legal and Practical Implications of the U.S. Withdrawal from the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change," *Just Security*, 14 January 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/128687/implications-us-withdrawal-unfccc/>.

²² Jean Galbraith and Laurence R. Helfer, "Has the U.S. Actually Withdrawn from the World Health Organization?" *Just Security*, 29 January 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/129914/us-withdrawal-world-health-organization/>.

treaty depository for the Constitution) or the WHO secretariat will recognize the United States' status as a non-member state after the one-year notice period expires.²³

The fourth and final issue revealed by these examples is the relevance of domestic law and politics to unilateral withdrawals. Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas provide extensive evidence that domestic backsliding drives most IO suspensions. But their analysis gives far less attention to how national legislatures and courts constrain, and sometimes prevent, executives from unilaterally quitting an IO.²⁴ Under international law, the president, prime minister, or foreign minister of a state possesses “full powers” to submit notices of withdrawal and their decision is rarely subject to meaningful scrutiny.²⁵ Domestic legal and political constraints can be far more consequential.

For example, the President of South Africa revoked a notice of withdrawal from the International Criminal Court after the High Court of South Africa concluded that such action required prior approval by the Parliament.²⁶ In the United Kingdom, domestic law and politics influenced the process of Brexit. Following a national referendum, Prime Minister Theresa May announced that she would unilaterally pull the UK out of the EU, triggering a lawsuit. The UK Supreme Court then ruled that parliamentary approval was constitutionally required, and the Prime Minister filed a formal notice of withdrawal after obtaining such approval.²⁷ Legislative constraints can also influence the credibility of unilateral exit threats, as recently highlighted by the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act, a statute that requires prior Congressional approval for the United States to withdraw from NATO—a recurring concern under President Trump.²⁸

The ambiguities and omissions described above could be explored in future research on IO withdrawals. For example, scholars could differentiate the consequences of withdrawals and withdrawal threats that conform to international rules from those that violate international law, including the waiting and notice periods in IO charters. Studies could also identify whether and why certain types of withdrawals generate

²³ Kerry Cullinan, “Member States to Discuss US Withdrawal from WHO as Failure to Pay 2024–25 Fees Violates Legal Obligations,” *Health Policy Watch*, 14 January 2026, <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/member-states-to-discuss-us-withdrawal-from-who-as-failure-to-pay-fees-violates-agreement/>.

²⁴ The book notes in passing that “domestic institutional constraints,” such as the support of the legislature or voters, can affect interstate bargaining over exit (47, 48). However, it does not explore this insight with regard to IO withdrawals, focusing instead on the international costs of unilateral exit (108).

²⁵ Hannah Woolaver, “From Joining to Leaving: Domestic Law’s Role in the International Legal Validity of Treaty Withdrawal,” *European Journal of International Law* 30:1 (2019): 73–104, 89–90.

²⁶ E.g., Başak Çalı and Laurence R. Helfer, “Rethinking Human Rights Treaty Withdrawals: The Case for a Process-Based Approach,” *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 26:1 (2025): 40–72.

²⁷ E.g., Laurence R. Helfer, “Treaty Exit and Intrabranched Conflict at the Interface of International and Domestic Law,” in Curtis A. Bradley, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Comparative Foreign Relations Law* (Oxford University Press, 2019): 354–372.

²⁸ Alberto J. Mora, “How Congress Can Preserve NATO and Greenland: Using 22 USC 1928f to Protect the Peace,” *Just Security*, 16 January 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/128930/preserving-nato-prohibiting-military-action-greenland/>.

high material, reputational or cooperative costs even if they formally conform to specified exit procedures. In addition, careful coding of negotiations leading to the creation of IOs that lack withdrawal clauses could enable scholars to identify when and why states nevertheless believe that unilateral exit is implicitly lawful under the VCLT. Last, more in-depth analysis of the domestic institutional, legal and political constraints on unilateral executive withdrawals could help to determine whether exit threats are credible and, for states that do leave, the likelihood of a returning to IO membership in the future.

IV.

Exit from International Organizations necessarily grounds its analysis in the past. The authors are careful to highlight where specific findings may be affected by the fact that their dataset of IO withdrawals stops in 2022 (71). More consequentially, in the conclusion von Borzyskowski and Vabulas identify “three reasons [that] give us pause in interpreting our findings from the last 100 years as projections for the future: the changing nature of international cooperation, democratic decline, and polarized domestic politics” (319).

The few short months since the book’s publication underscore the wisdom of these hesitations. The world is undergoing a period of extensive and accelerating transformations that are profoundly challenging the multilateral order that has governed interstate relations since the Second World War. International organizations, and international law more generally, are confronting crises on multiple fronts.²⁹ According to some public officials and scholars, the international legal order is facing a real risk of collapse.³⁰ In this unsettled and unsettling environment, we should not be surprised if, as the authors’ caution, the future of IO exit differs from its past.

²⁹ The January 2026 Executive Order by President Trump, cited above, withdrawing the United States from 66 IOs, treaties, and multilateral initiatives offers one very recent example.

³⁰ E.g., Oona A. Hathaway, “The Great Unraveling Has Begun,” *New York Times*, 6 January 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/06/opinion/peace-conflict-war.html>.

Review by Stefanie Walter, University of Zurich

Exit from International Organizations by Inken von Borzyskowski and Felicity Vabulas offers a fascinating and insightful study of the act of exiting from international organizations (IOs). It tackles an issue that is of importance both in academic and policy terms, yet whose systematic study has been neglected by much academic research: when and why do countries leave international organizations, and what are the consequences of this? The book explores these questions by developing both an original theoretical argument and presenting a comprehensive empirical analysis of the two distinct types of IO exit: withdrawal and suspension. The book offers a combined analysis of these two types of exit that is both rare and powerful. The book tests its main argument using an original and comprehensive dataset of IO exits and several qualitative case studies. Overall, the book makes a major contribution to research on international organizations.

Focusing on two types of IO exit, withdrawal and suspensions, the book is theoretically ambitious and proposes an integrated theoretical argument that is centered on bargaining strategies and sheds light on the motivations, processes and consequences of these two different types of IO exit. The theoretical argument conceptualizes IO exit as a bargaining strategy in negotiations about institutional or policy change on the international or domestic level. It argues that a growing preference divergence between the exiting and the remaining member states, and a decline in the exiting state's power, incentivizes states to negotiate such change. But this is no easy undertaking. States therefore use exit threats, and actual withdrawals or suspensions from IOs, as ways to increase their bargaining leverage in situations in which merely voicing dissatisfaction has proven insufficient to push for change.

The authors hypothesize that as a result, the exit process tends to be closely linked to demands for institutional or policy change, and is driven by the dissatisfied state's preferences, bargaining power, and institutional constraints. Because exit is conceptualized as a bargaining tool, they also argue that many exit threats never materialize into actual exit and that many exits are only temporary. Nonetheless, the decision to exit an IO is not without consequences for exiting states. The authors argue that such exits negatively affect exiting states' reputation and reduces cooperation gains, though they do not expect major material consequences. Somewhat counterintuitively, the authors also hypothesize that in the end, even though states use IO exit as a bargaining tool, exit usually does not achieve institutional change.

Exit from International Organizations also makes a significant empirical contribution. It introduces the first comprehensive dataset of IO exits from 1914 to 2022 that covers all states and IOs, with details provided in the appendix. This dataset allows the authors to put the phenomenon of IO exit into a much needed long-term and cross-IO context. It also enables them to empirically explore the patterns and mechanisms underlying both types of exit. This dataset will be of huge value to the research community and will surely be used for new and exciting research on the contestation of global governance, IO politics, and the backlash against globalization and multilateralism. In addition to insightful descriptive and regression analyses based on this quantitative data, the book contains qualitative case studies of various cases of IO

exit: These case studies detail the often prolonged history of dissatisfaction and negotiation that preceded the withdrawal of the US from the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1979, Japan's withdrawal from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 2018, the UK's decision to withdraw from the European Union (EU) in 2016. Likewise, it examines the suspensions of Honduras from the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2009, Syria from the Arab League in 2011, and Guinea from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2021. These case studies explore the mechanisms underlying exit dynamics and add important nuance to the quantitative analyses.

In sum, the book's theoretical and empirical contributions considerably advance our understanding of IO politics, IO contestation, and the life cycle of IOs. At the same time, given the breadth of its ambition, it is perhaps not surprising that the book also raises some questions and leaves others unanswered. Three issues stand out in particular: the rationale of member states for (threatening) to withdraw from an IO, the question whether exit is a bargaining tool or a bargaining failure, and the agency of the IO and its other member states especially in withdrawal negotiations.

First, the book raises questions about how domestic and international-level reasons interact to shape countries (threats) to withdraw from an IO. The book emphasizes the international-level bargaining reasons and discusses some domestic-level explanations of why states (threaten) IO withdrawal, but it could have explored these issues more in-depth, both in terms of theory and empirical analysis. Even in cases where states express demands for IO reform, e.g. by voicing dissatisfaction with IO policies or politics, such demands are likely to have both a domestic and an international audience. Moreover, the book documents that in about one-third of all cases, states make no demands of an IO when discussing potential IO withdrawal. The book does explore the domestic politics side of withdrawal politics to some extent but does not investigate these issues in depth. For example, it does not engage with Seung-Whan Choi's analysis that shows that nationalist leaders are more likely to push for IO exit.¹ Thus the book's argument on the effect of leader/government nationalism on IO withdrawal might be sensitive to whether nationalism is operationalized on the leader or party level. More importantly, it suggests that domestic politics shapes IO-related behavior of national governments in addition to international concerns.

Particularly, the Brexit case study would have been an empirical opportunity to explore such interactions between domestic and international politics in more depth. In this case, domestic issues related to party competition, the agenda-setting power of populist right parties, and internal party politics shaped the international-level negotiations with the EU.² The book documents the UK's long history of unease with the EU and the decade-long negotiations between the UK and the EU in detail, but the analysis of the actual Brexit negotiations is quite short and could have engaged with the large existing literature on the

¹ Seung-Whan Choi, "Nationalism and Withdrawals from Intergovernmental Organizations: Connecting Theory and Data," *The Review of International Organizations* 17:1 (2022): 205-215, <https://doi.org/10/gt7rxx>.

² See e.g., Frank Schimmelfennig, "Brexit: Differentiated Disintegration in the European Union," *Journal of European Public Policy* 25:8 (2018): 1154-1173.

Brexit negotiations and the role that domestic politics played in this process in more depth.³ For example, from a bargaining perspective, it is hard to explain why the British government triggered Article 50 early on in the withdrawal negotiations, even though this put it into a significantly worse bargaining position. That said, the two-level dynamics between domestic politics and international-level bargaining in exit negotiations is a promising agenda for future research on IO exit.

Second, the book makes a strong argument that exits from IOs are best understood as a costly strategy to negotiate change in a negotiation process between the exiting state and the IO. While this conceptualization of exit as a bargaining tool is a compelling argument for exit threats, it is less convincing for exit itself, which appears to be more of a bargaining failure. For exit itself to be a bargaining tool, along the lines of a costly signal,⁴ it should increase the chances of IO reform in line with the exiting state's demands. Yet, the book argues and convincingly shows that the consequences of IO exit tend to be negative on average. In addition, exit usually does not achieve institutional change and states often return to IOs, even if their demands have not been met. In the case study of the US withdrawal from the ILO, for example, the book documents a growing divergence of US preferences from the other ILO member states in the years leading up to the withdrawal decision. However, the US then re-entered the ILO even though this divergence had increased further in the meantime and remained higher post-return than at any time prior to the withdrawal.

All these findings raise the question of why, given that such exits tend to have negative consequences for the exiting state and little chance of bargaining success, states pursue such a risky strategy in the first place. The authors recognize this tension but argue that the fact that "efforts to negotiate are not always successful [...]" does not undermine the argument that exit politics largely represent states' efforts to negotiate" (62). But an explanation of why and how these different expectations can be reconciled is largely missing. This suggests a couple of promising areas for future research. First, future studies should explore this puzzle in more depth, possibly drawing on research about bargaining failures in international relations⁵ and research about the termination of international treaties, which, while distinct from IO exit, is a closely related phenomenon.⁶

³ See e.g., Brigid Laffan and Stefan Telle, *The EU's Response to Brexit: United and Effective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Filipa Figueira and Benjamin Martill, "Bounded Rationality and the Brexit Negotiations: Why Britain Failed to Understand the EU," *Journal of European Public Policy* 28:12 (2021): 1871-1889; Stefanie Walter, "Brexit Domino? The Political Contagion Effects of Voter-Endorsed Withdrawals from International Institutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 54:13 (2021): 2382-2415.

⁴ James D Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41:1 (1997): 68-90.

⁵ E.g., James D Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations of War," *International Organization* 49:3 (1995): 379-414.

⁶ E.g., Brett Ashley Leeds and Burcu Savun, "Terminating Alliances: Why Do States Abrogate Agreements?," *Journal of Politics* 69:4 (2007): 1118-1132; Clint Peinhardt and Rachel L Wellhausen, "Withdrawing from Investment Treaties but Protecting Investment," *Global Policy* 7:4 (2016): 571-576; Charlotte De Bruyne et al., "Design and Change in

Another promising avenue is to study how exit, with its uncertain probability of success, compares to other IO negotiation strategies. Why and when are exit threats a more attractive and powerful negotiation tool than, for example, threatening to veto joint decisions/IO functions in order to extract concessions from the IO? Finally, it seems worthwhile to employ the book's theoretical framework to explore not just the commonalities, but also the differences in the negotiations during withdrawals and suspensions. For example, the logic of the argument seems to imply that the negative consequences of suspensions should be larger than those of withdrawals, especially in terms of reputational consequences. The data collected for this book also seems an excellent data resource to explore such differential patterns.

Third, the book pays a lot of attention to the motivations and bargaining strategies of the exiting states but assumes a surprising degree of passivity on part of the IOs and their other member states, especially with respect to IO withdrawals. However, these actors not only have considerable agency in how they shape the negotiation process, the outcomes of the process, and the utility of exit for the withdrawing state, but also can choose from a much broader set of responses than the dichotomous choice between institutional change and exit suggested in the book.⁷ IO exit and reform is also not always unambiguously negative for the IO and its other member states. For example, the exit of a member state can be better for an IO than having a dissatisfied member state constantly block IO decisions. Sometimes other member states also share the dissatisfied state's grievances and this facilitates reform. For instance, the book argues that the withdrawal of the US threat from the Universal Postal Union helped negotiate change, but reform was probably facilitated by the fact that several other IO member states, including Germany, Japan, and the UK, shared the grievances of the United States.

Given the importance of reputation in the theoretical argument, it is perhaps most surprising that the book pays little attention to the reputational concerns on part of the IO and its member state. Reputational issues emerge not just for the exiting state, but also for the IO and the remaining member states, as accommodating the demands of the exiting state can create considerable contagion risks and encourage other member states to pursue similar strategies.⁸ When these risks are high, the IO has incentives not to

Transboundary Freshwater Agreements," *Climatic Change* 162:2 (2020): 321-341; Tuuli-Anna Huikuri, "Constraints and Incentives in the Investment Regime: How Bargaining Power Shapes BIT Reform," *The Review of International Organizations* 18:2 (2023): 361-391, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-022-09473-1>; Averell Schmidt, "Damaged Relations: How Treaty Withdrawal Impacts International Cooperation," *American Journal of Political Science* 69:1 (2023): 223-239, <https://doi.org/10.1017/xap.2023.1>.

⁷ E.g., Stefanie Walter and Nicole Plotke-Scherly, "Responding to Unilateral Challenges to International Institutions," *International Studies Quarterly* 69:2 (2025): sqaf022; Hylke Dijkstra et al., *The Survival of International Organizations: Institutional Responses to Existential Challenges* (Oxford University Press, 2025).

⁸ Sara Hobolt et al., "The Brexit Deterrent? How Member State Exit Shapes Public Support for the European Union," *European Union Politics* 23:1 (2022): 100-119; Marco Martini and Stefanie Walter, "Learning from Precedent: How the British Brexit Experience Shapes Nationalist Rhetoric Outside the UK," *Journal of European Public Policy* 31:5 (2024), 1231-1258; <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2176530>.

compromise and to take a non-accommodating stance towards the exiting state.⁹ The book offers a great opportunity for future research to explore these issues across a large number of IO exit (threats).

Overall, *Exit from International Organizations* makes great strides in broadening our understanding about the causes and consequences of IO exit. It proposes a broad theoretical framework and introduces a treasure trove of data to explore this phenomenon further. As my discussion has shown, it also raises a number of questions that are likely to inspire important research going forward. As such, it marks an important step in improving our understanding of the contestation of global governance.

⁹ Walter and Plotke-Scherly, “Responding to Unilateral Challenges to International Institutions”; Ignacio Jurado et al., “Brexit Dilemmas: Shaping Postwithdrawal Relations with a Leaving State,” *International Organization* 76:2 (2022): 273-304; Stefanie Walter et al., “Noncooperation by Popular Vote: Expectations, Foreign Intervention, and the Vote in the 2015 Greek Bailout Referendum,” *International Organization* 72:4 (2018): 969-994, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000255>.

Response by Inken von Borzyskowski, University of Oxford, and Felicity Vabulas, Pepperdine University

We are grateful to our three expert reviewers for their detailed reading of, careful engagement with, and constructive reflections on our book, *Exit from International Organizations: Costly Negotiation for Institutional Change*. It is exciting to see esteemed colleagues from international politics, economics, and law pull our research in several productive directions that align with the future research agenda we have outlined in the book.

Overall, we are sympathetic to many, if not most, of the ideas raised by the reviewers and hope that other scholars will expand on our theory, leverage the International Organization (IO) Exit dataset for their own projects, and examine some of the many promising avenues noted by our reviewers and the book. Here we address two joint themes among reviews, the main questions raised by individual reviewers, and a couple of misunderstandings where perhaps we could have been more explicit, and which this allows us an opportunity to clarify. We close with a brief reflection on how the historical patterns documented in our book might differ from contemporary IO exits, which reviewers raise as an open question.

Recurring themes: The Menu for Dissatisfied States and Domestic-International Interactions

Two themes are raised in all three reviews: the menu of actions for dissatisfied states and domestic-international interactions. We do discuss these two themes throughout the book, in the theory chapter, in the case studies, and the conclusion. Nonetheless, no book can tackle everything, so the reviewers are right to point out that each theme could be developed with greater detail (and in fact could deserve their own books).

First, all three reviewers mention that dissatisfied states have an array of actions that they can employ to push for change within IOs, short of exiting. For example, states can vote against policies, choose not to comply, or otherwise voice their disagreement. The reviewers ask: how do these actions fit with IO exit? Building on Hirschman's seminal work (1970), we argue in the book that states usually engage in strategies of "voice" before turning to exit (39-40). In the theory chapter, we present these voice options in a somewhat productive manner, including grouping these mechanisms with flexibility provisions and diplomatic strategies of negotiation. This may make strategies of "voice" sound more sanguine than they always are. In the concluding chapter, however, we are quite clear that as multilateralism is under siege, scholars need to pay more attention to dissatisfied states' strategies of obstructionism within IOs (317), i.e. intentional attempts to undermine established IO processes, decisions, outcomes, or purposes. State contestation of IOs that falls short of exit or states that engage in competitive de-legitimation of IOs might be even more prolific and consequential in the global governance landscape.

Interesting conceptual questions arise in terms of where legitimate voice ends and obstructionism begins. For example, Hungary's blocking of aid to Ukraine (December 2022 - April 2026) leveraged institutional

voting rules in the European Union and was thus legally part of compliance with rules inside the institution. Yet some people would characterize this as the political action of a preference outlier to subvert IO actions. We agree that examining obstructionist actions *and* IO exits paint a more comprehensive picture of negotiating institutional change than examining only one in isolation. The IO Exit dataset enables this future research. Conceptually and empirically, mapping the various forms of internal obstructionism would provide a better understanding of the breadth of state strategies in IOs and is over-due in the field. Scholars will also be able to better understand alternative paths that states pursue *after* they exit, when they might embrace a unilateral approach to interstate relations or instead shift cooperation to another institution with different substantive or membership rules. As one step in that future direction, our new research project examines strategies of disruption within IOs. Specifically, we have started examining one aspect of obstructionism: how and when states slash their funding of IOs across issue areas.¹ We are thus delighted the book inspired a vivid discussion of IO contestation and hope others will join us in this broader effort to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the full menu of dissatisfied state actions.

The second recurring theme among reviews is the desire for more extensive engagement with domestic causes of exit (and their interactions with international politics). Here, too, we agree that domestic politics cannot be ignored. We set an explicit and deliberate scope condition for the book to focus on international factors because we felt that they had been ignored. As we write, “this book centers its argument on interstate relationships in the bargaining process. Of course, domestic politics also matters... However, our main interest is theorizing and documenting IO exit as an international negotiation for change” (7). Even with this scope condition, the domestic drivers of suspension are core to our theory and empirics (as states’ rule or norm violations can trigger IO debates on potential exclusion). On the withdrawal side, we note the importance of state power (change) and test the potential relevance of government ideology (nationalism, populism) and found no support. In addition, we examined other domestic drivers in our prior work, including regime type (level of democracy) and government orientation (left, right, center).² The book also recognizes that “in separate work, we have examined the domestic politics around withdrawal in the US; we find that US public opinion on withdrawal from IOs falls along partisan lines, and that politicians can gain policy approval and electoral support by framing withdrawal around US national interests” (108).³

¹ While some studies exist on IO funding, many are limited to individual IOs, subsets of IOs (e.g. development organizations) or subsets of funding lines (earmarking). Inken von Borzyskowski, and Felicity Vabulas, “Domestic Politics and Participation in International Organizations: How US Legislators Affect IO Funding,” working paper, *The Political Economy of International Organization Annual Meeting*, 29-31 January (2026), https://www.peio.me/wp-content/uploads/PEIO18/submission_190.pdf.

² Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “Hello, Goodbye: When Do States Withdraw from International Organizations?” *Review of International Organizations* 14:2 (2019): 335-366, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-019-09352-2>.

³ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “Public Support for Withdrawal from International Organizations: Experimental Evidence from the US,” *Review of International Organizations* 19:4 (2024): 809-845, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-024-09539-2>.

That said, the reviewers are entirely correct that more can be done to examine additional domestic drivers of IO exit. We particularly favor a few ideas raised by them. For example, while the book focuses on why states withdraw (dissatisfaction, declining power), Stefanie Walter and Larry Helfer note that more attention should be paid to how states leave: both how national legislatures and courts may constrain (or facilitate) the withdrawal announcement, and how domestic-international interactions shape the details of the divorce that follows. As Walter points out, in Brexit, the exact terms of withdrawal were not pre-specified and needed to be negotiated, and the British government perhaps pursued several sub-optimal tactics in this process. We agree that detailing the process of separation (that follows the withdrawal announcement or even precludes it from happening in the first place) could be fascinating.

As we note in the book, how states withdraw differs greatly across states, IOs, and over time. For example, we explain that in the case of the US and the World Trade Organization (WTO), any member of Congress can express their dissatisfaction with an IO by introducing a resolution proposing to withdraw. Among other examples, we discuss potential withdrawal from NATO (48), a case raised by both Walter and Helfer. This shows that the US president could have theoretically made the withdrawal decision unilaterally, but following President Donald Trump's 2019 threat to withdraw from NATO, the US Congress added a provision that US withdrawal would require a two-thirds vote in the Senate or separate act of Congress. Examining the varied nuances of how states leave IOs falls outside the scope of our already 400-page book, but the details matter. There is much to explore on this frontier.

As a side note on another comment related to domestic politics around nationalism, we have previously addressed the importance of exogenous measurement for causal inference and thus only note it briefly in the book (100).⁴ It may be worth repeating here. Since our book assesses the causes of withdrawal, we chose measures of these causes before withdrawal happens; temporal priority is one of the necessary elements for establishing causality. We thus employ exogenous measurements of nationalism, which are assessed based on the documents that were published ahead of potential withdrawals. Specifically, we leverage nationalism data from the Database of Political Institutions (DPI), which is based on party platforms. This stands in contrast to datasets which deliberately employ post-hoc coding, e.g. asking coders in year $t+n$ to look back at state foreign policy that happened in year t to code nationalism in year t (e.g. VDem data). Coding nationalism after IO withdrawals means that the coder risks, and often does, including withdrawal events in coding a government's degree of nationalism. This makes the VDem nationalism measure endogenous to withdrawal because withdrawal shows up on both sides of the equation. We are grateful to have an opportunity to emphasize this issue again and hope future work will employ exogenous measures to allow for inference.

A last point in the theme of domestic-international interaction is a desire for more attention to differences among IOs. While our book aims at a universal theory of exit in order to understand the commonalities of

⁴ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, "On IGO Withdrawal by States vs Leaders, and Exogenous Measures for Inference," *Review of International Organizations* 17:1 (2022): 217-222, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-021-09419-z>.

withdrawals/suspensions, reviewers encourage future studies to better understand the institutional nuances that might create differences. We took heterogeneity seriously throughout the book (e.g. accounting for variation in IOs with democracy clauses, IO size/age, IO performance, global versus regional coverage etc.), but we fully agree that harder to measure differences, like the IO's importance in the eyes of the international community or its political consequences, might also play a role in the dynamics of exit.

Other Aspects: Bargaining Failure, Agency, Legal Ambiguities, and Testing

We now turn to a few questions that individual reviewers raise, including bargaining failure, agency, legal ambiguities, and testing.

Stefanie Walter raises two interesting theoretical questions about bargaining strategy vs. failure, and about the agency of IOs/remaining member states. On the first, Walter asks whether IO exit is a bargaining strategy or a bargaining failure. We see little tension here but take this opportunity to perhaps explain better. To us, exit is often a bargaining process: threatening, announcing, actually leaving and potentially returning, while pushing for change. Bargaining failure (exiting terminally) is one potential outcome of that process. Bargaining efforts are not always successful. Individual states do not always get what they want because bargaining happens under institutional constraints and with states' different political preferences. So, some exits may be a sign of bargaining failure if no bargain is struck in the demanded timeline. But sometimes negotiation continues after exit; in half of exit cases, the state returns to the IO. When thought of this way, exit is usually not a finite end-point but instead is a longer strategy to negotiate institutional change.

Walter also asks about bargaining success, correctly noting that exit “should increase the chances of IO reform in line with the exiting state's demands. Yet, the book argues and convincingly shows that the consequences of IO exit tend to be negative on average.” Both are correct: we distinguish effects on the leaving state versus effects on the IO. We demonstrate that exit effects are usually negative for the exiting state in terms of its reputation and future cooperation from other members of the IO. We also show in our case studies that withdrawal (and withdrawal threats) seem to increase the chances of IO change in some cases (US from ILO 1977–1980, UK from EU 1974–2016) but does not achieve substantial change in other cases (Japan from IWC 1982–2018). In previous work, we also show descriptively that reform demands are more likely to succeed when they (1) come from powerful states and (2) are more limited in scope (that is, tackling more technocratic features versus mission/mandate).⁵ Documenting the effects on IOs in a more systematic quantitative manner (both in measured outcomes, and across IOs and time) is another great avenue for future work.

⁵ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “When do Withdrawal Threats Achieve Reform in International Organizations?” *Global Perspectives* 4:1 (2023): 67826, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2023.67826> [1, 2]

Walter also notes that we seem to assume a lack of agency on the side of the IO and remaining member states. This is important to clarify. We did not assume this, but we understand how our study of the effects mainly for leaving states can lead to that impression and critique. That said, most of our important explanatory concepts are relational rather than monadic: they explicitly take into account how the exiting state interacts with the IO and remaining member states. For example, in the case of withdrawals, preference divergence captures how a state's preferences relate to other member states. Declining power takes into account the relative change in power of the exiting state as compared to other states. In the case of suspension, IO agency is even more pronounced as it is precisely the IO's remaining member states who decide on suspension. We capture this empirically by including factors like the IO's voting rules, IO size, and its average democracy score. And our measures that capture the exiting state's alliance relationships cannot be unilateral by definition. We also take IO bureaucrats and remaining states seriously in the case study chapters that track how these actors engage in the bargaining process. For example, our fieldwork at the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) and the African Union in Addis Ababa allowed us to interview IO staff to better understand how they push and pull back on exit decisions (45-46, 189, 195, 197, 205). In other work, we have explored whether remaining states accede to IO reform requests⁶ and how remaining member states' reaction to a withdrawal may be critical for IO vitality and survival.⁷ We would also like to highlight complementary work by our colleagues who put IO bureaucrats at the heart of the bargaining process when dissatisfaction arises.⁸

Larry Helfer contributes valuable insights from a legal perspective and points to an ambiguity, a potential error, and an omission. He highlights an ambiguity on page 53, where we might conflate lawfully quitting an IO (withdrawal) with flouting the legal obligations of membership (non-compliance).⁹ While we fully agree that withdrawal and non-compliance are different events, we draw a parallel because observers may assess these actions similarly when they consider states' reputations.¹⁰ Even if "withdrawing from a treaty does not inherently violate *pacta sunt servanda* (agreements must be kept) if done in accordance with the treaty's terms or international law,"¹¹ observers rarely expect that states will exit. When states are members of an IO, the norm is that membership does not have a pre-defined endpoint. Backing out of an IO, even if

⁶ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, "When Do Withdrawal Threats Achieve Reform in International Organizations?", 1, 2.

⁷ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, "When Do Member State Withdrawals Lead to the Death of International Organizations?" *European Journal of International Relations* 30:3 (2024): 756-786, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661241256951>.

⁸ Hylke Dijkstra, Laura von Allwörden, Leonard Schütte, and Giuseppe Zaccaria, *The Survival of International Organizations: Institutional Responses to Existential Challenges* (Oxford University Press, 2025).

⁹ Helfer only refers to withdrawals here (because suspension is a reaction to underlying non-compliance).

¹⁰ Averell Schmidt, "Damaged Relations: How Treaty Withdrawal Impacts International Cooperation," *American Journal of Political Science* 69:1 (2025): 223-239, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12826>.

¹¹ Dieter Fleck, "State Responsibility Consequences of Termination of or Withdrawal from Non-Proliferation Treaties," in Daniel Joyner and Marco Roscini, eds., *Non-Proliferation Law as a Special Regime. A Contribution to Fragmentation Theory in International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2012): 250-269.

done legally, may be startling and diverge from the expectations of states continuing their membership (i.e. keeping the agreement). Like marriage, signing on the IO dotted line is rarely conditioned with an expected endpoint; even if divorce is legal, it may therefore lead to reputational or cooperative consequences. We therefore use the analogy between withdrawal and non-compliance when referring to how states' expectations about following through diverge in practice, and the consequences this might have for exiting states.

It is also worth remembering a key argument in our book: IO exit is a *political act*, not just a question of legality. Its political ambitions include being a strategy for states to gain some institutional benefit rather than operating as a singular act of terminally quitting. Seen this way, withdrawal may be regarded as a state trying to broker better terms or carve out changes in the institution, and *not* as an act of keeping the agreement. Rather, using withdrawal to negotiate institutional change is about altering the agreement. Despite our different viewpoint on this, we fully support and reiterate Helfer's suggestion that future studies should try to compare and contrast the reputational/cooperative damage of withdrawal versus non-compliance. How similar are these costs (and when do they differ)? Indeed, the book has already done this sort of comparison in the case of suspension where we find that state noncompliance alone (e.g., political backsliding in violation of an IO treaty) does not generate strong reputational damage but instead, getting suspended for that non-compliance (i.e., IO exit) does (248-250). Future research should grapple with how to draw parallels in the case of withdrawal, and how to model non-compliance that potentially precedes these types of exits across IOs and time.

Second, and related, Helfer notes our "erroneous" understanding that withdrawal is legal under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT) even when withdrawal clauses are not included in IO charters. Helfer makes a strong argument that the VCLT creates limits on the legality of withdrawals by pointing to Article 56.¹² But other legal scholars disagree, based on ambiguity in the VCLT and/or non-objection by other member states.¹³ Some detail how this issue was debated at the International Law Commission and the Vienna Conference itself, resulting in a treaty compromise between legal camps that is confusing and ambiguous.¹⁴ Thus, one camp notes a presumption or broad right to leave, and points to articles 54, 62, 65. Article 62 notes that a member state can withdraw due to a "fundamental change in circumstances" that

¹² Laurence Helfer and Basak Çalı, "Rethinking Human Rights Treaty Withdrawals: A Process-Based Approach," *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 26:1 (2025): 40-71, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/melbjl/jlae002>. Helfer and Çalı also make a normative argument that remaining member states should require withdrawing states to justify their exits and be scrutinized so that they follow the strictest treaty interpretation.

¹³ Kelvin Widdows, "The Unilateral Denunciation of Treaties Containing No Denunciation Clause," *British Yearbook of International Law* 53:1 (1982): 83-114. Konstantinos Magliveras, *Exclusion from Participation in International Organisations: The Law and Practice behind Member States' Expulsion and Suspension of Membership* (Kluwer Law International, 1999, 144).

¹⁴ Kelvin Widdows, "The Unilateral Denunciation of Treaties Containing No Denunciation Clause," *British Yearbook of International Law* 53:1 (1982): 83-114.

“constituted an essential basis of the consent of the parties to be bound by the treaty.”¹⁵ Further, Article 54 states that “The termination of a treaty or the withdrawal of a party may take place: (a) in conformity with the provisions of the treaty; or (b) at any time by consent of all the parties after consultation with the other contracting States.”¹⁶ Further, a member state can withdraw due to a “fundamental change in circumstances” that “constituted an essential basis of the consent of the parties to be bound by the treaty” (Article 62).¹⁷ This provision about the “consent of all parties” is where the *practice* of withdrawal is important. We are not aware of cases (at least to date) where IOs (remaining member states or staff) have *not* consented to a withdrawal, even when withdrawal provisions are not mentioned in the treaty. Our point is not, however, to wrestle with an international law scholar here; this seems to be a matter of debate among legal scholars, and we are political scientists analyzing withdrawal from a political lens. What is ultimately important to us is that the empirical record, whereby several withdrawals have occurred from IOs without withdrawal clauses, suggests that states find permissive conditions for exiting IOs.

That said, we are sympathetic to the claim that withdrawals can be complicated in their proceedings (as our book shows, for example, in the case of Brexit). Helfer is right also to point out that the US may face legal challenges from its January 2026 withdrawal from the WHO because it has outstanding dues. Our conversations with IO diplomats, however, suggest that this is a nuanced process: paying financial arrears is sometimes only enforced at the point of re-entry, and even then, subject to negotiation on the amount and timeline, practically subsiding as an issue. Still, this contemporary case is rare historically. In earlier times, examples suggest that states made good on arrears at exit. When the United Kingdom withdrew from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1985, citing mismanagement and ideological bias, its leaders ensured their financial obligations were settled. They re-joined in 1997. Similar to the UK, when the US withdrew from UNESCO in 1984, citing its poor management and anti-Western bias, the US paid its outstanding dues. It re-joined in 2003. Even following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation officially assumed the international obligations and debts of the former Soviet Union, including dues owed to various specialized UN agencies from which the USSR had disengaged, including the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Third, Helfer points out that while we examine the *presence* of withdrawal clauses, further analyses of their detailed content would be beneficial. We agree that this is a promising avenue for inter-disciplinary work; given President Trump’s slew of recent withdrawal announcements, states and organizations may be paying more attention to these details going forward. That said, Helfer’s examples of the importance of withdrawal

¹⁵ “Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties,” *United Nations*, 23 May 1969, 21; https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/L_L_1969.pdf.

¹⁶ “Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties,” *United Nations*, 23 May 1969, 19; https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/L_L_1969.pdf.

¹⁸ Lloyd Gruber, *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

waiting periods only serve to underscore our argument: that waiting periods are key in the negotiation process of exit.

Last, we appreciate Helfer's deep expertise on treaties, of which formal IOs are a subset. Some of the examples in Helfer's review (e.g., the Energy Charter Treaty) are not IOs. We think this matters. While there may be parallels between treaty exit and IO exit, we think there are also important differences relating to the cost of exit and the stakeholders involved: withdrawing from an IO can also mean a reduction in staff, funding for a secretariat, and cuts in programming, which shapes the process and politics in ways that are different than when IO bureaucrats are not involved. We therefore take Helfer's points as motivating future research to examine what pieces of the argument travel beyond IOs to treaties generally.

Finally, Julia Gray raises questions about testing in terms of precision, falsification, observability, and scope. She also makes important points about the fragility of IO bargains. In terms of precision, Gray rightly notes that we do not specify the exact threshold at which preference divergence will be sufficient to determine withdrawal. Instead, we hypothesize probabilistic relationships: that an increase in preference divergence makes withdrawal more likely. This strikes us as common in political science; few theories make point predictions about precise thresholds when there is a continuum. Further, specifying exact thresholds may be challenging given that states likely have different reservation points which may depend, among other things, on the state's power,¹⁸ level of international integration, its own experience with leaving and seeing others leave the same IO¹⁹ as well as the particular IO in question and what its replacement options are.²⁰ As a result, a state's best alternative to no agreement (BATNA) will vary greatly across states, IOs, and time. That said, we applaud the ambition and will be eager consumers of a research stream along these lines. Are there tipping points that push countries over the edge? What kinds of things intersect with dissatisfaction to prompt exit?

Relatedly and in terms of falsification, Gray notes that not specifying exact thresholds would make the argument more challenging to falsify. We understand this risk and agree it is a valid criticism for qualitative case narratives. We think (hope?) that we alleviated this concern by using a mixed method approach including statistical techniques that allow us to falsify hypotheses and test for significant associations in the hypothesized direction. We also test for several alternative explanations, many for which we do not find statistical support.

¹⁸ Lloyd Gruber, *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Stefanie Walter, "Brexit Domino? The Political Contagion Effects of Voter-endorsed Withdrawals from International Institutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 54:13 (2021): 2382-2415, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997169>.

²⁰ Yoram Haftel and Tobias Lenz, "Measuring Institutional overlap in Global Governance," *Review of International Organizations* 17:2 (2022): 323-347, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-021-09415-3>; Phillip Lipsky, *Renegotiating the World Order: Institutional Change in International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Third, on the observability of exits vs exit threats. We agree that data on exit threats is imperfect and thus discuss the data shortcomings (15, 80-81), encouraging future work on this issue. If anything, our conservative measurement strategy would under-count withdrawal threats, meaning that the portion of implemented exits is even lower than what we found (10 percent). This underscores many of our key findings: that exits should not only be evaluated at the stand-alone point of departure but instead should be evaluated in terms of the entire process, including the lead-up and aftermath. We are confident, though, that we have captured actual exits well. That is because we were skeptical of exclusively relying on news sources, given known biases and under-reporting problems.²¹ We thus did not purely rely on news sources but also IO websites, archival work, interviews with IO staff, and secondary sources (including case studies and other literature). Of course, no dataset is perfect, and a few cases may still come to light, but the IO Exit dataset of almost 500 cases is comprehensive. It is also possible that some states are captured less than others (given language or importance). However, we note that several states from the Global South rank fairly high (including Indonesia, Venezuela, and Kiribati, all of which rank in the top 10) among withdrawers and represent 8 of the top 10 suspended countries (Egypt, Syria, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Afghanistan, Madagascar, and Fiji). We plan to continue updating the IO Exit dataset in the years to come to ensure the usefulness of this public good and welcome scholars to notify us of any omissions.

On scope, Gray notes that the book squarely focuses on formal intergovernmental organizations and thus leaves out many other types of institutions in international affairs. We discuss these scope limitations and boundary conditions throughout the book (14, 137, 317-319). We would of course be delighted with future work that builds on our findings. In the book's conclusion, we explicitly ask:

What might our book mean for this shift in the formality of international cooperation? On one hand, it is worth underscoring that this shift to informal venues is happening while member states are not systematically exiting formal IOs ...on the other hand, exit may not have the same implications for informal agreements. And that might be one reason that states choose to use them (more) in the first place... Relatedly, the changing nature of global governance has introduced an increasing number of international institutions, creating a world of contested multilateralism... this makes it difficult for countries to completely depart from a regime (cooperation in an issue area). (318)

We encourage scholars to continue analyzing the expansion of global governance institutions not just by looking at membership but also better understanding dynamics of exit.

Last, we want to underscore that we do not disagree with Gray's view of IOs being persistently imperfect. We would argue this is true of most institutions. The equilibrium that we explain at the IO's outset does not imply a euphoric time of IO perfection, but instead that the moment of IO charter signing represents a time

²¹ Von Borzyskowski and Michael Wahman, "Systematic Measurement Error in Election Violence Data: Causes and Consequences," *British Journal of Political Science* 51:1 (2021): 230-252, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000509>.

when states calculate that membership presents a favorable tradeoff. We assume that states decide to join (and remain in) IOs when the potential benefits of IO membership outweigh costs. But our point is that over time, the balance can change: states power and preferences change, other member states change, and IOs themselves evolve in the face of changing conditions. Exit (and threats) can therefore represent both efforts to improve cooperative benefits as well as frustration with the limits of multilateralism itself. As such, as Gray argues, exit threats may be a structural feature of cooperation, and what we have called a “regular part of the life cycle of IOs” in forthcoming work.²² The fact that strategies of obstructionism appear to be increasing in IOs suggests that uncertainty is indeed hard to contract away.

Where Do We Go from Here?

All three reviewers close by noting that the world is currently witnessing a dramatic shift in international relations. In 2026, after the book was published, the US administration’s antagonistic approach to multilateralism has marked a startling departure from the US’ traditional commitment to IOs. In January 2026, the US threatened to leave 66 international institutions. The reviewers thus ask how we can interpret contemporary attacks on IOs and institutions more broadly, and how they might differ from the past. While we tried to anticipate such policy decisions in the book (319), we use this opportunity to briefly comment on the current landscape (i.e. summer 2026).

Our historical analysis in *Exit from International Organizations* suggests that the US may not implement all withdrawal threats and may return to some of the institutions it leaves (as it did previously), either because of a change in administration, public opinion, or the reputational and cooperative costs of leaving. We also note that only 5 of the 66 institutions in Trump’s announcement are formal intergovernmental organizations akin to those studied in our book (most are funds and programs), and 2 are not institutions that the US can leave because it is not actually a member.²³ Combined with different waiting periods, this means that even if all 5 IO withdrawals are ultimately implemented, the historical average of 3-4 withdrawals per year may not change by a large factor in the next couple of years. This certainly does not mean that the other departures are not important, but they are different, and we should compare apples to apples. Again, we echo that more work remains on other kinds of institutional exit. However, even if only a few formal IOs are affected by Trump’s recent announcement, our previous work suggests potential consequences for these organizations: US departure from IOs could endanger IO vitality and performance

²² Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “Member State Exit in the Life Cycle of IOs,” in Julia Gray, ed., *The Lifecycle of International Cooperation* (University of Michigan Press, 2026): forthcoming.

²³ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “Why Do Countries Walk Away from International Organizations? And What Do Current Breakups Mean for Global Politics?” *Policy Brief for the Global Governance Innovation Platform* (United Nations University, 2026), <https://unu.edu/cpr/brief/why-do-countries-walk-away-international-organizations-and-what-do-current-breakups-mean>.

through contagion risk and resource deprivation; but it may also ease cooperation among remaining state members because a preference outlier has departed.²⁴

It is also worth reflecting on whether the basic ideas that have guided IO scholarship are still valid. There are at least five ways in which we believe that the fundamental assumptions of IO cooperation are currently in jeopardy given the unprecedented shift in US politics and geopolitical alignments.

First, the US under the Trump administration is less interested in collective aims with other states. Instead, the America First mantra puts US goals before others in a zero-sum logic. Doing so hinders negotiation, burden-sharing, and the traditional give-and-take that has pervaded international cooperation. Instead, the current US strategy includes a go-it-alone mentality and veers toward ad hoc coalitions that are rooted in personal relationships.

Second, states have always guarded their sovereignty, but the willingness to relinquish some of it to achieve benefits and global governance has diminished as countries prefer to turn inward in response to global pandemics, immigration concerns, and challenges related to international trade.

Third, the US is rejecting institutional structures, both at home and abroad. Instead of valuing bureaucracies for their routinized processes, the Trump administration views institutions (and staff within them) as creating shackles that need to be shattered to regain freedom.

Fourth, the Trump administration is skeptical that neutral information is a public good, so it sees little value in collecting or sharing such information which has traditionally been a key benefit of IOs. Information is instead viewed as a transactional currency, and distribution is contingent on fluctuating political dynamics, alignments, and favors.

Last, in terms of the content of cooperation, the Trump administration has signaled a lack of leadership for (and rejection of) previously shared values like democracy, human rights, and economic liberalization. These are the bedrock values upon which many IOs have been formed since World War II. Without shared agreement, there is less need for the US to use the hand-tying device of IOs to signal commitment to these values. Of course, illiberal countries have also joined IOs in the past, but their incentives diverge from committing to the liberal international order. None of this bodes well for international cooperation (as we know it) in the short and medium term. The future of IO exits, as we say in the book, may therefore differ from that of the past.

²⁴ Von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “Hello, Goodbye;” von Borzyskowski and Vabulas, “When Do Member State Withdrawals Lead to the Death of International Organizations?”