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Examining the Fundamental Challenges of Global Governance in the Absence of a World Government

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Abstract

The international challenges of the present era, including issues of peace and security, development and prosperity, human rights, the environment, migration, terrorism, and health, remain largely unresolved due to structural and normative problems in the global governance system. These challenges are exacerbated by factors such as the proliferation and fragmentation of institutions, weak cooperation, uncoordinated functioning, inadequacy of traditional mechanisms for managing international issues, instability in the balance of power, and lack of global community cohesion. In the context of global governance, increasing disorder, liberal

bias, normative contradictions in human rights implementation, deficiencies in democratic legitimacy, slow adaptation, and lagging behind global developments highlight the limitations of the current system. A rights-based world government, due to its unique characteristics, could harmonize and coordinate management, establish hierarchical cooperation among actors, and create structural and procedural unity, thereby enhancing the capacity to manage and resolve these challenges.

This article addresses the primary question: what fundamental challenges does global governance face in the absence of a rights-based world government? Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the study identifies the dimensions of undesirable global governance and underscores the necessity of establishing a rights-based world government to overcome these challenges. The research concludes that structural, normative, and operational deficiencies in global governance render the creation of a comprehensive global authority essential for addressing the fundamental problems of the international system.

Keywords: global governance, world state, global, United Nations, international organizations

Introduction:

The modern nation-state emerged from the Westphalian Treaties, founded on the principles of defined territorial boundaries and sovereign independence, which grant a state the authority to exercise full sovereignty within its borders. This framework, however, has frequently generated conflicts and disputes over territory and national interests among states. To prevent war, curb autocracy, promote effective governance universally, and maintain international order, the concept of global governance has been proposed and progressively operationalized through institutions such as the League of Nations and, subsequently, the United Nations.

Global governance seeks to foster positive interactions among states, implement regulatory frameworks, establish international institutions, formulate policies, and reform specific global sectors such as trade and public health. These functions are widely recognized as vital contributions of global governance in the contemporary era. Nevertheless, recent global crises—including Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the threat of nuclear escalation, the COVID-19 pandemic, energy and food insecurity, accelerating climate change, economic recessions, wealth concentration in limited regions, and emergent threats in cyberspace, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction—have exposed the limitations and inefficiencies of the current governance system more starkly than ever.

While the necessity of global governance is broadly acknowledged, addressing these multifaceted challenges demands substantial reforms. Strengthening existing institutions, creating or enhancing alternative mechanisms, and ultimately moving toward a more effective global governance framework are essential steps to improve the international system. Formal and informal institutions, practices, and initiatives collectively constitute global governance, and through increased coordination, predictability, stability, and capacity to resolve transboundary issues, they may progressively assume attributes of a world state, offering viable solutions to contemporary global problems.

This article employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, drawing on extensive library resources to examine the primary question: What are the fundamental challenges facing global governance in the contemporary era in the absence of a world government? The central hypothesis posits that global governance is presently inadequate due to structural-institutional and normative-political deficiencies. Beyond identifying these critical challenges, this research aims to demonstrate the necessity of establishing a rights-based world government—an integrated political authority bound

by human rights norms—to effectively manage and ultimately resolve these global governance challenges.

1. Research Background

Numerous books and scholarly articles have been published on global governance and the institutions that operate within this framework. While many of these studies critically examine the challenges and shortcomings of global governance, proposals advocating the abolition of this model are generally conservative, focusing predominantly on its reform and enhancement. The concept of a world government—a comprehensive, powerful, and rights-based political entity capable of managing global issues—has been far less explored. The innovation of this research, relative to previous studies, is grounded in two primary dimensions: first, the systematic collection of the principal challenges facing global governance and the mechanisms for their management; and second, the conceptual design of a rights-based world government as a solution to these global challenges.

In “Global Governance or World Government? Anarchy versus Global Hierarchy, Civil Society, and International Organizations” (Grace Purvis, 2022: 45), the author delineates the distinctions between global governance and a world state, highlighting the anarchic nature of the nation-state and the inefficiencies of a global system lacking hierarchical structures. While Purvis proposes a world state as an alternative to the current global governance model, the discussion of global governance challenges is not fully comprehensive.

Similarly, in *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions in the 21st Century* (Acharya & Plesch, 2020: 546), the authors examine the institutional infrastructure of the United Nations, critically analyzing its operational limitations. They argue that reforming the UN Charter is essential to prevent the misuse of power inherent in the current international system and to establish a framework based on global constitutional principles. This book's strength lies in its thorough analysis of global governance challenges and the presentation of practical mechanisms for reform.

The study “Global Governance: Conceptual Analysis and Operational Challenges” (Mamta Kohli, 2022: 4) provides a historical overview of global governance, emphasizing the intensification of global problems and the necessity of reevaluating the world order. Kohli's research concludes that global governance, in its current form, is increasingly ineffective, rendering the establishment of a world government inevitable for

the long-term preservation of humanity. The study highlights trends in global governance aimed at improving effectiveness, the role of non-state actors, and institutional interactions. However, it lacks sufficient theoretical and practical justification for advocating a world government.

In “Is Global Governance Collapsing? A Revolt Against Liberal Globalization” (Adrian Pobst, 2019: 19), the author critiques the liberal order underpinning global governance, noting that Western-dominated multilateral institutions are increasingly at odds with the multipolar and civilizational diversity of non-Western powers. Pobst identifies five fundamental forces—capitalism, statehood, technology, liberalism, and the globalization of political culture—that undermine the future of global governance institutions. While this study effectively highlights the limitations of Western-centric governance, its analysis is constrained by a one-dimensional critique of the liberal order.

Finally, in *Global Governance Theory: Power, Legitimacy, and Competition* (Michael Zürn, 2018: 336), Zürn presents a normative-institutional framework for analyzing global governance, recognizing hierarchies, power inequalities, and distributed struggles. The book contributes valuable insights into the legitimacy and operational challenges of global governance. Nonetheless, it falls short in providing a theoretical framework for addressing post-global governance scenarios.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Global governance has frequently been subject to conceptual ambiguity, being analyzed from multiple perspectives that are sometimes contradictory. Understanding its semantic scope requires a clear distinction between “governance” and “government.” While both terms relate to systems of rules, government is conventionally understood as the exercise of formal authority to implement policies and enforce laws, whereas governance refers to the capacity to coordinate actions and achieve objectives without necessarily possessing formal legal authority (Haidari Fard, 2016: 152).

Global governance, in turn, is often defined as a system of international laws negotiated and agreed upon by states through treaties, which establish the creation and powers of international organizations. Within contemporary academic discourse, global governance is largely understood as the management of global affairs through these organizations, mediated by norms, rules, and legal frameworks. Although scholars widely acknowledge the absence of a world state, global governance has been characterized as a “government without a recognized state” (Purvis, 2022: 2–5).

The conceptual core of global governance has also been articulated as the facilitation of global interaction across all domains or the unrestricted cooperation of states to pursue common interests. This includes organizing joint actions to address transnational challenges and establishing international surveillance mechanisms to enhance information convergence. From a realist perspective, global governance is viewed as a transitional pathway from international disorder toward a potential world state. According to the World Health Organization, global governance constitutes the management of global affairs through forms of governance that are not exclusively state-centric, even if states are included. It identifies issues with global or transnational dimensions and creates knowledge frameworks, infrastructures, technologies, and policy interventions that operate beyond national boundaries.

Some scholars conceptualize global governance not merely as a project, idea, process, or action, but as a constructive structural framework—a non-polar system in which the entire world functions as the arena of governance. This approach encompasses multidimensional global interactions across economic, political, social, cultural, developmental, and human rights domains, reflecting the comprehensive and integrative nature of global governance.

3. History

The theoretical origins of world governance can be traced back to ancient Greece and the era of city-states, yet its practical implementation began with the establishment of the League of Nations. Subsequently, the activities of the United Nations, with its mandate to maintain global peace and security—particularly in the prevention of war and crisis management during conflicts—represented a significant step toward operationalizing world governance. The adoption of instruments such as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the establishment of international criminal courts, and measures to protect the environment and global commons—including oceans, the atmosphere, outer space, and the Antarctic—further solidified the governance framework. Programs focusing on human rights protection, public health, humanitarian aid distribution, sustainable development, and support for international law have been among the most notable initiatives in promoting global governance. Regional organizations, such as the European Union, SAARC, ASEAN, G20, African Union, and BRICS, alongside specialized institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Health Organization, and World Trade Organization, have also played pivotal roles in advancing the global governance agenda (Das, 2020: 19).

The modern global governance system evolved significantly during the 1990s through a path-dependent process. The aftermath of World War II created conditions conducive to the institutionalization of liberalism and the establishment of a collective security system under American leadership. Subsequent self-reinforcing mechanisms consolidated this institutional framework, and following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a globally interconnected governance system emerged, encompassing political and specialized spheres of power with remarkable institutional and organizational growth. Despite its achievements, over time, this system has revealed structural and functional deficiencies, which have undermined its legitimacy, sustainability, and broad acceptance, generating resistance and demands for reform (Zürn, 2018: 107).

Over the past century, proposals for reforming and transforming global governance have included ambitious ideas such as establishing a World Republic, a World Legislative Assembly, a World Federal Government, a Democratic Union of Nations, a World Democratic Federation, a Democratic Confederation of Earth, a Coalition for World Democratic Government, and a comprehensive World Constitution. These proposals underscore the enduring aspiration for a more unified and effective system of global governance capable of addressing transnational challenges.

4. Challenges of Global Governance in the Absence of a Rights-Based World Government

The principal challenges of global governance can be classified into two main categories: structural-institutional (formal) and normative-substantive. Alongside identifying these challenges, the

capacities of a rights-based world government to manage and ultimately resolve them will be discussed.

4.1 Structural and Institutional Challenges

4.1.1 Multiplicity and Number of Governing Institutions

The contemporary global governance architecture encompasses a diverse set of actors, including nation-states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, civil society groups, networks, and private security companies, each with distinct perspectives, authorities, and contributions (McSparren et al., 2016: 2). While multilateral configurations expand the potential for solutions, they simultaneously generate fragmentation, complexity, overlapping mandates, and competing clusters of lawmaking and enforcement. The polycentric nature of global governance, combined with the diversity of actors, ambiguous governance domains, dispersed international laws, and persistent legal gaps, underscores the necessity of establishing a unified, coordinated system at the global level.

4.1.2 Coordination and Cooperation

As a “government without a state,” global governance involves multiple actors operating within a largely horizontal structure. Effective coordination among these actors is crucial; however, current efforts are largely ad hoc and inefficient. International institutions often operate within sector-specific domains with limited overlap in mandate. For instance, the World Trade Organization focuses on trade, while the World Health Organization addresses health, yet the lack of mechanisms to coordinate these priorities has occasionally allowed trade interests to override global health imperatives. The absence of a universal constitution or a comprehensive global authority result in fragmented, inconsistent, multi-level governance, with no single entity accountable for overarching outcomes. A rights-based world government, guided by a global constitution and universal legal principles, would have the capacity to coordinate governance, ensure accountability, and create a coherent and progressive global order.

4.1.3 Instability in the Balance of Power

The UN Charter prohibits the use of force to achieve international objectives and aims to promote peace and security. Despite these principles, some major powers—including the United States and Russia—have engaged in unilateral military actions, preemptive interventions, and counterterrorism operations that contravene global governance norms (Zhakarian & Eskandari Zanjani, 2021: 495). This behavior undermines multilateralism and destabilizes governance processes. From a realist perspective, the global balance of power has historically been unstable; each major conflict and subsequent war has revealed the limitations of existing governance mechanisms. The establishment of the Holy League post-Napoleonic wars, the League of Nations after World War I, and the United Nations after World War II were all attempts to address these challenges, but each ultimately faltered due to power imbalances among major states. Consequently, the creation of a world government emerges as the fundamental solution for achieving durable international peace and security (Mohammadi Almouti, 2006: 37).

4.1.4 Absence of Community in Governance

Global governance has historically marginalized the perspectives of developing countries, privileging Western viewpoints and thereby restricting inclusivity and participation (Bahrami, 2014: 36-38). Addressing this deficit requires a paradigm shift toward a

rights-based global governance model that incorporates civilizational diversity, pluralism, and equitable participation. By establishing a global community under a unified legal and institutional framework, a rights-based world government can ensure inclusiveness, diffuse power more equitably, and create a truly non-polar system.

4.1.5 Anarchic System with Increasing Disorder

Some scholars, such as Vent and War, argue that the current nation-state-based global system is inherently anarchic, lacking a superior authority to mediate power and prevent disorder. This structure, characterized by internal struggles for recognition and increasing instability, ultimately necessitates the emergence of a world state. Vent defines this “world state” as a Weberian entity (possessing the monopoly over legitimate use of force) with a Hegelian structure (mutual recognition of all subjects) (Vendt & Salimi, 2021: 139-141). A rights-based, rule-governed world state would internalize human rights norms, eliminate the shortcomings of contemporary global governance, and function as a legitimate, balanced, and equitable regulator of global affairs.

4.2 Normative Challenges in Global Governance

4.2.1 Liberal Bias

One of the fundamental shortcomings of contemporary global governance is its inherent liberal bias and the self-interested orientation derived from it. Most traditional global governance institutions were established and are managed primarily by Western states, resulting in the predominance of liberal norms and principles across the international order (Green, 2005: 235–238). Consequently, critiques of these institutions are often framed as objections to liberal interventionism, while the broader systemic limitations—such as the inability to equitably redistribute wealth, prevent financial crises, or regulate markets—remain unresolved. The establishment of a rights-based world government, informed by ideological pluralism, multilateralism, and post-liberal governance principles, could transcend the limitations of the liberal order, enabling regulatory interventions in the global economy and promoting social and financial equity (Zürn, 2014: 63–65).

4.2.2 Legitimacy and Democratic Deficits

Current global governance institutions face substantial democratic and legitimacy deficits. Limited participation of emerging stakeholders, excessive state-centeredness, and the dominance of historical or economic powers undermine the credibility of international institutions. Moreover, sovereignty constraints, politicization of institutional interventions, and the prioritization of political considerations over rational policy further weaken legitimacy (Pouliot, 2020). Contemporary global governance relies on inherited practices, often grounded in tradition rather than democratic justification. While democratic processes beyond the nation-state may appear structurally unnecessary, the establishment of a world political community could institutionalize democratic autonomy. A rights-based global government could create a systematic link between global citizenship and democratic governance, ensuring legitimacy through inclusive participation, transparent decision-making, and accountability mechanisms. Reforms such as the creation of a world parliament and structural transformation of the United Nations could enhance decision-making processes and promote democratic peace.

4.2.3 Normative Contradictions in Human Rights Implementation

Despite progress in conceptualizing and implementing universal human rights norms, global governance faces significant

challenges in enforcement. State actors tasked with safeguarding peace and human rights often encounter procedural, structural, and political constraints, such as Security Council veto powers, which hinder effective humanitarian interventions (Adams, 2015: 23). Unilateral actions by powerful states, such as the United States, have further undermined the universality of human rights by selectively adhering to international treaties (Zakeriyan, 2015: 9). Overlapping legal frameworks, limited advocacy by international actors, ambiguous standards, and insufficient solutions for specific human rights issues exacerbate governance deficiencies. Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic reveal the fragility of global institutions and the need for robust governance mechanisms. A rights-based world government, adhering to Weberian (legitimate use of force), Hegelian (mutual recognition), and Kantian (binding global governance) principles, could ensure distributive justice, enforce human rights, resolve conflicts, and achieve a global community oriented toward shared human welfare (Shahi et al., 2021: 208).

4.2.4 Adaptation and Lagging Behind Global Changes

Global governance institutions, rooted in traditional concepts of national sovereignty, often resist reform and fail to respond effectively to contemporary challenges. For instance, the United Nations' structural framework has remained largely unchanged since 1945, limiting its capacity to address complex global problems. Inadequate mechanisms for reform, lack of trust among actors, insufficient attention to emerging risks, and absence of long-term strategic vision hinder adaptability. A rights-based world government could implement reforms aligned with contemporary realities, build trust through shared values, reshape institutions and legal frameworks, enhance coordination, promote compliance, and address global challenges inclusively, considering the interests of all peoples.

4.2.5 Existing Governance Deficits

The twenty-first century presents humanity with an array of complex challenges—climate change, terrorism, migration, poverty, financial instability, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—that demand effective global responses. Traditional governance mechanisms have proven inadequate in coordinating collective action, sharing costs equitably, and delivering coherent solutions (Campbell Craig, 2008: 135). Functional deficits in global governance arise from institutional incoherence, lack of unified vision, and absence of hierarchical decision-making structures. A centralized, rights-based world government could provide political leadership, establish a global legislature, and facilitate participatory decision-making.

A prominent contemporary example is the digital governance vacuum. Platforms such as Google, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Amazon dominate global communication, knowledge exchange, and digital commerce. This unregulated environment exposes vulnerabilities in cybersecurity, privacy, and market fairness. A rights-based global government could establish a regulatory framework for the digital domain, promote ethical standards, and safeguard user rights, while fostering global technological integration. Initiatives like the Metaverse illustrate early steps toward digital governance, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive oversight and policy coordination.

Conclusion:

Global governance, as an institutional framework for international policy formulation, decision-making, and collective action, has been a crucial driver of human progress. It has fostered social and

economic development, advanced human rights, promoted peace, and supported environmental sustainability. Yet, despite these achievements, this study has highlighted the systemic shortcomings of the existing global governance model. By analyzing its structural and normative deficiencies, we demonstrated the urgent need for a stronger, rights-based global government capable of ensuring more effective, inclusive, and just governance.

In the contemporary globalized era, nation-states face multifaceted challenges—including climate change, environmental degradation, terrorism, armed conflict, politically motivated violence, humanitarian crises, human rights violations, mass migration, persistent poverty, pandemics, financial instability, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The existing governance system, in the absence of a world state, has failed to deliver the necessary regulatory frameworks, multilateral strategies, and mechanisms of collective action required to address these threats. Instead, fragmentation, institutional multiplicity, power imbalances, unilateralism, and fragile processes have undermined coherence and effectiveness.

This research classified the major challenges of global governance into two dimensions: (1) structural and institutional challenges, including lack of inclusivity, weak coordination, instability of power balances, and systemic fragility; and (2) normative challenges, such as liberal bias, legitimacy deficits, contradictions in the protection of human rights, failure to adapt to global transformations, and persistent governance gaps. Collectively, these deficits weaken global efforts to establish a fair and sustainable order.

Against this backdrop, we proposed the theory of a rights-based world government—a political structure that unites humanity under a shared authority grounded in human rights. Such a model could standardize practices, eliminate systemic deficiencies, and create a responsive, flexible, and effective governance system. By ensuring coordination, strengthening institutional legitimacy, fostering inclusivity, and establishing coherent structures and processes, a rights-based world state offers the most comprehensive solution to the persistent failures of current reforms.

The analysis confirmed that while incremental reform of existing institutions remains possible, it is insufficient without a broader reimagining of global governance. The proposed rights-based world government stands as both a theoretical and practical necessity. It would enable humanity to overcome the repeated failures of fragmented governance, establish a coherent legislative authority at the global level, and dismantle unnecessary geographical and political barriers. In doing so, it would provide the means to manage global risks and commons effectively, safeguard peace, and create the conditions for a just and unified international community.

Ultimately, a rights-based world state is not merely a normative aspiration but a realistic and urgent imperative—the only viable pathway to prevent catastrophic systemic failures, achieve universal justice, and secure a shared future for humanity.

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