Pump Up the Volume: From Covert to Overt Politics in Global Governance

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Recent commentary on the state of multilateralism begins from an alarming premise: a popular backlash against globalization is underway. The prospects for multilateralism depend, by this account, on shielding global governance from the forces of mass politics. We challenge this conventional account to develop a novel conceptual framework for the mass politics of global governance and the role of contestation in resolving, rather than inciting, the present crisis of multilateralism. We distinguish between two modes of mass politics—covert and overt—and examine variation in (i) mass preferences, (ii) party strategies, and (iii) international organization between them. Building on this framework, we make the case for a shift from the current covert mode to a more overt politics of global governance that could make the multilateral system more effective, accountable, and legitimate. Concrete steps in this direction will accommodate broader political forces while defanging challenges from opportunistic political leaders. We conclude with an outline of pragmatic reforms to reinvigorate multilateralism for the post-pandemic era.

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the world, populist movements are leading a backlash against globalization, dragging the institutions of global governance into the court of public opinion, where their flaws, weaknesses, and missteps fuel calls for withdrawal from arenas of international cooperation (De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021; Haas 2018; Jervis et al. 2018; Wolf 2018; Walt 2016). According to this common view, mass politics has become a centrifugal force in global governance, encouraging dissatisfied governments to obstruct cooperation, contest rules, and advocate alternative arrangements in pursuit of greater unilateral control (Morse and Keohane 2014). The scholarship is divided between those who identify economic drivers of this political centrifuge (Autor et al. 2020; Fetzer 2019; Pastor and Veronesi 2018) and those who identify cultural ones (Cramer 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2018), but both sides agree that a popular backlash against globalization is underway—with existential stakes for the international order (Ikenberry 2016; Nye 2017).

From this diagnosis, policymakers have sought prescriptions to guard the multilateral system against the globalization backlash. The prospects for international cooperation, according to this view, depend on the extent to which global governance is protected from the dynamics of electoral competition and political contestation that are set to intensify in a multipolarizing world (Hale and Held 2018; Rodrik and Walt 2021). To manage the tension between increasing interdependence between nations and decreasing shared values among them, a new global order must create "clubs" that insulate global governors from the pressures of mass contestation and depoliticize the content and operation of their work. Such delegation is not only critical to address the global crises of our time; it can also constrain the politics of backlash by limiting the power of political entrepreneurs to intervene in the process of international cooperation (Keohane, Macedo, and Moravcsik 2009).

In this article, we challenge the conventional wisdom on the globalization backlash and develop a novel conceptual framework on the role of mass politics of global governance. We begin from the premise that the neglect of mass politics is conceptually misleading: far from neutralizing mass politics, such a technocratic turn attends its own form of mass politics that is toxic to the longevity and efficacy of global governance institutions. We distinguish between two modes of mass politics—*covert* and *overt*—and the variation in (i) mass preferences, (ii) party strategies, and (iii) international organization between them. We make the case that a shift to a more overt politics of global governance can make the multilateral system more effective, accountable, and legitimate, and we outline reforms that can support these aims.

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Our analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we diagnose covert politics as a key cause of the present crisis of global governance. This type of politics intends to shield entire areas of policymaking from democratic pressures by cladding them in expert management: consequential decisions take place behind closed doors, with little input from and engagement with national publics and the parties that represent them. We posit that the shift toward covert methods of global governance has made them more vulnerable to challenges from political movements that seek to place blame for local failures at their feet. The opportunity for populists to target multilateral institutions is an outcome of these quiet politics, which have failed to engage, inform, and align respective publics. In other words, the effort to depoliticize multilateral institutions has backfired, repoliticizing in ways that threaten their function and survival.

Second, we argue that a more overt form of politics can help resolve the crises of global governance. Specifically, the shift to overt politics can create more informed public preferences, more representative party systems, and more flexible modes of international organization. The debate over the role of mass politics in global governance tends to focus on the impact of the latter on the former. Some argue that international integration binds the hands of national governments (e.g., Gartzke and Naoi 2011); others argue that multilateral arrangements can "enhance" democracy at the national level (Oneal, Russett, and Berbaum 2003; Pevehouse 2002; Keohane, Macedo, and Moravcsik 2009). We invert the terms of this debate to point to how mass political engagement can enhance multilateralism at the global level, as well as the potential pitfalls in increasing such engagement.

In developing these arguments, we start from a set of principles that could underpin a more sustainable and equitable multilateral system. Our proposals for embedding mass politics into transnational decision-making thus relate to steps that have already been taken by some multilateral institutions; for example, increasing engagement with civil society is a measure that many international organizations have implemented in recent decades. While this is a worthwhile endeavor, it is often pursued as a tweak to an antecedent modus operandi. In contrast, we consider these issues in terms of first principles vis-à-vis how a different approach to multilateralism can be structured from the ground up. While such an approach will surely confront unfavorable realities when considering the current institutional setup, it may prompt some deeper and broader reflection about overall system structure and the scope of change that would be required to make it more democratic and sustainable.

2. TECHNOCRACY AND THE RISE OF COVERT GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

In autumn 1973, *Foreign Policy* magazine published a cover story called "Choices." In it, Stanley Hoffman (1973) set out the dilemmas facing modern governments as the world shifted from the "age of grandiose blueprints" to one of "bewildering complexity." Just two years earlier, US presi-dent Richard Nixon had initiated his New Economic Policy as a defense against what he described as an "all-out war on the American dollar," administering a shock to the global economy that would bring the Bretton Woods era of international economic management to an end (Centeno and Cohen 2012). Meanwhile, Third World governments were getting organized to challenge the United States and its industrialized allies with plans for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) that would assert the right to economic sovereignty against former imperial powers (Gilman 2015; Getachew 2019). By the time of Hoffman's publication, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries had initiated an oil embargo that would both inflame new political crises and unsettle old international alliances. In short, the world was becoming more *complex*, more *disordered*, and more *democratic*, generating calls for a fundamental transformation in the modus operandi of global governance and the uneven distribution of power and prosperity it had delivered (Ruggie 1982).

This section traces the rise of covert global governance from the critical juncture of the 1970s. The crises of international political economy that erupted in this period yielded an unexpected consensus on the urgency of a technocratic turn in global governance. We identify four camps with distinct visions of the technocrat's role in the post–Bretton Woods era. The first, following the line of argument of Hoffman's essay, envisioned the technocrat as the *executive* of the global economy, supervising its increasing complexity and regulating its interdependent challenges. The second camp, opposed to this vision of managerial global governance, promoted the technocrat as its *electrician*, constructing the circuitry of global capital and intervening only to ensure the stable flow of current through it. The third camp, led by advocates of the NIEO, supported the technocrat as the *engineer* of the global economy, actively planning a more just world and aggressively intervening to guarantee it. The fourth and final camp, led by US opponents of the NIEO, saw the technocrat as an *enforcer*, empowered to defend the United States against the redistributive ambitions of its neighbor nations. Each of these groups had its own motivation to transcend the political conflicts of the 1970s in a new global technocracy. Together, however, they gave a common push toward the covert form of global governance that lies at the heart of the present crisis of international order.

We begin with Hoffman and the drive toward an executive mode of global governance. These advocates began from the premise of a "Great World Crisis," driven primarily by the challenges of interdependence, complexity, and uneven development (Barraclough 1975): "from a world dominated by a single chessboard...to a world dispersed into a variety of chessboards" (Hoffmann 1973, 5). Common rules might apply to a well-ordered international system, but the breakdown of that system required the construction of new institutions—as well as the revamp of existing ones—to manage new challenges ad hoc with resources and authority of their own. The prevalence of this line of thinking can be measured in the increasing deployment of "management" as the guiding method of global governance, from

the "management of foreign economic policy" (Malmgren 1972) to the "management of interdependence" (Camps 1974). Global technocrats, in other words, would solve global technical problems—and the more executive power they had to do so, the more effective their governance would be.

The second camp saw this managerial vision as a threat to the integrity of the global economy. According to these neoliberal thinkers, the crisis of the 1970s was not one of complexity but one of democracy. "The problem of the international order is not an essentially international problem," wrote Jan Tumlir, economist and architect of the UN General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), in 1977. "The difficulty, rather, is that virtually all the core countries are passing at present through a difficult crisis of democratic home governance" (Tumlir 1977). The solution, then, was not to manage this crisis but rather to "encase" it by applying strict, simple, and universal rules to govern the global economy (Slobodian 2018). In other words, the second camp shared with the first the view that power should be delegated from national governments to global governors, but differed in its understanding of the purpose of that power—ad hoc and executive for the former, architectonic and uniform for the latter.

The third camp had a similarly ambitious vision of the technocratic turn, but for opposite ends. If neoliberals sought to strip democratic politics from the circuitry of the global economy, the advocates of the NIEO sought to enshrine it there. The role of the technocrat, according to this view, was to engineer a global economy that was fair, just, and more evenly distributed—and to do that, World Bank's Mahbub ul Haq argued in 1976, would require "the evolution of many of the same institutions and mechanisms which have been gradually accepted at the national level," from a global central bank to new global tax authorities (cited in Sargent 2015, 206). The driving mission of the NIEO may have been democratization of the international economy, seeking to advance the project of decolonial liberation on the global stage. But to do so would require building institutions powerful enough to dictate new rules to the colonial powers that once dominated the Third World. As Algerian president Houari Boumediène laid out in his 1974 speech to the United Nations, the technocrats would have to be "entrusted" with engineering a more egalitarian world order (Group of 77 2006).

The fourth camp saw technocracy as a strategy to guard against these egalitarian ambitions. Led by First World government officials, representatives of this fourth camp viewed the democratization agenda of the NIEO as a rising threat to their global economic position—but recognized that a new institutional architecture would be necessary to accommodate a postcolonial global politics. "We have to avoid an international dispute where Americans say the existing system is great and the LDCs call for a new economic order," Henry Kissinger told Gerald Ford in 1975 (cited in Sargent 2015, 209). The technocratic turn, instead of empowering Third World countries to engineer a more egalitarian international order, would guarantee the sustained hegemony of the United States under the guise of economic

efficiency. "The trick in the world now is to use economics to build a world political structure," Kissinger emphasized in his conversation with Ford. In other words, the fourth camp advanced a cynical synthesis of the views of the first, second, and third, agreeing on the need to delegate more powers to international institutions—but only as a means to enforce more the national interests of countries like the United States.

The result of this overlapping consensus was the expansion in number and scope of international institutions and the emergence of a new class of technocrats to run them (Bromley and Meyer 2015). By 1975, UK prime minister Harold Wilson was complaining about the "inordinate proliferation of world bodies," commissioning a seven-page list to show his G6 colleagues (Galpern 2012). The combined effect was the transfer of increasing amounts of power into enclosed spaces of global governance—where, following Kissinger's prediction and desire, countries like the United States were able to dominate (Strange 1996). Consider the transformation of the global trade regime from the 1980s onwards: the GATT, a treaty with low enforcement capacity and low international participation, became transformed into the World Trade Organization (WTO), a powerful international organization with near-universal membership, a dispute resolution mechanism, and a slew of binding agreements (Chorev and Babb 2009; Chorev 2005). By the time the WTO arrived for its 1999 Ministerial Conference in Seattle, the mere existence of mass movements with preferences over international trade was considered an existential threat to the international order: the castle of covert global governance was dealt the first significant blow, prompting even the former GATT director-general Peter Sutherland to accept that there was "a fundamental deficit in effective political support for the WTO system" (cited in Slobodian 2018, 275).

In sum, the rise of covert global governance was not a conspiracy of masterminds but the product of an overlapping consensus about the ideal response to the last "existential" crisis of the international. The technocratic turn was seen by a diverse set of actors as the solution to the problems—economic, social, political—that emerged following the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system. This critical juncture can help explain the durable legacy of the technocratic logic at the international level. Fifty years later, scholars and policymakers simultaneously lament the covert nature of global governance while insisting that it is necessary to protect the integrity of the international order (Dahl 2010; Buchanan and Keohane 2006; Keohane 2002, 2015). When Eurogroup chief Jean-Claude Juncker advocated for secrecy to determine the direction of economic policy in the eurozone crisis of 2011, he was making the case for technocratic power as a vehicle for collective rationality: "Monetary policy is a serious issue. We should discuss it in secret... If we indicate possible decisions, we are fueling speculation on the financial markets and throwing in misery mainly the people we want to safeguard from this. I am ready to be insulted as insufficiently democratic, but I want to be serious" (quoted in Tooze 2018). It may be that, at the international level, Winston Churchill's adage found

its inverse: technocracy is the worst form of governance, except for all the rest.

3. THE POLITICIZATION OF COVERT GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Whatever the appeal and merits of technocratic global governance, it provided a fertile breeding ground for the contemporary backlash against the multilateral system. Of course, it is not the only culprit for the rise of globalization-skeptic authoritarian populist forces: for example, scholars have situated the roots of authoritarian populism in racism (Mutz 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2018) and sexism (Valentino, Wayne, and Oceno 2018). But the opacity of global governance made it a ripe target for emerging populists. In other words, we are not arguing that covert governance was the sole cause of the backlash to globalization, but rather that it provided favorable conditions for political entrepreneurs to exploit its weaknesses and launch attacks.

In this section, we rely on a tripartite framework—linking mass preferences, political parties, and international organizations—to argue that covert global governance did not do away with mass politics but instead provided a breeding ground for one strand of toxic mass politics to emerge. How did this happen? The covert mode of global governance sought to concentrate agenda-setting and decision-making in its circle of experts and institutional managers, restricting engagement with publics around the world in favor of opacity, secrecy, and exclusivity. To compensate for the absence of a public, engagement with "civil society" was seen as the remedy: opening up to input from external actors in order to increase their claims to legitimacy (O'Brien et al. 2000), even though what was on offer were often "only shallow forms of participation" (Tallberg et al. 2013, 20; Seabrooke and Wigan 2015; Wade 2009). In this context, our focus on legitimacy refers to its processual side that captures the degree of participation by the public (known as "input legitimacy"), rather than legitimacy deriving from the effectiveness of interventions ("output legitimacy") (Scharpf 2009; Schmidt 2013). That is, even if an organization is highly effective in delivering on its mandate, there are still good reasons to be interested in questions of governance processes and participation, as this can impact its legitimacy over the long run.

The result of covert global governance was that most voters are highly uninformed about the functioning of international institutions (Eichenberg 2016; Bearce and Jolliff Scott 2019). Recent studies have documented that, on the whole, mass preferences vis-à-vis international cooperation appear ambivalent and underdeveloped (De Vries 2018; Walter 2021). Based on available evidence, mass preferences in the covert mode of global governance can be described as *valence preferences*: general orientations toward the concept of international cooperation that can be charged positively or negatively based on signals from mass media or political elites (Bearce and Cook 2018). In the covert mode, then, the "demand" side of mass politics is often framed in the binaries of valence preferences: in or out, more or less, good or bad.

The demand-side dynamics of mass preferences then shape those of the supply-side attitudes of political parties at the national level. Poorly informed and actively disengaged citizens create the conditions for political entrepreneurs to inflame discontent with the institutions of global governance and weaponize it for domestic political gain. Stefanie Walter's (2021) investigation of the globalization backlash confirms its origins on the supply side: there is no organic tide of antisystem sentiment among citizens but rather an increasing attraction of political parties to "skeptical" if not outright hostile positions toward international cooperation. Party strategy in the covert mode can therefore be described as *opportunistic*, premised more on political strategy than the representation of voter attitudes toward the shape, function, or operation of the international system. De Vries, Walter, and Hobolt (2021) attribute this opportunism to the "absence of an international public sphere," leaving political entrepreneurs to charge the valence preferences of their supporters. We take this analysis one step further to argue that this "absence" is endogenous to the covert mode of global governance, which constrains the formation of informed preferences and encourages political entrepreneurship against the international order.

The demand and supply sides of the analysis therefore shape and are shaped by the mode of international organization, the third level of our framework. As we have seen in the motivations of its architects, the covert mode of global governance was designed in part to guard against democratic movements rising up to make demands for a new international order. On the one hand, these efforts have succeeded in hardening the borders around international institutions and encasing the experts working in them; several recent studies have illustrated how international institutions have resisted "ubiquitous" calls (Stephen 2018) from civil society organizations, rising powers, and underrepresented nations for greater representation, voice, and power (Wade 2013; Vestergaard and Wade 2015). But the resistance of international institutions to such reforms threatens a countermovement toward fragmentation, delegitimation, and—in some cases—dissolution of the international institutions themselves (Held and Roger 2013). For this reason, we describe the mode of international organization as *brittle*, hard to penetrate but liable to shatter under pressure.

The recent backlash against globalization is therefore directly related to failures of global governance—but not by the mechanisms advanced by comparative political economy. Economic insecurity and cultural anxieties may play a role in driving backlash sentiment, but they do not do so in a vacuum. On the contrary, we have argued that the covert mode of global governance—once seen as a solution to the problem of mass discontent—created the preconditions for its own backlash by encouraging the formation of valence preferences, opportunistic party strategies, and a brittle form of international organization.

4. TOWARD OVERT POLITICS IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Efforts to depoliticize the operation of global governance overlooked the dynamic relationship between mass politics, domestic politics, and international organization, thereby setting the stage for its repoliticization by globalization-skeptic political forces. However, alternative models of global governance are available. In this section, we make the case for an "overt" mode of multilateralism that can preempt and defuse challenges to the principle of multilateral cooperation, and this argument proceeds in two steps. Drawing on international relations scholarship, we set out the contours of what a more open mode of global governance could look like. At first, this is an exercise in concept building by setting up an ideal type of overt global governance, rather than a concrete discussion of empirical cases. This approach is helpful for constructing the two theoretical poles of the debate and is not intended to advance a binary argument that pigeonholes existing multilateral arrangements into a covert/overt dichotomy. Through such conceptual clarification, we provide a lens through which to evaluate ongoing and proposed attempts for reforming multilateral institutions. Subsequently, we apply this lens to assess attempts at opening up these institutions to greater scrutiny and control.

How does overt multilateralism compare to its covert version? We return to our theoretical model that emphasizes the role of mass preferences, political parties, and international organizations, as summarized in Table 1. At the level of preferences, a more overt politics transforms valence positions into *programmatic* ones. Here again, we highlight the key role that information plays at the base level of mass politics: while the covert mode restricts the flow of information for fear that it might inflame discontent or "fuel speculation," as Jean-Claude Juncker suggested, the overt mode prizes the creation of new pathways for information to reach people. Scholars have often suggested that citizens are naturally uninterested in the operation of global governance, the "sheer complexity" of which "puts them beyond the immediate capacity of many, probably most, citizens to appraise" (Dahl 2010). But a slew of studies has shown that this capacity is endogenous to the information that citizens are provided, concluding that more and better information has the capacity to improve political judgment, erode popular misconceptions, and align mass preferences with a more accurate assessment of mass interests (Althaus 1998; Kuklinski et al. 2000; Gilens 2001; Caplan 2008; Rho and Tomz 2017). The recent backlash against globalization has provided ample evidence that voters are not simply passive recipients of global governance outcomes; at the same time, it has revealed that their activation is often ad hoc and misdirected. The challenge therefore is not only to address the questions of economic distribution and cultural change that might inflame citizen discontent. It is also to transform the pathways of preference formation so that discontent yields more programmatic demands for the direction of global governance.

At the level of parties, the formation of programmatic preferences pushes parties away from opportunism and toward *representation*. A rich literature has examined the relationship between mass preferences and party strategy, concluding that more informed voters are more resistant to entrepreneurial challengers and referenda that enable them (Dalton, Burklin, and Drummond 2001; Anderson and Goodyear-Grant 2005, 2010; Donovan and Karp 2006)—and conversely, that political misinformation is correlated strongly with support for right-wing populist parties (Rydgren 2004; Visser et al. 2014; van Kessel, Sajuria, and Van Hauwaert 2021). From the perspective of political parties in pursuit of popular support, the shift from valence to programmatic preferences encourages a spatial rather than entrepreneurial mode of party competition. The politicization of global governance in the overt mode, far from inciting backlash, can therefore provide more "constraining power" to citizens to prevent it (De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter 2021).

However, neither programmatic preferences nor representative parties carry meaning in the absence of opportunities to reform the institutions of global governance themselves. In their recent study of politicized international cooperation, De Vries, Hobolt, and Walter (2021) put emphasis on the importance of political opportunities like "permissive elections" and national referenda that can give voice to underlying mass preferences over global governance. We argue here that supply-side opportunities are insufficient to capture the dynamic politics of global governance. Consider the case of the EU treaties. Where De Vries and colleagues point to the 2005 Dutch referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty as an example of a "permissive" political opportunity structure, three other examples—the Danish referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the Irish referendum on Nice in 2001, and later the referendum on Lisbon in 2008—suggest that these national opportunities often fail to reach the international institutions that are on the ballot: in all three cases, the "no" vote was not heeded by the European Union, and a second referendum was run to secure a "yes" instead. Public discontent is related not only to failures of supply-side representation but also to the mode of international organization that resists mass movements for reform: such is the vicious cycle kicked off by covert global governance. The overt mode, by contrast, is defined by its *flexibility*, with a permissive political opportunity structure that creates channels for the transmission of mass preferences to international institutions—and, in doing so, turns existential backlash into an opportunity for systemic reform.

5. THE ROAD AHEAD FOR MULTILATERALISM

Multilateral institutions are—for the most part—not oblivious to the legitimacy challenges that covert operations can generate, or to the important trade-offs that overt politicization can lead to. Although some technical or highly specialized agencies, like the International Maritime Organization or the Bank of International Settlements, continue to operate without considerable scrutiny (Apuzzo and Hurtes 2021; Martinez-Diaz 2009), many large international or-

ganizations—most notably, UN system organizations and large international financial institutions—have attempted to placate critics and reform practices. In this final section, we set out the promise and pitfalls of reforms that can underpin a more resilient multilateralism and outline how they link up to mass preferences, political parties, and international organizations. In advancing these arguments, we are guided by international relations scholarship—particularly the English School—that emphasizes the role that solidarity plays in international society (between states, and also between ordinary individuals), as an alternative to a minimalist conception that privileges minimal and conditional agreement by participants in international society (Bull 1966; Bain 2010; Linklater and Suganami 2006).

First, *transparency* can become integral to the activities of global governance organizations as it is a precondition for the development of informed preferences by different publics. As set out in the previous section, more information can help citizens form preferences that are better aligned with both their own economic interests and those of their neighbors (Rho and Tomz 2017). If jingoistic nationalism is a paradigmatic example of a valence position—linked as it is to levels of misinformation (van Kessel, Sajuria, and Van Hauwaert 2021)—then the formation of programmatic preferences promises to facilitate a different approach: the discovery of common interests among citizens within a country and citizens of different countries who grapple with common challenges like climate change, tax evasion, and race-to-the-bottom labor deregulation.

In this process of programmatic preference formation by mass publics, greater transparency by global governance organizations is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. Progress has already been made on this front: since the 1990s, many organizations have expanded access to information about their activities and routinely publish a lot of data on their operations. For example, responding to civil society pressure, the World Bank reformed its information policy in the early 1990s, making a range of project-specific data publicly accessible (Udall 1998). Around the same time, UN programs and agencies sought to increase public access to information on their processes and decisions (Grigorescu 2013).

Notwithstanding such progress, there is still scope for meaningfully expanding transparency. This is not merely a truism: in principle, organizational practices could almost always become more transparent, while in many cases confidentiality needs to be preserved (e.g., in sensitive discussions with national authorities) (Keohane 2005). Instead, revisiting the basis and social aims of transparency can open new pathways for engagement with diverse publics. This approach entails not only narrowly construed access to information policies but also a broader democratization

of governance practices, with open selection processes for senior leadership in international organizations being the prime example. For example, the IMF and the World Bank follow anachronistic conventions that posit that they must be led by a European and an American, respectively. This has contributed to legitimation challenges to the institutions when their leaders become embroiled in controversies or scandals, as has often been the case in the last two decades. To be sure, this is not to advocate for states to relinquish control or their prized voting shares in different organizations; rather, it is to point to the extensive scope for open and public engagement in setting out the terms for the functioning of international organizations.

Second, *permeability* of global policy-making processes would provide opportunities to those affected to express their preferences and participate in the design of policies. This means meaningfully incorporating political forces and civil society in global policy-making: global bargaining around rules and norms is currently too often a closed shop, with government officials and—formally or informally—business representatives authoring decisions while civil society is either co-opted or relegated to making noise at the margins (Block-Lieb and Halliday 2017; Kentikelenis and Babb 2019; Kentikelenis and Seabrooke 2017; Stewart and Wang 2003). Even when "good" policies are designed, lack of input from affected communities can imperil implementation as well as the legitimacy of the institutions involved. The case of IMF-sponsored attempts to phase out fuel subsidies in Ecuador provides a case in point. This policy is partly motivated by climate change and distributional concerns: such subsidies do not expose consumers and businesses to the true cost of carbon, thereby leading to excessive use and underinvestment in clean energy sources, and have adverse distributional implications, as richer households and corporations benefit more from them. Yet it is poorer households that are disproportionately affected by such measures, as spending on energy represents a high share of their expenditure. Following IMF advice, successive Ecuadorian governments have tried several times to remove such subsidies, only to be met by fierce resistance and political unrest—spearheaded by indigenous groups—that forced the reversal of the policy path (Valencia 2019; Kueffner 2021). In this context, permeability of the relevant policy discussions would have helped anticipate and preempt such protests by designing policies that could have sheltered low-income households from adverse income shocks while also rallying their support for more equitable climate policies.

Opening up to a broader set of actors in the context of negotiations can increase the translation of political preferences into policy change at the transnational level. In addition to the key role of civil society on this front, this would

Table 1. Ideal Type Modes in Global Governance

Mode	Mass preferences	Political parties	International organization
Covert	Valence	Opportunistic	Brittle
Overt	Programmatic	Representative	Flexible

also entail a greater role for parliaments in global governance. There is precedent on this. Many states already include parliamentarians in their delegations to the UN General Assembly and other organizations, and parliaments have consistently clamored for greater involvement in international policy-making, given its momentous implications for national-level policy space (Alger 2010). Such involvement can be institutionalized to give a broad range of voices—including starkly dissenting ones—a role in the development of global policy, thereby diminishing the "outsider" status of opportunistic politicians. This increased polyphony and the potential role for hostile politicians will not by default lead to paralysis: it can also reinvigorate pro-multilateralism political forces to reach compromises and expand their political reach.

Finally, the principle of *reversibility* can become integral to the functioning of multilateral organizations, thereby formalizing the ability to revisit agreements and reengage within and across publics to do so. This call is the opposite of the vision of transnational democracy recently expounded by European Council president Charles Michel: "European construction follows a path marked out by 'noes,' which we need to discuss in order to move beyond them to irreversible 'yeses'" (Michel 2021). Indeed, aiming for instituting irreversible structures is antithetical to democratic principles and can create path dependencies that lead to the survival of organizations or agreements that are no longer fit for purpose. To be sure, reversibility would contribute to a degree of organizational insecurity: rounds of international negotiations will shape the fate of international institutions, and the threat of dissolution would loom on the horizon.

But reversibility would also ensure responsiveness to the changing needs of their constituencies. Designing international agreements with sunset clauses—that is, stipulations to revisit the terms, or even withdraw, in medium-term intervals—can provide a boost to everyone involved to deliver on promises made. This has been the underlying idea of using such clauses in domestic politics, where they remain an attractive policy tool to ensure the accountability of bureaucracies and the efficacy of rules and regulations (Kouroutakis and Ranchordas 2015). Extending this logic to the transnational level, ensuring the reversibility of multilateral agreements can underpin the flexibility of international organization, as demonstrating effectiveness and fitness-for-purpose becomes regularly scrutinized and mass politics is incorporated into decision-making structures.

Our proposals for increasing transparency, permeability, and reversibility represent steps toward a reformed multilateralism for the twenty-first century, but they are by no means guaranteed to succeed as they interact with anti-multilateralism forces and ongoing challenges to global governance. For example, the spread of misinformation is a major challenge for multilateral arrangements (van Kessel, Sajuria, and Van Hauwaert 2021), and radical anti-multilateralism political forces have been gaining ground (De Vries and Hobolt 2020). Would our proposals merely make it easier for them to hijack or abolish organizations? We do not believe so. To the contrary, providing space for challenges within global governance can simultaneously galvanize pro-multilateralism forces and increase the attentiveness of international organizations to the ways in which they design policies.

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