

Complexity in Institutional Reform¹

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Abstract

Why is there so much institutional reform in the world? If institutions are the deep rules of the game that determine how societies are governed, collective decisions taken, and resources mobilized for public purposes, then changing them is bound to have effects that are long-run and multidimensional across politics, the economy and society. Such effects will be unpredictable. Politicians with short time horizons should flee such initiatives, but instead embrace them the world over. Why? Because politicians design reform processes around often unstated private goals that may be orthogonal, or even directly opposed, to a reform's stated, public goals. We characterize *instrumental mismatch* as the gap between stated goals and the specific reform instruments politicians deploy. Such reforms lead to *incongruous institutions* ill-suited to their core purpose, and hence to outcomes that are bad for society. Through 14 case studies from Latin America, India, Rwanda and the UK we test, refine, and significantly expand the theory. A final paper mines this evidence to propose four game-theoretic models of institutional change from a complex systems perspective. Taken together, we call this *the complexity approach to institutional reform*.

Keywords: institutions, reform, incentives, political economy, complexity, development

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1 Introduction

Why is there so much institutional reform in the world? This is a deep conundrum that is little acknowledged and less understood. Why are senior politicians in all the world's regions, across developing and developed countries, and in both democratic and autocratic regimes, so eager to change their institutions? Some recent examples include transitions from constitutional monarchy to republics in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, and Jamaica; reforms to judicial independence in Israel, Poland and the UK; broad public sector management reforms in New Zealand; new constitutions in Bolivia and Chile; abandoning presidentialism in favor of parliamentary systems in Sri Lanka and Togo; the creation of new states in India and new districts in Uganda; sweeping changes to macroeconomic management and market regulation in Uzbekistan; and decentralization in countries as diverse as Colombia, France, India, Japan, Mexico, Mozambique, Serbia, and South Korea. There are many more.

The authors in this Special Issue follow North (1990) and others in defining institutions as the deep rules of the game that determine how societies are governed, collective decisions taken, and resources mobilized and spent for public purposes. It follows that reforming institutions is likely to have powerful, long-term consequences across a country's politics, economy, and broader society. That consequences should be broad and deep is implicit in the 'rules of the game' concept. Outcomes that are both long-term and multidimensional will be almost impossible to predict with any accuracy. But political leaders' incentives are widely held to be short-term (Pierson 2004), prioritizing immediate political advantage over uncertain future payoffs. Why, then, are leaders so eager to reform?

Faguet and Shami's (2022) concept of instrumental incoherence provided an initial answer. They begin by distinguishing between a reform's stated vs. private goals, which can

be similar, dissimilar, or even diametrically opposed.³ *Stated goals* are the first-order outcomes a given reform may be expected to have. These serve to justify the reform and give it social legitimacy, and are thus key to generating the political opportunity to move reform forward. *Private goals*, by contrast, refer to some pressing, short-term, typically political problem. These remain unspoken in the context of the reform. They can vary from well-aligned with reform's stated goals to diametrically opposed to those goals. They may even operate in a policy dimension orthogonal to the reform's main thrust. For example, politicians may alter an electoral system or decentralize government not to improve the match between voting outcomes and social preferences, or make the state more efficient or responsive, but because they wish to cement a parliamentary coalition or undermine the opposition.

Faguet and Shami's central contribution is to characterize and theorize a class of institutional reforms marked by serious mismatches between the purported object of reform and the most important problems reformers are actually trying to solve. Leaders pursue these reforms not for the sake of stated goals, but because they hope the process of reforming institutions will achieve private goals, and design and implement reforms accordingly. Faguet and Shami then apply this concept to decentralization in Bolivia and Pakistan, analyzing why apparently similar programs had polar-opposite medium and long-term outcomes: reforms eventually abandoned in Pakistan, but significantly deepened in Bolivia until they redefined the country's identity.⁴

³ Faguet and Shami (2022) term these 'main effects' and 'side effects' respectively. This Special Issue moves the terminology on in the interest of clarity and theoretical precision.

⁴ In 2009 the Republic of Bolivia was officially renamed the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Instrumental mismatch and incongruous institutions

This Special Issue significantly develops the theory, which we re-christen *Complexity in institutional reform*, and then applies it far more widely across regions and policy dimensions. We unpack ‘instrumental incoherence’ to distinguish more carefully between policy instruments, the institutions they lead to, and the ultimate effects of reform. Hence we refer to *instrumental mismatch* to denote the degree to which the policy reform tools (‘instruments’) politicians deploy align with the stated goals of a reform. When stated and private goals are similar, instruments will tend to align. But when private goals are opposed to stated goals, or operate in a different dimension (‘orthogonal’), the *instruments* of reform – the specific characteristics of reform design and implementation – will be poorly suited to stated goals, and so instrumental mismatch will be high.⁵ High mismatch will tend to produce institutions that are incongruous, meaning ill-suited to their core functions, including reaching stated goals. *Incongruous institutions* will tend to produce outcomes that are bad for society. Instruments that are well-matched to stated goals, by contrast, will tend to lead to congruous institutions, with ultimate outcomes that are good for society. The sections that follow show this empirically.

Current scholarship assumes such mismatches are unsystematic. ‘We know’ that politicians exaggerate, dissemble, and even lie. In analytical terms, our theories treat these untruths as random. But that’s the wrong model. This Special Issue takes the view that politicians dissimulate systematically according to their needs. Their untruths form a pattern in response to identifiable stimuli, with consequences that are also systematic and hence predictable. We can extract useful information from these patterns. Recognizing this allows

⁵ Instrumental mismatch is the direct result of goal mismatch. We could substitute the former with the latter without loss of insight.

us to distinguish the results of instrumental mismatch from unintended consequences, which are unforeseen effects that *are* random.

The articles that comprise this Special Issue take up the idea of instrumental mismatch and apply it to a much broader set of powerful institutional reforms across 14 case studies from India, Latin America, Rwanda, and the UK over the past 250 years. Eleven original papers explore phenomena as diverse as electoral and campaign finance reform in Chile, decentralization in Mexico, gender quotas in India, constitutional reform in Uruguay, the introduction of elected governorships in unitary countries in South America, rights-oriented criminal reforms in Venezuela, Rwanda's switch from French to English as the main medium of instruction, Mexico's shift to an adversarial criminal justice regime, inverse malapportionments in Argentina's legislative and executive branches, the Brexit referendum and the UK's fractious withdrawal from the European Union, and Jesuit participation in the construction of colonial Spanish America in the 1600s and 1700s. These are complemented by a twelfth, theoretical study that mines our evidence to propose four models of institutional change from a complex systems perspective.

Beginning in each case with the status quo ante, colleagues analyze the deep political and economic drivers of reform. These insights are used to map leaders' most pressing political needs onto the specific measures they undertake. Such reform specifics in turn determine the nature of their long-term, often surprising effects on outcomes as diverse as electoral equilibria, gendered marginalization of rural women, the quality of subnational governance and accountability, levels of political instability, police brutality, national integrity, and a set of broad human and economic development outcomes.

Our motivation is, first, to show that the concepts of instrumental mismatch and incongruous institutions travel across large numbers of regions and phenomena with diverse

histories, geographies, political regimes, and economic and social characteristics. But our more important purpose, through these applications, is to develop and refine the central idea. If Faguet and Shami was a proof of concept, this is a far more ambitious distillation of the core theory of complex institutional reform through its application across space and dimensions. Contributors are a carefully chosen blend of prominent senior figures with rising young academic-stars-of-tomorrow. The 13 articles are products of a highly participative process centered on two in-person workshops at the European University Institute (Florence, late 2023) and the Santa Fe Institute (New Mexico, mid-2024). We are very grateful to both institutions for the warm hospitality and intellectual stimulus they provided.

2 Institutional complexity in action

The concept of instrumental mismatch was first applied to decentralization in Bolivia and Pakistan; it is helpful to summarize that analysis before proceeding. Faguet and Shami show that apparently similar reforms carried out at roughly the same time had radically different effects in the two countries because they were motivated by very different priorities. Different priorities led political leaders to strategize about and design reforms in very different ways. And different designs produced different outcomes.

In Bolivia, democratically elected leaders faced dual threats from the long-term political decline of the previously-dominant MNR party, plus growing calls for secession by elites from Bolivia's eastern region. The structural solution on which they alighted was far from obvious, but proved effective: decentralization to Bolivia's 300+ municipalities. Because national leaders were elected while regional elites were self-appointed and autocratic, they designed decentralization as a democratic shock to the body politic that would undermine regional elites by creating and empowering competitive local elections that they expected their parties to dominate. In this way, one complex reform would give the lie to business

elites' claims to represent Eastern Bolivians at the same time that it forged a durable alliance between the MNR and voters in hundreds of new rural municipalities (Sánchez de Lozada and Faguet 2015).

In Pakistan, by contrast, the new dictator's imperative was to legitimize himself and extend his tenure beyond the three years conceded by the Supreme Court. The structural solution on which he alighted was also decentralization, and also far from obvious. But there the similarities end. Pakistan's reform was designed behind closed doors by military planners who sought to undermine political parties and legitimize military rule. Hence the decentralization they designed explicitly excluded existing parties from local elections, and drew convoluted, confusing lines of budget transfers, reporting, and accountability amongst provincial, district, tehsil and union governments. In this way, tens of thousands of public jobs beholden to the dictatorship were created, ensuring hundreds of thousands of pro-regime votes in the coming plebiscite, with little risk of encouraging new grass-roots leaders who might challenge Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

The outcomes of reform were similarly divergent. Bolivians embraced municipal politics enthusiastically. New voters registered in their millions, more than doubling the electoral rolls. Local governments proved far more responsive to local needs, which in turn drove a sea-change in nationwide investment patterns away from large infrastructure and production, towards human capital investment and primary services. Decentralization bedded down so robustly in the political culture that by 2008 Pres. Evo Morales, then at the height of his powers, was unable to reverse it (Faguet 2019). In Pakistan, by contrast, decentralization was completely abandoned in 2008. When a judicial scandal forced Musharraf from power, one of the first acts of the democratic government that replaced him was to shut down local governments. Tellingly, no one complained. Pakistanis had never

understood which level of government was responsible for what service, and made little attempt to use decentralized governments for anything. With so little grass-roots support, civilian politicians were able to kill off decentralization quickly, in full view of everyone.

As decentralization in Pakistan shows, institutional reforms motivated by orthogonal imperatives may be intentionally designed to fail. The Musharraf regime did not want a competitive local politics that allowed voters to hold local governments to account. It sought, instead, to create patronage in a way that ensured no political rival came up through the ranks. A decentralization that worked would pose problems for a de facto regime, so they designed one that couldn't. In Bolivia, by contrast, the ruling MNR sought to defeat authoritarian rivals and regain primacy by deepening democracy. They were the best-organized party in Bolivia and saw much to gain from a robust local politics. So they designed a decentralization that worked, hoping voters would embrace it. And voters did.

In-between 'designed to fail' and 'designed to succeed' lies a third possibility, which we term 'feckless reform'. As the papers in this Special Issue show, these are cases in which the failure of a reform to reach stated goals is not strictly functional to politicians' private goals, as was the case in Pakistan. Reforms are not 'designed like a fox' to be unworkable. Basic elements of a successful reform are present, but the process of reform stalls or goes awry, and stated goals are not achieved. This can occur when politicians' private goals are met early in the reform process, and a lack of follow-through, funding, or complementary actions condemn a reform that might have worked to failure. Incompleteness in policy design or implementation may be a product of larger leadership groups with heterogeneous motives, where some reformers sincerely believe in stated goals whereas others adhere to private goals in orthogonal dimensions. Or it may be the result of inefficiency, ineptitude, or bad luck. Such dynamics make these cases intrinsically messy. They also imply that this category

is probably the largest of the three. Examples in the next section flesh it out further.

3 Evidence from the Special Issue

We turn now to 14 cases analyzed in the papers that make up this Special Issue. We first consider cases of institutional reforms that were *Designed to Fail*, followed by its polar opposite, reforms that were *Designed to Succeed*. Lastly, we consider the more complicated, intermediate category of *Feckless reform*. As we shall see, one of the key analytical differences distinguishing these categories is the degree of orthogonality between the stated goals of a reform vs. the instruments deployed to achieve it.

Designed to fail

A striking example of designed to fail is Laitin and Ramachandran's analysis of Rwanda's switch to English-language instruction throughout the school system in 2008, from Kinyarwanda (the indigenous language shared by 99 percent of the population) in primary schools, and French in secondary and above. The government appealed to economic development to justify this sweeping change, arguing that Rwandans require English to actively participate in the global economy. English would also ease the country's regional and global integration with the East African Community and the Commonwealth, bolstering trade, investment and development.

But reformers' real motive was to disempower the francophone Hutu elite, who dominated public sector jobs, and also to snub the old colonial powers, Belgium and France. A reform aiming principally at elite replacement was not effective at building human capital. Laitin and Ramachandran carefully analyze a wealth of data to show that Rwanda's shift to English reduced literacy rates, lowered students' probability of progressing to secondary school, and consequently worsened the educational attainment of the generation most affected by the change. This is less surprising when we consider that the bulk of Rwanda's

teachers in 2008 could not speak English; only around 3 percent of the population does today. To succeed, language reform required, first, a huge training program to teach these teachers English, and then teach them English pedagogy. But that would have empowered francophone Hutu elites, which reformers did not want. So none was provided. Instead, Hutu teachers were left to flail, denigrated, attempting to teach a language they did not understand, while senior roles in education and government were taken by the new English-speaking, Tutsi elite. The ultimate result is a generation of children with lower human capital today than their grandparents achieved fifty years ago.

Gender quotas provide a second vivid example of reform designed to fail. The stated goal of India's surprisingly radical 1993 reform was gender equality in politics. The method was the reservation for women of up to half of all elected heads of local government positions, in a country often called 'the worst place on earth for women'. But Chauchard, Brulé and Heinze's analysis shows that the underlying, private goal of the politicians who led this reform was to keep power in the hands of elite, upper-caste males. And so they designed constant rotation in office into the reform. This turned successful female candidates into eternal novices, unable to build track records, grow in experience, or develop public personas of their own. In combination with no-confidence motions used to unseat uncompliant women, the reform's effect was to keep elected women dependent on male power brokers, who remained in the shadows.

Some context is illuminating. Women's votes proved important to national election victories by Indira Gandhi in 1980 and Rajiv Gandhi in 1984. When the opposition Janata Dal coalition won the 1989 election, it sought to shift power permanently away from the Congress party by instituting expansive reservations for lower castes in government, education, and employment. These reforms succeeded, and there followed a large influx of

voters and candidates from the lower, previously under-represented orders of society into politics, many of whom were duly elected. This led to a substantial decline in male, upper-caste elites at all levels of government. The new Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, had promised “a silent transfer of power”, and had achieved it.

Against this background, female reservations were proposed not to further increase political equality, but rather as a cynical, upper-caste ploy to stem the rising tide of lower-caste men in politics. Reformers sought to mobilize the women’s vote and channel it to upper-caste women, usually the wives of male politicians, on the assumption that they could control them. If gender equality was not the goal, Chauchard, Brulé and Heinze’s evidence shows that it was not the outcome either. Thirty years of female reservations did not erase gender hierarchy in local government. Women who attain public offices still face many disadvantages in their relationships with village bureaucrats, their interactions with village elites, and within their own families. But interestingly, not all is bad. Despite hindrances, women elected via quotas have shown independence in local policy-making, wield significant fiscal power over local budgets, and are actively reshaping the intra-household division of labor.

The introduction of regional elections in Chile presents a third example of reforms that were clearly designed to fail. Eaton shows how establishment politicians introduced gubernatorial elections as a way to increase the legitimacy of the post-Pinochet democratic order in the midst of a spiraling political crisis. The stated goal was elected governors with popular mandates who would better represent the regional diversity of this enormously long country, and make policy that was more responsive to voters’ needs and aspirations.

The theory of decentralization (Ahmad and Brosio 2009, Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006, Eaton 2004, Faguet 2012, Faguet 2014, Faguet and Pöschl 2015, Litvack et al. 1998,

Oates 1972) holds that power and resources are devolved from center to periphery in the name of a more accountable, responsive, and robust governance structure. But Chile's reformers were not interested in giving up power or resources. So rather than replacing centrally appointed *intendentes* who previously ran Chile's 16 regions with democratically elected governors, they created a hybrid system in which governors work alongside *delegados*, who replaced *intendentes*, retain most of their power and control over resources, and can veto key gubernatorial decisions. It is still too soon to evaluate the effects of this 2021 reform. But both theory and an enormous empirical literature (Eaton 2006, Faguet 2023, Faguet et al. 2021, Faguet and Pal 2023, Wibbels 2005) suggest that a 'devolution' that fails to devolve power or resources is unlikely to improve either governance or democratic legitimacy.

Designed to succeed

The introduction of elected regional governments in Colombia and Bolivia, both unitary systems, sit at the opposite end of the institutional complexity spectrum. In Colombia, Eaton shows, gubernatorial elections were introduced in 1992 in order to open up the nation's politics to non-traditional actors and parties and push electoral competition further down into the regions. This was intended to liberalize politics, as part of a broad constitutional reform that sought to end Colombia's internal conflict by transforming violent conflict into political contestation, smoothing the way for left and right-wing fighters to return to civilian life.

The ruling Liberal party had retained the presidency and control of Congress in the 1990 election, even as new parties stole votes from their traditional Conservative rivals. Dominant nationally, President Gaviria and other Liberal leaders no doubt expected to dominate gubernatorial politics as well. With their private and stated goals largely aligned,

both government and political elites wanted reform to work. And so they implemented a straightforward design of elected governors accountable to departmental voters. Elections were held, governors elected, and all seemed to proceed smoothly.

What political leaders could not have predicted is that this would end up dismantling a two-party political system that had been in place since the 1840s and was widely considered one of Latin America's most stable. The decision to join political decentralization with specific, powerful elements of fiscal decentralization, Eaton argues, severely undermined national leaders' ability to co-opt emerging local and regional leaders and guide political discourse from above. It also weakened intergovernmental coordination, widening further the gap between what subnational vs. national politicians cared about. The ultimate result of a reform designed to succeed, paradoxically, is a vigorous regional politics alongside the destruction of Colombia's Liberal-Conservative duopoly.

In Bolivia, Eaton argues, autonomous regional governments did not so much end a civil war as prevent one. Since the election of Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2005, political tensions between the indigenous *altiplano* and the more ethnically mixed, cosmopolitan eastern departments had risen to dangerous levels. Massive demonstrations in the main cities turned shockingly violent, and armed insurgencies began organizing on both sides. Having initially resisted eastern elites' demands, the government did an about-face and proposed a deep devolution to elected regional governments in the new Constitution of 2009.⁶ This was designed to respond to demands for 'departmental autonomy' and remove the main battering ram used by eastern elites to attack the government.

Much more than in Colombia, Bolivian reformers were dominant nationally, with larger

⁶ This reform built on the earlier municipal decentralization program of 1994.

majorities in presidential and congressional elections than any party in 60 years. From the heights of their power in La Paz, they saw little risk in electing governors. A few of these might fall to the opposition, chiefly in the east, but the governing MAS was bound to win more. With private and stated goals largely aligned, reformers sought a reform that worked. As in Colombia, they implemented a straightforward design of elected governors accountable to departmental voters.

What reformers did not expect was that the creation of a regional space to contain eastern elites politically and isolate them economically would end up equipping them with a powerful means to drag the national government towards the policies they preferred. The key here, according to Eaton, was the twinning of regional elections with important elements of departmental autonomy, guaranteed in the Constitution. This gave Santa Cruz, Bolivia's most economically dynamic department, the leverage to trade political stability for property rights and the deepening of large-scale, capitalist agricultural accumulation by Eastern elites. The end result was the MAS' abandonment of 'indigenous socialism' in favor of a pro-market economic model that was quite liberal in many dimensions and much closer to the demands of Santa Cruz elites.

Bidegain and Carozzi's analysis of Constitutional reform in Uruguay reveals a third, fascinating case of reforms designed to succeed. Party politics is highly institutionalized in this small but rather successful South American republic, and was dominated from 1830 through the end of the 1990s by the *Blanco* and *Colorado* parties. But the rise of the *Frente Amplio*, a left-wing challenger, threatened to topple their duopoly in the 1999 election. So *Blanco* and *Colorado* leaders agreed a constitutional reform to replace the "double simultaneous vote", which featured concurrent primary and general elections at the national and subnational levels for executive and legislative offices, featuring closed lists and a

plurality rule for presidential elections. The new system consisted of: (i) the separation of national and subnational elections; (ii) separate primary elections for the selection of presidential candidates; and (iii) a second-round vote for president with a simple majority rule.

Reformers argued that these changes would simplify the electoral system and make it more transparent to voters, enhancing political parties' ideological coherence and internal democracy. In a context of a rising third party, it would also prevent minority governments and promote governing coalitions. But they also had a key private goal (surely obvious to Uruguayan voters): to keep the *Frente Amplio* out of power. Private and stated goals were largely aligned in reformers' eyes. These were, after all, the natural parties of government in Uruguay. They fully expected to fight the *Frente Amplio* to a draw in subsequent first-round elections, and then unite to win the second round.

Initially, the strategy worked. The *Frente Amplio* won the 1999 first-round election and lost the second round to a *Blanco-Colorado* coalition. But then came the 2000-2001 Argentina economic meltdown, which caused the greatest economic and social crisis in Uruguay's history. The country avoided an institutional rupture, but electoral costs for the coalition, especially the leading *Colorados*, were harsh. As a result, the *Frente Amplio* won the following election outright in the first round, and – now benefitting from economic recovery – retained the presidency and both chambers of Congress in the two elections that followed. Good economic growth throughout 2005-2020 permitted the *Frente Amplio* to implement their program of reforms to taxation, the health system, strengthening the state, etc. Uruguay's party system reached a new equilibrium in which *Blancos* and *Colorados* systematically support each other in second-round elections.

The design of this reform shows that Uruguayan leaders fundamentally trusted its

political institutions. As Bidegain and Carozzi argue, they sought incremental change to promote a 2-bloc electoral system that could provide successive presidents with stable parliamentary majorities. On this basis, strong governments could implement significant policy programs confidently. In all of these ways, Uruguay's constitutional reforms splendidly achieved their stated goals. But they did not keep the *Frente Amplio* out of power. Most unexpectedly for reformers, reform elevated the challengers to equal status with *Blancos* + *Colorados* combined. Reform seriously undermined the reformers and benefitted its intended victim.

Feckless reform

Our third class of reforms are not designed to fail, but neither are they pursued with the care and sustained attention necessary to succeed. Under different conditions, with more resources and political will, these reforms might have succeeded. Some cases saw early or partial success. But design shortcomings and/or insufficient follow-through ultimately cause these reforms to fail.

A clear example is Hanson and Kronick's analysis of policing reform in Venezuela. As in Mexico and indeed most of Latin America, the vast majority of Venezuelan arrests throughout the 20th century occurred in the absence of any admissible evidence, 'for investigative purposes'. Many innocents were wrongfully detained. In 1998, Congress approved a new criminal code that strengthened protections for suspects and defendants. Arrests were restricted to cases where criminals were caught *in flagrante* or a warrant had first been obtained; 'for investigative purposes' was explicitly prohibited. Stated goals were to improve policing and the administration of justice, reduce arbitrary detentions and other abuses of Venezuelans' civic rights, and generate a more investor-friendly climate.

But reformers had private goals as well. Since Venezuela's return to democracy in

1958, politics had been completely dominated by two mass parties, *Acción Democrática* (AD) and COPEI⁷, who carefully divided up public sector jobs and resources between them as they alternated in government. Opposition parties longed to loosen their grip on power. When a third party was finally elected to government amidst a deep economic and political crisis, it seized the opportunity to pass a wave of reforms aimed at undermining the AD-COPEI duopoly and wresting the country's institutions from their grip.

At first reform worked. Hanson and Kronick's evidence shows that Venezuela's arrest rate fell more than 80 percent. Suspects and defendants enjoyed strong new protections in the criminal justice system. But police chiefs continued to face strong de facto incentives to mete out punishment in the name of 'social control'. Unable to throw suspects behind bars, they turned to what Hanson and Kronick term official vigilantism: "the extralegal punishment of perceived offenses". Officers killed suspects they could no longer arrest; police killings rose from 100-200 per year before the reform to more than 1,000 per year after.

The reason was a complete absence of support for educating the police in forensic investigation, or hiring and training public prosecutors and retraining judges for the new system. The reason for that, Hanson and Kronick argue, was that during the 18 months that elapsed between passage and implementation of the reform, politicians' private goals had largely been met. AD and COPEI had been knocked from their perch atop Venezuelan politics, the judiciary had been largely depoliticized, and reformers saw little point in continuing to expend energy and resources on implementation. So they didn't. Hence reform instruments about policing that were actually driven by political goals resulted in the

⁷ *Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente.*

institutional incongruity of a police system that could not arrest suspects without evidence, and was incapable of forensic investigation. So they killed suspects instead.

The contrast with next-door Colombia, which implemented similar reforms a few years later, is instructive. Arrests also dropped precipitously, but with little police backlash. Why? Because the Colombian government provided healthy support for police re-training, hiring of prosecutors, building new courtrooms suitable for oral trials, and other complementary actions important for the reform to succeed.

Orthogonal incentives and incomplete follow-through also abound in Peru's introduction of elected regional governments in 2002, as Eaton demonstrates. Unlike Bolivia and Colombia, there was essentially no pressure from below for this reform. Also unlike them, Pres. Alejandro Toledo opted for "a highly unusual and complicated sequential approach to decentralization" that began with political devolution via the introduction of elected regional governments, but held back on transferring fiscal and administrative powers until existing regions had amalgamated into larger 'macro-regions'.

Why this odd design? Because the stated goal – a more effective, responsive structure of the state – was trumped by Toledo's very short-term private goal: to distinguish himself from rival candidates, former presidents Alberto Fujimori and Alan Garcia, in the 2001 Presidential campaign. As electoral strategy, the ploy worked. Promises of decentralization garnered enough votes in departmental capitals and secondary cities to win Toledo the presidency. But as a reform of the architecture of government it was an abject failure.

Regional governments were rushed into existence in 2002, and regional governors elected. But Garcia's opposition APRA party was the big winner, taking 12 of 25 governorships, versus one for Toledo's party. Not surprisingly, the drive to complete the reform died there. A key next step – the amalgamation of 25 just-created regional

governments into a smaller number of macro-regions – was anyway absurd as it would have required newly-elected governors and assembly members to campaign for and negotiate to eliminate their own positions. Decentralization was dead on arrival from the start.

So a deep mismatch between political goals and the instruments of reform led to institutional incongruity that left regional governments stillborn. But the effects on Peru's politics were worse. Rules allowing regional movements to contest subnational elections without running nationwide have generated a deep chasm between national and regional governments. Over time, national parties simply lost the ability to win regional elections. Regions are now governed by parties with no representation at the center, and vice versa, denying Peru the sorts of mechanisms that other countries use to address serious development challenges. Eaton argues that this deep territorial disconnect is slowly making Peru ungovernable.

Fecklessness in institutional reform need not be cynical. It can also result from institutional weakness, as Garfias and Sellars' analysis of the Jesuit expulsion from New Spain shows. In 1767, some 250 years into the Spanish-American Empire, and two centuries after the Jesuits' arrival there, the latter were suddenly and unceremoniously expelled. Why this happened, and what were its effects, comprise a fascinating example of institutional complexity.

The roots of the story go back to Spain's conquest and colonization of America in the early 1500s. Notwithstanding its soldiers' steel weapons, gunpowder, and command of cavalry tactics, Spain was a small, distant power trying to subjugate and govern an enormous landmass 26 times its size using 16th-century technologies. Having conquered Tenochtitlan (modern Mexico City), they attempted but failed to extend their control much beyond the central highlands. So imperial officers turned to the religious orders accompanying them,

and especially to the Jesuits.

It was a cunning decision. The Jesuits were a powerful order that brought strong internal motivations and a great deal of organizational coherence to the construction of empire. Delegating to them solved the Crown's short-term problems of rapid pacification, conversion to Catholicism (an important imperial as well as Jesuit goal), and the extension of Spanish authority over a rich but difficult land. With Jesuit help, New Spain soon reached from California to Costa Rica.⁸ But the choice was not costless. Jesuits had their own, independent objectives in the Americas, and a strong chain of authority that, bypassing the Emperor, extended straight to the Pope, and even to God.

Awkwardly, Jesuits could also appeal beneath imperial authorities directly to creole elites and indigenous peasants alike, and often did. Their deep involvement in all levels of education in New Spain, from prestigious universities to humble rural primary schools, and their widely-admired facility with native languages, were two of many factors that gave them social reach and legitimacy that often exceeded those of the imperial authorities they nominally served. In the long term, the effect was to incorporate – in the heart of the state – an enemy that exempted itself from many taxes, routinely ignored imperial commands, and often mobilized public sympathies against the Emperor and towards itself. Hence instrumental mismatch in the construction of empire led to incongruous institutions in New Spain. The expulsion of the Jesuits is the story of the Empire's attempt to unravel this incongruity, with apparent success at first, but, as Garfias and Sellars demonstrate, failure in the end, hastening the collapse of Spanish America.

Reform may also be unintentionally feckless, as Diaz-Cayeros' analysis of Mexico's

⁸ Jesuits were also central to the construction of Spain's South American colonies.

decentralization shows. As in Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, and elsewhere, Mexican reformers justified decentralization in the 1990s through pro-democratic appeals to a more participative, responsive, and effective state after 70 years of effective one-party rule. But public finances had always been highly centralized in Mexico, and local-government tax capacity was extremely weak (Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2006). So reformers additionally created the *aportaciones* mechanism, a formula-based federal transfer, to help local governments fund the services they were expected to provide. Because it was unlinked to local tax collections, it had the unfortunate effect of undermining local tax capacity further and increasing dependency on the center.

The fiscal architecture that emerged out of this arrangement ensured a credible fiscal commitment from the Treasury, intended to facilitate stability and long-term planning in local budgets. But it also undermined accountability of local officials to voters, and allowed politicians to build personalistic careers cultivating local constituencies in ways that dissolved established parties' internal bonds. National parties became increasingly fractured and disarticulated. The movement best able to exploit these trends proved to be Morena, which exploited disharmony in Mexico City and its southern bulwark states to project itself to national power. This case highlights how instrumental mismatch may come about in the absence of orthogonal private, political goals. The fiscal instrument designed into Mexico's decentralization was motivated by concerns over local public goods, and certainly not intended to smooth Morena's path to the crushing political dominance it enjoys today. But that is what it achieved.

Reforms can be well-intended and well-matched to important public goals and nonetheless become feckless through accretion. In these cases, an institutional tool designed to achieve something specific provokes a second tool in reaction, and eventually a

third. In isolation, each of these may be logical and institutionally congruous. But superposed one on the other, they shape institutions incapable of functioning efficiently. Such dangers are much greater when nations are being formed, when uncertainties are huge and leaders are establishing institutions meant to last centuries.

Paniagua and Ricart-Huguet's analysis of dual malapportionment in Argentina provides a powerful example. At the founding of the Argentine Federation in 1853, the provinces designed Congress and the Electoral College to over-represent smaller, rural districts. Legislative malapportionment came at the expense of the economic giant, Buenos Aires, whose port made it the natural hegemon. As in many other countries throughout North and South America, this was a strategic mechanism to integrate rural elites into the national project (Samuels and Snyder 2001). But once the Federation was established, and given its huge economic and military weight, why didn't Buenos Aires simply renege?

Paniagua and Ricart-Huguet uncover a highly original answer: legislative malapportionment was countered by a significant executive malapportionment that strongly favored Buenos Aires from 1862, following its victory against the Argentine Confederation at the Battle of Pavón, until today. With 42 percent of the national population, Buenos Aires accounts for 58 percent of the cabinet ministers Argentina has ever had. With an average cabinet size of 14 ministers, and in a country of 24 provinces, this implies 8 ministers for Buenos Aires and none for most provinces. For example, Jujuy – a founding province – has never been represented in any cabinet. Executive dominance gave Buenos Aires the power to implement laws, design policies, and shape budgets, and this was surely worth more.

But the dual malapportionment did not spontaneously balance. Governments stand or fall in Congress, where over-representation allowed smaller, rural provinces to extract large fiscal transfers from the center (largely financed by Buenos Aires). In good economic times,

this fiscal mechanism balances Argentina's two structural distortions, probably compensating the provinces of Cordoba and Santa Fe, who otherwise lose from both malapportionments, and more broadly helping to hold a highly heterogeneous country together. But in economic downturns, the system can quickly become pathological and then explosive, incentivizing provinces to run huge deficits that the Treasury is forced to absorb (Ardanaz et al. 2014). Argentina's 2001 economic crisis is one spectacular example.

Complicated cases of incongruous institutions may unite two or more of these types. Constitutional reform in post-Pinochet Chile, for example, contains elements of strategic fecklessness and instrumental superposition. The background is a neo-democratic regime carefully designed by the dictatorship to protect conservative policies and interests and undermine the political left, in which a binomial electoral system played a key role. To win both congressional seats, a party or alliance needed more than twice the votes of those in second place. In the Chilean context, this awarded Congressional parity to right-wing parties despite a far lower vote share.

Chile returned to democracy in 1990. The years that followed saw political stability, strong economic growth, and strong governments peacefully exchanging power. The feeling grew, even amongst some right-wing congressmen, that Chile's maturing democracy had outgrown such a restrictive constitution. Also, new ideas and opportunities arose as figures from the authoritarian past receded and Chilean politics evolved. So governments in 2005 and 2015 were able to assemble the bicameral supermajorities required to amend the Constitution. The 2015 reforms changed the electoral landscape significantly, adopting proportional representation and introducing public funding for political parties. According to Albertus, Menaldo and Rojas-Vallejos, this shifted advantage from large, heterogeneous alliances towards small, well-organized groups. Mainstream center-left and center-right

parties declined while smaller parties further from the ideological center grew. Over time, parties became more opportunistic and politics more fractious.

Chilean society exploded in 2019 in a massive outpouring of anger that transcended age, region, and political inclination. People poured onto the streets first in Santiago and then all over Chile protesting inequality, the high cost of living, unemployment, privatized public services, and government dishonesty and corruption. Protesters made sweeping demands and the government struggled to respond. The global pandemic in 2020 greatly worsened matters, with poverty deepening, instability rising, and parts of the economy closing down.

In Albertus, Menaldo and Rojas-Vallejos' analysis, these dual shocks signaled to conservative politicians with sincere policy preferences for no change that changing pro-elite elements of the Constitution was more popular than they thought. Reforms previously considered fringe were now seen as mainstream, as protests revealed popular opinion to be not where they thought it had been. Centrist and right-leaning politicians were convinced to "join the bandwagon" supporting such reforms, which carried real costs to key constituents, in the name of their own re-election. And so when protests against privatized pensions joined with demands to allow Chileans to access pension savings during the Covid emergency, the center-right government of Sebastián Piñera obligingly changed the Constitution. Piñera approved three separate withdrawals of pension assets totaling 19 percent of GDP, which saw one-third of Chileans fully deplete their pension accounts. This put the entire pension system at risk, caused Chilean stock and bond prices to plummet in the wake of the mass selloff from withdrawals, and fueled a consumption boom that stoked inflation and increased exchange rate volatility.

Chile is thus a complex, two-stage case. The first stage is electoral reform sincerely

intended to democratize the electoral system, where stated and private goals largely align. But this changed the nature of political representation in Chile in ways that made subsequent crises much harder to handle for mainstream parties. The net effect was to facilitate pension reforms that reformers privately opposed, but which they strategically approved to remain viable in the new dispensation, which ended up decapitalizing the entire pension system.

One of the most important institutional reforms adopted throughout Latin America over the past 200 years is criminal justice reform. In many countries, reform broadly succeeded. But in Mexico, Magaloni's analysis shows, a reform meant to improve the quality of policing and strengthen defendants' rights instead led to significant increases in police fabrication of evidence, especially in low-capacity states. As late as 2000, Mexico's criminal justice system operated as a mixed-inquisitorial system where: (i) prosecutors directed the investigation and prosecution of crimes with little judicial oversight; (ii) trials were conducted via written briefs, and decisions were largely reliant on evidence presented during prosecutors' preliminary investigations; (iii) defendants had little ability to challenge witnesses or contest evidence; (iv) defendants were presumed guilty until proven innocent; and (v) given overworked judges and prosecutors, coerced confessions were regularly used to close cases. Quoting Magaloni, this was not a system of "investigate to arrest", but rather "arrest and torture to investigate".

The reform implemented in Mexico was wide-ranging. Key features include: (i) oral trials in which defense attorneys directly confront prosecutors before a judge; (ii) three-judge panels for each case: one judge who controls the investigation, one presiding over the trial who can know none of the facts in advance, and a third who executes sentences; and (iii) protections for due process written into the Constitution and the National Code of

Criminal Procedure. Torture, intimidation, and pre-trial detention were all prohibited, and the presumption of innocence and the right to trained legal representation constitutionally guaranteed. But the reform was designed with no programs or funding to train police in criminal investigation techniques. They have no knowledge of what forensic evidence is or how to collect or use it. So the police plant evidence to obtain convictions.

Why was reform implemented in this way? Magaloni argues that reform had almost no roots in Mexican society. The impetus for reform came from a tiny group of human rights activists in Mexico and the US, including members of the US Congress. Foreigners, especially the Maryland Initiative, provided significant funding. Mexican voters did not demand any of this. The Mexican government was similarly uninterested, especially Pres. Calderón,⁹ whose fierce war against the drug trade was generating many human rights abuses (Magaloni and Rodríguez 2020). So the reform was approved by Congress and left abandoned. The PRI government that followed implemented it in a highly decentralized way, leading to the systematic differences in outcomes that Magaloni identifies in low vs. high-capacity states. Hence an orphaned reform whose stated goals commanded little political support was incompletely, indifferently implemented. And yet good has come of it: policing in Mexico is less brutal than before, and torture is less common. Reform decreased police abuse of human rights dramatically in high-capacity states.

Our last case is perhaps the purest, most dramatic case of instrumental mismatch leading to institutional incongruity that warps the trajectory of a nation: Brexit. Why, exactly four decades after joining, did UK Prime Minister David Cameron call a referendum on leaving the European Union? How did he lose the referendum, and what were the

⁹ Or even opposed – Calderón was quoted as having said, ‘Just kill all the criminals’.

consequences? Hopkin provides a rich analysis of a tumultuous, confused episode that ended up removing the United Kingdom from the world's foremost club of rich democracies that it had done so much to shape.

The reform itself was initially the simplest of all the initiatives in this special issue: an up-down vote on continued membership of the EU. Cameron announced it in January 2013, in his third year as Prime Minister, not in response to public pressure, but rather to appease a loud, troublesome minority of his MPs. The latter feared the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (highly unusual in British politics) was abetting the rise of a new right-wing party, UKIP, which threatened many Tory seats in 2015. So Cameron made a convenient promise to quiet 'Eurosceptics', allowing him to focus on the delicate task of governing in coalition.

Cameron thought his promise was empty and hence costless. Having failed to win the 2010 election, he expected 5 years of coalition government to lead, at best, to another coalition government in which the strongly Europhile Liberal Democrats would veto a referendum. And if events instead forced him to honor his pledge, he would renegotiate membership terms with the EU and then win the referendum on the back of 'a better deal for Britain'. His political skills, he was sure, were equal to the task.

But the game grew complicated. Many more, diverse interests, and even beliefs about reality, swirled around Brexit. Powerful banks and hedge funds in the City of London saw a chance to free themselves from European regulation and engineer a system more easily capturable than before – 'capitalism unconstrained by democratic accountability' in Hopkin's words. The right-wing press (e.g. *Telegraph*, *Mail*, *Sun*) and political donors (e.g. Dyson, Marshall) operated on a mixture of ideological and commercial motives. To the surprise of many, immigration and British identity became key Brexit issues. And Cameron's close

political allies and friends, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, deserted him to campaign for Brexit and hopefully become Prime Minister.

The interaction of these actors and interests proved chaotic. The process of generating electoral backing for Brexit and then implementing the UK's withdrawal was guided by no clear goal or interest. Instead, short-term opportunism, political constraints, and a great deal of chance dominated. In Hopkin's telling, this multidimensionality of goals had a causal effect on process incoherence. The result was an outcome no-one wanted: a hard Brexit that undermines trade with the UK's most important trading partner, reduces fiscal space to pursue 'levelling-up' reforms in poorer regions, substitutes European migrants with dramatically more migrants from further afield, and greatly complicates the response to Covid and future pandemics.

The costs to the principal actors were also dire. Cameron resigned as Prime Minister shortly after losing the referendum. The following eight years saw four Tory governments, alternately hamstrung and chaotic, as Brexit was finally dragged into existence in 2020. And then the country began to realize what had been done. Brexit is now deeply unpopular. Large, stable majorities assert it was a mistake. Outside the EU, the UK is now poorer and less relevant. Brexit destroyed four Tory governments and led to an electoral wipeout in 2024. Labour has replaced Conservatives in voters' minds as the party of honesty and competence. And so comically mismatched instruments generated an incoherent process of change with emergent outcomes that satisfied almost no one.

Finally, a word on inefficiency, ineptitude, and bad luck. These may often play a role in the incompleteness of design or implementation that make reform processes feckless, as our cases illustrate. But it is important to acknowledge that inefficiency, ineptitude and bad luck play a role in the other two categories as well, as they do more generally in life. Even

carefully designed, resourced and implemented reforms may suffer unexpected reverses that have little to do with reformers' intentions. The difference is that where leaders' private and stated goals align closely, reformers will make larger efforts to overcome unexpected shocks, and so shocks are less likely to determine outcomes. With feckless reforms, by contrast, the costs of overcoming are more likely to be judged excessive, especially if politicians' private goals have already been achieved. And so shocks will play a larger role in determining outcomes. And when reforms are designed to fail, shocks that stymie stated goals will be welcomed by 'reformers' who prefer reforms that do not work.

4 Conclusions

Table 1 summarizes the 16 cases according to our key analytical variables. Doing it this way allows us to see clear causal connections between the degree of mismatch between politicians' stated goals and the instruments of reform they deploy, the institutional (in)congruity that results, and short and long-term outcomes for both reformers and society. The first conclusion that jumps out is that high mismatch between instruments and stated goals leads to incongruous institutions in all our cases. Examples include women's quotas designed to benefit upper-caste Indian men, and language reforms designed to emasculate ethnic-Hutu teachers in Rwanda. As a result, stated goals are not achieved in any of these cases, but private goals are. Across the board, incongruous institutions fail to produce good outcomes for society, with at best modest gains in Chile and India, and null or large negative results in Pakistan, Rwanda, Venezuela and the UK. Interestingly, outcomes for reformers are mixed, sometimes benefiting them, as in Pakistan and Rwanda, but other times leaving them worse off, as in India (Congress) and the UK (Tories).

Table 1: Reform instruments, goals and outcomes

Case	Degree of instrumental mismatch	Resulting Institutional type	Stated goals achieved?	Private goals achieved?	Outcome good for reformers?	Outcome good for society?
Chile – Regional elections	High	Incongruous	No	Yes	Yes?	Modestly
India – Gender quotas	High	Incongruous	No	Yes	No	Modestly
Pakistan – Decentralization	High	Incongruous	No	Yes	Yes	No
Rwanda – Language reform	High	Incongruous	No	Yes	Yes	No
U.K. – Brexit	High	Incongruous	No	Yes	No	No
Venezuela – Policing reform	High	Incongruous	No	Yes	Yes	No
Chile – Consitutional reform	Medium	Incongruous	Yes	No	No	No
Jesuits in the construction of New Spain	Medium	Incongruous	Yes	Partly	No	??? #
Mexico – Policing reform	Medium	Incongruous	Partly	Partly	??? #	Modestly
Peru – Regional devolution	Medium	Incongruous	No	Yes	Yes	No
Argentina – Malapportionment	Low	Incongruous*	Yes	Yes	Yes / No**	Yes / No**
Bolivia – Decentralization	Low	Congruous	Yes	Yes / No	No	Yes
Bolivia – Regional elections	Low	Congruous	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Colombia – Regional elections	Low	Congruous	Yes	No	No	Yes
Mexico – Decentralization	Low	Semi-Congruous	Yes	-----	No	Yes
Uruguay – Constitutional reform	Low	Congruous	Yes	No	No	Yes

* In isolation, executive malapportionment is congruous. But in concert with fiscal transfers, the entire system is incongruous.

** Yes in the short run because dual malapportionment stabilized the federation. No in the long run because the fiscal mechanism required to balance offsetting malapportionments generated fiscal instability.

Outcomes are difficult to evaluate in these cases.

At the other end of the table, we see that low instrumental mismatch leads to institutions that are mostly congruous¹⁰ and stated goals that are universally achieved. This flows logically from the fact that politicians' private goals did not conflict or distract from the stated thrust of reforms, increasing the likelihood of coherent reform design, as in the introduction of regional elections in Colombia and Bolivia, as well as sincere implementation, as occurred with Uruguay's Constitutional reform. All of these reforms¹¹ were also good for society, deepening democracy and strengthening state legitimacy in Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico, and reconfiguring Uruguay's electoral system into a more stable form. Reformers' private goals were only sometimes achieved, and then often fleetingly. Perhaps the most striking conclusion is that these reforms were ultimately and systematically bad for reformers. Decentralization in Bolivia (Faguet 2019) and regional elections in Colombia led to the collapse not only of the reforming parties, but of each country's entire political party system in the years that followed. Decentralization in Mexico undermined the reforming parties and greatly abetted Morena's rise to dominance. And the introduction of regional elections in Bolivia gave the opposition a potent platform to challenge and eventually defeat the government's 'indigenous socialist' model.

In the middle of the table are cases of medium mismatch between reformers' stated goals and their policy instruments. This process led in all four to incongruous institutions featuring internal contradictions, such as Jesuit colonialists who did not answer to the Crown, or incomplete structures, such as devolution to Peruvian regions that were never created. Not surprisingly, such institutions sometimes achieved stated goals but other times

¹⁰ Argentine malapportionment is only incongruous over the long run, when considered alongside a fiscal mechanism implemented subsequently. In the short run malapportionment successfully held the new federation together.

¹¹ The previous footnote applies again here.

did not. Their effects on reformers' private goals were similarly variable: good for Alejandro Toledo, who won the presidency in Peru, but bad for Sebastián Piñera, who presided over the decapitalization of Chile's pension system. Outcomes for reformers also varied. Outcomes for society varied less – they were generally poor. This is not surprising given incompleteness in reform design and implementation.

Categorizing cases by degree of instrumental mismatch produces a somewhat different grouping compared to the categories of section 3. Table 2 compares the two, with cases that switch group in bold italics. Note that all the switchers emerge from the feckless group. At the simplest level, it stands to reason that the largest group would be most affected. More interestingly, reforms that might have succeeded can fall short due to a deep mismatch between reformers' private goals vs. the instruments they employ, as with police reform in Venezuela and Brexit, or the superposition of multiple reform instruments that undermine an initial, sincerely designed reform, as with malapportionment in Argentina and decentralization in Mexico. Fecklessness has many parents.

The larger lesson that emerges from our cases is that institutional reform is hard to do. Changes to the deep rules of the game that structure governance, the economy, and social relations are complicated, full of uncertainty across time and dimension, and so very hard to get right. In any specific instance, much must go well, including probably non-trivial doses of luck, for reform to work and society to benefit. By itself, this logic explains a large share of feckless reforms.

Table 2: Degree of instrumental mismatch vs. characteristics of reform design

Degree of instrumental mismatch	Design characteristics
High mismatch	Designed to fail
Chile – Regional elections	Chile – Regional elections
India – Gender quotas	India – Gender quotas
Pakistan – Decentralization	Pakistan – Decentralization
Rwanda – Language reform	Rwanda – Language reform
U.K. – Brexit	
Venezuela – Official Vigilantism	Feckless reform
Medium mismatch (poor follow-through)	Argentina – Malapportionment
Chile – Consitutional reform	Chile – Consitutional reform
Jesuits in the construction of New Spain	Jesuits in the construction of New Spain
Mexico – Police reform	Mexico – Decentralization
Peru – Regional elections	Mexico – Police reform
	Peru – Regional elections
	U.K. – Brexit
Low mismatch	Venezuela – Official Vigilantism
Argentina – Malapportionment	Designed to succeed
Bolivia – Decentralization	Bolivia – Regional elections
Bolivia – Regional elections	Bolivia – Decentralization
Colombia – Regional elections	Colombia – Regional elections
Mexico – Decentralization	Uruguay – Constitutional reform
Uruguay – Constitutional reform	

Reforms that are designed to fail, on the other hand, represent a knife's edge of reformers opposed to the stated purpose of reform, who intentionally design it in the interest of private goals that make stated goals unreachable. It is here that private goals will most likely be met. But this is political cynicism in the extreme, and probably difficult to organize in complex societies where a least *some* reformers or interests want stated goals to obtain. Although the latter would not suffice to make a reform successful, it might well tip it into fecklessness. By contrast, reforms designed to succeed tend to be good for society but bad for reformers. This is, again, intrinsic to the definition of institutional reform. Where rational institutions are allowed to function in a changing society and polity, outcomes cannot be controlled and so will not reliably favor the interests of reformers. That so many leaders nonetheless pursue stated goals through congruous institutions is a testament to the

public spirit of some, and to the hubris of others.

A Development Studies contribution to social science

Finally, we hope the articles in this Special Issue coalesce into two broad contributions to social science. First, consider where instrumental mismatch sits in purely theoretical terms. It is broadly related to the time inconsistency problem introduced by Kydland and Prescott (1977), which subsequently propagated powerfully through economics and is now an accepted part of that intellectual toolkit. We argue that time inconsistency is but a special case of the larger, more vexed phenomenon of instrumental mismatch, where the incentives of agents pursuing a change, and the effects of that change, are dissimilar in both time *and dimension*, and at the limit can be wildly asymmetric. This makes instrumental mismatch a more powerful, complex, difficult problem. Its innate multidimensionality renders it problematic for the mathematical tools preferred by economists. By contrast, trade-offs amongst policy dimensions, sectors, social groups, and time scales are the bread-and-butter of development studies, and hence susceptible to our multi-methods toolkit. Characterizing this phenomenon and making it susceptible to empirical investigation is our first contribution.

Secondly, the development studies literature is full of ideas devised by our constituent disciplines to explain rich-country phenomena, which are then re-purposed for developing-country contexts. We seek to reverse that flow. Our ambition is to forge a powerful concept in the methodologically and empirically diverse fires of development studies, test and perfect it there, and then feed it back into the social science disciplines. And in so doing, we hope to show that an idea that emerges in the developing world can explain some of the most important events in developed countries too.

Demonstrating that is one key contribution of the article on Brexit, perhaps the most

prominent example of instrumental mismatch in the world today. For eight years the UK's economy and politics have staggered through the turmoil that Brexit created. Settled opinion pins responsibility on immigration and the populist right, missing the extent to which it is a self-inflicted, accidental wound that need never have happened. With tongue somewhat in cheek, our Brexit analysis is a piece of intellectual reverse colonization that we hope will inspire further colonizations of 'developed-country studies'.

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