

A world parliament for global democracy?

Legitimacy and representativeness of the world's people in global decisionmaking are imperative for the governance of global issues, but global decisionmaking bodies have no institutional mechanisms for effective and influential citizen participation. At a time when intergovernmental decisionmaking has shown its limits, the quest for equity and sustainability and the urgency of addressing defining challenges for our planet require the engagement of the global citizenship.

A world parliament would complement the United Nations General Assembly—either formally integrated in the UN system or instituted as a separate body. This idea is not new, but as it matures, it is receiving increasing support from civil society actors and regional parliaments (including the European, Latin American and African Parliaments) and was recently highlighted in the Manifesto for Global Democracy put forward by a multinational group of intellectuals.¹

A world parliament would be composed of delegates from national parliaments, representing multiple political parties from each country. Since the great majority of national parliaments are democratically elected, such

a body would have a high level of representativeness and political accountability. A world parliament would serve as a link between national policymaking and global decisionmaking, providing incentives for national parliaments and governments to consider the implications of decisions beyond national borders and instilling national parliaments with knowledge and experience on governing global issues.

This assembly could have one extended annual session, during which it would issue recommendations and add agenda items to the UN General Assembly and, by a qualified majority, submit agenda items to the UN Security Council for debate and decisions. The deliberations would possess a high moral and political authority, although the final decisionmaking power would remain with national governments. The composition of each national delegation could be determined either by national parliaments or through special elections allowing citizens to choose representatives for the world parliament. Delegation size would be proportional to a country's population, an approach considerably different from international bodies where voting quotas are based on monetary contributions.

1. Beeston 2012.

international governance. The World Health Organization, for example, has had to manage state interests carefully and adjust to the emphasis on privatizing health services that became dominant in the 1980s. Its core commitments to public health and its ties to civil society, however, have enabled it to continue to pursue policies that emphasize a rights-based approach to health.³⁰

Towards coherent pluralism

The challenge facing the multilateral system in response to the rise of the South is not a false choice between globalism and regionalism or between older structures devised and managed by the traditional powers of the North and newer arrangements responding to the needs of the developing world. Rather, it is integrating, coordinating and in some cases reforming these institutions so that they can all work more effectively together. Diversity and flexibility in global governance mechanisms can be net positives for the international system but cannot substitute for the global pursuit of solutions to problems that are inherently global in nature. Policymakers working both regionally and internationally should strive towards a more coherent pluralism in multilateral governance,

with shared norms and goals supporting varied yet complementary regional and global development initiatives.

Recent experience in much of the South has shown that some public goods can be effectively provided at the regional level. As noted in chapter 2, regional institutions can sometimes respond to regional needs faster and more efficiently than can global forums—for example, programmes for eradicating endemic diseases, protecting shared ecosystems and removing barriers to intraregional commerce. In such cases, it makes sense for like-minded neighbouring states to address these challenges cooperatively while pursuing global responses to these issues where needed.

Increasing regional cooperation can also have disadvantages—adding further complexity to an already diverse array of multilateral institutions, with all the attendant risks of exclusion, duplication and interagency competition. In many areas, regional institutions have the potential to complement global structures, even if that kind of coordination seems rare or inadequately synchronized today.

Global governance arrangements must respect the mixed strategies that countries are choosing. It is clear that developing and emerging economies are choosing to cooperate in different ways—bilaterally, regionally

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