



The Rise of Non-State Actors in Global Governance

Opportunities and Limitations

a One Earth Future Discussion Paper by

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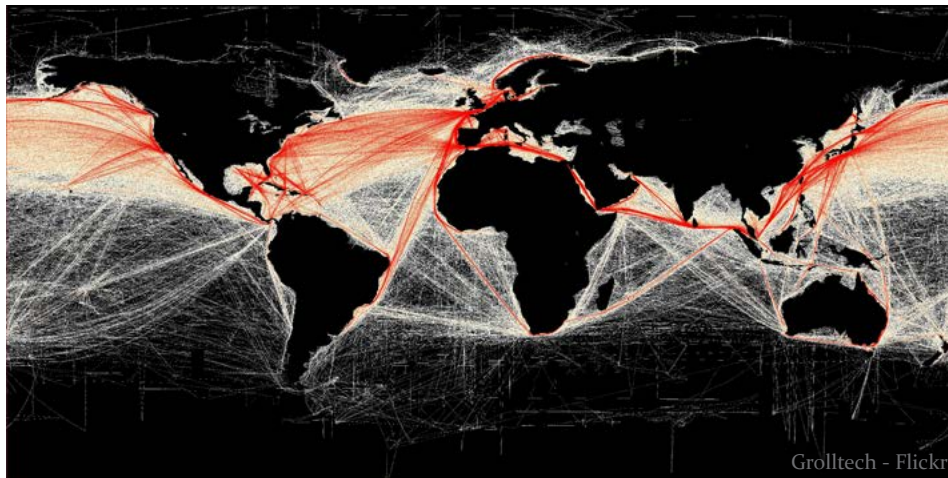
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Cover Image: "Mankind's Struggle for a Lasting Peace" by José Vela-Zanetti. United Nations Photo - Flickr

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The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented growth in the number of international actors and dramatic changes in the scope of international connectivity, with a corresponding boom in discussions among scholars and policy wonks about the pluses and minuses of globalization and how it could be governed. Wherever one stands on the globalization divide,¹ everyone agrees that today the intensity, speed, and volume of global interactions reflect increasing interdependence. That recognition has nudged us toward examining international relations through the lens of global governance, which “has attained near-celebrity status” according to Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall.² The question of what global governance is (and how it has changed as the scope and number of actors have evolved, and whether the current global governance glass is half empty, half full, or something else entirely) remains contested.³

This essay aims to contribute to that ongoing conversation by making three claims. First, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of international organizations in the private and public sectors that are not only willing and able to participate in global governance, but have also on many occasions helped solve problems and improve lives. However, this growth was not equally distributed among such organizations: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) account for the lion’s share of the increase in absolute numbers, with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) having attained a natural limit (although their budgets, activities, and networks have continued to increase).

Ironically, until the 1990s, virtually all scholarship in the field of international organization and law focused on IGOs. At that juncture, other types of international organizations came to the fore, and the term “global governance” was coined. It expanded the way specialists viewed international relations; seminal publications reflected this view, including James Rosenau and Ernst Czempiel’s 1992 *Governance without Government*, the Commission on Global Governance’s 1995 *Our Global Neighbourhood*, and the creation in 1995 of the journal *Global Governance*.⁴

Second, this growth allowed for the creation of new architectures of global governance. Multi-sector partnerships represented a new way to govern the world, albeit one that is under-researched and poorly understood, especially in terms of the role of transnational business. Third, although such partnerships are valuable additions to the international toolkit, they have clear limitations. Non-state actors have a greater degree of nimbleness and their looser organizational structures allow for more efficient courses of action than the bureaucracies of states can attain. Yet, without formal oversight or the constraints of international law, powerful non-state actors can have a disproportionate influence on the outcomes of certain decisions.

To summarize our conclusion, the diversity among actors has created opportunities for new systems and new partnerships to form and for old ones to be strengthened and transformed. However, essential components of future global governance which are largely absent from contemporary conversations are the need for increased legal codification and more robust orchestration efforts made by IGOs, especially the United Nations.



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We focus on the UN because in the absence of a global government the UN serves as the convener for the states of the world. Yet the UN itself is not easily characterized. Depending on the issue and angle, the UN is both a state and a non-state actor. In fact, calling the UN an “intergovernmental organization” is somewhat misleading. What was predominantly the “first UN” of member states has always been backed by what Inis Claude called the “second UN” (of international civil servants).⁵ And over the last few decades, a new phenomenon has become less peripheral and more prominent and essential—namely, the “third UN” of experts, commissions, NGOs, TNCs, and interested individuals.⁶ Although states pay the bills and make decisions within the intergovernmental arena, UN actions must be implemented by staff members and increasingly must embrace non-state actors as well for appropriate actions and normative development. In some ways, then, the UN is hard to qualify as an exclusively state-based actor.

The inclusion of civil society and business in a third UN was deemed necessary by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan when at the turn of the century he remarked, “I was convinced that the UN would achieve little in the twenty-first century unless it reached out to such people and convinced them that it was a useful ally, able and willing to work with them to achieve their ends.”⁷ But before we turn to the role of non-state actors in global governance, a brief look at global governance itself is in order.

Can the World Be Governed?

What do we mean by global governance? A short definition is collective efforts to identify, understand, and address worldwide problems that go beyond the problem-solving capacities of states.⁸ As such, it may be helpful to think of global governance as the capacity within the international system at any given moment to provide government-like services and public goods in the absence of a world government. A longer definition is the combination of informal and formal ideas, values, rules, norms, procedures, practices, policies, and organizations that help all actors—states, IGOs, civil society and NGOs, TNCs, and individuals—identify, understand, and address trans-boundary problems. At its simplest, global governance is a set of questions that enable us to work out how the world is, was, and *could be* governed, and how changes in grand and not-so-grand patterns of governance occurred, are occurring, and ought to occur.

A disconnect is apparent between the nature of a growing number of contested global problems and the rickety political structures for international problem-solving and decision-making.

As we look at today's headlines or listen to talking heads, a disconnect is apparent between the nature of a growing number of contested global problems—for example, climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, mass atrocities, financial volatilities, cyber-threats, transnational crime, and pandemics—and the rickety political structures for international problem-solving and decision-making. We lack systems that would allow us to plan and implement effective measures to attack and avoid the global problems that are on the horizon or that are actually upon us.

However, in many specific domains there is a significant, and even surprising, degree of stability, predictability, and order. A letter or a package can be mailed from one hemisphere to another, and people pass from country to country by rail, road, and air with few constraints and by increasingly easier modes of travel. Finances and commerce move electronically. Safety and reliability are expected—in fact, disruptions and failures in international interactions are less frequent and spectacular than they are within countries that supposedly have functioning governments.

Many a cynic asks, “Can the world be governed?” To a significant extent, it already is. The question is, “how?” And the follow-up question is, “how can we make it better?” To take one example, commerce transits the seas via container vessels with remarkable efficiency, in a process that involves shippers, insurers, port authorities, labor unions, governments, and intergovernmental organizations. But the resulting global governance in that sector is hardly without problems—oil spills, the exploitation of seafarers, and maritime piracy to name a few. Digging deeper into many issues leads us to see dramatic flaws in the international system.

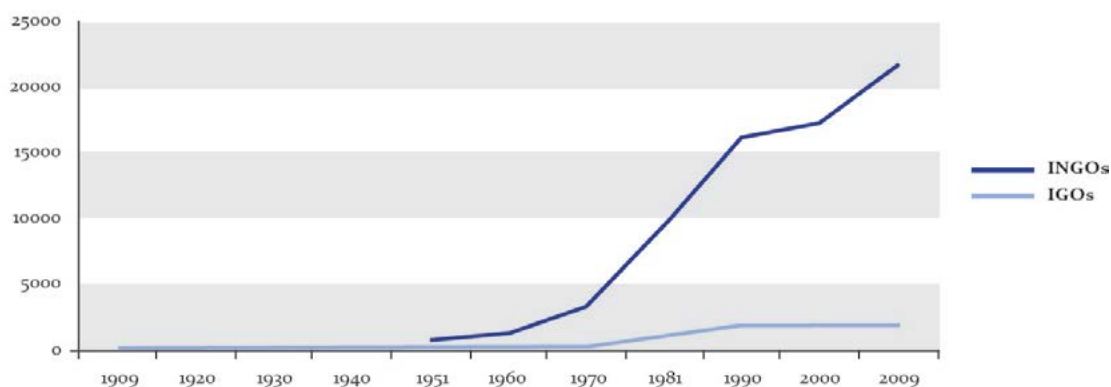
International NGOs were, in many cases, created in response to these flaws. NGOs and businesses have shown a remarkable ability to establish transnational links, address global problems, and work to resolve failures in the global system. Nonetheless, the rising tide of international organizations that tackle specific global issues requires an appreciation of their limitations as well. What exactly do we mean by a “proliferation of non-state actors”? Do they matter for global governance? What are their limitations?

Non-State Actors: A Look at the Numbers

We are hardly the first to remark that the modern world is more interconnected than it used to be. One result has been the increased ease of establishing international entities of all sorts and in multiplying and intensifying their interactions. However, many readers may be unaware of what exactly the landscape of international organizations looks like. Over the past century, there has been a marked increase in the number and the scope of international actors on the world stage. This burgeoning has been concentrated in non-state actors; specifically in international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and transnational corporations. Below, we provide numbers demonstrating the growth of non-state actors over the past century. Each of these new non-state actors, by nature of their working to address issues or facilitate action internationally, represents an additional brick in the growing edifice of global governance.

The *Yearbook of International Organizations* has tracked the founding and growth of IGOs and INGOs over the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The data dramatically demonstrate the changing landscape of international organizations.⁹ Over the twentieth century, more than 38,000 IGOs and INGOs were founded—a rate of more than one per day. New ones are added and old ones disappear, however, and the growth in international organizations was unevenly distributed. Figure 1 graphs the organizations founded from 1909

Figure 1: Number of IGOs and INGOs, 1909-2009



to 2009 and shows that more than 33,000 organizations were founded after 1950. Indeed, almost half of all organizations created in the twentieth century were established in the last two decades of the century. The result of this growth, and the change in its speed, was a dramatic surge in the total number of international organizations, as suggested by the slope of the curves.

Rapid proliferation was the case particularly for INGOs, which by the end of the century outnumbered their intergovernmental counterparts by a ratio of 9.5 to 1. INGO growth began to pick up speed after World War II and accelerated more after the end of the Cold War. Table 1 presents the number of INGOs and IGOs founded for each decade from 1909–2009. The data show that while INGOs have always outpaced IGOs, the ratio held steady at roughly 4 NGOs per 1 IGO until the 1950s, when it jumped to closer to 5. This ratio jumped again in the 1980s, and remained significantly higher than in the first half of the century throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Table 1: Number and Ratio of INGOs and IGOs Founded by Decade, 1900–2009

	INGOs	IGOs	INGOs :IGOs
1900–09	445	118	3.77
1910–19	492	118	4.17
1920–29	845	215	3.93
1930–39	731	208	3.51
1940–49	1244	317	3.92
1950–59	2580	523	4.93
1960–69	3822	775	4.93
1970–79	5645	1219	4.63
1980–89	7839	924	8.48
1990–99	8988	1299	6.92
2000–09	3505	500	7.01

The growth of INGOs and transnational corporations in relation to IGOs can be explained in a variety of ways. Many legal barriers to international commerce and human mobility disappeared in the second half of the twentieth century: the Cold War ended, and the establishment of the EU, among other changes, increased the ease of cross-border engagement. Technical advances (in communications and transport especially) removed some of the physical challenges that had constrained transnational connections. The disappearance, or at least reduction, of legal and technological barriers empowered civil society to extend from the local to the international. The relative ease with which NGOs can be founded versus the arduous challenges of creating treaty-based IGOs provides another explanation for the more extensive growth of the former, as does the existence of a plethora of long-standing regional and universal IGOs for virtually every world problem. Other factors may be at play as well: “The involvement of NGOs seems to rise when governments need them and to fall when governments and international bureaucracies gain self-confidence,” Steve Charnovitz notes,

“suggesting a cyclical pattern.”¹⁰ Kjell Skjelsback hypothesizes, however, that “the relative number of NGOs has been growing precisely in those areas that are most politically relevant and in which national governments are likely to be most active.”¹¹ Whichever explanation is correct, it is clear that there was an explosion in the number of INGOs starting in the twentieth century.

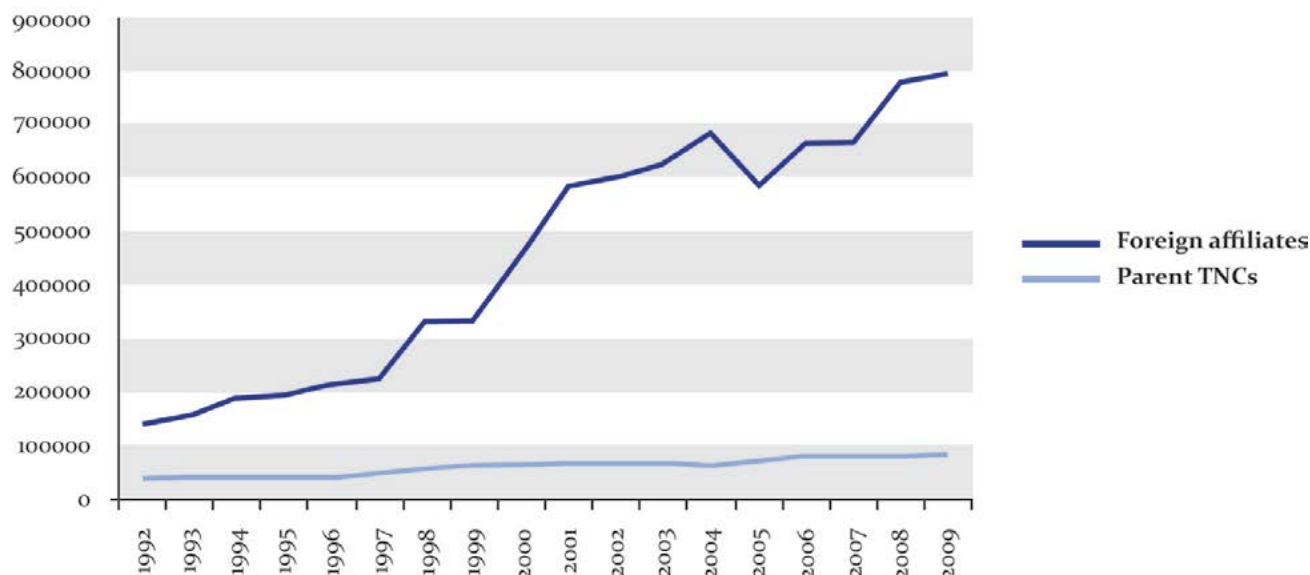
As noted, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations have long been the focus of the Association of International Organizations. With over a century of longitudinal data, they are the entities typically analyzed. However, this approach leaves out another type of international organization: entities

organized across national boundaries whose activities are profit oriented; these are transnational corporations, or TNCs. In light of their importance and impact, such an absence is unfortunate within an attempt to assemble the pieces of the contemporary global governance puzzle.

Increasing economic engagement obscures distinctions between national and transnational corporations.

TNCs are easy enough to describe in the abstract, but a precise definition that allows for a compilation of data about their exact numbers is more daunting. The networked structure of many modern business enterprises, which are often organized as a collection of subsidiary and superordinate bodies with complex ownership and supply ties,¹² makes it difficult or misleading to identify a single entity within such structures. One attempt to specifically define TNCs was created by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which defined them thus: “A transnational corporation is generally regarded as an enterprise comprising entities in more than one country which operate under a system of decision-making that permits coherent policies and a common strategy. The entities are so linked, by ownership and otherwise, that one or more of them may be able to exercise a significant influence over the others and, in particular, to share knowledge, resources, and responsibilities with others.”¹³ The increasingly transnational nature of business has meant that this definition may better be considered as a spectrum, rather than a simple binary: given the nature of global supply and demand, along with subcontracting, more and more companies have commercial ties internationally that may meet the UNCTAD definition. The continuing internationalization of global investment and supply and distribution chains also complicates attempts to accurately count the numbers of TNCs; increasing economic engagement obscures distinctions between national and transnational corporations.

Even with these caveats, attempts to track the growth of TNCs have been made that allow us to estimate the importance of TNCs on the global stage in an effort to make a rough comparison to the international non-profit organizations discussed above. From 1991 to 2009, the annual *World Investment Report* released by UNCTAD tracked the number of parent companies

Figure 2: Parent TNCs and Foreign Affiliates, World Investment Report 1992-2009

and foreign subsidiaries.¹⁴ The data plotted in Figure 2 demonstrate the relationship between TNCs and global economic activity. As one would expect, UNCTAD's analysts counted more TNCs during the economic expansions in the late 1990s and again in the 2000s, but TNC numbers dropped precipitously or stagnated during economic and financial downturns over the last decade. However, overall growth has been fairly steady and trending upwards: on average, the global economic system added 2,677 parent TNCs and 38,579 foreign affiliates per year over the last two decades. While these numbers are restricted to only the last 20 years, they mirror the pace of growth for other types of international organizations in the *Yearbook* as reported earlier.

Our primary claim here is straightforward if not simple: there are more international organizations now than at any other point in history, and the burgeoning presence of INGOs and TNCs is joined to the steady number of IGOs whose budgets have continued to increase and whose geographical and programmatic diversification is not captured by simply counting institutions. The argument here is not, however, the more-the-merrier; rather it is in favor of the necessity to grasp the past evolution and future prospects for enhanced global governance. The growth in actors permits—indeed fosters—a networked structure of global interconnections, with the various different types of partners (IGOs, NGOs, and TNCs) making identifiable and distinct actual or potential contributions to global governance.

A skeptic, noting that international organizations have been with us for some time, may ask, “What’s new?” Our answer, at least in part, is that “more is different.”¹⁵ The quantitative growth of IGOs, NGOs, and TNCs over the twentieth century constitutes a qualitative change in global governance, because the reach of the networks created by this growth means that

fewer and fewer global problems lack a set of international stakeholders advocating for, or working to address, a solution. The proliferation of non-state actors has meant that there are many more potentially powerful contributors to global governance—sometimes by themselves, sometimes in tandem, and sometimes in partnership with states and intergovernmental organizations created by states. This implies a different structure, process, and function for how governance operates on the global level; specifically, that states or state-based entities no longer exist as a monopoly in global affairs. Particularly interesting in this regard is the increasing number of corporate entities participating in governance, a non-traditional role for corporations usually interested in “just business.” The following section provides greater insight into how the evolution of these new and old actors has changed global governance.

Non-State Actors: Why the Numbers Matter

While states are the starting point for analyses of world politics, they are no longer alone in the limelight on the globe’s stage. The growth of non-state actors has meant more diversity in potential players and partners. The proliferation of actors that are legitimately representing stakeholders and contributing concretely to contemporary global problem-solving means that we have come a long way from the state-centric model of traditional international relations.

The proliferation of non-state actors has ushered in an age of global partnerships between private and public bodies on specific issues. A few examples from today’s script for global governance suggest complex interactions among states, IGOs, and non-state actors:

- Over the last decade, some 100,000 international peacekeeping soldiers, police officers, and civilian monitors were deployed worldwide each year in war zones. Personnel have come from regional organizations such as the African Union, sub-regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States, alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the United Nations, and coalitions of the willing, or some combination thereof. Alongside the states and the IGO-supported troops, a host of not-for-profit development and humanitarian agencies funded by states, foundations, and direct public donations worked in war-torn areas and fragile states to support economic development and provide the public with health care, education, access to clean water, and more. In addition, local and international for-profit companies operated in countries before, during, and after armed conflicts. In short, some typical duties of a national government—providing security, economic development, and access to public goods—were often facilitated by a partnership between the state, IGOs, NGOs, and TNCs.
- Since the collapse of the Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organization in 1999,

the changing complexion of the resources available for development has elevated the perceived importance of trade's benefits for sustainable growth. Meanwhile, in poorer countries, the roles of remittances from migrant workers and foreign direct investment (FDI) have come to dwarf the charitable funds and grants coming from a dwindling flow (in percentage terms) of development assistance. Indeed, remittances in 2010 (the most recent year for which World Bank figures are available) from the African diaspora alone were over \$50 billion, whereas official development assistance was about \$10 billion less than that.¹⁶ As state-based systems struggle to support economic development, non-state systems have played a larger role. For example, the resources for public health coming from the Gates Foundation have become more significant than those from the World Health Organization, and some pharmaceutical companies provide low-cost drugs to alleviate the impacts of the AIDS epidemic and other diseases. Countless non-profit organizations have worked in partnership within all sectors of development.

- As piracy surged in the waters off the Horn of Africa in the 2000s, stakeholders (including not only states, but various members of the international maritime community) came together to address the problem. Eschewing formal UN structures and the constraints that come with them, the Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) was created as a deliberately informal multi-stakeholder network for the coordination of counter-piracy planning. The CGPCS had active participation not only from naval, intelligence, legal, and other staff from many states and IGOs but also from NGOs and industry associations.¹⁷

States and non-state organizations have cobbled together frameworks for cooperation and actual responses that have resulted in more order, stability, and predictability than might have been expected.

These examples describe situations in which transnational actors have come together in different combinations to attempt to address specific problems with varying degrees of success. In doing so, states and non-state organizations have cobbled together frameworks for cooperation and actual responses that have resulted in more order, stability, and predictability than might have been expected. In short, they have contributed to improving global governance, which goes far beyond a system of coordination by state-based entities to embrace an evolving system of multi-sector partnerships.

Data concretely shows that states are no longer the sole—or in some instances, even the most crucial—actors in the existing world order, which has long been a claim documented by researchers. The ever-more-crowded governance stage means that “States’ ability to control or regulate [global economic growth] has diminished,” according to Deborah Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan Sell, “while nonstate actors’ efforts to shape or tame it have in-

creased.”¹⁸ Peter Willetts points out that non-state actors have not only participated in global governance but have also been involved in its construction.¹⁹ The so-called third wave of democratization has facilitated the growth of non-state actors in global governance,²⁰ which in turn has supported networks of various types in fostering additional transnational interactions. “Transnationalism is my name for a way of understanding global governance that focuses not on international institutions or national states themselves,” wrote Tim Sinclair, “but on other agents and processes.”²¹

Civil society’s organizations play active roles in shaping norms, laws, and policies. They challenge traditional notions of representation, accountability, and legitimacy. Similarly, for-profit corporations may expand their purview beyond mere bottom lines to delve into arenas (active participation in international conferences, for example) and activities (corporate social responsibility, for example) that were formerly either absent or peripheral.²² In an increasingly diverse, complex, and interdependent world, states alone cannot pretend to have all of the answers to collective-action (or most other) questions.

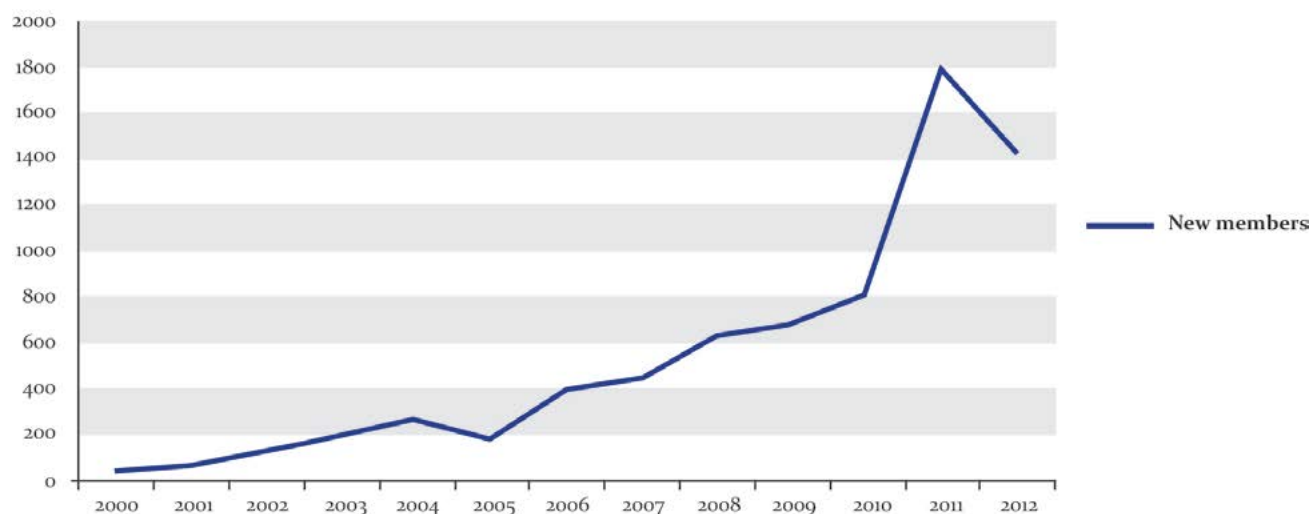
The progress on development, as on every other sector, will involve not just governments but also business, civil society, and individuals.

One illustration of the changing structure of actors engaged in transnational activities was the establishment of the UN Global Compact (UNGC) at the Millennium Summit of 2000; the UNGC is an initiative aimed at encouraging corporate participation in sustainable development, the protection of human rights, and involving NGOs in monitoring the performance of TNCs. By definition, states pay the bills and make the decisions in IGOs, but to be meaningful in today’s world their actions have to embrace non-state actors. While NGOs specifically figure in the UN Charter (Article 71), market actors do not; indeed, they had been kept at arm’s length during the decades of the Cold War because of ideological opposition from the socialist bloc and many countries in the global South. The Global Compact was a specific recognition by the United Nations of the crucial role of TNCs. The United Nations, as the foremost intergovernmental organization and preeminent global governance institution, acknowledged the private sector—both the for-profit and non-profit species—an essential partner in supporting UN goals and decisions. More recently, the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda coined the apt phrase “global partnership,” which captures the reality that progress on development, as on every other sector, will involve not just governments but also business, civil society, and individuals.²³

The data on the membership of the UNGC since 2000 demonstrate the potential interest in such partnerships: they show a steady increase in companies committed to respecting its terms and conditions. Although the elapsed time is shorter, Figure 3 depicts the same snow-

balling of global corporate networks found in the IGO and NGO data presented earlier. Of the 7,259 companies represented as members in the UNGC in 2012, almost 80 percent had joined since 2006, and almost half (44.5 percent) had joined in the previous two years. The UNGC as an institution relies on voluntary compliance: as members of the UNGC, companies are required to submit an annual Communication on Progress that outlines their commitment to the UNGC's guiding principles and the status of their efforts to align their business practices to those commitments. If companies fail to submit a report on an annual basis, they are removed from the Global Compact, but absent this they have no formal censure. Despite these challenges, companies are making an in-principle, public declaration of their commitment to human rights. With the growth of IGOs and NGOs, the growth rate of corporate participation in global networks appears to have developed steadily and accelerated until recently.

Figure 3: New TNC Members of UN Global Compact, 2000-2012



The UNGC also helps to demonstrate the claim that these ever-evolving systems represent new mechanisms for global governance. The Global Compact proceeds by asking TNCs to voluntarily commit to principles supporting sustainable business practices, which are supposed to be carried out throughout the structures of the participating companies. In doing so, the compact's members set policies that govern their own activities and those of their subsidiaries and suppliers. Given the size and impact of the most powerful TNCs, this effort to improve governance is not trivial: TNC policies and procedures can have a direct impact on the health, education, and well-being of the individuals who work for them and on the extended families of those individuals. They can help to bring employees in line with international standards for professionalism or technical proficiency through training and by demonstrating the utility of these practices.²⁴ In addition, the impact of these policies has significant ripple effects on other institutions; work by Chuck Kwok and Solomon Tadesse, for example, has found that TNC activities that incorporate deliberate refusals to engage in corruption can

actively reduce that blight in host states.²⁵

Although multi-stakeholder networks lack the formal legal authority of IGOs, they can nonetheless shape the collective activities of their participants in ways that have a meaningful impact on global problem-solving. The Global Compact is one illustration; another, as mentioned earlier, is the Contact Group for Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, which is composed not only of states and IGOs but also of business organizations and trade groups representing the maritime sector. Yet another network consists of the private regulatory initiatives that increasingly govern supply chains across the globe, setting environmental, food safety, and social standards to such an extent that private, not public, standards are the prime determinants of access to many western markets.²⁶

Whether TNCs identify specific issues as being directly relevant to their bottom lines, wish to avoid negative publicity, or are concerned with forestalling regulation (or some combination of these concerns), frequently, companies have stepped forward to improve the way the world is governed. Nevertheless, it would be short-sighted to overlook the dark side of TNCs—the recent spectacular fires and building collapses in Bangladesh more than adequately demonstrate the sometimes disastrous results of unregulated or unmonitored TNC activities and global supply chains. There are other spoilers, of course; Andrew Clapham and Scott Jerbi, for instance, have a 12-page categorization scheme just to describe the different ways that corporations could be complicit in the abuse of human rights.²⁷

New technologies and higher expectations can be mobilized to enhance corporate accountability.

But even here, signs of change were evident from the immediate reactions of outrage and opprobrium from across the world to the series of 2013 disasters in Bangladesh; this is significant for our argument about layers of global governance. Transnational corporations—not unlike governments or environmental organizations—are affected by the expression of public opinion via blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and the rest of the internet. After these disasters, consumers put heat on major retailers in North America and Europe so that their discount clothing was not coming from dangerous Bangladeshi factories—the kind that pay poor female laborers the lowest wages in the world, starting at \$37 per month. Following the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory complex that killed more than 1,100 people, major TNCs agreed to help finance fire safety and building improvements. These decentralized public campaigns resemble earlier ones to ensure the safe origins of food brought to market via fairly compensated non-slave labor. Embarrassment and poor public relations have costs for TNCs. New technologies and higher expectations can be mobilized to enhance corporate accountability.

Our purpose here is not to rail against evident exploitation and condemn scandalous abuses, but rather to correct the past analytical practice of largely ignoring the for-profit sector as an integral component of global governance. The limited focus and specific economic self-in-

terests of TNCs may appear to preclude them from acting in good faith to provide public goods or broader services. However, such a view ignores the extent to which TNCs are global organizations with a substantial impact on the lives of millions of people; it also ignores the fact that TNC contributions to governance based on bottom lines can, in fact, dovetail with socially determined goals. When considering the evolving system of global governance, TNCs and their operations have grown alongside those more traditionally identified with IGOs and NGOs, and an appreciation of their roles is a necessary part of any analysis of contemporary global governance and of workable proposals for improving the way that the world is governed.

Non-State Actors, a Look at the Stakes: What about IGOs?

The changing face of global governance also exposes potential weaknesses from letting countless flowers bloom. The evolution of partnerships between the private and public sectors as well as the expansion of non-state actors and their increasing importance on the world stage should be appreciated for what they are: a significant shift in the way that the world is governed. The growth in numbers and in scope of both the not-for-profit and for-profit varieties with international portfolios are reflected in a world order in which many international issues are now addressed to some degree. To repeat, and to an under-appreciated degree, the world is governed.

At the same time, the daunting array of what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan calls “problems without passports”²⁸ are still staring us in the face. While partnerships outside of the state-based system are helpful, even essential, they also are unpredictable, ad hoc, episodic, and ultimately inadequate. Could multi-sector partnerships not be made more effective within a more formal and regulated international system? Could the impact of such partnerships not be multiplied with appropriate orchestration from intergovernmental organizations?

On one hand, the playing field for global governance is changing rapidly, and new players are rushing in to fill gaps identified by stakeholders and constituents. New organizations and new partnerships act to support governance on specific issues and respond to specific challenges. While non-state structures are helpful, even powerful, and flexible, on the other hand they lack the legitimacy, authority, decision-making, and legal capacities derived from formal state structures, especially intergovernmental ones with universal membership. Without stronger IGOs, which inherently have capacities and legitimacy that

More regulation, better coordination, and fulsome convening powers are required if lessons are to be not only learned, but also applied.

informal structures lack, the most daunting global problems—climate change, transnational crime, financial meltdowns, the proliferation of WMDs, and the list goes on—will be addressed, but not in the systematic, effective, and comprehensive way that the greatest threats to humanity should be. More regulation, better coordination, and more fulsome convening powers are required if lessons are to be not only learned, but also applied.

Diversity among institutions is intriguing and encouraging, but proliferation has resulted in a complicated but weak and inconsistent network of governance, whereas solving global problems requires global norms, global laws, and global buy-in. Depending on an issue area, geographic location, and timing, there are vast disparities in power and influence among states, IGOs, TNCs, and NGOs in the ways that they individually or collectively approach problem-solving.²⁹ Sometimes global problems are flagged; sometimes they are discussed and recommendations agreed upon; but only occasionally are they even partially implemented.

Paradoxically, IGOs seem to be more marginal at exactly the time when enhanced multilateralism is so sorely required.

Consequently, today's world is governed by an indistinct and intricate patchwork of authority that is diffuse and contingent, creating inconsistent rules and varying degrees of effective collective action. It is better than nothing, but it also is totally inadequate.

One striking reason for the inconsistent and ad hoc coverage is that intergovernmental organizations are the weakest link in the chain binding together global governance. While perhaps sufficient in number—indeed, all could be streamlined and many consolidated—most IGOs are inadequately resourced, are not vested with the requisite authority, lack competence and coordination, and display incoherence in their policies and philosophies. While their budgets and staffs have of course increased, nothing has altered the validity of the evaluation made two decades ago by Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury in *United Nations, Divided World*: “international society has been modified, but not totally transformed.”³⁰ Indeed.

Paradoxically, IGOs seem to be more marginal at exactly the time when enhanced multilateralism is so sorely required.³¹ The proliferation of and enthusiasm for NGOs and TNCs, along with the disenchantment with IGOs, has serious implications for world order. Lacking the legal mandates and legitimacy of IGOs, ad hoc partnerships between public and private entities can only achieve so much. Without more formalized overarching structures, the impact of partnerships will necessarily be uneven and far from optimal. Yet why are more robust IGOs an afterthought of the global system, if even a thought at all? Not-for-profit and for-profit non-state actors play a crucial role in alleviating poverty, reducing greenhouse gases, improving gender equality, and more. The resources and energy of NGOs and TNCs are necessary but insufficient. The current generation of intergovernmental organizations is so obviously inadequate that we have to do more than throw up our hands and hope for the best

in terms of norm entrepreneurs, activists crossing borders, profit-seeking corporations, and transnational social networks.

The plea for strengthened IGOs is not a surreptitious call for the kind of all-powerful world government (or global tyrant, or Leviathan) that would have frightened even Thomas Hobbes and made emperors jealous. According to Anne-Marie Slaughter, the glue binding the contemporary system of global governance is government networks, both horizontal and vertical.³² Horizontal networks linking counterpart national officials across borders and through IGOs are a way to expand the reach of regulation; these are networks such as those of police investigators or financial regulators. Vertical networks are relationships between national officials and a supranational organization to which they have delegated authority, such as the European Court of Justice. One solution for improving the punch of IGOs would be strengthening the existing networks and developing new ones.

To return for a moment to the private sector's possible contributions to better global governance, we could illustrate our contention about the possible value-added of an IGO with an example of a self-regulatory governance system that has become wider practice: the ad hoc adoption of systems for best-practice environmental management. While national and international regulation remain rudimentary and the need for more regulation remains hotly debated, many companies have recognized environmentally positive activities as necessary, due either to public pressure or a perception that long-term sustainability is essential for a long-term business plan. Would it not be desirable to reinforce the bite of this recognition with overarching intergovernmental coordination? Would the spread of best practices not be more rapid and the learning more widespread?

Enter the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), one of the least well-known intergovernmental organizations, composed of representatives from various national standard-setting organizations.³³ The ISO 14001 standard is a system designed to support business best practices for environmental impact and illustrates the kind of IGO value-added that we have in mind. In this case, the IGO plays the role of convening and bringing together essential non-state actors; the ISO sets standards for business based on actual performance, rather than on some externally-defined and arbitrary targets, and it is generally accepted because it is understood to work. Moreover, in addition to specifying certain internal controls for the management of environmental impact, ISO calls for the certification of performance by such external actors as other private-sector firms or by third-party NGOs. That is, ISO 14001 operates not only to encourage good internal governance of TNC activities but also to stimulate TNCs to participate in international networks with other partners to improve governance. The spread of ISO 14001 illustrates not only complex inter-connections among different actors in global governance but also the importance of state decisions in broadening the pool of TNCs interested in business and adopting these standards.³⁴

The Tattered Patchwork of Authority

After his archival labors to write a two-volume history of world federalism, Joseph Barrata observed that in the 1990s “the new expression, ‘global governance,’ emerged as an acceptable term in the debate on international organization for the desired and practical goal of progressive efforts, in place of ‘world government.’” He continues that scholars “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.”³⁵ It is fair to say that most analysts of global governance see global government as atavistic idealism that is beyond the pale.

The cleavage between “global governance” and “global government,” however, suggests a chasm that is neither necessary nor justified. The success of non-state actors does not mean that intergovernmental organizations have no role—quite the contrary. How much more could be achieved if global networks of non-state actors were reinforced by a corresponding and complementary growth in the where-withal and authority of IGOs? Why are more robust intergovernmental organizations a bridge too far? Typically, skepticism if not scorn greets such a suggestion.³⁶

The cleavage between “global governance” and “global government,” however, suggests a chasm that is neither necessary or justified.

Global governance lies between the international anarchy or absence of central authority underlying Realist analyses and a world state. The meaning of this evolution is increasingly clear: the concept of anarchy still predicts some, but far from all, international relations because the web of global governance has become a significant factor in explaining and constraining state behavior. The current generation of intergovernmental organizations and the corpus of public international law undoubtedly help lessen transaction costs and overcome some structural obstacles to cooperation. For example, it is evident from an analysis of international responses to the 2004 tsunami and to other humanitarian crises for which we see a constellation of helping hands: soldiers from a variety of countries, UN organizations, large and small NGOs, and even WalMart.

However, the disappearance of any passion to pursue the construction of a third generation of intergovernmental organizations that is more robust than the first two generations, the League of Nations and the United Nations, appears to be the accompanying downside of the intellectual pursuit of global governance. Satisfaction with an improved understanding of the way the world is governed should not be equated with satisfactory results or with self-satisfaction—not today and certainly even less tomorrow. And hoping for the best certainly should not be mistaken for a strategy.

This realization underscores the need for better analyses of the current global system, of its constituent parts, *and* of its limitations. Global governance is certainly not a continuation of traditional power politics, because many powerful and potentially key players are absent unless our analytical perspectives embrace the global networks of non-state actors that we have described and quantified. Global governance is also not the expression of path dependency because the growth of non-state actors has provided solutions and opened opportunities that were missing earlier. If the global system is to function better, these novel elements must be appreciated and extended. Multi-level governance—applying the principle of subsidiarity to accomplish tasks at the lowest level of authority that works, a community group or a universal membership organization—is a reality that should be exploited to the maximum.

Ultimately, however, the term “global governance” reflects the limits of our current conversation: to speak of “governance” and not “government” is to discuss the product and not the producers. This discussion of the growth in kinds, and impact of, non-state actors is a modest effort to understand not only what is happening, but also to begin to identify what could happen and who might contribute to a more just and sustainable global order within a more propitious analytical and action framework.

In the absence of formal IGOs, the problem-solving capabilities of the current system of global governance are limited.

Over the last century, the data demonstrate a growing number and density of issue-specific international organizations of every sort. Starting in the 1980s, and earlier in some cases, both civil society and businesses have been become increasingly integral to solutions either promulgated or actually undertaken by such multilateral organizations as the European Union and the United Nations. Such a burgeoning should certainly be acknowledged as a plus, but what Daniel Drezner called “good enough” global governance is frankly not good enough.³⁷ The international system lacks central direction; it is constructed as much on the limited forms of governance allowed by not-for-profit and for-profit non-state actors as the tools accessible to governments; it lacks a robust integration with the international legal system; and it certainly has no equivalent to the state’s monopoly on the use of force.

The result is a system of global governance that is, to borrow an image from James Rosenau, a “crazy quilt” of authority that is constantly shifting, and the veritable tattered patchwork of institutional elements is different by sector and region, and its stitching and appearance are different at different times.³⁸ Institutions vary in their membership, their degree of formalization, the presence or absence of enforcement mechanisms, and a variety of other elements as well. In the absence of formal IGOs with elements of central authority and a solid grounding in public international law, the problem-solving capabilities of the current system of global governance are limited.

In fact, the flourishing spectrum of international organizations may conceal serious gaps in governance. If institutions exist that claim to govern specific domains but are not effective in doing so, they can shift public and diplomatic attention away from the real problems without actually solving them. A well-populated institutional terrain does not an effective system of global governance make. While today's system may be effective in many and often surprising ways, it would be hard to characterize it as anything except inadequate.

The fledgling and inadequate contemporary structures of global governance must move beyond merely providing incentives for self-interested cooperation when it suits or for only a handful of issues.

While we have sought to emphasize that the human species is not starting from scratch, we would be ostrich-like and ahistorical to heave a sigh of relief and rest on our limited laurels. Cavernous gaps remain in global governance. In particular, we should not go overboard in our enthusiasm for non-state actors. We can point to numerous examples of helpful steps in issue-specific global governance for a host of issues: the International Committee of the Red Cross for the laws of war and humanitarian principles; the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (or FIFA, its familiar abbreviation) for the world's most popular sport (football or soccer); and the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (also better known by its acronym, ICANN) for the internet. Similarly, corporations have come together to participate in the development of novel governance systems either at the urging of international organizations such as the Global Compact or in shared recognition of the need for new systems of coordination, as happened in the 1970s with the development of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). Moody's Investors Service and Standard & Poor's Ratings Group render judgments that are authoritative enough to cause market responses. However, such contributions are evidently constrained by their inability to move from voluntary engagement and healthy networks around shared concerns to more robust systems of compliance and enforcement for issues other than those in their mandates.

Alongside the positive stories of collaborative networks, there are also demonstrations of the challenges that organizations share in moving towards the establishment of effective institutionalized governance. To take but one example, the Kimberley Process was once much-hailed as a multi-stakeholder solution to the problem of conflict minerals, but more recently it has been accused of ineffectiveness and an unwillingness to put in place adequate enforcement mechanisms.³⁹ Without more solid foundations in international law and without robust intergovernmental organizations, global governance mechanisms are limited to voluntary participation, moral suasion, and peer pressure, invoking democratic or market pressures in order to ensure compliance. The fledgling and inadequate contemporary structures of global governance must move beyond merely providing incentives for self-interested cooperation when it suits or for only a handful of issues.

Governing the world at present reflects what Scott Barrett aptly labels “organized volunteerism.”⁴⁰ But will global voluntary action suffice? Organizations routinely help ensure postal delivery and airline safety, to be sure, but too rarely address such grave problems as acid rain and ethnic cleansing. Can the world be governed without institutions that have some supranational characteristics, starting with more robust versions of the current generation of IGOs, especially those with universal membership?

Conclusion

The growth in non-state actors documented in these pages represents a sea change in providing answers to the question about how and why the world benefits from global governance, but this evolving system is unbalanced. The diversity of actors has created opportunities for new partnerships to form and older ones to be strengthened, but an essential component of future global governance has been short-changed in our enthusiasm for non-state actors. The coming together of these new systems will require increased legal codification and more robust orchestration by intergovernmental organizations. The absence of IGOs with the requisite scope, resources, and authority means that the global system is deprived of the tools, wherewithal, and legitimacy that only universal intergovernmental organizations can bring.

Rather than describing current global governance as “good enough,” a better label would be “better than nothing.” Certainly global problem-solving is not a sunset industry, and progress will require actors doing what each does best and designing incentives so that they continue to contribute or begin to do so. In short, we require expansion in the formidable amount of practical global governance that already exists; the use of the political and economic possibilities opened by the communications revolution that began in the late twentieth century; and the fundamental re-working of intergovernmental organizations, most especially those of the UN system. In a back-to-the-future moment, the study of “global governance” requires an infusion of more traditional “international organization and law.” To use an expensive word, the mixture will be “polycentric,” or, to use a cheap one, “messy.” Could it be otherwise in a world of multiple and overlapping jurisdictions and allegiances, of cascading cultural and economic differences?

NOTES

¹ See Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996); David Held and Anthony McGrew, with David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); and C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

² Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Introduction” in *Power in Global Governance*, eds. Barnett and Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³ See forthcoming essays by Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, “Rethinking Global Governance: Complexity, Authority, Power, Change,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (2014) and “Global Governance to the Rescue: Saving International Relations?” *Global Governance* 20, no. 1 (2014) as well as the fifty chapters in their edited *International Organization and Global Governance* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁴ James N. Rosenau and Ernst Czempiel, eds., *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); and since 1995, *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, a quarterly journal of the Academic Council on the United Nations System.

⁵ Inis L. Claude, Jr., *Swords Into Plowshares: The Problems and Prospects of International Organization* (New York: Random House, 1956) and “Peace and Security: Prospective Roles for the Two United Nations,” *Global Governance* 2, no. 3 (1996): 289–98.

⁶ Thomas G. Weiss, Tatiana Carayannis, and Richard Jolly, “The ‘Third’ United Nations,” *Global Governance* 15 1 (2009): 123–42.

⁷ Kofi A. Annan, “Introduction,” *“We the Peoples”: A UN for the 21st Century* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014 forthcoming).

⁸ This short definition first appeared in Thomas G. Weiss and Ramesh Thakur, *Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). For additional reading, see Thomas G. Weiss, *Global Governance: Why? What? Whither?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Ian Goldin, *Divided Nations: Why Global Governance Is Failing and What We Can Do about It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Timothy J. Sinclair, *Global Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); and Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, eds., *Who Governs the Globe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹ Data in Table 1 and Figure 1 are from Union of International Associations, *Yearbook of*

International Organizations, edition 48, volume 5 (Brussels, Belgium: Union of International Associations, 2011), using the year closest to the end of the decade and including all INGO and IGO categories. Data in Figure 2 for IGOs from 1920–40 are from Michael Wallace and J. David Singer, “Intergovernmental Organization in the Global System, 1815–1964: A Quantitative Description,” *International Organization* 24, no. 2 (1970): 239–87. Comparable data for INGOs from 1920–1950 are unavailable.

¹⁰ Steve Charnovitz, “Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18, no. 2 (1997): 190.

¹¹ Kjell Skjelsbaek, “The Growth of International Nongovernmental Organization in the Twentieth Century,” *International Organization* 25, no. 3 (1971): 429.

¹² Sarianna M. Lundan, “The Coevolution of Transnational Corporations,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 18, no. 2: 639–63.

¹³ UN Conference on Trade and Development, “Transnational Corporations Statistics,” n.d., <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/Transnational-Corporations-Statistics.aspx>.

¹⁴ UN Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report*, available at <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/World%20Investment%20Report/WIR-Series.aspx>.

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¹⁸ Deborah D. Avant, Martha Finnemore, and Susan K. Sell, “Who Governs the Globe?” in *Who Governs the Globe?* eds. Avant, Finnemore, and Sell, 5.

¹⁹ Peter Willetts, *Non-governmental Organizations in World Politics: The Construction of Global Governance* (London: Routledge, 2011). However, this author wants to abandon the terminology because supposedly it reinforces the centrality of states.

²⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

²¹ Sinclair, *Global Governance*, 57.

²² See Catia Gregoratti, *The Global Compact* (London: Routledge, 2014 forthcoming) and Oliver Williams, *Corporate Social Responsibility* (London: Routledge, 2014).

²³ High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development* (New York: UN, 2013), available at <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>.

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³⁰ Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, "Introduction: The UN's Roles in International Society since 1945," in *United Nations: Divided World*, 2nd Edition, eds. Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 1.

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³³ Craig Murphy and JoAnne Yates, *The International Standards Organization* (London: Routledge, 2009).

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- ³⁵ Joseph Preston Barrata, *The Politics of World Federation*, 2 volumes (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004): vol. 2, 534–5.
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- ³⁹ See, for example, Global Witness’ criticism which ultimately led to the withdrawal of Global Witness from the process, available at <http://www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/conflict/conflict-diamonds/kimberley-process>.
- ⁴⁰ Scott Barrett, *Why Cooperate? The Incentive to Supply Global Public Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 19.

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