

“Institutionalizing Global Governance”

Comments on Panelists’ Papers

Each of the papers on this panel grappled with the extension of global governance norms and projects to developing countries. By focusing on how global governance travels outside its home in bureaucratized Western societies each paper reveals a tension between global governance goals and the implementation of global governance practices in new terrain.

I. What Is Meant by ‘Global Governance’?

Hein adopts a definition of global governance offered by James Rosenau – “as all the structures and processes necessary to maintaining a modicum of public order and movement toward the realization of collective goals at every level of community around the world” (Rosenau 1997, 363). This definition certainly casts the net widely – I would argue almost too widely to help give guidance for structuring empirical research. I see Rosenau’s definition as a conceptual definition. I would push Hein and students of global governance generally to look for more operation definitions that can support empirical study.

Ergun and Cali do not define the term explicitly in their paper, though they conceptualize the practice to be centrally concerned with the promotion of two universal values (democracy and human rights) by international agents in domestic settings.

I draw from Lawrence Finkelstein’s definition of ‘global governance’ as “governing, without sovereign authority, relationships that transcend national frontiers. Global governance is doing internationally what governments do at home” (1995, 369). The focus is on patterns of authority and governance in the absence of a formal system of authoritative government and a de-emphasis of territoriality in the study of international public policy. Again, this definition may be overly vague for the purposes to which I employ it, but I have yet to find a suitable alternative.

Though offering different conceptual understandings of what global governance is, all of the papers share an understanding of the goals of the global governance project – to respond to human needs in areas where the state cannot or will not. For Hein this occurs through seeing global governance as “politics in a global society” with international actors putting pressure on or offering selective inducements to local and state-level decision-makers to adopt policies that comport with the international community’s development (health and welfare) goals. The process is similar for Ergun and Cali – in two thoughtful case studies of human rights organizations in Azerbaijan and Turkey they demonstrate how international “agents of global governance” prompt changes in policy through the funding and training of HROs and the insinuation of a western ‘rights based’ discourse that implants terms like ‘gender’, ‘conflict resolution’, and ‘monitoring’ with a fixed western content. I take a similar approach in my paper on post-conflict reconstruction in the Balkans by looking at how international money and personnel have provided power incentives for individuals in the region to profess adherence to a new understanding of political, economic, and social organization, despite potential dissonance between these norms and local customs.

II. Global-Local Tensions

Implicit in each of the papers and an issue I hope is further developed at CPOGG and in subsequent research is the insinuation of hard and soft forms of power into the relationships developed through global governance projects. Further, the implications of entrenching this unequal power relationship needs explicit attention. Ergun and Cali make reference to this concern when they cite the dependent relationship that develops between local HROs and the international community in Azerbaijan and Turkey. Groups on the ground appeal to the international community for help in moving recalcitrant state actors and the “agents of global governance” demand strict adherence to internationals’ programs and message in return for their attention and continued funding. While it is hardly feasible to expect financial or political support by the international community without any strings, we should be careful of forcing a trade-off between advancing the goals of global governance (be they western notions of human rights, democracy, or development) and undermining the potential to embed autonomous, functioning local actors. While this issue may be peculiar to extending global governance norms and practices to the developing world, it is critical given the universal scope of the global governance project.

Each of the papers also highlights the simultaneous implication of local, state, and international issues, actors, and resources. Ergun and Cali’s interviews demonstrate well the political negotiations that occurs among citizens, officials at the local and state levels, and representatives from international organizations. Through these negotiations, the international community hopes to implant its understanding of goals and procedures (democratic, transparent) while various individuals in the countries either try to obstruct or enable this process. Hein illustrates this interaction in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria’s (GFFATM) funding guidance. The fund will support national programs and “respect country-led formulation and implementation processes,” but only those that clearly link Fund resources to “the achievement of clear, measurable and sustainable results.” Presumably the understanding of what constitutes “clear,” “measurable,” and “sustainable” is determined by the Fund, not the national programs themselves. Hein’s example shows well that the negotiations between local programs and their international patrons are often rather one-sided.

III. Areas for Growth in Future Research

I see three areas to develop the topic of “institutionalizing global governance.” The first is through constructing a Weberian understanding of institutionalizing or routinizing global governance in new geographic areas. Each of the papers addresses how well global governance norms and practices travel to new locales, and this process should be more explicitly investigated in a comparative manner using detailed case study analysis. Are certain parts of the world more amenable to an extension of global governance practices (either in terms of accepting norms of democracy and human rights or in terms of developing and sustaining functioning bureaucratic mechanisms to carry out projects sanctioned by the international community)? If so, why? What attributes of a society make it fruitful ground for the growth of global governance? The three papers presented here offer a good starting point for this sort of analysis.

The second area of research I would like to see explored would also address the exportation of global governance norms and practices by looking at how they are reconciled in different socio-political contexts. While related to the first research project, this project would focus on those societies in which global governance has morphed in the process of becoming embedded. How does the project adapt to different environments? Which aspects of the project remain stable across societies and which aspects prove to be more malleable? How and in what ways do locales co-opt global governance as a project and what does this say to the project overall?

Building from this second project comes a third: research should be conducted to study the effect of extending global governance into new areas on the areas themselves. What are the side effects of this exportation? The overall project of global governance has been approached as a normative good – responding to unfulfilled human needs is seen by most as a contribution to humanity. But as it is currently being carried out this project exacts a price. With ‘reforms’ directed from above, locales risk losing whatever ownership of projects they may have had. This has implications not only for the viability of the programs themselves, but also the efficacy afforded the state by its citizens. States also risk becoming dependent on the international community financially and politically. This concern must be weighed against the potential to do good in societies, but alternative means to achieve similar outcomes should also be explored.

IV. Critical Perspectives

The papers in the panel fit well into the purpose of CPOGG to reflect upon the concepts of both theorists and policy makers in order “to un/recover the political aspects of global governance.” In a strict sense these papers point out the very practical limits to what has been approached as a universal project. On another level, the papers point out the possible trajectories global governance practices may take in the near future. These practices may exacerbate the distinction that exists between western and transitional societies in the name of promoting a slate in universal programs, or they may recognize the disconnect that exists and adopt different strategies for reaching the goal of responding to human need at all levels.