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Global Governance

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Synonyms

Global order; World politics

Introduction

Despite (or maybe precisely because of) its apparent vagueness, the concept of *governance* has become one of the most influential intellectual leitmotifs in contemporary political science. Expanded in scale and scope within the field of International Relations (IR), the notion of *global* governance appears to be even less specific, more intricate, and hence even harder to pinpoint. To no surprise then, ever since its introduction in the 1990s, both proponents and opponents have criticized the concept for its inherent ambiguity and loose definition (Finkelstein 1995; Latham 1999; Murphy 2000). More surprising though is the fact that the concept nevertheless triumphed in reorienting the discipline as global governance today serves as a major point of reference for both scholars and practitioners of world politics (Barnett and Sikkink 2008). As such, global

governance carries a world of diverging meanings and normative commitments when being invoked. Against this background, this chapter provides a brief definition of global governance in the remainder of this introduction before sketching both the disciplinary and the real-world contexts against which the concept and the practice of global governance emerged. Based on this two-fold account which situates the concept in the field of IR, current debates and future directions for research will be discussed before the chapter concludes that despite its conceptual ambiguity, scholars should hold on to the concept and collectively continue to push toward realizing its full analytical value (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014a).

In the literature, we find an abundance of at first sight seemingly similar definitions of global governance. However, upon closer inspection, these definitions quite often feature slightly different foci and themes. Adapted from the 1995 Report of the Commission on Global Governance, for example, governance is broadly framed as "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs." More specifically, it is further defined as "a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and co-operative action may be taken" which "includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest" (Commission on Global Governance

1995, 2). Karns and Mingst (2010, 4) in particular focus on the global nature of the concept and think of it as "the multi-level collection of governance-related activities, rules, and mechanisms, formal and informal, public and private, existing in the world today." Advancing a functionalist, almost evolutionary logic, Held and McGrew (2002, 9) see in global governance the "evolving system of (formal and informal) political coordination – across multiple levels from the local to the global – among public authorities (states and IGOs) and private agencies seeking to realize common purposes or resolve collective problems." In this vein, global governance synonymously describes the process of international organization as well as single organizations within this process. Finally, Weiss and Wilkinson (2014b, 9), emphasizing the analytical dimension of global governance, think of it as a concept which helps scholars to "capture more fully the totality of ways in which life on the planet is ordered" as it encourages us to "ask questions not only about who and what were involved in governing the world but also about how any particular form of organization came about and the results of its particular mechanisms of control."

Considering the overlap between these definitions, we can distill five widely shared assumptions and commitments which, taken together, distinguish global governance from other approaches. Being both political and analytical in nature, these assumptions and commitments entail (1) the notion that "order" and governance on the global scale are dynamic and are likely to change over time and (2) the perception that recent changes are driven by new governance problems which are potentially global in nature and hence demand global solutions, translating into (3) the analytical need to consider other actors beyond the state engaged in the provisions of such solutions motivated by (4) the empirical realization that current provisions of "order" and governance on the global scale have become decoupled from formal-legal authority and ruling through coercive force as well as (5) the normative impetus to contribute to and direct future change. None of these assumptions and commitments are exclusively (or necessarily for the first time) advanced

within the notion of global governance. Taken together, however, they define global governance as an approach to *studying* and *doing* world politics in which both practitioners and scholars perceive the current state of world order as diffuse, polyarchic, and multilayered. As will be shown in the next section, this approach, whose intellectual origins can be dated back to the early 1990s, soon gained momentum in and beyond IR and quickly became an important contender within the discipline.

Global Governance and its Disciplinary Contexts of Emergence

Governance and order on a global scale in general as well as the role and influence of international organizations in particular have always played an important role in IR thinking. Against the background of accelerated globalization and ground-shaking events surrounding the end of the Cold War, however, interest in these *topoi* gained new momentum in the early 1990s. "Officially introduced" to the field with the publication of James Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel's edited volume on *Governance Without Government* (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992), this new approach soon received its name and intellectual home in the quarterly journal of *Global Governance* (Coate and Murphy 1995). Infused into a discipline suffering from and struggling with its self-made straightjackets of state-centrism, paradigm wars, and rationalism, global governance, despite its vagueness, quickly gained space and soon established a new disciplinary narrative to be reckoned with (Barnett and Sikkink 2008). It did so by (1) "annexing" the English School and regime theory with their foci on intergovernmental organizations and international law as well as the study of transnational actors, (2) challenging the assumingly nonnormative commitments of mainstream IR toward rigorous analytical theorizing, and (3) connecting to (social) constructivism which, taken together, opened the discipline to alternative knowledge claims in both methodological and substantial terms.

First, in terms of intellectual predecessors, the English School, regime theory, and the study of transnational actors stand out in particular. Vis-à-vis each of these, global governance presented itself as the more encompassing, more holistic approach. In multiple supersessions, global governance intellectually connected to all three strands yet at the same time reframed them and monopolized their assumptions in unique ways. For those who already studied intergovernmental organizations, international law, and transnational actors, global governance offered a new perspective to relate to and restate the relevance of their studies. For those who argued against such considerations, global governance appeared to be a much larger contender than previous approaches simply because real-world developments made a stronger case for these topics than ever before (see below). Ultimately, instead of embracing and explicating intellectual proximity and thematic resemblance with established research traditions in order to specify the approach, early global governance scholars emphasized the novelty of their perspective. In intellectual history terms, it can thus be argued that much of the attractiveness that allowed global governance to climb from the "ranks of the unknown to one of the central orienting themes in the practice and study of international affairs" with "its near-celebrity status" today originated in finding the sweet spot between drawing on and at the same time differentiating itself from other established approaches in IR (Barnett and Duvall 2005, 1).

Second, just as its flagship publication *International Organizations*, the field of IR as a whole heavily shifted toward analytical theorizing during the 1980s. As a consequence of this shift, explicit normative commitments to global policies became something IR scholars frowned upon. Such a heavy reliance on a particular philosophy of science, however, evoked criticism and opened new windows of opportunities. As Sinclair (2012, 16) critically put it, IR as an intellectual enterprise "increasingly drew back from matters of international policy and instead became a vehicle for the development of rigorous academic theorizing" against which global governance emphasized the political and hence normative nature of its topics.

As such, while mainstream IR became skeptical of any sort of value commitment, global governance proponents were not shy to discuss the possibility of a "better world" and turned their normative commitments into one of the defining assets of their new approach. Consequentially, important questions such as "what forms of organization and governance should prevail, how scarce resources should be allocated, and what kind of policy ought to be put in place" were raised, discussed, and answered within a global governance framework not afraid of such debates and normative commitments which only further added to the attractiveness of the new intellectual contender (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014a).

Third and connecting to the rise of (social) constructivism as another new paradigm in IR, such normative commitments translated into broader critiques of mainstream IR, its philosophy of science, its methods, and its study themes. However, whereas constructivists advanced their arguments from a theoretically inspired perspective and explicitly included methodological and epistemological critiques in their writings, global governance scholars for the most part were concerned with real-world changes and their substantial implications for world order. In other words, global governance became more of an empirically driven exercise and, other than constructivism, remained more or less noncommitted to epistemological or methodological debates and claims (Ba and Hoffmann 2005). Taken together, constructivism and global governance, almost in an implicit division of labor, collectively opened the discipline to alternative knowledge claims in both methodological and substantial terms and thereby created a much-needed intellectual space to engage with and make sense of real-world developments occurring parallel to these disciplinary dynamics.

Global Governance and its Current Manifestations

Being a concept "born from a marriage between academic theory and practical policy" (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014c, 208), the emergence of global

governance was equally driven by disciplinary dynamics as well as real-world developments. More precisely, the intellectual notion of challenging conventional ways of *studying* global issues was strongly motivated by the political notion that traditional arrangements of *solving* global issues were failing. Under the immediate influence of the Cold War ending, scholars of world politics in the early 1990s in this sense were equally influenced by optimism and high hopes as well as anxiety, disgruntlement, and dissatisfaction with the new world order proclaimed by contemporaries. Living in "a time when hegemons are declining, when boundaries (and the walls that seal them) are disappearing, when squares of the worlds cities are crowded with citizens challenging authorities" (Rosenau 1992, 1), both practitioners and academics alike felt that their time marked a turning point in history. Described by some as the end of history (Fukuyama 1992), Coate and Murphy (1995, 1) wrote in their first editors' note of *Global Governance* that it was a time of "great hope and great hopelessness, a time when ideological fault lines have disappeared, while the global rifts of wealth and power have widened." In the same year, the already mentioned Report of the Global Commission was all grist to the mill of global governance proponents. Proclaiming a "new world" and assessing that there was no alternative to global governance, the singularity and novelty of the time as well as the opportunities that supposedly followed from this became a new *mantra* for those engaged with and interested in world politics.

The end of the Cold War and the Global Commission report, however, were not the only points of reference that bestowed global governance advocates with a collective identity and new themes. In a sense, both only reflected the larger, more foundational development of increased globalization that affected (and continues to affect) our human condition and the nature of our time. It was strongly perceived around the mid-1990s that all spheres of life – culture, communication, and travel, production and markets, money and finance, and ecology and health – had accelerated to the extent that scholars and politicians were exposed to global dynamics unlike

before. Living in such a globalized world was referred to as living in a "world of increased complexity" in which previous ordering principles (e.g., the state and intergovernmental organizations) were deemed to have failed as "domestic problems" became "global problems." Transnational crime and terrorism; trafficking of people, weapons, and drugs; global warming; financial (in)stability; and global trade, it was concluded, were universal in their scope and diminished state capacities to maintain the integrity and welfare of their citizens. Consequentially, practitioners and academics alike felt helpless to grasp, let alone govern, these issues and saw in global governance at least a potential answer when traditional government approaches failed. Ultimately, the enthusiasm as well as the desperation the historical context brought with it strongly pushed the practice *and* the study of world politics toward embracing global governance as a new concept despite its ambiguity. As Latham (1999, 24) put it, a notion deliberately "open and diffuse, if not a little non-committal," appealed to contemporaries since these were "attractive qualities in an era of ambiguity, uncertainty, and flux."

Quickly gaining momentum, global governance soon became a self-fulfilling prophecy for both the practice and the study of world politics. Throughout the 1990s, with national and international politics increasingly merging, we saw both regional arrangements beyond the state fostering as well as stronger commitment to the UN on a global scale. State actors felt that almost all aspects of their decision-making was influenced by complex interdependence and hence advanced the notion that all policies were *foreign* policies. Globally, with various degrees of institutionalization and authority diffusing between different actors, intergovernmental organizations overall developed more autonomy and hence became more influential in world politics (Karns and Mingst 2010). In addition and probably even more important for global governance, non-state actors became more and more involved in private authority and transnational governance. Whether through NGO monitoring and shaming or multinational enterprises developing their own standards, these actors began to contribute to and shape global debates unlike ever before (Held and Hale 2011).

These trends – the internationalization of domestic politics and the ensuing proliferation of multilateralism, intergovernmentalism, and transnational governance – were further reinforced as almost all actors and institutions involved in global governance embraced a "partnering norm" of collective problem-solving. As such, states, IOs, NGOs, and enterprises not only became engaged in global governance individually. They also collectively created a plethora of multi-stakeholder initiatives which only further increased the diffusion of authority, the informalization of governance, and the integration of non-state actors.

Where do these developments leave us today? What are the major characteristics of the current manifestation of global governance? The most remarking aspect probably is the immense, almost infinite complexity that follows from a multilayered, multi-actor, polycentric, and diffused global order. We have to start any account of global governance with the state and emphasize that even in the twenty-first century, they remain key actors with their sovereignty qualified but not compromised. Next we need to add the layer of intergovernmentalism and consider both regional and global IOs. As such, global governance scholars put a particular emphasis on the UN system (Weiss et al. 2010) and on the importance of regional arrangements (Herz 2014). On both the regional and the global levels, however, we see organizations formerly defined by their intergovernmental nature increasingly relying on non-state actors as they embrace and sponsor initiatives such as the *UN Global Compact*; the *Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative*; the *Global Fund to Fight AIDS*, *Tuberculosis and Malaria*; and the *World Commission on Dams*, to name only a few from a seemingly endless list. In these networks and multi-stakeholder partnerships, we also find local, substate agencies independently engaged as well as a certain reliance on specialized epistemic communities and their experts, completing a complex picture of overarching authorities. This plethora of different "global governors" with diverse resources, interests, and constituencies is engaged in different governance activities from advocating and creating to implementing and enforcing norms and

policies which ultimately, to no big surprise, create diffused and unclear responsibilities as well as issues of accountability (see below). Configurations and arrangements vary from issue to issue, implying that we have an almost endless arrangement of different and overlapping governance systems constituting an overall messy, if not chaotic, architecture of global governance. In other words, global governance today is characterized by complex interplays of cooperation, coordination, competition, and contestation between global, regional, national, subnational, and non-state actors. To no surprise, as will be elaborated in the next section, this global patchwork of arrangements remains disputed both academically and politically.

Current Debates and Future Research

Against the background of the outlined disciplinary and real-world dynamics, two major debates along the lines of *how* much global governance and *what kind* of global governance we want today stand out. Each debate involves a multitude of scholars and diverse perspectives which can only be aggregated here to the point where individual contributions do not receive the credit they should receive. With this said, in the first debate, scholars and practitioners alike discuss the overall quality, scale, and depth of the current global governance system. Given the explicit normative impetus of many global governance proponents, it comes as no surprise that assessments differ. These range from affirmative approaches emphasizing the advantages of current global governance over state-centered governance as we experienced it in prior times. Not only are global issues more efficiently tackled, the increased integration of a broad range of different stakeholders also, accordingly to this position, adds to the overall legitimacy of the current order (Ruggie 2004). Others, often informed by Marxist or Historical Materialist thinking, challenge the underlying functionalist logic of global governance, disapprovingly discuss it as a consequence of neoliberalism, critically assess singular initiatives and partnerships, and ultimately reject its

legitimacy. Particularly the integration of private actors, so the argument continues, does not offer solutions but is rather part of the problem (Cox 1997; Murphy 2000).

Between these two positions, we see middle-ground approaches concerned with honing our conceptual tools and theories to better understand and assess global governance. Important dimensions in this are efficiency and legitimacy of governance. Consensus begins to emerge along the lines that considerations of "getting the job done" need to be related to issues of accountability and representation. Simply put, allowing everyone to speak does not imply that everyone is equally well heard as different actors, both state and non-state, command different resources and capabilities. Given that this allows them to influence global governance processes to larger extents, it raises legitimacy concerns about the overall quality of global governance. In addition, since many global governors lack any form of democratic accountability and represent specific constituencies (i.e., *share*holders, not *stake*holders), it has been argued that global governance needs to be grounded in better frameworks that directly connect the ruled with the rulers by allowing the former to choose and potentially replace the latter. Whether such democratic notions are possible on a global scale and whether this will ultimately improve the quality of global governance remain to be seen. For the time being, these issues are at least debated while so far "we have failed as agents of change; that is, as purveyors of opinion and proposals about a better and fairer world order" as global injustices, inequalities, and violence remain real for most people on this planet despite different commitments (and hopes) expressed in global governance (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014a, 19).

The second major debate revolves around the contested conceptual status of global governance. Being advanced at the same time as a policy notion with its origins in the practitioner's discourse, an empirical condition of a changed "world out there," and an analytical tool to study and assess this change, global governance from its very inception semantically entailed and continues to entail today a wide range of diverging

meanings. In other words, global governance denominates the activities of actors engaged in world politics, is intellectually condensed into a paradigmatic description thereof, and provides the conceptual tools and the ontology to scientifically grasp and study them. Just as with *I*nternational *R*elations, the use of capital letters to distinguish a field engaged in intellectual reflection from the real-world substance it is interested in could already help clarify whether we refer to the object of study (i.e., *g*lobal *g*overnance) or the collective academic enterprise (i.e., *G*lobal *G*overnance). With this distinction not made yet as well as skeptical voices still questioning its ability to explain anything, global governance does not constitute a full-fledged research tradition (yet). Rather, it appears to be in a "theoretical interregnum" (Pegram and Acuto 2015) and constitutes, at best, a "theory [still] in the making" (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006, 189). It is in particular the conflation of political commitments, empirical descriptions, and theoretical explanations which makes the notion attractive but also sustains much of the confusion surrounding it. In other words, global governance today is both the question *and* the answer to "what makes the world hang together," and further discussion is needed to fully realize its analytical value (Ruggie 1998).

In addition to conceptual conflation, further adding to the confusion surrounding global governance is the fact that its position in relation to the field of IR has never been quite decided. Framed by some as unwarranted distraction and hence unworthy of engaging with at all, others hail (ed) global governance as a potential savior which will not only reinvent but ultimately supersede the discipline (Ba and Hoffmann 2005). Advocates for disciplinary reinvention emphasize global governance's potential to foster interdisciplinary exchange and overcome IR's reluctance to embrace normativity. Such an intellectual transition, many argue, needs to be accompanied by institutional transition as well. The introduction of *Global Governance* in 1995 as a "quarterly [intended] to return to the global problem-solving origins of the leading journal in the field, which seemed to have lost its way" (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014c, 208), in fact already marked an early

step in this direction. Today, with IR fragmenting into different subfields and special interest areas, we see a proliferation of explicitly dedicated research centers, conferences, and workshops on global governance as well as specialized degree programs emerging. Again, it remains to be seen whether this improves the quality of the research agenda. Ultimately, what is already at stake, though, are the foundational narratives as well as the future of the discipline of IR, and the prominence of global governance in one way or another will change both the substantial the institutional faces of our academic enterprise (Barnett and Sikkink 2008).

Whether one hails these changes or condemns them, at least four conceptual challenges remain unresolved in current global governance thinking. First, it remains to be seen whether global governance can shed its functional bias and move beyond its "managerial vision" currently applied to global issues. Often framed as an "unavoidable consequence of globalization," global governance advocates in this context the need to develop better justifications for studying (and promoting) change (Sinclair 2012, 5). Second, global governance research has to embrace a historical dimension and realize that its subject existed long before it was captured in academic terminology. Studying previous forms and manifestations of global governance will provide scholars with a better grasp on how a particular order of governance came to be in the first place (and ceased at a later stage) as well as an overall better understanding of the core theme of change (Murphy 2014). Third, given its passive focus on structures, global governance research in the future needs to emphasize and theorize the notion of agency. While global governance is all about "how the world is governed" (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014a, 25), we need to know more about the governors involved (Avant et al. 2010). Fourth and finally, processes of governance will remain contested, and these contestations will be resolved through exercises of power which is why global governance has to develop better conceptualizations of power as a relational disposition beyond legal-formal authority (Lake 2010; Barnett and Duvall 2005).

Conclusion

How and whether these challenges will be tackled will determine future directions of global governance research. For the time being one can conclude that despite all the ambiguity and debates surrounding the concept, it simply has become "too important [and too influential] to just let go" (Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006, 198). Considering the impeding and sterile paradigm wars IR was engaged in during the 1990s as well as its inherent state-centrism, global governance significantly advanced the field and created space for new themes and approaches. In this sense, the debates surrounding global governance can be perceived as indicators of the liveliness and relevance of the notion. Put simply, there appears to be something to global governance that keeps us engaged with it. While oftentimes disappointing and frustratingly confusing, intellectual progress of the global governance research agenda overall, at least for the time being, should thus not be measured in terms of coming up with the right answers but rather in terms of raising the right questions. As Weiss and Wilkinson (2014c, 207) remind us, whatever shortcomings current global governance thinking might feature, it still represents a shorthand "useful for describing growing complexity in the way the world is organized and authority is exercised." Accepting the confusion inherent in any exercise as complex as studying world order while still committing to further realizing its analytical value collectively is on us as we owe it to the intellectual ingenuity expressed by the many great minds involved in more than 20 years of global governance research.

Cross-References

▶ Globalization and Governance
▶ Institutions and Globalization & Globalization and transnationalism
▶ Governance and Power

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