

Book Review

AVANT D, FENNIMORE, M. & SELL, S.K, 2010. WHO GOVERNS THE GLOBE? NEW YORK: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

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For those immersed in grand International Relations (IR) theory couched in the structural/functional paradigm of the 80's, this book is indeed iconoclastic. The paradigm informing traditional International Relations theory supported the bi-polar world view during the cold war. It then proceeded to support the shift to a multipolar view based on the geo-political power balance among leading states, their clubs and then the inclusion of state groupings as the non-aligned nations and more recently emerging countries such as those making up the BRICS cluster. Modern IR theory represented by this book has essentially replaced the key concept of balanced geo-political state power with global governance based on pluralism of global players.

This book builds theory by analyzing the diverse behavior, interaction and political impact of "governors" in the global arena. Although cognizant of other theoretical approaches, the authors offer a "problem-driven" approach to global governance. Case contributors identify global "governors" in their respective issue-areas, and examine the basis of their authority, their interaction patterns, and the endogenous and exogenous sources of change to their authority and consequent changes to their behavior.

The first part of the book (5 chapters) shows how synergy and tensions among "governors" cause authority and behavior changes. The second part (6 chapters) shows how these factors affect outcomes, feeding back into increased/decreased authority. The first three chapters of Part 1 describe how "new governors" emerge and how their authority is established and consolidated. The remaining 2 chapters describe how governors manage tension in the exercise of their authority and the "deference" commanded by such authority. An example of this authority establishment is provided by the case of international criminal tribunals based on authority delegated by states. The expertise and supporting moral principles sustained by judges in rule making and adjudicating through due process provide the basis of their authority. This is viewed by the authors as a source of their strength given the environment of little interest in these courts by powerful states such as the US, which runs the risk of being dragged into international tribunals and its leaders charged with war crimes. Another case features how UN affiliated advocacy-groups enticed corporations as a means to deter assorted conflicts, by appeal-

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ing to their corporate interests in conflict-afflicted areas, as in the case of extractive multinationals with a lot to lose by conflict. These corporate players are compelled to protect, not only the flow and integrity of their activities, but their image and reputation.

In discussing the dynamics of global governance, the book shows how conflict among “governors” lowers the bar of international policy quality by keeping contentious issues among governors off the agenda. This causes sub-optimal policy as groups that are likely to benefit from such international policy are excluded.

The book attributes major changes in international relations to important transformations at both the national and international levels as: globalization, privatization, deregulation, new technologies (the Internet), enabling social networks as advocate groups of assorted causes on a global scale, and the end of the cold war. All of these together serve to empower new non-state players in the international relations arena. In this context, the book makes the point that global governance is not always cooperative as suggested by conventional international relations theory that advocates for cooperation as a means to resolve conflict. It goes on to argue that conflict is the source of inventive behavior by governors, seen by the authors as desirable.

The book’s theoretical framework builds around four uniquely honed concepts: “governors” “authority”, “legitimacy” and “accountability”, which may invite challenges from readers who may subscribe to different notions of these terms.

Some might consider as “governors” only those entities that have governing authority, legitimacy and accessory coercive power within a constitutional framework: none of which exist at the global governance level. At best these “governors”, as used in the book, are influential players in the global arena, with limited authority and no governmental power as such. Participation in global governance does not make every player “governor” in the governmental sense. Many such players are self-designated with narrow or no constituencies as in the case of some NGOs with questionable legitimacy and authority.

On authority, the book posits that it engenders “deference” associated to respect, as opposed to compliance based on the recognition of their right to rule supported by coercive power only held by states, in the exercise of their governmental authority. Others might argue that authority does not wield power but is complemented by it. It is exhortative and a source of influence and not more, as implied in the book. For example, in the Arab Spring movement the influence of social media served to bring the masses to the streets in protest; but only armed rebellious forces really wielded equivalent coercive power, as in the cases of Libya and Syria, where different groups vie to become governments. Because the social networks also mobilized global public opinion and spilled over from country to country in the Middle East they became International Relations issues.

The authors define legitimacy as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper and appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms and values, beliefs and definitions which provides the basis of authority”. This construct would apply to state players, not to non-state players. Ascribing government-like properties to non-state players in global governance is quite a leap of faith to build a theoretical niche.

On accountability the book points out that in the new global arena, it is owed not only to the enabling sources of authority, but to beneficiaries and other stakeholders. This in fact has created another source of tension among global players as it bypasses governmental authority of the state players in global governance. The authors would argue that this is in the nature of functional and creative tension among the players.

Definitional issues aside, the book's argument is challenged by these discrepancies. In providing examples of sources of authority such as: institutional, delegated, expert, capacity, principled, one might counter argue that these are sources of "influence" and not authority, hence with much less reach than the authority of states as the major players in global governance. The authors' theoretical niche does not seem to make this important difference.

The book does describe the repertoire of actions by global governors: setting the global agenda, creating issues, making rules, implementing them or using state power of influence to enforce them, and monitoring and evaluating the outcome of such policies. Because of the book's inclusion, on equal terms, of non-state players as "governors", it ascribes to the latter a global prowess that some readers may see as a leap of faith. For example the book argues that corporations and NGOs can play a critical role in pre- and post-conflict states. It also points out that the poor performance of certain key global players such as the World Bank may lead to dysfunctional shifts in their role as when the IMF was entrusted with purely developmental functions when the World Bank was perceived as failing in its role in the case of the global financial meltdown of the 2008. Clearly the IMF was not equipped to play both an international financial and a development role. The impact of this shift, however does not seem to qualify as an international relations issue.

In drawing its conclusions the book emphasizes that the cases presented show that the power of analysis rests on a thorough understanding of relationships among "governors", not their form or structure as in the structural/functional tradition. It also concludes that the type of authority that enables and empowers "governors" often rests on the higher moral ground they command, the principles which underpin them, their expertise and their capacity. Finally the book pulls in the merits of comparative politics as a solid methodological foundation to understand global governance. The recognition of the multitude of "governors", their functionality and that they do not necessarily diminish the role of state players is an important conclusion.

In terms of readability the book is somewhat winding and unnecessarily long, risking losing its reader. To its credit, the book emphatically sustains that international relations can no longer rest only on a system of states, as many outcomes of international relations cannot be explained in terms of it but of the wider state and non-state players which operate in a non-systemic manner. It also shifts the discussion away from the narrow and no longer valid notion of equilibrium and stasis to focus on the dynamics and creativity of change among the wide gamut of players, called "governors".

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ISSN 1662-1387