

## **Wanted: A Third Generation of Global Governance Research**

David Coen and Tom Pogram, University College London

This is a final draft. Published in *Governance*, vol. 28, no. 4, October 2015, pp. 417-420.

Global governance is not working. The rapid development of economic globalisation and deepening interdependence of cross-border activity belie the relative absence of governance mechanisms capable of effectively tackling global public policy issues.

From financial regulation, to non-communicable diseases, bio-pathogen containment, and, of course, climate change mitigation, global governance is failing to find solutions. It is imperative that we make progress in understanding blockage and ways through.

A first generation of global governance research, principally in international relations (IR), has focused almost exclusively on formal mechanisms of interstate relations within public multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations and the World Bank. With these structures apparently in gridlock, many observers now regard global governance to be in crisis.

However, a second generation of disparate scholarship spanning IR, European Union Public Policy (EPP) and International Law (IL) has begun to investigate new forms of public and private global governance as a response to the limitations faced by states in tackling pressing transboundary challenges.

IR itself epitomises this rebellion against old orthodoxies, having decisively shifted away in recent years from *international* relations to world politics, defined not simply by anarchic system structures, but also by an infrastructure built on liberal principles, and the presence of diverse social forces.

We argue here that integration across this theoretically and empirically-rich second generation of scholarship can ground a powerful third generation of global governance research, distinguished by a concern for the complexity and dynamism of global public policymaking and delivery in the new century.

Global problems demand global solutions, but, as social scientists know well, in politics, demand does not translate automatically into supply. Notwithstanding a wealth of insight into governance, far less attention has been paid to its 'global' component, and even less to delivering policy goals.

If governance scholarship is to take global public policy delivery seriously, a more forensic understanding of multi-level governance problem structures is required. It is crucial not to squeeze public policy into a single analytical framework, given that the characteristics of any one regulatory target are likely to vary significantly.

Global governance may have its antecedents in a collective desire to prevent massive violence and destruction. However, the remit has rapidly evolved to encompass a range of global policy challenges where national interests cannot be assumed to align and which have negative externalities far exceeding the regulatory capacities of national government structures.

Across policy domains, from health to climate and finance, we now observe the proliferation of public and private actors engaged in core governance functions, operating under less severe regulatory constraints, and generating much more uncertainty over patterns of behaviour.

While global public policy implementation may be the objective, we must not lose sight of the two halves of the implementation puzzle: strategy and execution. A formidably long series of steps separates the one from the other in a global governance reality defined by power fragmentation, system complexity and uncertainty.

Ground-clearing analytical work on accurate problem identification is required if scholars and practitioners are to devise global policy interventions which actually work. A new generation of global governance research should be both pro-empiricist and anti-reductionist. It must also move beyond the collaboration narrative that animates much global governance thinking. Much more attention must be paid to the political strategic environment which informs diverse regulatory goals. A shift towards pooling knowledge and advancing debate across issue-specific governance silos is therefore vital.

The misspecification by conventional frameworks of problem structures, such as principal-agent modelling of multi-level governance systems, has led a second generation of global governance scholarship to strike out into more experimental and dynamic governance frames, giving rise to new research agendas attentive to contingency and adaptivity in governance processes and outcomes.

We propose triangulating insights on the dynamic effects of regulation across EPP, IL and IR to advance a third generation of global governance scholarship and provide a platform for a more pluralist intellectual and practice-oriented scholarship.

It is not surprising that EPP provides a highly sophisticated account of multi-level governance, reflecting overlapping jurisdictions and complex delegation chains within a dense supranational governance system.

In addressing implementation, EPP scholars have highlighted the role of cross-national institutional layering, the importance of explaining outcomes post-delegation, as well as – perhaps most consequentially – those street-level bureaucrats who must engage in mediating between elites and domestic interest groups, including civil society, consumers and market actors.

Reflecting, but expanding upon EPP's geographical horizons, IL scholarship's traditional privileging of hard law and state consent has given way in recent years to a new legal scholarship focused on the dynamic effects of regulation in the 'shadow of hierarchy'.

IL scholars, particularly those working in the 'new governance' paradigm, acknowledge that law is not simply a realm of state consent, but rather a reflexive, deliberative and plural component of changing governance landscapes.

New governance approaches in IL have escaped the constraints of standard 'command and control' theoretical modes to specify mechanisms responsive to the severe uncertainty which often informs contractual arrangements above the nation state.

Importantly, IL also brings normativity into focus. Concepts such as legitimacy, accountability, and reciprocity, increasingly familiar across disciplinary lines, have long been a mainstay of IL inquiry. Normative debate on content-dependent hierarchy, transnational conceptions of the ‘public good’, and interaction of normative orders are core components within a prescriptive concern for global governance delivery.

Completing our triptych, a new generation of IR scholarship directly probes the consequences of power fragmentation for explaining change, reimagining the global as a realm of disputes and confrontation, rather than one driven primarily by interest-alignment within multilateral state forums.

The scaling up of counter-hegemonic activities by rising powers has brought to the fore the importance of understanding power differentials in their historical and geographical context. IR scholarship has also reasserted the role of agency in global governance processes, in particular the relationship between the governors and the governed.

This analytical move has entailed orientating analysis away from design towards a drilling down of incentive structures, interest-alignment, actor positionality, underlying preference arrays and authority allocation among governance ‘managers’ and their supposed beneficiaries.

Mirroring developments in EPP and IL, efforts to circumvent multilateral deadlock have led to modification of principal-agent frameworks in IR. This has yielded important new insights into the new adaptive opportunity structures which may advance global public policy delivery in a context of accelerating fragmentation.

Notwithstanding the urgency of the endeavour, the ‘global’ in governance remains largely *terra incognita et obscura* for many scholars focused on local political systems. Despite a growing profile in IR, cross-fertilisation of global governance research with the fields of EPP and IL has only just begun. This call for a third generation of global governance research underscores the potential contribution of systematising a cross-disciplinary convergence which is already underway.

It is essential for social science scholars to grapple more fully with a globalising governance reality. Failure to do so risks marginalising the discipline. Social science has much to gain, and indeed much to offer, in driving forward a rigorous research agenda focused on closing the implementation circle of strategy and execution.

---

David Coen is Professor of Public Policy, Director of the School of Public Policy and the founding Director of the Global Governance Institute at University College London. Dr. Tom Pegram is a Lecturer in Global Governance and the Deputy Director of the Global Governance Institute at University College London. In November 2015, the Global Governance Institute will host a major international symposium on “Situating Global Governance Scholarship”. The GGI is committed to making a major intellectual contribution to the advancement of global governance scholarship and practice. More information can be found at: [www.ucl.ac.uk/global-governance](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-governance)