Introduction

Combining

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In order to answer a research question, scholars often rely on two or more methods introduced in the first four parts of this book to generate, collect, and analyze data. This section, entitled *Combining*, discusses the advantages and challenges of explicitly and purposely combining methods in research projects on IOs while providing practical examples.

Historically, scholars have mostly limited their methodological toolkit to the methods associated with their discipline. Methods of observation, for instance, have originally been used by anthropologists and sociologists (see part 1—*Observing*), while archival research was taken on by historians (see part 3—*Documenting*). However, in the last decades, scholars in social sciences and the humanities have increasingly mobilized an array of methods broadening the scope of their methodological approaches. Drawing on methods stemming from different disciplines has allowed scholarship in IO research to witness an increasing—and welcoming—interdisciplinary dialogue.

This section shows how studying IOs by combining methods has multiple advantages for doing empirical research in the ever-changing contexts of multilateralism. On the one hand, the use of multiple methods is relevant to address specific theoretical questions such as unpacking power relationships, going beyond institutional discourse, understanding the complex agency of IO actors, or tracing the origins of a particular idea or program. On the other hand, at a methodological level, researchers have suggested several rationales for combining methods. Being aware of the inherent limi-

tations of each method, researchers combine methods to overcome these in order to search for more validity (*triangulation*). Using various methods and thus intertwining data may come in handy to *complement* and *expand* the results derived from one method, which in turn allows researchers to *explore* the findings further. The combination of methods may at times also be needed to overcome the challenges researchers face while doing field-work, as it reveals the crafted nature of social science research (see chapter 29—*Composing Collages: Working at the Edge of Disciplinary Boundaries*).

This having been said, contributions also point to important challenges in combining methods. For instance, it supposes a high diversity of meth-odological skills and generally calls for more material resources. Last but not least, studies that combine methods are often longer both in the time dedi-cated to data generation and analysis as well as in their written format. The latter may collide with scientific journals that restrict the number of words in their publications.

The contributions gathered in this section address the issue of meth-odological combination in three ways. First, scholars provide examples of the combination of some established methods in social sciences (see chapter 20—*Interviews and Observations*, chapter 21—*Observations, Interviews, and Archives*, and chapter 22—*Computational Text Analysis and Archival Meth-ods*). They explore why and how these specific methods can be combined, what the value added is, and point to their reoccurring challenges. In box v—*Challenging Secrecy*, combining methods helps overcome the hurdles of secrecy in IOs for instance, while box w—*Research with LinkedIn*, shows how digital platforms provide complementary information. The possibility of combining methods is, of course, not limited to these examples. Second, contributors shed light on how combining methods can be done as part of a coherent research design (see chapter 23—*Qualitative Comparative Analysis*, chapter 24—*Structured, Focused Comparison*, and chapter 25—*Process Trac-ing*), guiding the reader on how to make sense of such combinations. Third, contributors present methodological approaches that in essence necessitate the combination of various methods for their data generation, data collec-tion, and data analysis (see chapter 26—*Prosopography*, chapter 27—*Practice Analysis*, chapter 28—*Feminist Approaches*, chapter 29—*Composing Collages: Working at the Edge of Disciplinary Boundaries*, box x—*Postcolonial Insights*, and box z—*Expeditions as a Research Method*). These contributions focus on a particular research approach and its adaptation to the IO context.

In sum, the final part of this book opens with a reflection on methodol-ogy (see box y—*Reflexivity in Practice*), broadening the specific challenges

on methods per se. Taken together, these contributions shed light on three important dimensions when combining methods: the rationales, timing, and practical implications. While all show that combining methods allows researchers to grasp the heightened complexities of IOs, they also provide rich examples by advocating in favor of methodological pluralism in the study of IOs (Interlude V—*Controversies on Methodological Pluralism*).