

battlefields of 1914–1918, ordinary soldiers arguably “counted for nothing” (p. 111). The ethos of bare death persisted in how the war was fought, even as societies lavishly commemorated the fallen afterward. Similarly, Zambernardi agrees with Vennesson that “eighteenth-century limited warfare is an early case of casualty aversion” (p. 52). Because it is rarely easy to conclude if pragmatic or humanitarian considerations drive such aversion, why would contemporary casualty aversion itself indicate a completely different stage?

A deeper question concerns the roots of this cultural transformation, which, however qualified, has undeniably transpired. Zambernardi rightly points to the process of individualization, which is concomitant with the rise of bourgeois and liberal values in the West. However, is the new “Western way of war” just a ripple effect of this larger transvaluation?

If not, shifting military *necessities* might be it. Zambernardi notes, in his penultimate footnote, “One may rightly argue that casualty aversion would virtually disappear if national survival were at stake in so-called wars of necessity, where an existential threat to a society is present” (p. 166). Indeed, no Western power has faced a conventional existential threat since 1945, and the last time the US fought for its survival was during the Civil War. There was no need to throw soldiers into the meat grinder. Western armies could further afford to spare its soldiers because of weapons that allow high-impact remote warfare like never before. With sub-existential stakes, the US’s handling of the dilemma of whether and how many boots on the ground to have in Afghanistan and Iraq may not indicate a distinct approach to soldiers’ lives and deaths. Arguably, sending over 200 thousand troops, while a small number compared to the 3 million fighting the civil war, is quite a lot for a non-existential war amidst the still-unipolar moment of the 2000s.

The existential facet may point to a deeper factor: choice. Humans venerate voluntary sacrifice for the greater good. Most foot soldiers, at first, did not fit that bill. Indeed, the modern usage of “soldier” emerged to designate a paid combatant (*solidus* was a Roman coin), unlike feudal knights, who fought for their sworn oath of fealty to their (land-)lord. Conversely, soldiering was less about honor, more about getting paid, often out of acute necessity, turning combatants into expendable hirelings, indeed coins, one pays to win a war. And so, beyond temporal shifts throughout modernity, it was possibly the warrior’s presumed motivation that was paramount: those who personally had most to lose and least to gain from going to fight were most respected.

Has growing respect for soldiers cost the West the capacity to win wars? For Zambernardi, recent US wars evince this: “Western armed forces were unable to impose their will on incomparably weaker enemies” (p. 7). True, and more boots on the ground could have possibly tipped the scale, though considering US myopic strategies, I

doubt that. And here, Zambernardi’s counsel—realign war aims with the casualties you can tolerate—is germane.

However, was it respect for soldiers’ lives that forestalled victory or was it (also) the growing regard for the lives of the enemy’s population? After all, both sacrificing and sanctifying lives need not stop at the border. If fighting is constrained not just by casualty aversion but also by increasing ethical concerns about enemy civilians, then military effectiveness is not just about respect for one’s own soldiers—it is about an expanding moral horizon that limits coercion. Moral and emotional: Empathy—let alone extending it to your enemy—may temper your prowess on the battlefield. However, to abandon it entirely may leave you with nothing to return to upon your victorious way home.

Speaking of home, since Zambernardi occasionally refers to my homeland, it may merit a final note. Here is a putatively Western country that defies most recent Western war patterns. Israelis often feel under existential threat, and in the wake of October 7, Israeli leaders and the public alike hardly disputed the urgent need for a mandatory mass mobilization of troops, knowing fully well many will be killed. As for respecting humans, dead or alive, soldiers or civilians, whether Israeli or Palestinian, both Hamas and the Israeli government seem to share scarce care for such obstacles, on their hubristic path to “total victory.” Zambernardi’s work provides a compelling framework for engaging such dilemmas, even as Israel’s case suggests that context, not just culture, matters.

Informal Governance in World Politics. Edited by Kenneth W. Abbott and Thomas J. Biersteker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. 319p.
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— Ian Madison , Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
ian.Madison@lstm.ac.uk

Guy Maddin’s film “Rumours” (2024) depicts a pillar of global governance taken to an absurd, apocalyptic extreme. G7 leaders meet at a forest retreat in Germany to produce a “draft provisional statement” regarding an unspecified crisis. Fuelled by wine and personal squabbles, the result—an anodyne non-statement, the making of which they all clearly relish—contrasts sharply with a much more proximate issue: they have been abandoned by their handlers and are now being stalked by mummified Iron Age zombies. Things only get odder from there. The point? A thinly veiled allegory for climate change, “Rumours” articulates a widespread perception: our leaders, and their institutions of global governance, are incapable of confronting contemporary crises. They fiddle as the world burns.

The authors of *Informal Governance in World Politics* seek to correct this perception, to a degree. They see the G7 as part of a hitherto neglected phenomenon in global

governance: the growing tendency of states to rely on informal cooperation at the expense of formal alternatives. Since the 1980s there has been a dramatic growth of what the authors identify as informal intergovernmental organizations (IIGOs) and transnational public-private governance initiatives (or TGIs). Both have outpaced the older, better known (and more widely studied) formal intergovernmental organizations such as the UN, WTO, and IMF. What are these informal modes of governance, why are they expanding, and what is their impact? This volume tackles these questions. In the process, it makes a compelling contribution to an expanding field of research.

First, the “what.” Any consensus on what “informality” means and how we know it when we see it remains elusive. Definition by negation is common. Informal blurs into “non-formal”, lumping together “missing”, “invisible”, “private”, and “irregular” across a range of social, economic, and political domains. Previous work on informal international institutions—a relative newcomer to “informality studies”—helps the authors sidestep the challenge by identifying factors specific to their field, such as the absence of treaties or secretariats highlighted by Charles Roger (*The Origins of Informality*, 2020). But the emphasis remains negative. Informal governance is whatever is not “enshrined in formally constituted organizations or their constitutions” (p. 5). Equating “informal” with “unwritten” still casts a wide net, so the authors narrow their scope to informal arrangements that include a state as at least one participant. The G7—a club of rich states lacking both treaty and secretariat—thus counts as an IIGO, while the Kimberley Process, which includes private business and NGOs alongside states, counts as a TGI. The exclusion of purely non-state configurations is reasonable, if somewhat ironic, given the associations of informality with working around, beneath, or beyond the state altogether.

Where can we find informality? A central contribution of the volume is a descriptive typology that helpfully identifies three options: the informality of institutions like the G7; informal norms and practices that occur *within* existing institutions, such as the “knowledge guardians” that help NATO learn from its mistakes; and the informal networks and communities that operate *around* institutions. This tripartite division structures the book, albeit unequally. Five chapters are devoted to examining the informality of institutions. Not all of this is a contemporary phenomenon, as Koremenos and Carlson’s chapter on secret agreements between 19th Century monarchs makes clear. But most take the recent proliferation of IIGOs and TGIs as their starting point. The section on informality *within* institutions has only two chapters. Informality *around* institutions is limited to Biersteker’s analysis of the loose networks of expertise that incubated the UN Office of the Ombudsperson.

The typology is clearly useful, even if, following Douglass North (*Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic*

Performance, 1990), more could be done to distinguish the informal rules of the governance “game” from its organizational “players.” The chapter by Michaelowa et al., for example, takes on the issue closest to that haunting our G7 leaders in the film: international cooperation on climate policy. That there are more “players” is evident. Initiatives like The Major Economies Forum, the Clean Energy Ministerial, the Group on Earth Observations, and the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum, not to mention the “G-groups”, all exemplify the growing informality of institutions clustered around the global climate regime. However, this informal proliferation has neither altered nor influenced—let alone challenged—the formal bedrock of the UNFCCC. To adopt Gretchen Helmke and Stephen Levitsky’s well-known typology, they are “complementary” institutions, rather than “competing” or “substitutive” (“Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda.” *Perspectives on Politics* 2(04): 725). More optimistic is their assessment of informality *within* the UNFCCC’s “rules” of the game—its negotiation processes. Here we encounter corridors, hotel bars, side events, and conference venues, loosely interpreted procedural rules, and the power of seating plans as lubricants of diplomacy. Still, the efficacy of these practices largely depends on the skill of the individual COP Presidents using them.

Herein lies a valuable contribution. A powerful, if implicit theme running through the volume is that informality is *strategic*. This endows the concept with more affirmative content. States *choose* informality, whether for reasons of flexibility, agility, and confidentiality, or to exercise power beyond the constraints of formal procedure. States use informality to guard their sovereignty and avoid the principal-agent problems associated with formal organizational bodies. Developing states use IIGOs to coordinate politically behind closed doors, away from domestic scrutiny; developed states prefer TGIs, throwing open the doors to a range of non-state actors less from a normative commitment to transparency than to share out the risks of failure. Absolute monarchs use secretive “gentlemen’s agreements” as a way of supporting their respective regimes. American administrations use informal influence over the World Bank to achieve foreign policy goals—but only when an oppositional congress means that doing so bilaterally would pose unacceptable domestic costs. Much of this has to do with what Viola’s chapter calls “negative liberty benefits”—that is, the avoidance of costs and obstacles associated with formality. But she also illustrates the “positive liberty benefits” of strategic informality. Particularly among developing states, informality builds capacity, and it builds coalitions.

The book thus offers a glimmer of hope about the dynamics and prospects of international cooperation. It is notable that three of the four leaders portrayed on the book’s cover—Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz, and Joe Biden—are, or were, representatives of what Gary Gerstle (*The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order*, 2022)

identifies as a fading political order, one built on a liberal consensus and centered on the industrialized West. As Kahler's chapter outlines, the pessimistic alternative may come to entail a retreat from globalization and international cooperation. The farcical politics of "Rumours" might come to be seen as quaint in hindsight; a feeble G7 is perhaps better than nothing. But it may also usher in a more equitable multilateralism. The kinds of informal governance alternatives explored in this volume offer new possibilities for innovative, experimental, and collective approaches to unprecedented global challenges like the climate crisis. In any case, this volume does an admirable job of mapping out the nuances of informal governance and provides a strong intellectual foundation for future research in this field.

Fueling Sovereignty: Colonial Oil and the Creation of Unlikely States. By Naosuke Mukoyama, Cambridge: Cambridge

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— Hussam Hussein , University of Oxford
hh.hussam.hussein@gmail.com

Naosuke Mukoyama's *Fueling Sovereignty: Colonial Oil and the Creation of Unlikely States* is a groundbreaking contribution to International Relations (IR), historical political economy, and postcolonial studies. The book examines how colonial oil exploitation during the 19th and 20th centuries shaped modern states in regions where statehood seemed improbable. Mukoyama argues that the extraction and management of oil resources by colonial powers influenced these regions' economic and political trajectories and created conditions for the emergence of "unlikely states"—entities that defied traditional expectations of state formation. Through historical case studies and theoretical insights, Mukoyama challenges conventional narratives of sovereignty and statehood, offering a fresh perspective on the enduring legacies of colonialism.

At its core, this book argues that colonial oil exploitation played a pivotal role in creating modern states in resource-rich but politically fragmented regions. Mukoyama contends that oil extraction by colonial powers necessitated administrative and infrastructural systems, inadvertently laying the groundwork for state formation. However, these states were "unlikely" because they lacked traditional prerequisites for statehood, such as a unified national identity or centralized authority. Instead, their creation was driven by colonial strategic interests and global oil demand.

Mukoyama introduces the concept of "separate independence" to explain how oil wealth and protectorate status enabled small colonial entities to resist mergers

and assert sovereignty despite lacking conventional state-building factors. This framework helps contextualize why certain resource-rich protectorates, such as Brunei and Qatar, secured independent statehood while others failed. Mukoyama further argues that colonial oil exploitation continues to shape these states' political and economic realities, contributing to ongoing challenges such as resource dependency, political instability, and contested sovereignty.

The book is organized into three main sections, each addressing a different dimension of the relationship between colonial oil exploitation and state formation.

The first section lays the theoretical groundwork. Drawing on IR theories, historical institutionalism, and post-colonial studies, Mukoyama argues that neither internal nor external explanations can fully make sense of what happened. He therefore covers two alternative explanations that he calls internal and external explanations, proposing a combination of the two, and in the empirical chapters, emphasizes both the agency of the local ruler and the interaction between the colonisers and the colonized. This section is particularly strong in its synthesis of diverse theoretical perspectives, making it accessible to readers from different disciplinary backgrounds.

The second section presents historical case studies illustrating the book's central argument. Mukoyama examines regions such as the Persian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and West Africa, where colonial oil exploitation played a decisive role in modern state formation. Each case study is meticulously researched, drawing on archival materials, colonial records, and secondary sources. However, while Mukoyama's case studies strongly support his argument, some—such as Bahrain—could have been more fully developed, particularly in explaining its political evolution beyond oil. A broader comparison with protectorates that failed to gain independence or deeper engagement with counterfactuals could have further strengthened his theoretical claims.

The author demonstrates how colonial powers established administrative structures to manage oil resources, which later evolved into modern state institutions. For example, he highlights how British oil companies in the Persian Gulf collaborated with local elites to create quasi-state structures that became the foundation for states like Kuwait and Qatar.

The final section explores the enduring legacies of colonial oil exploitation in the postcolonial era. Mukoyama argues that the "unlikely states" created during the colonial period continue to grapple with their origins' consequences, including resource dependency, weak institutions, and contested sovereignty. He also discusses the implications of his findings for contemporary debates about resource governance, state-building, and global inequality. This section is particularly thought-provoking, as it connects historical analysis to pressing issues in modern IR.