

Global governance

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Traditionally, governance has been associated with “governing,” or with political authority, institutions, and, ultimately, control. Governance in this particular sense denotes formal political institutions that aim to coordinate and control interdependent social relations and that have the ability to enforce decisions. However, authors like James Rosenau have also used “governance” to denote the regulation of interdependent relations in the absence of overarching political authority, such as in the international system.

“Global governance” is not a normative term denoting good or bad practice. It is a descriptive term, referring to concrete cooperative problem-solving arrangements. They may be formal, taking the shape of laws or formally constituted institutions to manage collective affairs by a variety of actors (such as state authorities, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector entities, other civil society actors, and individuals). But these may also be informal (as in the case of practices or guidelines) or temporary units (as in the case of coalitions).

Thus, global governance may be defined as ; the complex of formal and informal institutions, mechanisms, relationships, and processes between and among states, markets, citizens and organizations, both inter- and non-governmental, through which collective interests on the global plane are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated.

Global governance is not world government, and even less democratic globalization. In fact, global governance would not be necessary, were there a world government. Domestic governments have legitimate monopolies on the use of force - the power of enforcement. Global governance refers to the political interaction that is required to solve problems that affect more than one state or region when there is no power of enforcing compliance. Problems arise; networks of actors are constructed to deal with them in the absence of an international analogue to a domestic government. This system has been termed disaggregated sovereignty.

Improved global problem-solving need not involve the creation of more powerful formal global institutions. It does involve creating consensus on norms and practices. One such area that is currently under construction is the creation and improvement of accountability mechanisms. For example, the UN Global Compact brings together companies, UN agencies, labor organizations and civil society to support universal environmental and social principles. Participation is entirely voluntary, and there is no enforcement of the principles by an outside regulatory body. Companies adhere to these practices both because they make economic sense, and because stakeholders (especially shareholders) can monitor their compliance easily. Mechanisms such as the Global Compact can improve the ability of impacted individuals and populations to hold companies accountable.