

Subject Review [∇]**Rents, Rules, or Revolution: A Survey of Institutional Pathways to Peace**
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"Mayoral, L. *, & Mueller, H. **: **Rents, Rules, or Revolution: A Survey of Institutional Pathways to Peace**, *Economic Policy*, Oxford University Press, *Economic Policy*, Volume 40, Issue 123, July 2025, Pages 721–759.

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Reviewed by: Asst. Lecturer. Walaa Ali Farhan ***

This Companion provides a critical reading of Mayoral and Mueller's article Rents, rules, or revolution: a survey of institutional pathways to peace, published in the journal *Economic Policy*, through a systematic assessment of his theoretical and methodological contribution to the literature of peace and institutions. The critique focuses on how the essay organizes the field of knowledge across three institutional pathways, questioning the limits of this categorization in terms of methodological rigor and conceptual consistency. The authors also discuss the strengths of the review's comprehensiveness and its ability to link Political Economy and peace, as opposed to highlighting the shortcomings associated with the absence of explicit methodological standards and mixed levels of analysis. Criticism shows that the article provides a useful explanatory framework, but it remains closer to an analytical narrative review than to a well-controlled systematic review. Rafiu concludes that the value of the article lies more in systematizing the literature and opening up new research paths, than in providing definitive causal conclusions.

Preface:

The issue of achieving sustainable peace has become one of the central problems in the field of political systems, especially in countries emerging from conflicts or those suffering from structural institutional fragility. With the growing literature linking conflict and the nature of political and economic institutions, a research trend has emerged that focuses on the analysis of peace

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* *Affiliation* Institute for Applied Economics (IAE-CSIC), Barcelona School of Economics (BSE), and Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), Barcelona, Spain.

** *Affiliation*: Institute for Applied Economics (IAE-CSIC), Barcelona School of Economics (BSE), and Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR), Barcelona, Spain.

*** رئاسة جامعة النهدين walaa.ali@nahrainuniv.edu.iq

Presidency of Nahrain University.

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as a product of institutional processes, and not just as a result of political settlements or situational external interventions.

Mayoral and Mueller's article falls within the literature of the political economy of conflicts that seeks to explain the conditions for the transition from armed conflict to peace, by focusing on the role of institutions. The article aims to provide an analytical review (Survey Review) of the research that dealt with the various institutional paths to achieve peace, classifying them among three main approaches: rent, rules, and radical transformation.

In this context, Mayoral and Mueller researchers in their article seek to answer a central question: What are the institutional paths that lead to peace, and how can they be classified within a structured analytical framework? To answer this question, the two researchers adopted the method of a survey review of the literature, in an attempt to provide an explanatory theoretical framework for the paths of peace through institutions.

This critical review starts from the following question: to what extent does the article succeed in providing a coherent and explanatory analytical framework for peacebuilding processes, and what are the limits of its cognitive and methodological contribution within the institutional and conflict literature

1. evaluation of the conceptual framework of the article:

The article adopts a broad concept of institutions, which includes political and legal norms, economic arrangements, and the administrative capacity of the state. The authors are credited with trying to move beyond the narrow understanding of institutions as only formal structures, an orientation that is consistent with the literature of the new institutional economy. (North, 1990) However, this conceptual breadth poses a methodological problem, as the concept of "institutions" is sometimes employed as a comprehensive explanatory variable, without sufficient analysis of the differences between:

- Political versus economic institutions
- Formal versus informal institutions
- The level of corporate design versus the level of actual performance

This overlap reduces the analytical capacity of the framework, especially when comparing the results of studies based on different institutional definitions, which is a problem that has already been highlighted in the institutional comparison literature (Fail, 2012).

2. a critical review of the three paths of peace:

The article under review is based on the classification of the Peacebuilding literature into three main institutional tracks: the path of rent, the path of rules

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and institutions, and the path of radical transformation. This classification is intended not so much to offer competing alternatives as to systematize the cognitive field and reveal the logic of each approach and its explanatory boundaries. Based on this, this review critically examines the three tracks, by assessing the theoretical foundations on which they are based, their conceptual consistency, the strength of the evidence they rely on, as well as monitoring their implied reductionism or biases in interpreting the relationship between institutions and peace.

a. The path of rent (Rents)

The article presents the literature that considers the distribution of rents as a tool to contain violence, especially in contexts characterized by weak official institutions. This path offers a pragmatic interpretation of peace as the result of reducing the material incentives for conflict. However, the critical treatment of this path in the article remains limited; no clear distinction is made between:

- rent as a transitional arrangement.
- rent as a sustainable mode of governance.

b. The path of rules and institutions (Rules)

This path is the backbone of the essay, as the authors give it more explanatory weight compared to other paths. This trend is based on the premise that inclusive and accountable institutions reduce the motivation to resort to violence by addressing problems of commitment and credibility. Despite the strength of this thesis, the article tends to treat institution-building as a gradual technical process, with less attention to the political conflicts that accompany the process of institutional reconstruction, which is emphasized by the literature on State-Building and conflict. (Fukuyama, 2014)

c. The path of radical transformation (Revolution)

The article treats this path with obvious caution, presenting it as a high-cost option and not guaranteed results. However, this caution sometimes turns into an implicit bias against literature that sees radical transformations as a condition for re-establishing the social contract, as in some critical approaches to Peace Studies. It is noted that the article does not adequately discuss the distinction between:

- Radical transformation as a chaotic break.
- Radical transformation as an organized institutional re-establishment.

3. criticism of the methodology

Mayoral and Mueller present their article as an analytical review of institutional peace paths, but the article does not explicitly specify the approach

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to the selection of the literature covered by the review. The authors do not clarify the time frame of the sources, neither the inclusion and exclusion criteria, nor the search rules or approved databases.

This absence is problematic from the perspective of scientific methodology, because reviews that do not clearly publicize the mechanisms of literature selection are prone to selection bias, and their results become more a reflection of the a priori theoretical framework than the result of a balanced systematic survey of the field of knowledge. Booth and others point out that a review that lacks these criteria cannot be considered a systematic review in the strict sense, but is classified as a narrative review that is used for exploration or theorizing purposes, not to draw broad general conclusions. In this sense, Mayoral and Mueller's failure to clarify the limits of their review weakens the methodological strength of their conclusions, especially when presented as a comprehensive map of institutional peace paths (Booth, 2012).

The article is based on literature that deals with peace from multiple analytical angles, including the level of the state, the level of institutions, and the level of individual incentives, but this diversity is not accompanied by a methodological framework that explains how to link these levels or justify the evidentiary transition between them. This confusion leads to a weakening of the conceptual consistency of the audit, since sometimes general patterns at the state level are deduced from studies focusing on the behavior of individual actors, or vice versa. Ragin warns that the uncontrolled transition between levels of analysis is one of the most common sources of weakness in comparative research, as it causes inaccurate generalizations and confusion in the interpretation of causal relationships. Accordingly, Mayoral and Mueller's failure to address this problem reduces the article's ability to provide a coherent analytical framework for peace tracks, and makes some of its conclusions open to question in terms of their explanatory validity. (Ragin, 1987)

The article tends to draw on empirical studies of an associative nature when discussing the impact of institutions on the sustainability of peace, using these results to build an explanatory narrative of a causal nature. However, the article does not adequately discuss the methodological problems associated with causal inference, such as causal overlap (endogeneity) or the possibility of an inverse relationship, where conflict may be a cause of institutional weakness and not just a consequence of it .

Angrist and Pischke emphasize that the use of associative evidence in constructing causal inferences requires strict methodological tools and explicit

clarification of the limits of inference, which is not sufficiently available in the article under review. As a result, some of the explanations offered by the article about the effectiveness of institutional paths to peace seem closer to theoretical assumptions partially supported by the literature, rather than to well-established causal conclusions. (Angrist, 2009)

It is noted that the article gives a clear priority to economic–institutional approaches in the analysis of peace paths, with a limited presence of historical or critical literature focused on context, collective memory, power relations. Although this approach may be understandable within the framework of the journal's specialization, the article does not provide an explicit methodological justification for this choice, nor does it discuss its impact on the comprehensiveness of the review.

4. scientific contribution and its limitations:

The article clearly contributes to:

- Reorganization of the Peacebuilding literature within an inclusive institutional framework
- Breaking the traditional separation between political economy and Conflict Studies
- Provide a useful analytical ground for researchers and policy makers

In contrast, his contribution remains more organizational and analytical than a development of a new theory, and some of his general conclusions suffer from excessive breadth that reduces their explanatory accuracy.

Conclusion:

It can be said that Mayoral and Mueller's article represents a sober scientific review that contributes to the crystallization of a multidimensional institutional understanding of peacebuilding pathways. However, its organizational strength is not without conceptual and methodological limitations related to the breadth of concepts, the analysis of causality, the balance of the approved literature. Thus, the article is an important addition to the field, but it does not close the discussion so much as redirects it towards more complex questions about the nature of institutions and their role in conflict management.

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