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Citation

Bliesemann de Guevara, B., & Warnecke, A. U. (2025). Practice approaches to knowledge and expertise in international politics. In K. Kaczmarska, X. Kurowska, & B. Poopuu (Eds.), *Knowledge and expertise in international politics* (pp. 287-296). Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oso/9780192871145.003.0020

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4291434>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

PART III

PRACTICE APPROACHES

Practice Approaches to Knowledge and Expertise in International Politics

Berit Bliesemann de Guevara and Andrea Warnecke

Practice approaches to knowledge and expertise in international politics comprise scholarly studies that see knowledge as produced by and observable in the structured and meaningful practices of human communities (or assemblages of humans and non-humans). Focusing on different *ways of knowing*, or what Berling (Chapter 21, ‘The Embedded Study of International Knowledge Practices: Towards a Methodology of Ironic Immersion’) calls the ‘little doings and sayings of international relations’, they study *how* knowledge is socially produced, reproduced, and circulated, and with what effects on power and hierarchy in the social settings of international politics. Central questions thus include: How, or through which practices, ways, and performances of knowing, does knowledge come into being? Which devices and wider material arrangements make these epistemic practices authoritative or dominant? And what does this mean politically? In short, practice approaches are indispensable to understand the power of the seemingly banal and everyday doings that (re)produce knowledge and expertise in international politics and contribute to social ordering.

This section brings together a range of approaches that can be loosely grouped under this overarching orientation. International practice theory is not a theory or paradigm in the macro-sense, but rather a collection or ‘family’ of approaches (Bourbeau 2017; Bueger and Gadinger 2015). They share a basic understanding of practice as patterned, competent, and recognizable performance that delineates an epistemic, interpretive, or otherwise defined community (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 6), and they study how this performance is situated in various historical situations, material arrangements, and institutional settings. Rather than locating knowledge in ‘mental frames’ or ‘discourse’, [p]ractice theory implies emphasizing process, developing an account of knowledge as action, appreciating the collectivity of knowledge, recognizing the materiality of practice, embracing the multiplicity of orders, and working with a performative understanding of the world’ (Bueger and Gadinger 2015, 449–450).

Fundamentally, practices are at least in part products of shared knowledge which contributes to social ordering: they build on experiential knowledge such as tacit background understanding and practical know-how of how things are done (Bueger

and Gadinger 2015, 451) and ‘implicitly make the claim that “this is how things are”’ (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 8). Practices and the tacit knowledge underpinning them only become meaningful in specific ‘social fields’ (Bourdieu), understood as ‘a set of social practices coalescing around a specific social struggle and a shared understanding of what is at stake’ (Berling, Chapter 21, ‘The Embedded Study of International Knowledge Practices: Towards a Methodology of Ironic Immersion’; cf. Leander 2008, 15–16; Markland, Chapter 55, ‘Fielding Knowledge: The Problematic Case of Human Rights Advocacy and Genocide Labelling’). Academia, for example, is a social field, in which the quest for knowledge and ‘truth’, but also for reputation and careers is at stake (Bourdieu 1990), and which sometimes competes with other fields invested in the production of expertise for access to and impact on policymaking (Marshall 2022). In a social field, shared knowledge is everywhere (Leander 2008): it underlies the particular logics or ‘rules of the game’, which shape the struggles within the field and regulate access to it; they become embodied in people’s ‘habitus’, that is, their habitual, unreflected ways of doing things; and this in turn shapes, and is shaped by, shared overarching understandings that underly structures and discourses in a field (*‘doxa’*).

Importantly, as Leander (2008) highlights, looking for ‘symbolic power/violence’ in practices helps to explain why those at a disadvantage from established practice keep contributing to its reproduction, because there is a shared understanding or background knowledge that ‘this is just how things are’: ‘power is all the more effective when it rests on understandings which appear disinterested or unrelated to hierarchy’ (Leander 2008, 13). Due to their focus on the taken-for-granted, practice approaches to international politics have tended to focus on stability and endurance in the reproduction of social orders more than on possibilities for change (but see, e.g., Berling 2015, on ‘doxic battles’). In more general terms, where practice approaches have not paid attention to the ‘symbolic power/violence’ inherent in them, they have also been criticized for a limited understanding of or sensitivity to the reproduction of power, for instance how race, gender, or class, among other systematic differences, shape who can partake in epistemic practices or their critique and how (Chessé and Sondarjee 2024).

Specific epistemic practices—that is, practices that are explicitly meant to produce, reproduce, or circulate knowledge, such as quantifying a social problem, writing analytical papers or reports about it, briefing policymakers on solutions to it, organizing training sessions on how to practically address it, etc.—are then just one form in which we encounter knowledge in political practices, but an important one. When it comes to the construction of expertise, for example, epistemic practices include fundamental practices of ‘sorting out’ the expert from the layperson, relevant from irrelevant information, authoritative from peripheral interpretation, etc. and thereby create epistemic hierarchies in the specific field at stake, be it security, environmental policy, or migration, for example (see Berling, Chapter 21, ‘The Embedded Study of International Knowledge Practices: Towards a Methodology of Ironic Immersion’). The study of practices can thus show how some knowledge is constructed and accepted as ‘exclusive expertise’ (Leander and Wæver 2018).

Due to an increase in studies interested in the practices of international politics in general since the 2010s, there is now also a wealth of studies using practice approaches to explore knowledge and expertise in international politics more specifically. Scholars have studied, for instance, the (epistemic and other) practices of diplomats (Neumann 2012; Sending et al. 2015), bureaucracies (Bakonyi 2018), and philanthropists (Littoz-Monnet and Osorio Garate 2023). Others have explored specific epistemic practices, such as the practices of seeing and writing in fact-finding missions and panels of inquiry (Andrä 2022; Chapter 25, 'Producing Knowledge to Problematize War: A Foucauldian Approach to Knowledge Practices'; Lesch 2023), the politics of forensic practices (Moon 2013; Olarte-Sierra, Chapter 26, 'Forensic Experts and Knowledge Practices in Transitional Justice Scenarios'), practices of travelling and logics of 'on-the-ground' performances and 'first-hand' experiencing (Bliesemann de Guevara 2017), and political meaning-making through creative and artistic practices such as textiling (Andrä et al. 2023), to name but a few. Not least, epistemic practices also include the very practices which academia in general, and the discipline of International Relations (IR) in particular, use in the (re)production of knowledge and which call for researchers' reflexivity (in a Bourdieusian sense), that is, an analytical focus on the researcher's own role in the production of knowledge and on the politicality (rather than assumed 'scientific neutrality') of all academic-scientific practices (Leander 2008, 23–26).

Building on the understanding that 'practices are mediated by material artefacts' (Adler and Pouliot 2011, 8), some studies put a focus on the artefacts, devices, or technical processes that, together or in assemblages with actors, bring about epistemic practices and co-produce what becomes recognized as expertise in international politics. This includes, for example, studies of the epistemic role of reports (Kosmatopoulos 2014a), numbers and methods of quantification (Bandola-Gill et al. 2022; Bandola-Gill, Chapter 18, 'Quantified Expertise: Connecting Science and Politics in Global Governance'; Bueger 2015), indicators and rankings (Cooley and Snyder 2015; Martin de Almagro 2021; Rottenburg et al. 2015), training workshops and courses (Kosmatopoulos 2014b; Martin de Almagro, Chapter 28, 'Assembling Knowledge: Pilot Projects and Massive Open Online Courses in International Policymaking'), satellite imagery (Shim 2014), witness reports (Bake and Zöhrer 2017), algorithms (Amoore and Raley 2017; Aradau and Blanke 2018; Bellanova and Monsees, Chapter 27, 'Algorithmic Knowledge and International Politics'), and visual artefacts (Andrä et al. 2020; Bleiker 2018), among others.

Yet other scholars have put their focus on how epistemic practices interact with material arrangements, sites, and institutional settings in the production and diffusion of knowledge, that is, the larger formations that connect practices, sites, and networks of knowledge production with each other nationally and internationally. For example, some studies have taken cues from the concept of techno-politics (Mitchell 2002; Winner 1980), which captures both 'the complex ways in which opposing actors ... realize political objectives by strategically employing technical artifacts' and the social orders that emerge from such expert-driven techno-political assemblages (Kosmatopoulos and Nasr, Chapter 30, 'Colonial Wars, Postcolonial Peace &

Anticolonial Solidarity: Expertise and Techno-Politics in Southwest Asia (Middle East). Hochmüller (2023), for example, studies the expertise-driven techno-politics of gang violence prevention in Guatemala. Other scholars focus on ‘knowledge frames’ and how they shape practices, e.g. regarding politics at the environment–security nexus (Moe and Müller 2024). Yet other scholars draw on the concept of ‘epistemic infrastructures’ (Knorr Cetina 2008) to capture the interplay between practices and larger formations. As Bueger (2015, 8) explains: ‘While the notion of epistemic infrastructures refers to the larger formations that connect practices and sites to each other, the notion of epistemic practices conceptualizes the practical patterns of actions that keep the structure running’. The concept of epistemic infrastructures has been put to use, for instance, to study knowledge production about modern piracy for the United Nations (UN) (Bueger 2015); to conceptualize the role of quantification with regard to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ‘across three levels: materialities (such as data and indicators), interlinkages (such as networks and communities), and paradigms (such as new ways of doing policy work)’ (Tichenor et al. 2022); and to explore the promotion of deliberative mini-publics such as citizens’ assemblies as a model for democracy (Voß et al. 2022).

This section of the present Handbook approaches the practices and wider infrastructures of knowledge production in international politics from four angles. The first three chapters invite us to think about where to find and how to study (epistemic) practices in international politics, namely through methodological innovation by and in immersive fieldwork (Berling), the tracing of pragmatic learning (Stein), and creativity in academics’ own epistemic practices (Särmä and Vuori). The next three chapters turn to the exploration of various knowledge practices in international politics, using different conceptual tools to study them. They explore practices in the ‘co-production’ of knowledge and politics in global governance, drawing on concepts from Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Littoz-Monnet); as political and historically contingent practices which co-emerge with larger epistemic political formations (here: problematizations of war), drawing on Michel Foucault’s method of genealogy (Andrä); and as specific forensic practices and innovations such as the practice of producing ‘sites of forensic interest’ in Colombia, through which forensic experts make conflict victims knowable (Olarte-Sierra). The following two chapters then centre on particular devices or technical processes of knowledge production in international politics—namely algorithms (Bellanova and Monsees) as well as pilot studies and massive open online courses (MOOCs) (Martín de Almagro)—and discuss their wider contradictions and politics. The section closes with two chapters that focus more explicitly on wider epistemic infrastructures. One studies the political instrument constituencies and translocal spaces (re)producing and promoting specific knowledge about governance itself (Voß), while the other focuses on expert-driven techno-politics and its socio-political and moral effects in the Middle East through the examples of the report, the workshop, the drone, and the solidarity movement (Kosmatopoulos and Nasr).

Overview of the chapters in this section

The section starts with three different takes on practices of producing knowledge *about* epistemic practices in international politics. In Chapter 21, 'The Embedded Study of International Knowledge Practices: Towards a Methodology of Ironic Immersion', Trine Villumsen Berling reflects on insights from her embedded field-work on knowledge practices at the NATO Defense College. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory and Richard Rorty's notion of a 'liberal ironist', the author reflects on her methodology of 'ironic immersion' as a research practice that evolved through moments of social blunder and surprise. These were inadvertently provoked by Berling as a person gendered female doing research in a male-dominated institution and as an amateur in this particular professional setting despite her academic status as a security expert. While more standard ways of engaging her colleagues in conversations about and observing knowledge practices at the College did not work, ironic immersion helped to unsettle hierarchies and thereby lay bare the tacit knowledge and logics underlying the social and epistemic practices at the College.

In Chapter 22, 'Thinking, Feeling, and Choosing: Pragmatism, Political Psychology, and the Intelligence Community', Janice Gross Stein focuses on how pragmatism—understood as a set of dispositions for making sense of the world and what works in the world—and practices produce knowledge in international politics. Using her observations of knowledge production through pragmatism within the intelligence community in the United States as an example, Stein shows how processes and practices of knowledge production are embedded in an acknowledgement of the uncertainty of the world and evolve through pragmatic action and continuous learning. Specifically, the chapter tells a story of how, over time, knowledge from economics, psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and philosophy has been adapted by political scientists and/or political practitioners to challenge prevailing constructs of reason and passion in the analysis of decision-making in international politics, thereby changing the understanding of how humans think, feel, and choose.

In Chapter 23, 'Arts-Based Methods in IR: What Knowledges Become Possible', Saara Särnä and Juha A. Vuori discuss contributions that arts-based methods and/or collaborations with artists can make to the study of international politics. They thereby challenge the propositional way of knowing that dominates the discipline and open it up to presentational, experiential, and practical ways of knowing. Focusing particularly on visual arts in IR knowledge production, the authors discuss their own research involving collage art and collaborations with visual artists to explore the various contributions the arts can make to knowledge production, dissemination, and communication of research in/on international politics.

The next three chapters in this section turn to the exploration of various different knowledge practices in international politics, using different conceptual tools to study them. In Chapter 24, 'The Co-Production of Expertise in Global Governance', Annabelle Littoz-Monnet sets out to adapt the concept of 'co-production' of knowledge and politics drawn from STS to the study of expertise in global

governance. Particularly, the chapter discusses three types of logics and conduits of co-production in global governance: ‘orchestration’ of the asymmetries and hierarchies which determine what knowledge counts; ‘ideational alignment’ which results in increasingly stable common understandings; and ‘calibration’ understood as the self-adjustment of non-conforming views to dominant expectations. Littoz-Monnet argues that the circulation of people through inter-organizational networks, the role of boundary sites, and the materialization of expertise into knowledge artefacts such as documents, models, and data all make possible, reproduce, and sediment distinct kinds of entanglements between knowledge and politics.

In Chapter 25, ‘Producing Knowledge to Problematize War: A Foucauldian Approach to Knowledge Practices’, Christine Andrä suggests an approach to the study of knowledge practices, which is based on Michel Foucault’s method of genealogy. Such an approach centres the politics and historical contingency of knowledge practices and their co-emergence with larger epistemic political formations or ‘problematizations’—such as the dominant view on what type of problem war constitutes. The author demonstrates the interpretive steps suggested for such a genealogical study of knowledge practices through the empirical example of the Carnegie Endowment’s commission of inquiry into the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913. The example unpacks the commission’s practices of direct observation and report-writing and shows how they co-emerged with a problematization of war as deviant.

In Chapter 26, ‘Forensic Experts and Knowledge Practices in Transitional Justice Scenarios’, María Fernanda Olarte-Sierra takes an anthropological approach to the study of forensic knowledge practices which are central to transitional justice scenarios after violent conflict or authoritarian rule. Using the case of Colombia after the signing of a peace agreement between the government and the guerrilla group FARC as empirical example, the chapter centres on the particular practice of producing ‘sites of forensic interest’, through which forensic experts contribute to making specific victims of the violent conflicts in Colombia knowable. Far from being mere ‘expert witnesses’ to the violence, the author argues, forensic experts thereby actively partake in shaping the transition from war to peace and create what the author refers to as the production of ‘conditions of possibility’ for the transition and ‘future-making practices’ that contribute to the post-conflict social order to be established.

The next two chapters zoom in on what can be called specific ‘epistemic devices’ of knowledge production in international politics. In Chapter 27, ‘Algorithmic Knowledge and International Politics’, Rocco Bellanova and Linda Monsees turn to algorithms as a way of knowing widespread in international politics across fields such as global finance, warfare, and border regimes, to name but a few. Drawing on insights and concepts from STS, the authors explore various forms of knowledge production through algorithms. Specifically, the chapter looks at three tensions regarding algorithmic knowledge: between algorithms as immaterial (calculations) and as embedded in material infrastructures and assemblages (devices, practices, actors); between public and private actors in the production and use of algorithmic knowledge, particularly powerful corporate interests; and between the local and

the global in the roots, circulation, and reach of algorithmic knowledge as a situated epistemic practice with potentially global effects. Algorithmic knowledge, the authors suggest throughout, is not merely the output of calculations; it is highly political and deserves more systematic scholarly attention in the study of international politics.

Maria Martin de Almagro, in Chapter 28, 'Assembling Knowledge: Pilot Projects and Massive Open Online Courses in International Policymaking' analyses pilot projects and MOOCs as epistemic practices in relation to the UN Sustaining Peace Agenda. Using an analytical approach that combines assemblage thinking with a gender governmentality framework, the chapter zooms in on two pilot projects in Colombia and South Sudan and a MOOC developed from them within the framework of the UN Joint Programme on Women, Natural Resources and Peace, which produced and disseminated knowledge about 'how to do' the link between gender equality, natural resource management, and peace in practice. The author shows how, through their emphasis on 'local' knowledge, these epistemic practices shaped what knowledge counted as authoritative expertise and who was rendered an expert, while at the same time effectively silencing local voices that did not fit the dominant narrative.

The last two chapters in this section address the wider epistemic infrastructures within which epistemic practices are embedded and which they help (re)produce. In Chapter 29, 'Instrument Constituencies and Spaces of Knowing Governance', Jan-Peter Voß draws the reader's attention to the knowledge not about objects of governance, but about governing itself, or what he terms 'knowing governance'. In particular, the chapter unpacks a type of knowing governance which is inherent in governance instruments, namely the implicit functional models that underpin such instruments. The chapter draws on examples from the governance instruments of emissions trading and citizens' assemblies to discuss 'instrument constituencies', understood as the 'webs of practices specialized in the development and implementation of particular models of governing'. It then turns to 'translocal spaces of knowing governance', understood as 'material-cultural arrangements of conceiving of and practicing governance within the frame of particular models and their underlying ontologies'. Voß argues that it is not enough to look at practices of how particular issues are politically known, addressed, or regulated, but that it is equally important to unpack the dynamics and spaces where practical knowledge of doing governance is defined.

In Chapter 30, 'Colonial Wars, Postcolonial Peace & Anticolonial Solidarity: Expertise and Techno-Politics in Southwest Asia (Middle East)', Nikolas Kosmatopoulos and Chloe Nasr zoom in on a particular form of governing, namely techno-politics and its underlying assemblages of experts and technologies, and discuss how it affects politics in the Middle East. Through a decolonial techno-politics lens, the chapter unpacks the dynamics at play in four case studies: first, the techno-political devices of expert think-tanks' 'crisis reports', which shape narratives and imaginaries about the region; second, the 'conflict resolution workshop', which aims to shape local subjectivities and highlights experts' influence on techno-moral assertions and norm-making around peace politics; third, drone warfare, which

illustrates how technologies, expert knowledge, and human and non-human actors shape power dynamics; and finally, the Ships to Gaza movement as an example of transnational activism for Palestine, which exemplifies possibilities for people's techno-political resistance. The authors thus show how techno-politics is being used both to depoliticize the region by means of expert governance, but also how civil societies in the region, and their supporters further afield, deploy techno-political devices in their collective resistance and solidarity actions.

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