



Dynamics of Global Governance: Building on What We Know¹

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It is hard to quarrel with Weiss and Wilkinson's argument that deeper investigation of global governance could have big payoffs, and the four "primary pursuits" or research tasks they sketch will interest many scholars in this field. My concern is that while Weiss and Wilkinson nicely describe the importance of these tasks, they offer only cursory suggestions about ways forward when they could do much more. Unlike Weiss and Wilkinson (hereafter W&W), I see a great deal of first rate work being done that speaks directly to issues they raise—how power is exercised globally,² structures of global authority,³ increasing complexity,⁴ actor proliferation, and change. The problem, I would argue, is not that scholars are ignoring these issues, but that so much more could and should be done. In this short essay, I build on foundations laid by others to sketch more focused research agendas for global governance scholars in four areas to tackle some of the central questions W&W identify, with particular attention to their laudable interest in change.

Structures of Power and Authority in Global Governance

One happy development in recent years has been the broader embrace by international relations scholars⁵ of more diverse and sophisticated notions of power and the way it works in global affairs. Credit for this shift has many sources and changing long-held ideas is slow work, but Barnett and Duvall's (2005) typology of power's many forms (cited but not used by W&W) draws together many of these concepts.⁶ Barnett and Duvall's essay does exactly what W&W prescribe in task 3: it "investigate(s) the myriad ways that power is exercised within (the global) system" (W&W), and their typology connects power to ideas and interests analytically by drawing on rich theories from sociology, organization theory, philosophy, and diverse corners of international studies. Serious engagement with these notions about power's role might alleviate some of W&W's pessimism and allow them to frame a more focused research program conceptually but also empirically and normatively.

For example, the second "primary pursuit" W&W prescribe for us is to "identify and explain the structures of global authority."⁷ This is, indeed, an important task particularly because application of the term "authority" to global matters is relatively recent and is bound up in the historical development of "global governance" that W&W so ably

describe. Authority used to be a concept applied only to domestic politics. States were the highest legitimate authorities, ergo legitimate authority could only be exercised by states or their explicitly delegated agents. This has changed, and scholars of many types are now freely discussing authority in many forms that do not obviously or directly flow from our old notions of sovereign states as the only source of legitimate authority (see, for example, Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Cutler, Haufler and Porter 1999; I. Hurd 1999; Hall and Biersteker 2002; Barnett and Finnemore 2004; E. Hurd, 2004; Grande and Pauly 2007; Lake 2009, 2010, 2013; Avant, Finnemore and Sell 2010). Investigation of authority structures is thus hardly unplowed ground, but W&W provide no discussion of what we already know about "structures of global authority" and how these relate to power, nor do they tell us what they believe is missing in our current understanding.

One way to investigate this relationship between structures of authority and power might be to develop a clearer understanding of the difference between the two and then investigate empirical problems that fall at that intersection. One rough cut at this would be to notice that power can be an attribute of an actor in isolation, but authority never can be.⁸ Authority is always conferred by others in some form, however distant. Thus, we can speak of "seizing" power, but one cannot seize authority.⁹ This conferral is central to the legitimation of many aspects of global governance. Big intergovernmental institutions like the UN make a big deal of "authorizing" uses of power through established institutional procedures (for example, voting, delegating). Big corporations are "authorized" to exercise power by shareholders. NGOs may be authorized by donors, clients, or diverse others. But the conferring of

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² Barnett and Duvall (2005a,b); Guzzini (2005); Finnemore and Goldstein (2013).

³ Barnett and Finnemore (2004); Avant, Finnemore and Sell (2010).

⁴ Cederman (1997); Hoffmann (2005, 2011).

⁵ W&W seem uncomfortable with the term "international relations" and with political science generally, but if disciplinary strictures are somehow to blame for the state of affairs they criticize, they do not explain this.

⁶ The typology appears in both in *Power in Global Governance* (2005:12) and in the 2005 article in *International Organization* (page 48). As of this writing, it is still the most downloaded research article from *IO*, making W&W's claims about inattention to power all the more puzzling.

⁷ This is apparently distinct from their third "pursuit" of investigating power, but they never explain how these two concepts are distinct (or related).

⁸ Of course power, too, has its own relational features such as the distinction between "power over" and "power to" detailed by Barnett and Duvall (2005b:10).

⁹ This statement should loosely hold for Barnett and Duvall's compulsory and institutional power, which seem to be the types of power on which W&W focus. Attending to structural and productive power and their relation to authority might yield some interesting variations, which I cannot explore here. Note, too, that my glib formulation could (and should) be much refined in a longer treatment of this subject. See, for example, Barnett and Finnemore (2004: chapter 2) and works cited therein for one early attempt.

authority is not a one-shot deal, something often obscured by the one-shot authorizing rules of these bureaucracies (and by the analytic structure of most principal agent frameworks). Authority structures, like power structures, are dynamic. UN members might vote to authorize sanctions or a military force or a no-fly zone, but over time authority can fray; conferral of authority by others and their deference to authorized power may diminish over time particularly if outcomes are bad. Conversely, authority could also increase over time. Habits of compliance or good performance by the authorized could consolidate deference to authority. Authority exercised to promote women's rights and reduce corruption might be an example of these consolidations over time: proliferating gender rights and anti-corruption provisions are embedded in more and more institutions at all levels, which increases internalized compliance as socialization kicks in. (Admittedly, both processes in these issue areas are very incomplete, but the difference in rules, behaviors, and outcomes from even two decades ago is notable).

So how might these theoretical connections help us focus research? For starters, they suggest we pay more attention to (i) instances where power and authority are divorced or at odds; and (ii) causes of change in authority structures. Indeed, there is good reason to believe these two things may be connected, and that disconnects between power and authority structures may fuel change. Power used without authorization or legitimacy is inherently unstable. We can conjecture, then, that powerful actors in this situation may try to create new or more congenial authorizing structures in which to exercise their power. Do they try to do this? Do they succeed? With what frequency and under what conditions? The United States' Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) is one attempt of this kind. This US structure to interdict WMD components was initially greeted with skepticism and criticism because its disconnection from long-standing UN-based authorizing structures, its lack of transparency, and, potentially, its violation of aspects of international law. While evidence of its activities is often classified, its early history suggests positive dynamics in that PSI has grown in membership and much of the early controversy surrounding its activities seems to have softened. Figuring out what factors contributed to these positive power and authority dynamics, and whether they might be in play elsewhere, could be useful.

Conversely, when authority structures with broad reach start to lose the support of powerful actors, their influence will be diminished. We can see this as strong states start to forum shop when existing global institutions no longer produce useful outcomes. The WTO has been stalled for a decade on multiple fronts, and actors have started to move elsewhere to negotiate trade. States are moving to regional and bilateral fora; NGOs and others interested in specific trade issues (for example, intellectual property, HIV drug access) may be similarly strategic (Sell and Prakash 2004). Tracing these processes, comparing cases of authority change and how it relates to power, making comparisons across different issues, across different types of authorities, different types of power, and over time could reveal much about the relationship between these central aspects of global governance and the interrelated dynamics in these power and authority structures.

Effectiveness

The PSI and WTO cases point to an issue not addressed by W&W but which may be crucial to the trajectory of global

governance: effectiveness. Whether our governing efforts "work" and what effects they have in the world should be a high research priority, and sometimes it is. We can, and do, carry out assessments of World Bank programs, nuclear inspection regimes, and new trade rules, but studies of effectiveness might benefit from some conceptual spade-work on several additional dimensions. One is suggested by the PSI and WTO examples: How does effective governance (or lack thereof) change power and authority structures? Effective governance and the capacity to solve problems or carry out tasks in ways valued by a community bolster the power and authority of the effective problem solver (Raz 1990:5–6; Avant, Finnemore and Sell 2010: 13–14). NGOs who are effective in delivering humanitarian assistance and advocacy groups successful in creating environmental change gain legitimacy and power by their actions. Even private actors, like corporations, who have little claim to public trust or public authority may acquire these properties to some degree if they are seen as effectively solving governance problems (Haufler 2001, 2009). The same logic runs in reverse, however. Ineffective governance and bad performance can damage the authority and, thereby, the power of governing structures. These are reasonable conjectures, widely shared, but we know rather little about the conditions under which they actually hold true. Bad outcomes are common in global governance and often persist for many years since big governance institutions are notoriously difficult to change. Nor do we understand well the processes by which change actually occurs. Efforts at reform are common, but research on conditions under which reform proposals might actually succeed and why would be helpful.

A second dimension of effectiveness that could profit from more exploration is normative. Effectiveness, by itself, is only as desirable as the underlying aims of the governance policy, and asking "effective for what" and "effective for whom" must remain central to our analysis of governance effectiveness. All too often even well-intentioned global governance that effectively accomplishes its stated goals ignores the "governed" or gives them inadequate roles in the shaping of their own destinies. Such governance might be effective from the point of view of the "governors" who designed, financed, and implemented the program, but not so much when viewed from the perspective of those upon whom the program was visited.¹⁰ Perhaps a more common dilemma is that it is simply hard to know all the effects a governance effort will have. Global governance efforts almost always have varied effects, many of them unanticipated. Assessment mechanisms, sometimes embedded within governance structures, tend to see what they expect and find what they are looking for. If we do not expect a governance measure to have effect X, we are unlikely to look for it and less likely to find it. This is true of scholarly investigations as well as evaluation bureaucracies, but scholars have more freedom to expand their range of vision so their responsibility for alerting us to unintended effects is greater. Evaluation bureaucracies, by contrast, often must work with checklists of criteria, often created by designers of the policy, and may have less room to maneuver. Time frames also influence our assessments of effectiveness. Many effects, both intended and unintended, are hard to discern over the short term. Longitudinal and historical studies of governance effects and effectiveness would thus be particularly valuable.

¹⁰ The term "global governor" comes from Avant, Finnemore and Sell (2010:1).

Actor Dynamics

W&W's call for global governance scholars to move beyond Finkelstein's humorous 1995 description, "add new actors and stir," is welcome but, again, their recommendations about how to do this are frustratingly vague (W&W). One promising avenue researchers could explore would be to make the causes and character of proliferating new actors a major research question—not something we want to just notice and describe as we analyze other problems, but something we treat as an object of research and want to understand conceptually and theoretically. This is not a new idea, but it is most explored in sociology; global governance scholars have done less than they could with these insights. Boli and Thomas (1997), cited by W&W, are a prime example of such an argument about actor proliferation. Their book (Boli and Thomas 1999) is not just notable for its historical sweep (W&W's concern on page 11). Their challenge is more fundamental. They and their colleagues in the "world polity" school offer sophisticated theoretical arguments about the ways in which what Barnett and Duvall would call "productive power" is deployed to *create* these new actors that are now populating the global governance scene. This is not a random process in the world polity account. It is a patterned, even a predictable one about which we can theorize and do research. As we seek to "govern" more and more of global life, the recipe for doing this is clear in the world polity view: Set up an organization and professionalize or "rationalize" that activity according to impersonal rules and procedures. Thus, they argue, as we construct new spheres of activity like peacekeeping or humanitarian assistance, we organize these activities via new IGOs and NGOs and we develop whole new professions to carry them out.¹¹

This is a very neo-Weberian approach to the proliferation of actors and changes in global governance. One could imagine others. Arguments about governmentality, rooted in Foucault, provide quite different leverage on questions of actor proliferation and the expansive dynamic of global governance, as Guzzini and Neumann (2012) show. Like the world polity argument, they invoke forms of power, particularly productive power, which much current global governance scholarship neglects. One payoff of this move is that they can explain global change and actor proliferation in ways others cannot. Habermasian arguments could take scholars in yet a different direction, as Jennifer Mitzen (2013) shows in her examination of the creation of "public power" inside the Concert of Europe in global governance's early days (again, a reach into the past consonant with W&W's interests). My point is simply that we already have good theories for investigating how and why actors are proliferating, often through the deployment of previously unexamined forms of power. We also have good ways of making educated guesses and generating research about the types of issues and actors most likely to be affected by these expansionary dynamics, as Boli, Thomas, and their colleagues show. Applying what we know to more aspects of global governance and developing additional arguments on this topic could be fruitful.

Relationships as Units of Analysis¹²

In addition to endogenizing actor creation into our understandings of global governance, researchers could

benefit from shifting their focus from discrete actors to *relationships among actors* involved in global governance. Governing globally is never a solo act. In fact, it is hard to think of a policy area where a single "global governor" is acting alone. Any policy area of consequence is likely to be shaped by the power and authority of multiple actors, all trying to create new rules (or change existing ones) and implement policies in ways they prefer.

The nature of relationships among these potential governors can vary greatly, which in turn has diverse effects on policies and outcomes. Global governors compete, conflict, cooperate, delegate, and divide labor in a host of ways we have not always examined systematically, but should. Those trying to influence global policy may be in direct and obvious conflict as when advocacy groups clash with states or with each other. Outcomes then may range from victory for one side, to compromise of many types, to more dysfunctional eviscerations of the formally victorious policy by the losers, something Clifford Bob calls "zombie policy"—policies "so devoid of content that, although inscribed on paper, they are in reality dead" (Bob 2012:32).

Even when those seeking to govern agree on goals and policies, the nature of relationships among those exercising power can vary in consequential ways. Governance may be done through political delegation arrangements, as when the UN delegates problems to regional or state authorities, or through legal and business contracting arrangements, as when the World Bank or USAID contracts out its development programs to NGOs or to private firms. Divisions of labor in the governing process also create distinctive relationships and specialization among governing actors. Advocacy organizations like Greenpeace may specialize in agenda-setting and issue promotion, but may see actual rule creation and policy implementation as the job of others. Again, though, there is dynamic potential in divisions of labor. Organizations that start life with one specialization may branch out as they age and expand. Humanitarian relief organizations that provide services to victims may develop advocacy wings over time as they try to tackle "root causes" of the situations they seek to relieve. Governing may also happen through various types partnerships between large international IGOs and local NGOs, with diverse structures and outcomes. Indeed, the World Bank and many other development organizations require projects to involve local partners, both because they believe partnerships to increase effectiveness and because they believe local partnerships help legitimate their efforts with local populations by making development "participatory." At the same time, the participatory nature of partnerships has often been criticized as more symbolic than substantive and, as with many governing efforts, outcomes have been mixed.

We know these relationships among governors are fundamental to global governance, but we know little about their long-term effects on the power structures and authority structures of the overall governance enterprise. For example, we know that delegation arrangements among global governors often rearrange power. "Agents" (those to whom tasks are delegated) may become entrenched and autonomous over time, but they don't always. What can we say about conditions under which power and authority will migrate and when it will be "sticky" and hard to dislodge from actors who have it? In a world of collective principals, nested principals, and agents empowered by asymmetries of information, exper-

¹¹ One can now get graduate degrees in both these fields.

¹² This section draws on Avant, Finnemore and Sell (2010: chapter 1).

tise and evolving legitimacy of their own, figuring out who is really in charge (ergo who wields power) in these governing arrangements can be difficult, both conceptually and empirically. Other kinds of relationships raise similar problems. The complexity of some of this becomes particularly vivid in discussions about accountability for governing and its outcomes. With so many governing “cooks” stirring the pot, efforts to hold anyone accountable and figuring out what exactly they should be accountable for has been tricky across diverse spheres of global life. Good accountability structures must rest on good knowledge about which actors play what role in creating outcomes, something research could help uncover.

Relationships *with the governed* also shape global governance dynamics and outcomes, and the normative component here should appeal to many scholars, including W&W, who rightly draw attention to these issues. These relationships, too, vary enormously. Strong civil society critiques of flagship governors like the Bank, Fund, and WTO have changed the way these organizations govern, albeit not as much as the critics would like. Pressure on multinational corporations, much of it in originating in civil society groups, can reshape business practices (think blood diamonds and the Kimberly Process.). Attention to civilian casualties, much of it coming from civil society groups, is clearly aimed at influencing security organizations on putatively “humanitarian” missions, like NATO. Global governance routinely encounters (and often creates) myriad forms of protest and pushback, but we understand these relationships only thinly. We know that relations between governed and governors strongly shape the legitimacy and potentially the effectiveness of these governing efforts. These relations also create major feedback loops into many of these governing actors, causing them to rethink their missions, their policies, and their own internal structures. These reconsiderations do not always create change and often the change has unintended consequences, but we have only recently begun to investigate these feedback loops with longitudinal studies of change and our conceptual understandings of the effects of the governed on governing is in its infancy.

Conclusion

These are only four areas in which we have good foundations on which to build more focused inquiries and research programs. One could easily identify others. The importance of such scholarship would not be to answer the question W&W pose, “[w]hat is it that we need to do in order to realize the analytical utility of global governance?” (W&W). Analytically, the concept of global governance is a means, not an end. Our analytic shared interest, I suspect, lies in the larger question posed by John Ruggie: “what makes the world hang together?” (Ruggie 1998; W&W). Whether and how the concept of global governance is useful in tackling that question depends very much on progress on questions like those I have laid out. The bet in doing this research for most of us is that understanding how the world hangs together will tell us something normatively useful about our shared goals for governing globally.

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