

Global Governance Futures

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Making sense of global governance futures

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The year 2020 began gloomily, though there was little to suggest that it would stand out from the long-run ebb and flow of world politics. Decades-old growth in trade was being eroded by tensions between the leading commercial powers, particularly the United States and China. The United Kingdom's divorce from the EU had yet to be finalized. Washington, Beijing, and others were at loggerheads over the use of Huawei products in national infrastructure projects as well as over pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. Long-standing tensions between the United States and Iran were exacerbated by the drone-strike killing of Qasem Soleimani – the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Quds force. Australia was suffering from some of the worst bush fires in recent history. And long-standing corruption investigations in South Africa had culminated in an arrest warrant being issued for former president Jacob Zuma while he was in Cuba for medical treatment.

While these events and many others were cause for concern, they did not suggest that 2020 would be exceptional. Yet, in the space of a few weeks, the complexion of world politics and everyday life changed. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the spread of a novel coronavirus first detected in Wuhan, China – what became known as “COVID-19” – was a public health emergency of international concern. This was upgraded on 11 March 2020 to a pandemic – by definition a global crisis. By the end of 2020, some 75 million cases had occurred with more than 1.75 million deaths.¹ The Americas were by far

the hardest hit continents, with the United States and Brazil recording the highest number of infections and rates of mortality. Significant outbreaks had also affected Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and the eastern Mediterranean. In less than a year, COVID-19 had gone from an also-ran influenza to a global catalyst for change, with the months that followed reaping further and increasing misery.

The pandemic not only threatened lives and killed weak and vulnerable people worldwide, but its myriad consequences and the fledgling responses to mitigate its spread exerted significant governance effects on all aspects of life on the planet. The initial reaction from most countries was to close borders and restrict domestic travel. In highly affected areas, severe lockdowns restricted movement outside of personal homes to essential matters. The dramatic reduction in social interactions and the introduction of physical distancing and additional hygiene measures had a significant positive effect on the virus' spread in those countries where effective processes were put in place. In others, where the response was equivocal – including Brazil, the United States, India, and the United Kingdom – the virus ran amuck. The announcement of an effective vaccine in the waning days of 2020 provided a moment of rare respite and optimism.

Irrespective of the national measures, globally the aggregate consequences of COVID-19 were severe. In the first months of the pandemic, xenophobia increased markedly, particularly toward people of East Asian origin. The global airline and hospitality industries all but collapsed, along with national and international tourism. The supply of goods, including essential foodstuffs and medicines, was disrupted globally and nationally. Panic purchasing ensued. Industries collapsed as workers stayed home. The fall in demand for goods and services generated pressure on employers to lay off staff. Those governments that could underwrote the temporary furloughing of employees to cushion some of the damage wrought by falling demand. For others, the lack of capacity or political will for public intervention generated additional pressure on already vulnerable populations. Globally, housing markets initially teetered on the edge of collapse, and the number of people deferring or defaulting on mortgage payments and rents increased. The price of oil temporarily plummeted to below \$0. Universities faced substantial financial challenges in the face of disruption to national and international student recruitment and returns. The shift to remote working created significant demand for technological goods and services. Video conferencing and algorithms shaped not only the delivery and consumption of education but also the nature of work, social interactions, the flow of information, and understandings of domestic and international politics.

These were not the only consequences of the virus's first blush. Stock market values fell sharply across the globe before the move to remote working and the search for effective vaccines drove the price of technology and pharmaceutical shares skyward. Those that were able bought heavily in these markets and took advantage of otherwise depressed stock prices to expand their portfolios. Property markets, too, though suffering significant initial contractions, boomed in suburban and rural areas, fueled by stamp duty holidays, favorable prices, lower population densities, and the longer-run prospects of remote working and learning. The inevitable consequence of these and other financial movements was an increase in the wealth of the already rich and a very different experience for those in the middle or already living at the margins. Similar patterns played out in access to health care, essential foodstuffs, and even leisure, as they did once effective vaccines became available. In sum, the responses to the virus generated by governments

and market movements combined to exert some of the biggest and most dramatic governance effects in centuries. COVID-19 had become – for a discernible time, at least – global governance and generated many of its discontents.

The onset and immediate aftermath of the pandemic inevitably became the focus of journalistic, scholarly, and policy analyses. Yet, no matter how significant its effects, the global governance of COVID-19 will not constitute the totality of forces shaping world order, now or in the future. Although global crises on the scale – or greater – than COVID-19 cannot be discounted, in the next quarter century we are likely to continue to confront unprecedented economic, political, social, ecological, and health changes – arising from and independent of the pandemic. Our modest effort, and that of the other contributors to this volume, is to offer some of what we consider the most significant emerging and enduring issues that will also shape the world order to come and the forces involved in its governance. As we collectively note, the changes wrought by continuing human domination of the planet; war; current and future geopolitical, civilizational, and regional contestations; life in and between urban and non-urban environments; the enduring divides between those who govern and those who are governed, and those that have and those that do not; persistent racial, gender, religious, and sexual-orientation-based discriminations, among many others; the plight of migrants worldwide and the threats to the human rights gains of the modern era; and the challenges of food and health insecurities, ongoing environmental degradation and species loss, the current and future politics of international assistance, and the wrong turns taken in the control of illicit drugs, among other international regimes, will bring as many challenges as they do opportunities.

Our endeavor is to understand and interrogate the *problématique* of future global governance in light of recent developments and the themes we detect in those areas that we have chosen to highlight. Our aim is not merely to understand what state, intergovernmental, and non-state actors – the traditional fare of global governance – will do. While state-based responses are clearly important, they are not – and indeed never have been – the whole story, as COVID-19 has illustrated only too well. Our purpose is more broadly conceived: to understand the forces large and small, the systems of governance, the enduring divides, and the primary challenges that will shape life on our planet into the middle of the twenty-first century and beyond. We seek to mobilize our current understanding of contemporary forces to appreciate how the world is likely to be governed and ordered as well as to comprehend how adjustments can be made to improve prospects for the survival and meaningful advancement of humanity and the planet. We do this through the lens of a rearticulated understanding of global governance.

Thus, our objective in this chapter is to provide a framework for making sense of what is to come. We do so by offering an understanding of global governance that wrests it from the strictures of traditional conceptualizations and enables us to appreciate better the sum of forces likely to shape world order in the near and not-so-near future. We achieve this by setting out a series of conceptual markers to help better understand future global governance and the alternative possibilities that may and could be realized. We draw attention to the need to account for the underappreciated temporal and spatial aspects of global governance; we consider the role of a wider variety of actors – including those we call the “missing middle”; and we highlight the impact that global governance has and may have on those whose relationship with its outcomes is most intimate but also often underappreciated.

Global governance futures: A framework for thinking

One way to imagine the global governance of the future is to start with the global governance of today: its constitution, organizational form, and inner logic. Yet, to do so is not without problems. These problems arise because of the lack of both a clear understanding of global governance and a common consensus about what it could and should be. For some, global governance is merely old wine in new bottles – an alternative expression for the actions and activities of international organizations. For others, it is a descriptor for a global stage packed with ever more actors, a call to arms for a better world, and an attempt to control the pernicious aspects of accelerating economic and social change. For others still, it is a synonym for world government, a pejorative term, and a hegemonic plot to advance the interests of a murky global elite.

Our contention is different. We see considerable analytical value in the term. Our assertion, however, is that to be able to think about the global governance of the future, we first have to acknowledge and overcome eight problems that have come to be baked into its current meaning and that restrict its utility to comprehend not only the governance of today but also eras past and future. These problems are:

- 1 the overly strong association between global governance and the problems and possibilities of international organization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries;
- 2 the lack of a comprehensive identification and explanation of the structure of global authority that accounts not just for grand patterns of command and control but also how regional, national, and local systems intersect with and push against that structure;
- 3 an ignorance of myriad ways that power is exercised within such a system, how interests are articulated and pursued, and the kind of ideas and discourses from which power and interests draw substance as well as help establish, maintain, and perpetuate the system;
- 4 misunderstandings of what propels changes *in* and transformations *of* systems of global governance that focus on the causes, consequences, and drivers of continuity and change, not just today but over extended periods in the past and the future;
- 5 an unwillingness to ask questions about systems and instances of global governance through time to explore the mechanisms, machineries, institutions, rules, norms, ideas, interests, and material capabilities that have governed world orders in times before and after our own;
- 6 an assumption that the “global” preceding “governance” is necessarily planetary in scale, which risks ignoring the forces involved in the governance – for example, of the Silk Road, ancient empires, and colonial regimes, among many others – and the indelible marks left by those systems on the governance of world order today and tomorrow;
- 7 too little an appreciation of the output end of the global governance equation – what is produced, the effects that are generated, the impact of systems and expressions of global governance on everyday lives, and the feedback loops that exist between aspects of global governance and those whose lives are affected by it; and

- 8 a neglect of those directly and indirectly involved in the production of global governance, not just those identified as the “global governors” but also the professionals, service teams, and individuals at work behind the scenes whose combined activities contribute to creating, sustaining, disrupting, and dismantling world orders – what we call the “missing middle.”

To appreciate how these shortcomings came to be part of conventional understandings and how they inhibit our capacity to look forward to global governance of the future, we need to recover the genesis of the term “global governance.” The term “global governance” emerged from academic and policy responses to a series of real-world events in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These responses sought to understand the forces at play on the world stage that had led to the end – and were in evidence in the aftermath – of the Cold War. Early works on global governance were also concerned with identifying and enhancing the prospects for a better world order after a half century in which East-West rivalry had crowded out many a progressive global public policy initiative; thinking through how feminist analyses could be brought to bear in a subject where they had previously found little traction; and understanding the transformative potential of grassroots resistance and civil society movements.² Global governance was, as a result, a concept imbued with possibility – one that was expressly concerned with understanding change, complexity, and alternative futures – but it was also born from a narrow moment in time.

In their pioneering collection *Governance without Government*, James Rosenau and Ernst Czempel charted a pathway for thinking about how the world was governed and ordered in the post-Cold War world. They chose to focus not only on the state and its intergovernmental entanglements but also hidden, in-between, emerging, and non-state sources of governance and authority. Elsewhere, the policy-oriented Commission on Global Governance led by Sonny Ramphal and Ingmar Carlsson focused on the normative possibilities of the newly emerging world order. At the same time, others were thinking about the future world order under the auspices of the Multilateralism and the United Nations System (MUNS) project – coordinated by Robert W. Cox and sponsored by the United Nations University (UNU).³ Indeed, a proliferation of works emerged keen to shine new light on the possibilities of and prospects for the new world order.⁴ Such was its appeal that by the time of the 1995 publication of the commission’s report, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, the term “global governance” had gained considerable traction and was being used as a forward-focused optic in academic and policy-making circles.

These early works, and the events they sought to understand, paved the way for a raft of works about growing global complexity, the management of globalization, and the challenges confronting international institutions.⁵ What they did not do, however, was settle on a common understanding or a clear path for inquiry. As Lawrence Finkelstein noted, ambiguity was a design feature of early works on global governance as scholars sought to understand the changing dynamics of global politics in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. His complaint, however, was that far from being helpful, this ambiguity rendered global governance “virtually anything.”⁶

Cox and his colleagues choose to define global governance as “the procedures and practices which exist at the world (or regional) level for the management of political,

economic and social affairs.” While this definition also appeared rather elastic, it came with an important caveat:

One hypothetical form of [global] governance (world government or world empire) can be conceived as having a hierarchical form of coordination, whether centralized (unitary) or decentralized (federal). The other form of coordination would be non-hierarchical, and this we would call multilateral.⁷

What was instructive about Cox’s definition was the liberty it gave to thinking about global governance. Cox and his colleagues were clearly concerned with thinking about the normative possibilities of one element of global governance – multilateralism. But they also left open the understanding that global governance could, had, and would take many and varied forms. This, in turn, opened the way for thinking about global governance through time by focusing on how world orders were managed and arranged in different eras, and this clarified some of the issues about which Finkelstein complained. That said, Cox’s definition and the challenge of understanding global governance through historical time and social space are not widely explored by others in the literature. They are, however, key elements of our call for rethinking the analytical utility of global governance.⁸

As global governance gained traction and interest both in and beyond the academy, subtle changes in conceptualization emerged. Some of these changes were driven by scholars adapting understandings of global governance to account for important earlier work that had run out of steam, no longer captured the attention of a new generation, or had hit conceptual hurdles that had proven tricky to surmount.⁹ For others, the term was manipulated to account for newly noted but seldom satisfactorily explained phenomenon.¹⁰ As Joseph Barrata observed, during the 1990s, “the new expression, ‘global governance,’ emerged as an acceptable term in debate on international organization for the desired and practical goal of progressive efforts, in place of ‘world government.’” He continued, noting that scholars Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall observed only a decade after the expression had come into use that “the idea of global governance has attained near-celebrity status. . . [it] has gone from the ranks of the unknown to one of the central orienting themes in the practice and study of international affairs.”¹¹

wished to avoid using a term that would harken back to the thinking about world government in the 1940s, which was largely based on fear of atomic bombs and too often had no practical proposals for the transition short of a revolutionary act of the united peoples of the world.¹²

This growth in interest was not without problems. Subtle changes moved global governance away from a concern with appreciating complexity, change, and

possibility on a worldwide scale to a narrower focus on collective efforts to identify, comprehend, and address problems and processes that went beyond the capacities of individual states in the post-Cold War period. As a result, global governance became overly associated with the capacity of, and the desire for, intergovernmental arrangements – sometimes working hand in glove with non-governmental actors, sometimes not – to provide government-like services in the absence of anything like a world government. Debates became reified between supporters and detractors of international institutions in fields ranging from health and conflict prevention to trade and development. In short, global governance had ceased to be analytically useful and instead had become a proxy descriptor whose meaning had become ever narrower as its usage increased. The result was to dull the edges of the term's analytical utility.

Another, darker turn also emerged. While global governance continued to carry with it the hopes and fears of many inside and outside the academy at the turn of the millennium, it had also been captured by more conspiratorial forces who chose to interweave the term with discourses about global elites and cabals with little basis in fact and often with highly racialized tones – as was much in evidence in some of the proclamations of those who stormed the US Capitol building on 6 January 2021. The result was that global governance had – in a few short decades – shifted from a genuine attempt to understand and affect the changing map of authority worldwide to a new way of talking about international organization and, to a lesser extent, conspiracy theories in the post-Cold War era.

Why do these changes in meaning matter? The future of international organizations and other expressions of intergovernmental cooperation are important – conceptually and otherwise – as we have argued previously,¹³ and synonyms can provide a useful shorthand for talking about broad phenomena. Moreover, many students are interested in classes on international organization because they are fascinated by these institutionalized sites of discord and collaboration, often hoping to embark on careers in international public service. As we think about the future, it is important not to ignore the experiments of the last century and a half;¹⁴ we should not dismiss the relevance or irrelevance of the mandates and activities of international organizations or the perceptions and forces that drive conspiratorial thinking. Nonetheless, such restricted understandings reduce analytical utility. They stifle the capacity to ask broader questions about how world order is governed – now, in the past, and in the future. To focus only on burgeoning forms of intergovernmentalism at the turn of the twentieth century would, for instance, fail to do more than glance briefly at the significant role of imperialism, social Darwinism, and industrialization. Equally, to stress contemporary criticism (during the Trump administration in the United States, for instance) of international organizations would falsify interpretations of today's global governance and the world order that it shapes.

Our contention is that, to enhance its analytical utility, global governance must move beyond a singular association with alterations in international organization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The complexities of the post-Cold War era are concrete expressions of global governance at that moment in time, but earlier formations have been different, as future ones will be in epochs to come; they are driven by ideas, interests, and forces that vary and evolve.¹⁵ To be useful, an inquiry into global governance has to identify and explain the often contested¹⁶ structures of global authority in play at any given moment; it must account not just for grand patterns of command and control

but also for how regional, national, and local systems intersect with and push against that structure. It needs to involve an investigation into the myriad ways that power is exercised within such a system, how interests are articulated and pursued, and the kind of ideas and discourses from which power and interests draw substance as well as which help establish, maintain, and perpetuate the system. It should account for less and more substantial changes *in* and *of* the system and probe the causes, consequences, and drivers of change and continuity, not just today but over extended periods in the past and into the future. And, crucially, it must account for the outcomes of systems of governance at all levels. Only then will we be able to understand better “global governance as it has been, is, and may become”¹⁷ as well as provide reasonable answers to questions about “how the world hangs together.”¹⁸

What is required to realize the analytical potential of global governance? The first part of the answer is to tackle global complexity in a more satisfactory fashion, to not be afraid to disaggregate by issue and by context, and then to try to fit what we find back together into a better explanatory whole. We should not only describe who the principal actors are and how they connect to one another but also how a particular outcome has resulted, why and on what grounds authority is effectively or poorly exercised, and who and what has been lost or excluded. We should examine the consequences of new forms of organization and determine what adjustments might enhance their utility to meet existing, new, or changing objectives. Important as well are subtler understandings and a better appreciation of the differing characteristics of actors, institutions, and governance machineries and their significance when those with varying natures and capabilities come together or clash.

We also should give greater prominence to the way that power of various types is exercised. State capabilities clearly matter, but so, too, does the way that formal and informal institutions mediate relations between states and the way that goods and services are exchanged and managed. When the numbers and kinds of actors proliferate, when states exert less control over markets, and when complex relations exist among various actors and markets, questions of power are less straightforward. For instance, we should probe more than the relationship between the birth of the current system of global governance and US preponderant power, and we should look beyond Washington’s crucial role in the creation of the first and second generations of universal intergovernmental bodies to explore other elements of structural power. We should also reflect on institutional expressions and social groups, epistemic communities and policy networks, financial decision-making, and changing capabilities among other actors.¹⁹

A final task is the need to understand fully the ideas and interests that drive the machineries of governance that we have, how they arose and developed, and how they subsequently permeated and modified the international system at all levels.²⁰ Here, ideas themselves are essential, as are the value systems upon which they rest and inform, the discourses in which they are embedded, the interests to which they speak, and other elements of symbolic power of which they are part. So too are the entrepreneurs and despots who generate ideas, the networks through which they are disseminated, the ways that various institutions mediate core messages, and the processes through which they are translated into forms of organization and policy delivery. So far, we have failed to adequately link ideas to global governance, to tease out what works and why.

Global governance through time

Without a concerted effort to press forward our understanding of the complexities of global governance, the way that authority and power are exercised, and the ideological and material aspects of world order, we risk not only misunderstanding but also underestimating our capacity to make meaningful adjustments to that order and its governance. In short, our task is far from finished. As noted, Cox's distinction between forms of global governance provides a fruitful way to remove some of the restraints that its association with the post-Cold War moment thus far has imposed. To be useful, our view of global governance must go beyond its *contemporary* manifestations and their emergence from a specific and very recent historical juncture.

One way to think about global governance over time is to evaluate prevailing ideas about world order at any given moment. In the two-dimensional and static view of the Westphalian order as essentially an interstate system, pointing to the organizing principle of anarchy tells us little about why the world has been organized that way, or why we should strive to understand what existed before. Such an approach takes us into well-charted territory, but our way of journeying through it – if we focus on questions of how and why the world is organized – is different and potentially provides additional insights.

One reason for the emergence of the interstate system, as the broad framework that governs the world, was a response to ideas that – in the European world, at least – sought to move away from a form of governance in which papal authority was supreme to one in which various secular and non-secular rulers exercised sovereignty over discrete geographic units. While ideas of self-determination found their first expression here, the move from papacy to state was not necessarily in the interests of those populations who were subjected to previous or subsequent forms of governance. Nor did it end the influence of the papacy – or religious institutions more generally – in the global governance of that time or extinguish ideas about the subjugation of peoples beyond notional national borders as a “legitimate” product of that global governance.

Other agents that contributed to how the world was governed until that point – such as mercenary armies and city-states, to name but two – fell into desuetude, but new actors emerged to play more central roles. Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Empire*²¹ emphasized, for instance, the actions and activities of private enterprises – which in many cases started off as “privateer” ventures and became the nationally sanctioned “companies” of European empires – and their roles in extending imperialism as a worldwide system of order and governance. Thus, asking questions about the rush to empire enables us to see the role of such actors as the British and Dutch East India companies. It also helps to distinguish between the kind of global governance that existed before and during the accumulation of European imperial power (as well as the brutal forms of governance experienced by colonized peoples) and the versions that existed once the scramble for territory subsided and the world map had settled into areas well demarcated by colonial acquisition, expansion, and interests.

Our usual disciplinary route into thinking about how the world was organized and ordered in the nineteenth century is to examine how the balance of power was institutionalized among the major European states through the Holy Alliance and the Concert of Europe.²² Yet this perspective merely tells us of efforts to avoid costly and catastrophic wars in Europe among ruling elites, not how the world was governed. Absent

are understandings of the competing imperialisms that were the dominant framework for nineteenth-century global governance along with differing ideas about the subjugation of non-European peoples and the colonization of apparently uninhabited lands (treated as *terra nullius* irrespective of indigenous populations). Also missing are the ways that this dominant form of organization and its ideas were challenged – both ideationally and physically – which, in turn, eroded the bases of competing imperialisms and helped set in motion wholesale changes in global governance.

Craig Murphy's examination of international public unions as the forerunners of the intergovernmental elements of contemporary global governance illustrates the crucial importance of testing the framework of global governance as an approach to understanding how the world was ordered in historical periods other than just in the post-Cold War moment.²³ The utility of Murphy's work lies in his willingness to connect changes in the form and function of contemporary global governance with the onset, consolidation, and acceleration of another global dynamic that mainstream international relations (IR) has always found difficult to comprehend – the onset of the Industrial Revolution and the spread of capitalist production and organization.

A few other analysts have peered through these economic and social lenses as a starting point for thinking about how the world is and was organized and governed in earlier times.²⁴ They have contributed to our understanding of the world authority structures that we have, but they do not – attempts to historicize these approaches notwithstanding²⁵ – fully explore the kinds of questions that a deep dive into the historical manifestations of global governance demands. John M. Hobson's exploration of the contributions of non-Western civilizations and non-European forms of organization to the contemporary world is a good example of important insights into thinking about historical and contemporary aspects of global governance, but it also illustrates the work that remains.²⁶

If the need to understand change and new horizons in the immediate post-Cold War era drove us to pose questions about global governance, it should also encourage us to ask similar questions about earlier epochs and find satisfactory, or at least better, answers than we have fashioned to date. Yet wrenching global governance from the contemporary moment and applying it historically is, by itself, insufficient. Any shift should also help inform and anticipate tomorrow. The future-oriented value lies in treating global governance as an appropriate set of questions that enable us to work out how the world is, was, will, or could be governed and how changes in grand and not-so-grand patterns of governance occurred, are or will be occurring, and *ought* to occur. These questions, in turn, need to be pursued in areas of critical concern and wherein we have a long-run understanding that highlights likely trends, and precisely in those areas that our contributors address in the following chapters.

Global governance across space

Wresting our comprehension of global governance from the grip of presentism is not the only pressing requirement. We also need to rescue it from an obligatory association with the planet as the distinguishing spatial and conceptual element. Investigating the manner that systems combine to organize, manage, govern, and arrange the world does not demand that those arrangements be planetary in scale. Indeed, in eras prior to our own,

forms of global governance have been less than planetary in their reach and scale. Our reconceptualization requires merely that they curate a good proportion of human-centered activity over large swathes of the understood and imagined worlds.

Two shortcomings have impeded the analytical traction of this aspect of global governance and motivate our line of inquiry. The first is that existing conceptualizations invariably treat “global” as a synonym for “planetary.” The second is the lack of familiarity with – or perhaps even a reticence about – what the governance of world order might look like if it is not as encompassing as our own.

As is evident from the previous historical examples, not all world orders have been global. This was as true for the nineteenth-century’s inter-imperial order as it was for uneasy arrangements among competing empires in the ancient world. In these and many other cases, the systems of order that orchestrated actions for a large share of humanity were not planetary in coverage – although many individuals at the time may well have imagined that they were. They were world orders nonetheless, and we can identify the systems that lent order to those epochs as forms of global governance. What is different about today’s world order is that it is genuinely planetary in scope, and we exist in the first epoch in which such an arrangement has been possible and a reality.

That said, just because we have reached a moment when we can talk of planetary governance does not mean that all future constellations will necessarily be manifest in that way – they could be smaller or more extensive. Although ongoing advances in technology and communications – not to mention climate change and COVID-19 – lead us toward the planet as the logical unit of analysis, moments of retreating global governance have also been evident in times gone by, as they were during the interwar years. Both a technology-driven closeness and the reassertion of centrifugal tendencies are possible.

It is important to note, however, that areas of the globe need not be formally governed to be elements of, or integrated into, a worldwide system. They can also take a position in opposition to, or be (consciously or otherwise) different or excluded from, a dominant system. What is key to our understanding is that such stances are taken in direct response to – and thus inevitably entail a measure of orientation around – a dominant system of world order.

Conceptualizing global governance in this way has considerable utility. It enables us to ask questions about the spatial and substantive arrangements in different (and sometimes competing) systems of world-order management as well as of how areas outside formally orchestrated space relate to relationships of command and control. This has particular pertinence when we think about the evolution of our own order. For example, at its inception Pax Americana was far from global in reach and occupied a space also inhabited by declining empires and a nascent communist system. Later, during the height of the Cold War, the Washington-centered “world” order coexisted alongside a competing Moscow-centered system. Both orders organized life not only within the respective spheres of influence but also affected those areas that formally lay beyond but were nonetheless oriented in relation to the Cold War’s dominant powers – for example, countries of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) or the Group of 77 (G77). None of the world orders or their systems of management could genuinely be described as “global.” All three were, nevertheless, elements of a wider system of global governance based on ideological rivalry and opposition thereto, and it is helpful to conceptualize them as such.

Thus, emphasizing history alone is insufficient for understanding the whole global governance puzzle. We also need to comprehend the implications of real and imagined space. Expanding our conception of global governance across time and space enables us to ask questions about how non-planetary world orders were and are organized as well as how regulatory systems among small settlements governing relations among themselves at the outset of human evolution have developed into systems that define and determine the Anthropocene.

Global governance, up and down

Time and space are not the only elements missing from a more satisfactory understanding of global governance. Also neglected are interpretations that reflect more accurately two other perspectives that are typically absent from macro views. The first is the “everyday” – that is, accounts of the daily experiences of those across social groups whose lives are affected by the myriad ways that world order is fashioned and governed. The second is “the missing middle,” those individuals who create, shape, and produce global governance but whose role is often unseen or overlooked.

These additional optics help us understand not only the complexion and complexity of systems but also their consequences – what we describe elsewhere as the “output end” of the global governance equation. The reasons are relatively simple. Global governance has multiple and varying effects, as the literature suggests. However, these effects are often starker than acknowledged. We should, for instance, consider the effect that international borders have on everyday life – a key technology of governance and a means by which order is lent to the contemporary world. International borders shape relations between communities, and not just those who find themselves bifurcated by them – such as Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey or families seeking refuge in the United States from Central America. They also have an impact on those whose commerce and communications require trans-border passage – such as Syrian shepherds in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Likewise, alterations to international borders and rules governing movements across them (of goods, services, information, and people) have a profound impact. The changes wrought by the United Kingdom’s departure from the EU – in passing from the Republic of Ireland to Northern Ireland and in traveling to and from the United Kingdom to continental Europe – is a contemporary example. The continuing reverberations of colonial border-making – in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere – provide many other illustrations.

It is thus important to reverse the usual direction of the top-down analytical lens of global governance in order to appreciate how systems and expressions of governance are experienced and encountered from the bottom up – that is, from the perspective of the “globally governed.”²⁷ When viewed from this angle, we discover a perspective that is all-too-often absent; we are better able to appreciate how global governance is gendered and racialized; and we are then able to feedback into analyses in ways that have so far been eschewed, or at least overlooked. This, in turn, enables us to lend further precision to thinking about what is required to bring about effective and lasting change.

This perspective begs the question: why do we know so little about global governance in the everyday? We appreciate a great deal about the power of financial

markets because the effects of catastrophic financial collapse have animated the work of scholars after every major economic collapse – the 2007/2008 global financial and the COVID-19 crises are only the most recent illustrations. Yet we do not know nearly enough about how precisely global financial decision-making affects daily life. We are, for example, far from understanding the relationships between what transpires in Zurich and London and personal income quakes on the ground for farmers in the Andes or Great Plains or the connections between the speculative actions of traders in global commodity markets and the effects on local spot markets, farming livelihoods, and household economies.²⁸ The best that we can probably say is that financial and economic crises render the everyday lives of ordinary people more precarious, with those living in the Global South likely to be the most affected.

These shortcomings in knowledge are not confined to our understanding of global financial systems alone. We are equally remiss in failing to comprehend the everyday effects of international assistance programs and crisis responses or of health restrictions put in place in response to an outbreak of infectious diseases and the impact of their subsequent removal on the capacity of communities to reestablish commerce. All too often we have failed to explore how the globally governed have encountered – for good and for ill – global governance. Instead, we have concentrated on the actions and activities of those who govern.

Why are the globally governed so invisible?²⁹ Conceptually, the close association between the term “global governance” and what international organizations do has overly determined the extent to which the field has proceeded. We tend to read global governance – its history, content, and drivers of change – from the vantage points of Washington, London, Brussels, or Geneva and through the eyes of privileged elites, rather than from communities in Ruhororo (Burundi), Ürümqi (China), or Dili (Timor-Leste). This orientation has concentrated minds on the art of governance as practiced by the powerful rather than on its consequences for recipients. It also reflects the origins and locations of those who study global governance – namely, from countries at the center of global decision-making whose analytical radars are insufficiently tuned to looking at the multiple variables in the governance equation and whose physical distance is far removed from many of the consumers of global governance. In addition, no one has yet confronted sufficiently the enduring legacy of colonial ways of thinking.³⁰ Studying those on the receiving end of global governance can require the kind of fieldwork and investigation into primary sources for which few IR scholars or prospective students were equipped, even before COVID-19.³¹ We have much to learn from anthropologists whose careers are devoted to comprehending the everyday, often in communities far removed in distance and culture from classrooms, library stacks, and data sets.

That said, global governance scholarship is not, in fact, all that different from research in other disciplines. Most social scientists tend to focus on the most visible institutions and individuals at the center of problem-solving and policy-making. They customarily stop short of understanding how power and influence flow to recipients. Most of us, particularly in the digital era, have access to primary documents and interviews at the press of a button. Few have the time, resources, language skills, or courage to run risks in war zones, go to makeshift customs houses abutting contested international borders, build social networks in isolated communities, or wander into volatile borderlands. The result is that our view of global governance is restricted

by our privilege and is confined to questions of institutional design and construction and to policy development and delivery.

There are other reasons why we should correct this gaping oversight in our analytical industry. As indicated, much of the practice of governing globally originates in the Global North. This is – to paraphrase Deborah Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan Sell – where most of the global governors reside, work, and play.³² In contrast, many of the recipients of contemporary global governance are in the Global South, and the most acute effects are often experienced by their most vulnerable citizens (women, children, the elderly, and indigenous peoples). This reality does not mean that the effects of, and strong perceptions about, global governance are absent in the Global North. But it does mean that many of the world's most precarious communities have a more intimate daily relationship with global governance than do citizens of states where the global governors reside. Their familiarity comes from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the WHO, Oxfam, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The globally governed encounter not only these recognizable players but also such less visible ones such as transnational criminal networks, faith groups, and financial markets.

Moreover, those populations on the receiving end of global governance seldom have access to, or even a say in, the decision-making whose consequences affect their daily existence. This startling imbalance is especially pronounced when we examine the design and consequences of institutional actions. Indeed, because we as a scholarly community have studied the successes, failures, and impacts of global governance so narrowly, we may have been complicit in prolonging ineffectual systems that ignore recipients and their plights as well as restrict and constrain their agency.

Attenuating these conceptual shortcomings requires removing our blinders and bringing the globally governed to the fore. This appeal is akin to previous clarion calls sounded for the “everyday” to be brought front and center in international relations, international political economy, and peace studies.³³

At the same time, a broader and potentially richer appreciation of global governance also requires turning our analytical radars toward other individuals who create, shape, and produce global governance – what we call “the missing middle.” These often unheard and unheard-of people are the professionals, service teams, and individuals who are involved behind the scenes in making global governance happen, in doing the policy, operational, and support work to move the needle of global governance institutions of all varieties from the local to global levels. Certainly, insights into their effect on global governance can be gleaned from work on epistemic communities, transnational activism and networks, and, more recently, professions in international governance.³⁴ But even these accounts do not focus on the everyday roles of staff employed to keep the proverbial lights on – whose actions and activities animate the beating heart of global governance.

The members of the missing middle go beyond the relatively absent everyday contributions of professionals and staffers employed in intergovernmental organizations. The missing middle also includes those whose contributions shape the impact of other elements of global governance pertinent to shaping world orders. The computer

programmers who develop algorithms that predict and shape behavior are as much a part of contemporary global governance as resident representatives and their support staff in the country and regional offices of the UN system. Equally, mediators and military personnel in war zones play significant roles in shaping global governance. In the same way, the scientists and medical personnel in the response to and developing vaccines for COVID-19 are as much a part of crafting the contemporary world order as mercenaries and privateers were in creating non-Western and European imperial systems.

For those primarily concerned with international organizations, the legions of missing-middle officials are not absent – they feature in interviews, notes about the models of service, and levels of politicization – but they are seldom the cornerstone of reflection. Studies focusing on instances of global governance output – refugee camps, multilateral relief programs, and health emergencies – tend to emphasize the high politics that spawned or impeded initiatives or, alternatively, the beneficiaries on the ground. Analytical attention is rarely on the aid workers, military personnel, and volunteers who make relief programs happen. Similarly, analyses of financial markets stress the consequences of collective investor decision-making and, to a lesser extent, the behavior of individual fund managers. Rarely do everyday investors, market operatives, managers, or technicians appear center stage, let alone in the limelight of analytical attention. Yet global governance cannot and does not occur without them. Otherwise, strategic visions would not be translated into reality, decisions would not be made, actions would not be taken, projects and programs would not be monitored, and standards would not be enforced.³⁵ In short, we ignore the missing middle, their work, its effects, and those who are subject to the consequences at our peril.

The task at hand

How does all this help us think about the future of global governance? Unlike historical and current events that can be documented and examined, the systems of the future and the outcomes that they might generate have yet to be determined. While “global governance futures” are yet to be created, we nonetheless have challenged our contributors to imagine them – using methods of their choosing – which explains the title of this book.

Those futures will not unfold in a vacuum. Rather, they will be shaped by a combination of events influenced by the past and present, which stand apart from those that have yet to occur. The future remains unknown, but the identification and avoidance of past mistakes is a realizable goal – as each subsequent contribution demonstrates. Understanding global governance’s complexity, its manifestations over time and space, those individuals involved in its production, and the experiences of those on the receiving end would enable us to parse the distinctions between significant changes *of* global governance from more marginal changes *in* global governance so that we are able to understand global governance and make a genuine difference.

To do so requires that we understand the systems of the past and the enduring reverberations that are likely to continue. We need to evaluate how gender, war, race,

colonial legacy, and the human environment are likely to animate global governance, in familiar as well as new ways. We need to understand where progress has been made – for example, in education, longevity, and other areas – as well as where it has not – for example, in the enduring legacies of colonial administrators, cartographers, and social Darwinists.

The purpose of this edited collection is to consider the prospects for the governance of world order as we approach the middle of the twenty-first century. The chapters explore the consequences of some of today's most pressing problems in order to discern the prospects for improving global governance futures. The essays are designed to complement our edited volume *International Organization and Global Governance*, published by Routledge in its second edition in 2018 – the third will appear in 2023 – which is where readers seeking more foundational elements should begin.

The book has three parts covering what we believe are some of the most fruitful avenues along which to travel toward understanding global governance futures. The first is “Planetary,” which includes six essays that encompass global perspectives: the Anthropocene, war, geopolitics, civilizations, regions, and cities. It is often said that the world is more polarized than ever, and so Part II examines five “Divides”: human rights, migration, poverty and inequality, race, and people. The third part addresses seven “Challenges” that are present and looming and potentially fatal: food, health, climate, biodiversity, aid, data, and illicit drugs. “Suggested Reading” appears at the end of each chapter, in addition to extensive endnotes, to guide users who wish to pursue additional research.

We have commissioned essays from a stellar and intellectually diverse set of authors. Indeed, one of the strengths of this volume is that its contributors approach topics from distinct perspectives and disciplines, using a range of methods. The variety of approaches is not only helpful but also necessary for anyone interested in probing the problems and prospects of global governance futures as well as keen to avoid the pitfalls created by previous thinking and theorizing in the field. The “About the Contributors” section includes brief biographies on the authors, all of whom have researched and written extensively about the subject matter of their chapters.

Rather than introducing them here, readers will find an overview of each of the parts of the book and the chapters that they contain in a few pages at the outset of each of the book's three main parts. These texts preview the importance of thinking differently about global governance and exploring the futures that may follow. They also lend insight into the arrangement of the chapters and their collective contribution to the task at hand.

Our expectation is that readers will discover the importance of reimagining global governance – namely, its temporal and spatial dimensions as well as its impact on the globally governed and inputs from the missing middle – to understand the possibilities, prospects, opportunities, and pitfalls that lie ahead. In addition, the substantive emphases in separate chapters add additional proof to what the COVID-19 crisis had already revealed: the limits of the current system of global governance. Our collective call is for an ambitious rethinking of global governance possibilities as we move toward the middle of the century to avoid some of the trapdoors that line the way. This book is a modest contribution to that objective.

Suggested reading

- Amitav Acharya, ed., *Why Govern? Rethinking Demand and Progress in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, eds., *Who Governs the Globe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- Alice Ba and Matthew J. Hoffmann, eds., *Contending Perspectives on Global Governance: Coherence, Contestation and World Order* (London: Routledge, 2005).
- Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair, eds., *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1999).
- Tana Johnson, *Organizational Progeny: Why Governments Are Losing Control Over the Proliferating Structures of Global Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- Kathryn C. Lavelle, *The Challenges of Multilateralism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020).
- Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 2012).
- Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, *Rethinking Global Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

Notes

- 1 See World Health Organization, “WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard,” <https://covid19.who.int>.
- 2 See, for example, Mohammed Ayoob, “The New-old Disorder in the Third World,” *Global Governance* 1, no. 1 (1995): 59–77; Elisabeth Prügl, “Gender in International Organization and Global Governance: A Critical Review of the Literature,” *International Studies Notes* 21, no. 1 (1996): 15–24; Mary K. Meyer and Elisabeth Prügl, eds., *Gender Politics in Global Governance* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Lean Gordenker, “Pluralizing Global Governance: Analytical Approaches and Dimensions,” *Third World Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1995): 357–388; Robert O’Brien, Anne Marie Goetz, Jan Aart Scholte, and Marc Williams, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 3 Yoshikazu Sakamoto, ed., *Global Transformations: Challenges to the State System* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1992); Keith Krause and W. Andy Knight, eds., *State, Society and the UN System: Changing Perspectives on Multilateralism* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1995); Robert W. Cox, ed., *The New Realism: Perspectives on Multilateralism and World Order* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997); Stephen Gill, ed., *Globalization, Democratization and Multilateralism* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Michael G. Schechter, ed., *Future Multilateralism: The Political and Social Framework* (London: Macmillan, 1999), and *Innovation in Multilateralism* (London: Macmillan, 1999). See, also, John Gerard Ruggie, ed., *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Rorden Wilkinson, *Multilateralism and the World Trade Organisation: The Architecture and Extension of International Trade Regulation* (London: Routledge, 2000); and Edward Newman, Ramesh Thakur, and John Tirman, eds., *Multilateralism Under Challenge? Power, International Order, and Structural Change* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2006).
- 4 David Goldblatt, Jonathan Perraton, David Held, and Anthony McGrew, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); and Martin