

Reviews

Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most*, Polity Press, 2013, 1380 pp.

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In the post-World War II era, international organizations, either with generalist mandates (in particular the United Nations) or with more specific or technical mandates (for instance the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund) took on powerful and unprecedented importance in shaping—including in terms of conceptualization, negotiation, and implementation—a more interconnected international order. As such, international organizations were designed to reflect and manage the post-World War II balance of powers and geared toward state-to-state relations, economic liberalization and growth, and stable peace. In their book *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most*, the authors, Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, while starting by telling this story, focus on how the governance structures of international organizations have evolved. Although international organizations initially enabled and enhanced global cooperation and played a significant role in the development of a more globalized world, if not of globalization itself, in time they reached a situation of gridlock. In this context, effectively dealing with the contemporary demands and issues of global governance has become more and more challenging for international organizations, a state of affairs which not only presents a major danger for today but even more so for tomorrow.

Structure of the book

The compelling analysis and diagnosis by the authors of the current situation of global governance gridlock and the perils it entails, and the clarity with which they develop the argument, are definitely strong points of the book. After an initial theoretical chapter that outlines the main aspect of what Hale, Held, and Young mean by gridlock and how this situation came to be, the subsequent chapters illustrate and demonstrate the reality of gridlock, that is the alarming gaps in governance at the international level. They do so by examining three key areas of global governance: security, economy, and environment. They deal with each area in turn.

The chapter on security tends to cover familiar territory, at least for the reader well versed in United Nations matters. Yet, interestingly, in tracing gridlock under the area of security, the book points to the international order itself as a source of new threats. For example, the authors tell us that by entrenching the wealth and power of certain states at the expense of others within

the structures of international organizations, global inequalities and therefore global insecurities have deepened both within and among states and within the international community. Also, lacking inadequate access to the means for survival, opportunity for political voice, and lack of international standing, some disenfranchised people have turned toward radical/violent action, including global terrorism and piracy, as a way to make room for themselves and their interests.

The chapter dedicated to the area of economy explores problems associated with privileging the standing of developed countries at the expense of developing countries – an inequality that, despite the tendency of international organizations to adopt a rhetoric of international solidarity and responsibility, is to a large extent linked, the authors of *Gridlock* tell us, to current international organizations' structures. Here the chapter has the double quality of presenting a good synthesis of the main issues at hand and of being written in a crystal-clear fashion. Hence the fact that a non-specialist of economics at the global level will find much to value and reflect about in this chapter on the present limitations of global governance in the field of economy.

As for the chapter on the environment, in addition to its examination of the contemporary gridlock of environmental global governance, of particular interest is its analysis of the pre-Rio (1992) environment debates and policies. Indeed the historical aspects of environmental global governance tend to be overlooked in many books which deal with the politics and policy of the environment. Yet this is an interesting story, worth reminding the reader of.

Finally, the last chapter of the book brings together the theoretical issues raised by *Gridlock* and identifies ways through which the deadlock situation that today affects global policy and governance could be overcome in the future.

As a whole, the book is a convincing combination of history, political science, and political theory on the past, present, and future of global governance, in its positive and negative dimensions, and this as applied to questions of security, economy, and the environment. The mixing of the three approaches or disciplines allows an extremely clear overview and framework for thinking about global governance, especially in terms of its current limitations.

The argument

More specifically, at the core of the intellectual argument of the book is the idea that gridlock is the outcome of four distinct but sometimes overlapping dynamics: first, there is the emerging multipolarity, with new powers now challenging an international distribution of power that goes back to the end of World War II, and in the context of which the beneficiaries of the status quo, uncomfortable with the rise of new powers, are resisting changes and are therefore not offering many options for accommodating and facilitating the changes needed. Second, there is the issue of institutional inertia. Such institutional inertia is all the more real and problematic considering that the rules and laws of international organizations, and of multilateralism in general, are essentially predicated on privileging the post-WWII balance of power. This makes, at the same time, the international institutions prone to be inefficient, and any changes to the governance structures difficult, if not impossible. Third, there is the fact that gridlock is generated by what Hale, Held, and Young call harder and more complex problems. Because of the merging of the international and the domestic, these problems are one of the characteristics of a more globalized world. Among these are security issues, which breach conventional terms of warfare and now include cyberwar, global terrorism, and non-conventional weaponry; and climate change and its attendant problems, which breach the borders of any state and thus require global cooperation in addition to specialized scientific knowledge toward producing effective policymaking and

implementation. Fourth and finally, there is the challenge of fragmentation both within and among international organizations. Whereas fragmentation guarantees states that international organizations will not gain too much power so that states themselves would lose power, it is also creating problems of coordination, redundancy, and the use of forum shopping among international organizations in the service of avoiding adherence to policies and regulations outside of ones' own perceived or real interests.

Concerning these four dynamics, or pathways, the authors stress that there is no single explanation for their development in any single sector of governance, but that there are common linkages. More importantly, perhaps, Hale, Held, and Young believe (this is a crucial aspect of their argument) that current global governance problems are of a "second order" nature: they are not problems of international cooperation per se, but problems resulting from the historical processes in which past systems of cooperation have solidified amidst changing circumstances.

Beyond the book

In conclusion, we should add that while the book is a compelling read, perhaps its weakness is twofold. First, the authors might have had a more nuanced investigation of the problems and potentials associated with current international organizations' structures as a way toward negotiating better governance through the current system. For instance, although forum shopping between international organizations can have the effect of regulation avoidance, it also offers international actors multiple venues for pursuing interests, whether they be in profit-seeking and regulation avoidance or toward positive regulation compliance and even in the service of public goods such as environmental protection. Second, the recommendations put forward at the end of the book concerning how to overcome gridlock are not as substantive and developed as they could or should have been to be fully convincing or to offer clear alternative policy routes to the present situation. For example, the type of activism, of popular protest movements that seek to change the nature and form of the global order and to which the authors refer (Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring), have not had the kind of positive outcomes that one could have hoped for.

This shows that the problems identified by the authors are both very real, in need of urgent solutions, and yet extremely difficult to address, let alone resolve. Hence the book is a necessary step in the right direction, but more steps are required to come up with a full roadmap for the future.

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Linus Hagstrom (ed.) *Identity Change and Foreign Policy: Japan and its 'Others'*, Routledge, 166 pp.
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Focusing on identity and its relationship with foreign policies is always ambitious. Prizel (1998), Berg and Ehin (2009), and Warning (2011) are the forerunners. If you are under the influence