KEY CONCEPTS

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

TIMOTHY J. SINCLAIR

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Timothy J. Sinclair
Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire, 9 January 2012

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1
Introduction

What is global governance and what might it be? Global governance is a challenge to the way our world has been managed since the emergence of nation-states in seventeenth-century Europe. Most of us think of states making decisions independently but global governance implies the need to make decisions collectively, given the rise of common problems like global warming and terrorism. At the most basic level then, global governance implies change in what states are and what they can do as new ways of making decisions and acting on collective problems develop. But global governance, like states, can develop in different ways. Some states are tyrannical, and allow little freedom of expression to their communities, while others allow for free speech and democracy. Global governance can develop along multilateral and democratic lines, or it too could devolve into a more dictatorial or autocratic form. This is why knowing about how people think about global governance is so important.

Global governance is a difficult idea to get away from these days. As a concept, global governance seems to capture something very important about our world in the second decade of the twenty-first century. It represents a yearning of some sort, but whether that yearning is for peace and justice, or mere maintenance of the status-quo order, is less clear. Anxiety about global uncertainty seems important (Wilkinson 2005a: 1–3). In these circumstances, most of us tend to ask about

the essence of global governance. What does the concept really mean, and why is it important? This book will tackle these questions, not by telling you what I think is the correct approach to global governance, but by investigating how people think about global governance in different ways, the dimensions and implications of the views they hold, and where applicable, the more systematic thinking we might identify as theories which try to make sense of a complex world.

When Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) talk about the need for the international community to review what went on in the Sri Lankan civil war, when consumers complain about high oil prices and the rising costs of food and clothing, and when states debate military action against regimes, we can be sure that the idea of global governance will be invoked. Unfortunately, the substance of global governance is often far from clear. For some users of the term it means unified action against specific threats; for others, merely a framework of rules and norms. Other groups equate global governance with tyranny or a conspiracy to establish world government. This book investigates these ideas.

Global governance is not just an academic debate, as interesting as that can be. The implications of global governance affect us all. In order to illustrate this I have created two fictional families, one living in the US and the other in India. In chapters 3 to 8, these families adopt the perspective on global governance considered in each chapter. My hope is that you will obtain a more concrete understanding of what each idea of global governance might actually mean through these fictional vignettes, as family life meets different conceptions of global political organization. Studies of international relations too often neglect the probable implications of the phenomena they address, making these things seem distant and abstract. It is especially important to bring the global down to the local with global governance because, as with pollution and gender, it often has quite specific implications for everyday life, and is not confined just to the level of state–state interaction.

The prototypical American Mason family of Greenport, New York had not, until recently, discussed international issues, never mind this thing called global governance. They

were not a politically minded household. Normally, they were happy to leave policy, and especially foreign policy, to politicians in Washington. But John, the husband and father, had recently become concerned about coastal erosion close to the winery he manages on the north fork of Long Island, near Shelter Island. The beautiful, historic north fork of Long Island contains settlements as old as colonial America. How startling in this land of the big and the new to come across police cars carrying town seals proclaiming foundation dates in the seventeenth century. John was finding he had to work much harder to keep ahead of climate change. Thinking about new varieties of grapes in this context was a challenging job. What if the region and its extensive vineyards prove vulnerable to the changing weather? What will happen to the businesses that have grown in the local soil?

The Mason children – Henry, sixteen, and Sofia, fourteen – are worried too. They are still in high school, but can see that things are going to be different for them. Obsessed by environmental issues, they are both becoming advocates of change in the way things are done in the household. Henry wants to design eco-friendly houses. Sofia is interested in clothing recycling. All this is a very great distance from John and his wife Helen's own teenage obsessions with V8s and the local mall. The children are not afraid – as children aren't – to make it clear to their parents that the old ways of thinking and acting are no longer acceptable.

John's wife Helen, too, is getting worried. Her concerns include traffic congestion in what had once been an idyllic refuge from the problems of urban America. She also worries about energy supplies and, increasingly, about carbon emissions. Now, more and more, dinner-table conversation ranges further than the standard talk with the kids about where they are going on vacation next summer. What could be done about these problems, they wonder, and who is going to fix them?

The Patel family lives thousands of miles away from the Masons, and in very different conditions. For them, home is Bangalore (or Bengaluru), capital of the state of Karnataka in south India. Bangalore, the third largest city in India after Mumbai and Delhi, is often known as the Garden City. The Patels moved to the city from the countryside seven years ago.

The Patels are not poor by Indian standards. Nor are they rich. One of the sources of anxiety for Agastya, the husband and father, and Bhadraa, his wife, is the fear that they will get sick and fall into poverty. Coming to Bangalore is part of their effort to get away from these fears and participate in the high-growth India, the 'India Shining' the media talks so much about. Agastya runs a small cleaning business, servicing some of the software companies in Bangalore that have led the city to be known as the Silicon Valley of India. The Patels have four children: Aditi, fourteen; Vinod, thirteen; and the twins Janna and Mira, ten. Mr and Mrs Patel have high hopes for the prosperity and security of their children.

Environmental issues do not have the same prominence in family conversation amongst the Patels as they do in the Masons' household. The senior Patels are more interested in India becoming a rich country as quickly as possible, and in their children working hard, passing their examinations with good grades and securing well-paying jobs in expanding companies. They do not want their children to work in the family cleaning business. Although generally positive toward the West, the family, like many citizens of emerging market countries, are concerned by any effort to put a brake on economic growth, thinking it unfair for the West to obstruct development in India out of concern for the global ecosystem. The Patel children, although more circumspect about it than the Masons', do not always share these parental views. They have been more influenced by television and the internet, and are aware that their environment is not as clean as in other countries. Aditi and Vinod wonder whether part of getting rich is cleaning up the filth that has been a normal part of urban India in the past.

These two families, although facing many of the same problems of life, are very different from each other in important ways. For the Masons, many of the basic functions of the household are unproblematic. Water is safe to drink; waste is effectively removed via the public sewer system; although public transport is very poor where they live, the roads are good and they have two large and relatively new automobiles. Although the Patels are relatively prosperous by Indian standards, many of the things the Masons take for granted are a problem for them. Electricity supply is intermit-

tent, the sewers flood in the monsoon season, and Bangalore is a crowded place. In thinking about these families and their views, we must keep in mind the inequalities between them. We can expect this, and the history of these inequalities, to shape their thinking, giving rise to different ideas. Although the Patels and Masons can think for themselves, they do face different circumstances with different resources and opportunities at their disposal.

The problem of global governance

The apocryphal Mason and Patel families are hardly unique. Everywhere around the world, in rich neighbourhoods and in the desperately poor, people often reach toward an understanding of problems that cross borders and whose solution will require more than the usual national policy choices by governments acting in isolation from each other. Although this is inevitably a process dominated by the educated elite, broader opinion can influence political choices, as the Arab spring of 2011 showed. This pervasive sense of the interconnectedness of the world, and therefore of the necessity for global solutions to problems, seems significant. It may be the best hope for the human race. This makes the idea of global governance important, exciting and worthy of close study. Close study must include not just speculating about the world we want, but careful examination of the world we have, including the ways of thinking that shape it. The choices made by states, peoples and individuals are crucially shaped by ideas about the world held as axioms, or taken-for-granted assumptions, by others. Collectively held ideas are enormously powerful. The state, for example, is not really a collection of guns, soldiers and buildings. The state, first and foremost, is a collectively held idea that the government is legitimate. When that idea breaks down, the state is in trouble, as seen in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Collectively held ideas are not immutable. They change. We must keep in mind that in other eras, such as the twenty years or so prior to the First World War, many people in the rich countries shared a similar sense that the world was coming together in positive ways.

More than thirty years later, after two wars which destroyed tens of millions of lives, the scope for peaceful cooperation was less self-evident.

Although there may be some implicit agreement on the problems associated with these challenges, there is very little agreement on how to deal with them. Global governance, although a term often used by educated people, is typically deployed without clarity, like references to the 'good life' or 'human progress'. For some users, global governance is nothing more than a contemporary way to refer to international institutions. For these authors, there is nothing new in global governance and the term has no specific content, even though they are happy to adopt the new language. For others, global governance implies a change in the fundamental political units that rule our world, incorporating new forms of authority that recognize the technical complexity of a world characterized by economic integration (Rosenau 1992). Some thinkers see the potential for expanding democracy in this new emphasis on global governance, undermining established elites and traditions of inequality, while others see the perpetuation of elite control in a story about continuity (Dryzek 2010; Higgott and Erman 2010). Still others reject the very idea of global governance, seeing in it a sinister plot to undermine their state and national autonomy.

Before we can be effective advocates of global governance, if that is our objective, it is essential to clarify the range of thinking about what I will call the problem of global governance. This requires we put aside the idea that it is an agreed notion, self-evident to all, and come to grips with the diversity of thinking about the idea. By casting global governance as a problem, I wish to reinforce the understanding that the objectives of global governance and the means of achieving these objectives are not collectively held ideas in the same way as notions of the state.

Approach

This book examines these competing concepts of global governance, describing them, analysing them and evaluating

them. Among the elements covered are key puzzles, actors, assumptions, implications and, prior to the scenarios, strengths, weaknesses and likely future development. I have avoided long literature reviews. Toward the end of each substantive chapter, I have incorporated some special analysis. In the tradition of counterfactual analysis in the social sciences, which encourages us to imagine alternative realities if prior conditions were different, each of the substantive chapters uses scenarios or historical vignettes in which the Patels and Masons adopt the broad outline assumptions of each perspective on global governance, conditioned by their different circumstances, as presented in successive chapters, as a way to bring home the meaning and significance of each view of global governance (Ferguson 1999: 1–90; Sinclair 2005: 16). These scenarios focus upon the global financial crisis that started in 2007, climate change, development, security and gender relations.

The book should provide the reader with an introduction to a range of different understandings of global governance. It needs to be said that some ways of thinking about world politics are greatly concerned with global governance. In other approaches, references to global governance are more implicit. One way of organizing this book would have been to focus only on those approaches that talk about global governance and to ignore the others. But this would produce a rather unrepresentative book that ignores the range of views. It is that range that seems particularly valuable in a book of this nature. The range of ideas presented in chapters 3 to 7 undermines claims of any particular approach, or any special class of actors, to a monopoly over the definition of global governance. I am not presenting a positive or normative account of concepts of global governance. I assume no approach to global governance is self-evidently the right one and that it is ultimately up to the reader to decide, based on a reasoned examination, which approach or approaches might be cogent and for what purposes.

This is not a book that seeks to describe or provide a typology of empirical global governance institutions or processes in exhaustive detail. For one thing, given the different views of what global governance comprises found in this book, a representative empirical treatment would go well

beyond a discussion of international organizations. My objective is to treat global governance as the problem, rather than assume we know what global governance is, and move on to understanding how it works. You will not find within these pages lengthy descriptions of international regimes, institutions or private authorities. Those things can be found elsewhere, as in Karns and Mingst (2009), Hewson (2005) and Drezner (2007: 71–85). A focus on empirical material of this sort would undermine my central concern with competing ways of thinking about global governance and the significance of each approach. That is the purpose of this volume. I have also excluded explicit focus on international law in this book, as this is a separate and fascinating study (Reus-Smit 2004). Many examples and scenarios involving the Masons and Patels have been included in this book to ground the competing conceptualizations in a relevant and interesting way. I have specifically avoided any substantial consideration of the public policy debates about *governance* (Kjaer 2004), reasoning that global governance is a different and complementary literature and therefore worthy of analysis on its own terms. I have incorporated the academic debate about global governance, such as it is, into this book, as it links with the perspectives considered. A handful of complementary volumes published by others provide longer excerpts and specially written chapters that are useful reading in conjunction with this volume (Hewson and Sinclair 1999; Wilkinson 2005b; Whitman 2009; Diehl and Frederking 2010).

Argument

A specific argument organizes the analysis in this book. Although, as we will see, diverse approaches to thinking about world politics take a view on global governance, or enable a view to be inferred, in terms of both what global governance is and what objectives global governance should have, the impetus behind the debate about global governance has its origins in the policy world. Global governance here represents a quite limited managerial view of the world. This is in large part a reaction to the failure of prior programmes

for global change, as argued in chapter 2. These managerial underpinnings serve to limit the concept of global governance and undermine analysis of the concept's broader political implications. The managerial origins of global governance do not prevent more radical perspectives from offering alternative views. But they do tend to undermine the claims of these other views.

Global life, if we can call it that, increasingly throws up seemingly novel and challenging institutions, processes and relationships. Some of this we have come to label 'globalization'. However, how we understand this change today and how we respond to it shares much with how we responded to the advent of the gold standard regime or the Bretton Woods system following World War II. Global governance, while a recognition of new phenomena, is not, as a way of thinking, so very new itself (Hewson 2008: 1). It remains a limited and partial concept, rather than system-changing.

Contrary to much of the excitement about global governance then, the substantive story about this concept is one of continuity rather than novelty. It is the new language in which our policy-makers and scholars have learnt to debate the nature of the world's problems since the mid-1990s. So, although change is not the main focus of this story, it is an important story. Most broadly, what is really interesting about global governance is the terrain it provides for a debate about how to deal with those of the world's problems that cannot be limited to national governments. In this sense, chapters 3 to 8 represent different tendencies in a contest about the approach that will dominate policy in the years to come.

Plan of this book

The debate about global governance is complex and multifaceted. I have tried to cut through this to what I consider the most important elements, although no doubt other authors would make different judgements. In order to establish a sound foundation for these substantive chapters, I have provided a reading of the historical origins of the debate

about global governance in chapter 2. This is an important chapter because it quickly becomes clear just how much continuity is really central to the story about global governance. This chapter should be read before the substantive chapters. Chapters 3 to 8 address, respectively, what I label 'Institutionalism' (chapter 3), 'Transnationalism' (chapter 4), 'Cosmopolitanism' (chapter 5), 'Hegemonism' (chapter 6), 'Feminism' (chapter 7) and 'Rejectionism' (chapter 8).

In each chapter I have extrapolated the implications of this way of thinking, as well as its sense of what matters and what does not. I evaluate strengths and weaknesses and try to provide some sense of the future development of the concept. I try to do this explication in as systematic and methodical a way as possible within the limits of short chapters. The hypothetical vignettes involving the Mason and Patel families help illustrate the differences in views and the concrete implications of these differences. Concreteness, in the context of a debate about ideas, is advantageous to understanding. I have chosen to focus on interesting topical problems most of us will have some familiarity with: the global financial crisis that began in 2007; climate change; development; security; and gender relations. This element of each chapter will have more of a narrative quality to it than the rest. I incorporate the Mason and Patel families in a less systematic way in the following chapter. Global governance is usually debated in quite abstract terms, and some of that will be evident here too. But global governance is very much a problem of concern to us all as citizens of the world. Making the problem of global governance relevant and compelling is essential.

2
Emergence

Sorting out how people think about global governance is a challenge. Specific concepts and broader frameworks of thought develop and change over time in both the policy and academic worlds. Ideas that are prevalent at one time may reflect a specific understanding of how certain problems are effectively addressed. When the problem or issue changes, the concept or framework might be abandoned, developed further or transformed entirely. Intellectual changes themselves can also drive forward new ways of thinking about old problems, so that issues we may have thought of as intractable suddenly seem subject to improvement. In the human or social world, change often occurs simultaneously in circumstances and in our ways of thinking, making understanding doubly difficult. Compounding all of this is the reality that different and competing understandings cloud any unitary comprehension of the concept. Given the potential for complexity, it would not be surprising if the Masons and Patels found these debates confusing and frustrating.

In thinking about ideas and their success in influencing policy we need to distinguish between a rationalist understanding of this process and one based on social construction. Rationalism assumes ideas are selected for their merits and judged on their successes. Such an approach has difficulty with the persistence of ideas when their success has been strongly questioned, such as Nazism after 1943 and Soviet