

Alexandru Grigorescu. 2020. *The Ebb and Flow of Global Governance: Intergovernmentalism versus Nongovernmentalism in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Running title: Review of *Ebb & Flow of Global Governance*

In this important new book, Alexandru Grigorescu argues that shifts between intergovernmentalism and nongovernmentalism have been a regular feature of global governance since its beginnings in the nineteenth century. His analysis confirms what other observers have noted: since the end of the Cold War, nongovernmental organizations have played an increasing role, both by running non-state governance arrangements and by participating in multilateral organizations together with governments. But the fixation on developments since the 1990s risks obscuring the fact that swings along the continuum between intergovernmentalism and nongovernmentalism have been occurring for a century and a half and are likely to continue in the future. Grigorescu amasses an impressive amount of evidence in support of this argument, by offering a detailed account of developments in three issue areas: health, labor and technical standards. The historical analysis is guided by a sophisticated conceptual framework, which enables the author to classify each shift on the continuum according to two criteria: first, whether it resulted from the emergence of a new organization, changes within existing organizations, or changes in relative importance among organizations; second, whether the shift concerned primarily the dimension of decision-making, or financing, or deliberation. Based on this framework, the author identifies nearly one hundred shifts across the three issue areas, which occurred in fifty distinct moments between 1850 and 2015. Strikingly, shifts toward intergovernmentalism were almost as common as shifts toward nongovernmentalism. The way in which the detailed historical narratives are summarized in graphical representations of the swings is one of many strengths of the book.

This conceptually driven description of the ebbs and flows of global governance over the long run would be enough to make the book essential reading for all scholars of international cooperation. But the book offers even more: explanations for each recorded shift and for the general patterns of change. Grigorescu considers a wide range of possible explanations, in a way that defies summary. But two related factors emerge as particularly important: global governance is likely to shift toward intergovernmentalism when the most powerful states are

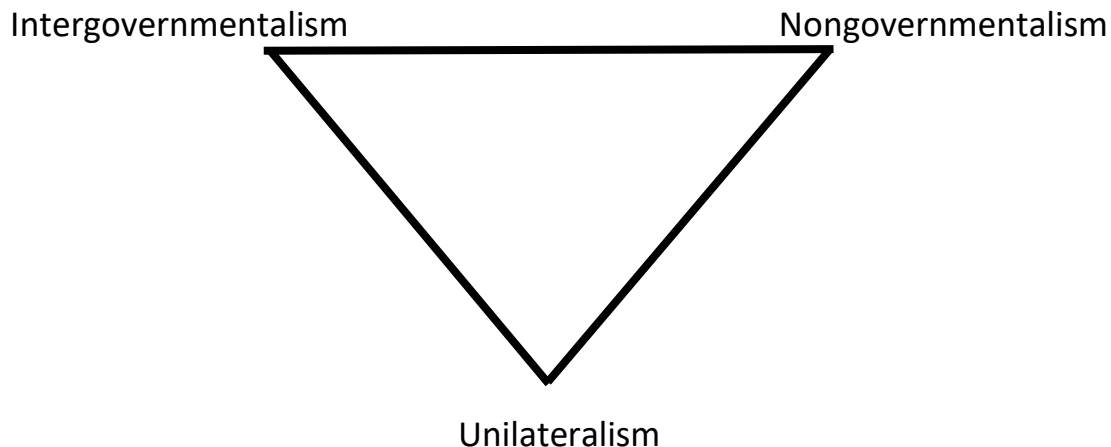
led by governments with ideologies of domestic governmental activism and/or possess government agencies that already deal actively with a given issue at the domestic level. By contrast, when the most powerful states stress nongovernmental solutions at the domestic level, they will usually ensure that global governance follows the same nongovernmental approach. Thus, global shifts along the intergovernmentalism-nongovernmentalism continuum tend to happen either when the most powerful states change their domestic preferences or when the global distribution of power changes in favor of states with different domestic preferences on government activism. While the “projection” of ideologies and institutions from the domestic to the international level emerges as the most powerful explanation, the book devotes plenty of space to alternative explanations and unexplained cases.

By combining conceptual innovation, powerful hypotheses, historical richness and grand synthesis, Grigorescu has produced a landmark study on global governance. It will help scholars to understand better developments in their area of study but also identify important areas for further research. Among those mentioned in the book itself, one seems particularly important: the cooperation problems studied by IR scholars (notably free-rider problems, distribution problems and relative gains concerns) are likely to affect issue areas differently, and so it would be desirable for researchers to observe patterns and test explanations in other issue areas beyond health, labour and technical standards. A different (but related) direction for research is determining how the shifts affect the coherence of global governance on a particular issue. Studies of regime complexes show that sectoral complexity can be “synergistic,” “cooperative” or “conflictive,” to use the labels proposed by Biermann *et al.* (2009). While the narrative provided by Grigorescu sometimes offers a glimpse of what type of regime complexity follows from a shift, future research could examine the issue more systematically. This question may well be related to differences between issue areas: pressure to move along the intergovernmentalism-nongovernmentalism continuum may not lead to conflictive fragmentation in a domain without strong relative gains concerns such as health, but it may have precisely that effect in an area where such relative gains concerns are high, such as trade during the Cold War.

A further area of research could draw on the argument that the state should be disaggregated into more specific components, which can engage in international interactions with some degree of autonomy. Grigorescu mentions that “lower-level” government officials occasionally negotiate internationally instead of “top-level” officials. But the degree of independence of such government officials vis-à-vis national executives is not conceptualized explicitly as a

variable. Given the literature that stresses the importance of “transgovernmental networks” established among public officials (judges, regulators, central bankers) enjoying substantial independence from core executive actors, the incorporation of such networks in the general intergovernmentalism-nongovernmentalism framework may yield important insights (Slaughter 2004; Abbott *et al.* 2018).

The conceptual and explanatory framework underlying the book is so rich that it is tempting to interpret it as a *comprehensive* general theory of global governance. But readers should keep in mind that Grigorescu does not advance such a claim. He distinguishes his research question – when does global governance shift toward intergovernmentalism or toward nongovernmentalism? – from the more common question of when governments are likely to cooperate with each other and form international organizations. His decision to focus on the former question is undoubtedly fruitful, given the state of knowledge. But it should be noted that the latter question – how much *global* governance do governments want and why? - remains very much in the background in the book. This can be seen in the narrative of specific events. For instance, the book’s account of the conference that created the International Labour Organization (ILO) provides much detail on the discussions on the distribution of votes between governmental and nongovernmental delegates, but it does not mention that the French, British and Italian delegates wanted the labor standards adopted by the ILO to become national law without the additional step of domestic ratification (Maul 2019). Such a provision would have entailed a substantially higher degree of pooling of authority than the institutional design that was ultimately adopted (Hooghe *et al.* 2019). Conversely, the fact that Germany left the ILO in 1935 is mentioned only as a development that increased nongovernmentalism, rather than as the reflection of a profound rejection of both forms of global governance by a key state. Similarly, the approach used by the author to synthesizing the findings – showing shifts on a line ranging from intergovernmentalism to nongovernmentalism – is not designed to show also attempts to weaken or strengthen global governance, whether in relation to intergovernmental organizations (e.g., through joining or leaving them, increasing or decreasing authority pooling and delegation) or in relation to nongovernmental organizations (e.g., facilitating or restricting the access and activities of INGOs in the territory of the state). A more comprehensive approach to continuity and change in global governance would need to consider shift within the area of a triangle rather than along a straight line:



Keeping the vertical as well as the horizontal dimension in the figure firmly in sight is essential not only to understand the historical development of global governance, but also to make sense of current and future developments. On the last page of the book, Grigorescu notes that the disengagement of the Trump administration from various global governance institutions may lead other great powers, most notably China, to step in and move global governance toward greater intergovernmentalism, in line with their domestic activist preferences. Tracking swings between the two global governance types is certainly important, but for this reviewer the attention of scholars and citizens should remain focused on the risk that current developments will result in a race to the unilateralist bottom.

## References

- Abbott, K.W., Kauffmann, C., & Le, J.R. (2018). The contribution of trans-governmental networks of regulators to international regulatory co-operation. *OECD Regulatory Policy Working Papers*, No. 10. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/538ff99b-en>.
- Biermann, F., Pattberg, P., Van Asselt, H., & Zelli, F. (2009). The fragmentation of global governance architectures: A framework for analysis. *Global Environmental Politics* 9(4), 14-40.
- Hooghe, L., Lenz, T., & Marks, G. (2019). *A Theory of International Organization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maul, D. (2019). *The International Labour Organization: 100 Years of Global Social Policy*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Slaughter, A.M. (2004). *A New World Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.