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19 Global governance

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Globalisation represents a major challenge to governance. Indeed, for many the concept of globalisation itself is inextricably linked to the idea of *ungovernability*. This association is comprehensible, since the classic locus of governance is the state, and the debate on globalisation concerns mainly the allegedly declining capacity of states to regulate what happens within their territories as a result of their growing enmeshment in cross-border flows and networks.¹

This chapter does not address to what extent the governance capacity of states has been curtailed by global forces: other chapters in this volume assess the extensive literature on this question. Its aim is rather to review a substantial body of research that shows that the performance of governance functions is not limited to the actions of governments exercising sovereign powers over their jurisdictions, but occurs also at supranational and transnational levels. Governance – understood as the establishment and operation of rule systems facilitating the coordination and cooperation of social actors – is conceptually distinct from government – understood as an organisation in charge of administering and enforcing those rules (Young, 1999). The literature discussed in this chapter (originating mostly from political scientists and international relations scholars) maintains that governance is not co-extensive with government, and that government should not be seen as a necessary condition of governance. More specifically, it shows that the absence of a world government does not mean that governance is impossible beyond the level of individual states. Global issues such as ozone depletion, the spread of financial crises and the prohibition of certain kinds of weapons are managed by governance structures that do not conform to the hierarchical model of rule-setting and enforcement that is typical of states. The combination of these structures can be said to form a system of global governance.

What is global governance?

Early uses of the term “global governance” date back to the 1970s (Mendlovitz 1975; Ruggie 1980). It was increasingly used in the late 1980s and early 1990s, mainly thanks to former members of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the “Brundtland Commission”), such as Shridath Ramphal and Maurice Strong. Several of these public figures participated in the Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance in 1991 and then in the Commission on Global Governance, whose landmark report *Our Global Neighborhood* was published in 1995. Around the same years, “global governance” was introduced in academic discourses by the work of James Rosenau, Oran Young and other scholars. Since the 1990s, the expression has retained its dual meaning as key term of a political programme for international reform² as well as a conceptual tool in political research.³ Disparate issues have been examined through the lens of global governance, such as the role of business in environmental policy⁴ the negotiation and implementation of public health policies,⁵ peace-keeping,⁶ gender policies,⁷ weapons bans,⁸ the regulation of world trade⁹ and the reform of the United Nations system.¹⁰

Lawrence S. Finkelstein (1995, pp. 370–1) probably provided the most comprehensive description of what global governance is about:

Governance should be considered to cover the overlapping categories of functions performed internationally, among them: information creation and exchange; formulation and promulgation of principles and promotion of consensual knowledge affecting the general international order, regional orders, particular issues on the international agenda, and efforts to influence the domestic rules and behavior of states; good offices, conciliation, mediation, and compulsory resolution of disputes; regime formation, tending and execution; adoption of rules, codes, and regulations; allocation of material and program resources; provision of technical assistance and development programs; relief, humanitarian, emergency, and disaster activities; and maintenance of peace and order.

The complexity of this description reflects the problem of conceptualising governance with precision. The term ‘governance’ itself has been used in a variety of contexts.¹¹ What is common to most uses of the term ‘governance’

is that it denotes a form of social steering that does not necessarily rely on hierarchy and command, as the concept of government implies, but also on processes of self-organisation and horizontal negotiation. In systems of governance, problem-solving is not the preserve of a central authority able to impose solutions on subordinate agencies and individuals, but the result of the interaction of a plurality of actors, who often have different interests, values, cognitive orientations and power resources.¹²

Sceptical views on global governance

To the extent that governance implies the possibility of ‘order without hierarchy’, it is especially relevant to the discussions about the management of problems in the global arena, where no supreme political authority exists. But to conceive the international or global system as orderly does not necessarily imply the recognition that a form of global governance has been established. Order is not *ipso facto* governance. According to the so-called ‘realist’ tradition of international studies, the main feature of the international system is anarchy – that is, the absence of a world sovereign. The international system can nonetheless be orderly, but realists hold a restrictive view of the conditions leading to international order. Order is said to be possible only through two mechanisms (stressed by two different strands within the realist tradition): the balance of power or the hegemony by one state over the rest. In the first case, order emerges as a by-product of alignment decisions made by states seeking survival.¹³ In the second case it results from some degree of ‘steering’ by the most powerful actor in the system.¹⁴ In both cases, order is unstable as interstate rivalry always threatens to disrupt economic relations and generate armed conflicts for supremacy.

Other components of the realists’ conception of international order contribute to their scepticism towards the idea that global governance exists or is a concrete possibility.¹⁵ First, this tradition is interested in *international* order, understood as *inter-state* order. States are considered by far the most important actors in world affairs. To the extent that other actors have an impact on global political and economic conditions, this happens within a framework constituted and governed by states.¹⁶ Second, in the realist conception of international order there is little room for international institutions. International institutions are either irrelevant or epiphenomenal, that is, devoid of autonomous causal power.¹⁷

Institutionalist perspectives on international governance

To date the most elaborate response to this restrictive conception of order comes from the so-called ‘institutionalist’ approach to international relations. Institutional scholars generally retain realism’s emphasis on the centrality of states, but deny that institutions have no real role in creating and preserving orderly and cooperative relations between states. On the contrary, international institutions can affect deeply how states behave towards each other, and enable them to cooperate in matters where otherwise conflictual relationships would have prevailed.¹⁸

The institutional form that has attracted more attention and study is international regimes, that is, ‘sets of principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue area of international relations’ (Krasner, 1983, p. 2). It is the pervasive presence of regimes that enabled several scholars to conclude that ‘governance without government’ is a real feature of the global system (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992).

While all institutionalists agree that international regimes *do* matter in international politics, they disagree on the best way to characterise their impact. This disagreement reflects a more general divide between rationalist (‘thin’) and sociological (‘thick’) institutionalism in political science.¹⁹ According to the former, institutional rules operate as external constraints, providing incentives and information to rational actors whose preferences are exogenously determined (or assumed for heuristic purposes). According to sociological institutionalists, on the other hand, institutions affect actors’ choices in a broader range of ways: by defining standards of culturally and normatively appropriate behaviour and common world views, they structure not only external incentives but also the basic goals and identities of actors. Institutions affect not only what actors can do, but also what they want to do and even who they are.

These differences are reflected in the study of international regimes (Young, 1999). Rational-choice institutionalists in international relations theory often draw on transaction cost economics and other economic approaches, but the most developed theoretical framework for studying ‘cooperation under anarchy’ (Oye, 1986) derives from game theory. Non-cooperative game theory examines social situations in which rational actors cannot enter binding agreements and identifies the conditions under which cooperation is nonetheless possible (Axelrod, 1984). These results have been applied to the study of international regimes, originating a flow of theoretical and empirical work that shows how states – conceived as rational egoists – can benefit from an institutionalised environment when interacting with each other.²⁰

For sociologically minded regime theorists, on the other hand, the institutional environment in which states interact does not simply affect their strategies, but participates in shaping their identity and goals.²¹ Cooperation under anarchy is possible because states’ actions are not oriented only to ‘logics of consequences’ (rational behaviour designed to maximise exogenous utility) but also to ‘logics of appropriateness’ (rules, roles and identities that stipulate appropriate behaviour in given situations).²² Norms have an independent causal impact on the behaviour of actors, which have been socialised through domestic and international learning processes. The recent wave of constructivist theorising presents in a different form some of the insights of the English school, which depicted the international system as an ‘anarchical society’ (Bull, 1977) where order is assured by a mix of power politics and common values. Insights from constructivism and English school theory have been recently been synthesised in a theory of the social structure

of globalisation (Buzan, 2004)

The effects of international institutions in general and of regimes and organisations in particular on the behaviour of states are summarised in Box 19.1.

From international regimes to global governance

Regime theory has produced an impressive amount of theoretical and empirical knowledge on various aspects of international affairs. This body of knowledge is an indispensable foundation for the study of global governance. Conventional regime theory, however, tends to ignore the contribution of non-state actors to the management of cross-border issues. The concept of governance, on the contrary, is frequently used to convey the idea that public actors have no monopoly over the resolution of public problems and that they increasingly collaborate with other actors in various stages of the policy-making process (Koenig-Archibugi, 2002, Abbott and Snidal 2009). This section provides an overview of the literature on the contribution of non-state actors to global governance, and focuses on three types of non-state actors: not-for-profit non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business entities and the staff of intergovernmental organisations (IGOs).

Over the last two decades there has been a proliferation of studies on NGO participation in global public policy, which have examined several issue areas: human rights,²³ rules of war,²⁴ humanitarian emergencies,²⁵ gender issues,²⁶ economic development,²⁷ demography,²⁸ health policy,²⁹ business regulation³⁰ and environmental protection.³¹ Several studies provide comparisons across issue areas or general reflections on public–private cooperation.³² Some go as far as claiming that, in the steering of global affairs, states have been joined by other actors that are ‘equally important’ (Rosenaau, 2000, p. 187).

Box 19.1. Functions of international institutions and organizations according to institutionalist approaches to world politics.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS:

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Rationalist institutionalism</i> ↓ | provide information about common problems provide information about preferences facilitate the signalling of intentions constrain bargaining strategies provide focal points in negotiations facilitate tactical issue linkage increase the credibility of promises multiply interactions disseminate information about past behaviour define obligations and cheating define appropriate sanctions for non-compliance improve the monitoring of compliance coordinate decentralized sanctioning define standard operating procedures stabilize routines generate cognitive models define rules of appropriate behaviour consolidate normative world views shape the formation of identities |
| ↑ <i>Sociological institutionalism</i> | |

The available evidence does not support the ‘equal importance’ thesis: global public policy-making is characterised by conspicuous asymmetries in power and tasks, and the current balance of power (still) favours states. Having said that, it seems indeed indisputable that NGOs are nearly ubiquitous, having established their presence in virtually all international policy domains. They are

well entrenched in traditional areas such as development policy, humanitarian assistance and environmental protection, but their presence is increasing also on previously less accessible issues like finance (debt cancellation) and arms control (land mines). Wolfgang Reinicke and his associates (2000) showed that a number of important global problems are dealt with by tripartite networks, bringing together public agencies, business actors and advocacy groups on an informal basis. It has even been argued that 'human rights NGOs are the engine for virtually every advance made by the United Nations in the field of human rights since its founding' (Gaer, 1996, p. 51).

On the other hand, presence is not necessarily influence. For instance, the authors of a comprehensive study of the relationship between three global social movements (environmental, labour and women's movements) and three multi-lateral economic institutions (the IMF, World Bank and WTO) conclude that some change in the way the institutions make policy has occurred as a result of this relationship, but they add: 'While signalling an alteration to the method of governance, it is less clear that there is a change either in the content of governing policies or in the broad interests they represent' (O'Brien et al., 2000, p. 206). Another study, comparing NGO 'participation' in the UN World Conferences on the environment, human rights and women held during the 1990s, shows that NGOs were granted high visibility and access to many official fora, but there is little evidence that the states accepted the NGOs' perspective on the problems debated. Considering moreover that access itself was conditional, the authors conclude: 'state sovereignty sets the limits of global civil society' (Clark et al., 1998, p. 35). On the other hand, a study of 23 environmental regimes found support for the hypothesis that the higher the degree of environmental NGO access in international environmental negotiations, the higher the commitment level of states, i.e. the depth of their cooperation, afterward (Böhmelt and Betzold 2013). As Thomas Risse (2001) noted almost two decades ago, it is no longer disputed that NGOs and other 'not-for-profit' transnational actors make a difference in world politics: now the interesting question is: why, and under what conditions?

With regard to the role of the business actors in the management of cross-border activities and exchanges, several recent studies demonstrate that this is significant. Some sceptics hold that 'International firms create the need for improved international governance, but they do not and cannot provide it' (Grant, 1997, p. 319), but other researchers have shown that, in many areas, business actors have established transnational regimes that give order and predictability to the massive flow of transactions that takes place across state borders. A major study on global business regulation finds that in all the sectors considered 'state regulation follows industry self-regulatory practice more than the reverse, though the reverse is also very important' (Braithwaite and Drahos, 2000, p. 481). Other researchers have highlighted several regimes whose members are mainly or exclusively private actors.³³ These transnational regimes overlap with and sometimes are functional equivalents of the international regimes established by governments. In addition, business actors – that is, interest associations or powerful corporations – participate regularly in the international policy-making process, and in many cases have a decisive influence on the outcomes.³⁴

Conventional regime analysis tends to neglect not only non-state actors such as NGOs and companies, but also international organisations *as organisations*. Most institutionalist analyses focus on the operation and effectiveness of regimes, which are not actors in their own right and affect outcomes only by influencing the behaviour of members and others subject to their provisions. In comparison, less attention has been paid to intergovernmental organisations, which are often at the centre of a regime and which in principle *are* capable of agency.

In the past few years a number of studies have advanced interesting hypotheses about the goals, functions and power of IGOs, which can provide a theoretical foundation for further empirical research.³⁵ Case studies of multilateral negotiations have already highlighted the active role of the bureaucrats who staff international organisations, showing that they are able to exercise influence by forging strategic alliances, sponsoring research, mobilising technical expertise, raising public awareness and playing a leadership role in negotiations.³⁶ This involves a certain degree of operational autonomy, that is, the officials' capacity to act independently of their 'principals' – namely, the governments that have collectively delegated functions to them.

In sum, the management of global affairs is not the preserve of governments, but involves a broad range of actors, at the domestic and transnational levels. Specifically, global governance implies that firms and NGOs are not simply the passive recipients of the rules negotiated by governments above their heads, but participate in various ways in the formulation of those rules through public–private partnerships, or even by establishing purely private regimes to regulate certain domains in their common interest. Therefore, *actor pluralism* should

be added to the *possibility of non-hierarchical order* and the *role of institutions* as a defining characteristic of global governance.

Some of the most interesting and innovative research on global governance in recent years tackles one or more of following three themes. First, researchers are increasingly interested in the “performance” of global governance institutions and its determinants.³⁷ For instance, while some of the authors cited earlier focused on organizational pathologies deriving from the bureaucratic elements of IOs, Ranjit Lall (2017) argues that the main obstacle to performance is the propensity of governments to use IOs to promote narrow interests rather than broader organizational objectives. Second, a strand of research shows that the (variously defined) performance of global governance institutions is decisively influenced by their ability to foster high-quality deliberation among the main stakeholders.³⁸ Third, scholars are increasingly focusing on the architecture of global governance as a whole, or at least in particular policy domains, rather than individual actors or institutions. Compared to ten years ago, we know much more about the causes of institutional fragmentation in global governance, as well as its impact on policy effectiveness and the distribution of the benefits and costs of governance.³⁹ The increased attention to the distributional implications of global governance goes hand in hand with a deeper understanding of the rising political contestation of global governance institutions.⁴⁰

Normative perspectives on global governance

This chapter had focused on analytical and empirical work on global governance, but normative approaches to the problem deserve at least a brief mention. The legitimacy of global governance can be assessed from a variety of perspectives, most of which are based on the commitment to democracy as an essential condition for the legitimisation of political orders.⁴¹ Roughly two main positions can be distinguished: democratic inter-governmentalism and democratic cosmopolitanism.

According to democratic inter-governmentalism, global governance cannot receive direct democratic legitimisation, but must obtain its legitimacy indirectly through the participation of democratically elected governments in global policy-making.⁴² In this view, democracy requires a public sphere, and no transnational public sphere exists now or is in sight. There are at least two formidable obstacles to the formation of a public sphere beyond the nation state, one cognitive and one affective. On the one hand, democratic deliberation is impossible when *de facto* the majority of people are excluded from global networks of political communication, notably because of insufficient foreign language skills. Deliberation in supranational fora would be monopolised by educated elites and therefore remain undemocratic. On the other hand, the acceptance of the results of collective and possibly majoritarian decisions requires a degree of solidarity and sense of common belonging that is extremely weak beyond the national level.

According to democratic cosmopolitanism, democratic legitimacy can and should be conferred through multiple channels, in a pattern that corresponds to the pluralistic character of global governance. Moreover, the democratisation of international institutions itself can extend the focus of concern and loyalty of individuals and groups beyond the national dimension, and for this reason democratic restructuring should be conceived as a dialectical process of mutual reinforcement. Cosmopolitan institutions (such as a global assembly of peoples and forceful international tribunals) will enhance the effectiveness of global public policy-making by increasing its legitimacy and at the same time they will promote domestic democracy.⁴³

Debating the normative strengths and benefits of different models of global governance is important because, while the establishment of a genuinely democratic system of global governance may be unlikely in the near future, there is little reason to believe that it is impossible.⁴⁴

Notes

1. Held et al. (1999); Hirst and Thompson (1999); Koenig-Archibugi (2003).
2. Commission on Global Governance (1995).
3. Rosenau (1997); Held and McGrew (2002).
4. Levy and Newell (2005); Falkner (2008).
5. Söderholm (1997); Lee (2003); Hein et al. (2007).
6. Cunliffe (2009).
7. Meyer and Prügl (1999); Hafner-Burton and Pollack (2002). 8. Price (1999).
9. Shaffer (2005).
10. Knight (1995); Weiss (2008).
11. See the overview in Hirst (2000).
12. Rosenau (1997); Pierre (2000). 13. Waltz (1979).
14. Gilpin (2001).
15. Gilpin (2002).
16. Waltz (1979); Krasner (1995).
17. Strange (1983); Mearsheimer (1994/95).
18. Hansenclever et al. (1997); Martin and Simmons (1998).

19. Hall and Taylor (1996); Scharpf (2000).
20. Keohane (1984); Oye (1986); Martin (1999); Haftendorn et al. (1999); Boehmer et al. (2004); Fortna (2008).
21. Kratochwil (1989); Katzenstein (1996); Finnemore (1996); Ruggie (1998); Wendt (1999); Risso (2000); Johnston (2008); Baccini and Koenig-Archibugi (2014)
22. This distinction stems from March and Olsen (1989).
23. Cohen (1990); Gaer (1996); Korey (1998); Schmitz (2006); Murdie and Davis (2012); Murdie and Peksen (2015).
24. Finnemore (1999); Price (1999). 25. Natsios (1996); Mills (2005).
26. Berkovitch (1999); Joachim (2007).
27. Nelson (1995); Fox and Brown (1998); Wenar (2006).
28. Barrett and Frank (1999); Eager (2004); Neumann and Sending (2010).
29. Jönsson and Söderholm (1996); McCoy et al. (2009).
30. Braithwaite and Drahos (2000); Kantz (2007).
31. Lipschutz and Mayer (1996); Rautiala (1997); Arts (1998); Betsill and Corell (2008); Böhmelt and Betzold (2013).
32. Gordenker and Weiss (1996); Willetts (1996); Charnovitz (1997); Clark et al. (1998); Keck and Sikkink (1998); Boli and Thomas (1999); Higgott et al. (2000); O'Brien et al. (2000); Benner et al. (2004); Börzel and Risso (2005); Koenig-Archibugi and Zürn (2006); Steffek et al. (2007); Tallberg et al. (2013)
33. Spar (1999); Ronit and Schneider (2000); Haufler (2001); Buse and Harmer (2004); Bartley (2007); Pattberg (2007); Macdonald (2007); Dingwerth (2008).
34. Braithwaite and Drahos (2000); Sell (2000); Collin et al. (2002); Ruggie (2003); Levy and Newell (2005); Falkner (2008).
35. Abbott and Snidal (1998); Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Hawkins et al. (2006); Thompson (2009).
36. Hampson (1995); Johnson (2014); Yi-Chong and Weller (2008); Bauer and Ege (2016). See also Cox et al. (1974); Reinalda and Verbeek (1998).
37. Miles et al. (2001); Gutner and Thompson (2010); Tallberg et al. (2016).
38. De Burca et al. (2012); Stevenson (2016); Dryzek and Pickering (2017); Milewicz and Goodin (2018).
39. Biermann et al. (2009); Morse and Keohane (2014); Gehring and Faude (2014); Abbott et al. (2015).
40. Zürn (2018).
41. McGrew (2000, 2002); Archibugi et al. (2011).
42. Grimm (1995); Dahl (1999); Scharpf (1999); Hirst and Thompson (1999); Kymlicka (1999).
43. Falk (1995); Held (2003); Archibugi (2008); Marchetti (2008).
44. Koenig-Archibugi (2011).

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