1 Global governance, accountability and civil society

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Introduction

As an initial step in exploring the relationship between civil society and accountability in global governance it is important to clarify the core terms. Each of the principal elements in this equation is subject to multiple and often conflicting interpretations. The point of this opening chapter is not to resolve these theoretical and political disputes with definitive definitions. Such an aim is neither achievable nor – from the perspective of creative democratic debate – desirable. Hence the following discussion only sketches broad conceptions and concerns in order to provide a starting framework of analysis for the subsequent case studies. Individual authors will, in those chapters, elaborate their particular understandings of the general issues in relation to specific global governance arrangements.

The present chapter has three parts that successively address the three central concepts in this study. The first part identifies ‘global governance’ as a complex of rules and regulatory institutions that apply to transplanetary jurisdictions and constituencies. In line with globalisation as a major general trend of contemporary history, global governance has grown to unprecedented proportions and significance in recent decades. The second part of the chapter discusses ‘accountability’ in terms of processes whereby an actor answers for its conduct to those whom it affects. Shortfalls of accountability (especially democratic accountability) in respect of global governance agencies constitute a major challenge to the delivery of effective and legitimate public policy. The third part of the chapter introduces ‘civil society’ as a political arena where associations of citizens seek, from outside political parties, to shape societal rules. The present enquiry considers the ways and extents that civil society activities can contribute to greater accountability in global governance.

Global governance

Globalisation is one of the most striking broad trends of contemporary history (Held et al. 1999; Scholte 2005b). Over the past half-century
the collective lives of human beings have acquired much larger planet-spanning (or ‘transplanetary’) dimensions. All manner of flows connect people with one another wherever on earth they might be located: for example through communications, merchandise, microbes, migrants, money, organisations, pollutants and weapons. Although global-scale exchanges have been going on for many centuries, transplanetary social relations have today reached unprecedented and qualitatively larger amounts, ranges, frequencies, speeds, intensities and impacts. Concurrently, society is also marked by greater global consciousness: that is, people have acquired heightened awareness of planetary realms as a significant aspect of their social existence. Indeed, many individuals have oriented their cultural identities and political solidarities partly to global spheres, as witnessed with phenomena like so-called ‘world music’ and humanitarian relief programmes. Materially and ideationally, therefore, contemporary society operates substantially through global frames alongside (and in complex interrelations with) social spaces on other scales such as neighbourhood, province, country and region.

Like all realms of social relations, global social relations require governance: that is, an array of rules along with regulatory institutions to administer those norms and standards. As any arena of human collective life becomes significant – be it a locality, country or other social space – frameworks of governance develop to bring a certain order and predictability to that sphere. Rules are set, maintained, adjusted and enforced. The rules may be strict or loose, formal or informal, permanent or transitory, enabling or oppressive. But even if it is softly applied and barely perceptible, regulation of some kind will transpire if a given social space is to have any stability and longevity.

So it is with global domains also. The intense globalisation of recent history has entailed, as part of the process, increased governance of transplanetary affairs. Much of this regulation has developed through pre-existent institutions such as nation-states and local governments. In addition, however, growing needs to govern global matters have prompted the establishment and expansion of many suprastate regulatory arrangements. Some of these new apparatuses, like the European Union (EU), operate in respect of regional jurisdictions while others, like the United Nations (UN), govern in respect of transplanetary jurisdictions. The latter type of regulation – namely rules and administering agencies that apply to places and people spread across the earth – can be termed ‘global governance’.

The phrase ‘global governance’ first surfaced in the late 1980s in connection with the Commission on Global Governance, which reported in 1995 on various challenges of regulating a more global world (Carlsson
et al. 1995). Twenty years later the vocabulary figures in the titles of textbooks and countless other publications. A journal named Global Governance was launched in 1995 and quickly became a significant outlet in its field (Coate and Murphy 1995; Carin et al. 2006). More than a dozen universities across the world now house research centres specifically dedicated to the study of ‘global governance’. Indeed, a number of recently created regulatory arrangements with a planetary scope have incorporated the adjective ‘global’ into their names, rather than the previously favoured term ‘international’. Examples include the Global Environment Facility (launched in 1991), the Global Reporting Initiative (1998), the Global Compact (2000) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (2002).

Like any key concept, the notion ‘global governance’ can be problematic if it is invoked loosely and uncritically (Hewson and Sinclair 1999; Sinclair 2004; Grugel and Piper 2006; Soederberg 2006). However, if used with precision and vigilance this idea can open important insights into contemporary politics. In particular, the newer term ‘global governance’ is arguably more exact and revealing than the older label ‘international organisation’, which dates from the early twentieth century. ‘Global’ specifically designates activities and conditions on a planetary scale, whereas ‘international’ covers any circumstance (bilateral, regional or global) that extends beyond the confines of a country-nation-state unit. Moreover, ‘global’ suitably highlights planetary realms as having become significant social domains in their own right, while ‘inter-national’ (as well as its cousin ‘trans-national’) still frame phenomena with primary reference to country arenas. Meanwhile, the word ‘organisation’ in ‘international organisation’ could encompass any association, whatever its activities, whereas ‘governance’ specifies the regulatory character of the circumstances in question. Furthermore, ‘international organisation’ has usually been understood in terms of relations among nation-states, while contemporary ‘global governance’ involves not only nation-states, but also other types of actors such as business enterprises, civil society associations, local governments and regional agencies. Finally, in contrast to the traditional conception of international organisations as being wholly and solely the servants of states, contemporary global governance institutions are to some extent also players in their own right: they influence states (and other actors) at the same time as being influenced by states (and other actors).

Global governance is not the same thing as global government. To speak of global governance is not to suggest the existence, emergence or goal of a world state. Global-scale regulation can operate in the absence of a centralised, sovereign, public entity that is elevated from a national to a
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planetary scale. After all, governance has historically taken many forms. Societal regulation has occurred not only through states, but also through empires (e.g. the Byzantine, Inca and Songay empires), corporations (e.g. the Dutch and English East India Companies), and diffuse networks (e.g. as in medieval Europe). Thus global governance need not, does not, and in all probability will not take shape as a nation-state writ large.

Instead, contemporary global governance operates through a complex array of numerous and diverse institutional mechanisms. Broadly speaking, six different types of global regulatory body can be distinguished in contemporary society: intergovernmental, transgovernmental, inter-regional, translocal, private, and public-private hybrids. The first of these categories, intergovernmental agencies, covers the conventional multilateral institutions that operate through state-based ministers and diplomats supported by a permanent suprastate secretariat (Diehl 2005). Examples include the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Transgovernmental networks lack the formal character of intergovernmental institutions. In these cases senior and middle-ranking civil servants from multiple states jointly pursue governance of common concerns through informal collaboration by, for example, conferences and memoranda of understanding (Raustiala 2002; Slaughter 2004). Examples of transgovernmental regulation include the Competition Policy Network, the Group of Eight (G8) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also operates largely through transgovernmental committees and working groups. Although transgovernmental networks lack a basis in conventional international law and have no distinct permanent institutional expression, they perform important regulatory tasks in areas such as crime prevention, disease control, environmental protection, financial supervision, human rights promotion and trade policy.

Less extensive to date, but potentially more important for the future, is global governance through interregional arrangements (Hänggi et al. 2005). In these cases, regulation of global issues is pursued among several macro-regional groupings of states. So far interregionalism has mainly occurred through EU relations with other regional institutions including the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is the most developed interregional arrangement (Gilson 2002). This multilateralism of regions could well spread worldwide in years to come as regionalism consolidates in areas outside Europe.

The future may also bring increased global governance through translocalism. In such arrangements, substate municipal and provincial
authorities from across the planet collaborate directly, without the mediation of nation states, in the regulation of common problems. Examples of translocal global governance include United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), with several thousand members in 127 countries, and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, which links some 500 substate authorities across 67 countries to pursue improvements in global environmental conditions.

Still further expansion of global governance has transpired in recent decades through private mechanisms with a transplanetary reach (Cutler et al. 1999; Hall and Biersteker 2003). Contrary to widely held assumptions, societal regulation does not, per se, have to occur through public sector bodies. Instead, business consortia and/or civil society associations can construct and administer governance arrangements for various aspects of global affairs. The many examples of private global governance include the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC, to promote ecologically sustainable logging), schemes for corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER), the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB, to improve and harmonise modes of financial reporting) and the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO, to advance the position of poor producers in global commerce).

A final category of growing global governance in contemporary history crosses the public-private divide with hybrid arrangements (Bull and McNeill 2007). These constructions, which have mainly arisen during the past decade, involve global regulation through institutions that combine public, business and/or civil society elements. Examples of these trans-sectoral hybrids include the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM).

Given this sixfold variety of forms, contemporary global governance could be described as comprising multiple multilateralisms. The old-style “international organisation” involved just one kind of multilateralism, namely intergovernmental arrangements. Thus the architects of 1945 envisioned that global governance would entail the United Nations system plus several intergovernmental institutions for finance and trade. In contrast, sixty years later global regulation encompasses in addition transgovernmental, interregional, translocal, private and hybrid multilateralisms. Rather than being an institutional umbrella for the whole of world order, the UN has become one site among many for planet-spanning governance.

The studies in this book examine cases of each of these diverse types of global governance, with the exception of translocalism. The next six chapters concern more traditional intergovernmental apparatuses (UN,
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World Bank, IMF, WTO, Commonwealth, OIC). Then two chapters examine cases with significant transgovernmental qualities (OECD, G8). The tenth chapter considers ASEM as an interregional arrangement. In the final four case studies, ICANN and the WFTO involve private global governance, while the climate change regime and the Global Fund illustrate the development of public-private combinations. Of course the question arises whether some institutional forms of global governance are more amenable to positive civil society influence than others, a matter which is addressed in the Conclusion to this book.

Appearing in these diverse manifestations, global governance is a growing reality of contemporary society. The number of regulatory agencies with planetary jurisdictions and constituencies has proliferated over the past hundred years and at a generally increasing rate, especially in recent decades. Moreover, most global governance bodies have expanded over time in terms of their mandates and resources. Today global governance arrangements figure significantly in every area of public policy, including in the most politically charged matters such as human rights, migration, money, policing and military affairs.

Not all governance in contemporary society takes place through regulatory agencies with a planetary reach, of course. Global governance for the most part complements rather than cancels out regulatory arrangements on regional, national and local scales. In particular, there is no sign that growing global governance entails a contraction, let alone demise, of the nation-state. On the contrary, territorial states generally remain as robust as ever in today’s more global world, if not more so (Weiss 1998; Sørensen 2004). The major national governments in particular nearly always figure as highly influential players in respect of global public policy concerns. Thus it is not a question of contemporary societal regulation occurring through global regimes or regional institutions or national governments or local authorities. Rather, the operative conjunction is ‘and’.

Thus governance of any public policy issue today involves a multifaceted trans-scalar network of institutions. In regard to trade, for example, the WFTO and the WTO operate on a global scale, while close to 300 inter-state trade agreements concluded since 1945 relate to regional domains (Cosbey et al. 2004: 2). In addition, states continue to act on trade in respect of national realms, and municipal and provincial governments regulate trade as it impacts their respective jurisdictions. Similar trans-scalar complexes of governance apply to any other area of contemporary public policy, such as communications, education, employment, environment, finance, health and migration. In all of these cases, global regulatory agencies do not stand alone, but are encompassed within

Yet, although global-scale rules and regulatory institutions form only a part of the whole, they are a vital and indispensable aspect of contemporary governance. A more global world of the kind that has emerged over the past half-century requires some significant measure of planet-spanning governance arrangements for the provision of global public goods (Kaul et al. 1999, 2003; ITFGPG 2006). For one thing, global regimes of technical standardisation are required to make possible, for example, transplanetary communications, disease control and production processes. In addition, significant elements of global-scale coordination are required for effective responses to matters such as global ecological changes, global financial crises, global criminal networks and global arms proliferation. To be sure, there are strong arguments to embrace a principle of subsidiarity, whereby regulation should be devolved to the smallest possible scale. For both technical effectiveness and democratic legitimacy, governance generally works best in the closest possible connection with the affected persons. Yet even if global rules and regulatory institutions were pared down to the minimally required proportions, planet-spanning arrangements would still remain an important feature of governance in the more global society that people now inhabit. The question is therefore not whether global governance will exist in the years to come, but what forms and proportions it will take, and what policies and outcomes it will promote.

Of course global governance arrangements rarely have total planetary coverage, in the sense of affecting – or affecting to equal extents – every person at every spot on the earth. ‘Global’ (spread across the planet) can therefore be distinguished from ‘universal’ (encompassing the whole planet). Indeed, some global governance instruments like the Commonwealth, la Francophonie and the OIC only aim at some rather than all people and countries across the globe. A global regulatory apparatus need not reach everywhere and evenly across the planet, just as a nation-state usually does not touch every inhabitant and locale in a country to the same degree.

Finally, as should be apparent from the tone of this discussion so far, the term ‘global governance’ is not invoked here in any particular normative sense. To speak of global governance is not to assume anything – either positive or negative – concerning the effectiveness and legitimacy of the arrangements in question. Global governance is not inherently functional or dysfunctional, equitable or inequitable, democratic or undemocratic, culturally homogenising or culturally pluralising, imperialist or emancipatory. Global governance is not intrinsically a good or a
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bad thing. This book neither applauds it nor decries it as such. The analysis merely recognises that global-scale regulation exists as a functional necessity of a more global world. Moreover, the phenomenon will in all likelihood continue to grow – and grow very substantially – as further globalisation unfolds.

Whether global governance has beneficial or harmful effects depends on how it is practised. The compelling need is therefore for global governance to be carried out well. Positive accountability processes can help to that end. Indeed, critical investigations of accountability – such as undertaken in this book – could contribute to the construction of alternative and better global governance in the future.

Accountability

As noted in the Introduction to this book, accountability is crucial to the establishment and maintenance of the effective and legitimate global governance that the present-day world vitally needs. In the absence of suitably accountable global-scale regulation, humanity today suffers major deficits in the provision of global public goods such as communications infrastructure, ecological integrity, financial stability, disease control, peaceful dispute settlement and potable water. Thus accountability is not an optional extra in planet-spanning governance institutions, but goes to the heart of providing decent human lives for all in the more global society that has emerged over the past half-century and looks very likely to develop further in the decades to come.

Yet what, more precisely, is entailed by ‘accountability’? And how does it relate more specifically to global governance agencies? For what are these institutions accountable? To whom are they accountable? Over what timeframe does their accountability extend? By what means do global governance organisations practise accountability, and how adequate are the existing instruments? These questions are examined in turn below.

Ahead of that more detailed discussion it should be stressed from the outset that this book approaches accountability with a critical democratic purpose. That is, accountability is understood here principally as a means to constrain power and make it responsive to the people that it affects, especially people who tend otherwise to be marginalised and silenced. This emphasis on democratic accountability contrasts in particular with a widespread contemporary discourse of so-called ‘good governance’, in which accountability often figures primarily as a means to promote financial responsibility and efficient performance. Of course these more technical aspects of accountability are also important for policy success, and when well integrated with other concerns can complement and
further democratic ends. However, as many painful historical experiences
have shown – including such extremes as the slave trade and concentra-
tion camps – a fixation on efficiency can sideline and undermine demo-
ocratic values, with potentially dire consequences. Given that prevailing
approaches to political economy have in recent times tended to overplay
efficiency aspects of accountability, it is important that other analyses,
such as those collected in this book, give due emphasis to democratic
concerns.

What is ‘accountability’?

In spite of contrasting notions regarding the purpose of accountability,
orthodox and alternative perspectives can concur on its broad nature.
Across the diverse conceptions there is general agreement that account-
bility is a condition and process whereby an actor answers for its con-
duct to those whom it affects. In a word, if A takes an action that impacts
upon B, then by the principle of accountability A must answer to B for
that action and its consequences. In elaborating this starting point dif-
ferent notions of accountability have contrasting ideas about who ‘B’ is,
what kinds of impacts must be answered for, and how ‘A’ should answer
for them. However, all approaches to accountability embrace the broad
principle that actors should be answerable for their actions (and some-
times also inactions).

Accountability can be understood to have four principal aspects: trans-
parency; consultation; evaluation; and correction. These apply whether
the accountable agent is a global governance institution or any other
kind of actor, be it a state, a corporation, a political party, a civil society
association, a media organ or an individual. Other analysts have devel-
oped other fourfold conceptions of accountability on broadly similar
lines, albeit with some different emphases (Coleman and Porter 2000;
Blagescu et al. 2005; Ebrahim and Weisband 2007).

With respect to transparency, accountability requires that A is visible
to B. In other words, the affected constituents must always, from the
start to the finish of a given action, be able to see what the affecting
actor is doing and how. In a situation of accountability, impacted circles
should be able to discover readily what decisions are taken, when, by
whom, through what procedures, on the basis of what evidence, drawing
on what resources for implementation and with what expected conse-
quences. Without such information B is left ignorant and cannot effect-
ively scrutinise A; thus transparency is a sine qua non of accountability
(Holzner and Holzner 2006; Hood and Heald 2006). Of course there are
situations (such as criminal investigations and advance notice of certain
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changes to macroeconomic policy) where public interest may require some temporary restrictions on the release of information. However, in accountable governance the default position is timely and full disclosure, and any exceptions to that rule require thorough justification.

With respect to **consultation**, accountability requires that A explains intended actions to B and adjusts plans in the light of information, analysis and preferences heard from B. In other words, decision-taking is accountable when affected people are incorporated into the deliberations and have opportunities to shape the outcomes. In thorough accountability this participation extends across the policy cycle, from the initial agenda formulation to the final report. The consultation may be direct (involving the affected persons themselves) or indirect (involving mediating parties such as parliaments and civil society associations). In the case of indirect participation the mediating agent should in its turn be accountable to those for whom it purports to speak.

With respect to **evaluation**, accountability requires that the impacts of A’s actions on B are thoroughly and independently monitored and assessed. Such evaluations might take the form of academic studies, civil society reports, judiciary proceedings, journalistic investigations, officially commissioned enquiries, parliamentary reviews, or testimonies of the affected persons themselves. Accountability entails an obligation to determine how affected circles have been affected. Impacted persons have a right to know how well the impacting agent has complied with its decisions and achieved the promised results. Stakeholders furthermore have a right to receive tenable explanations when outcomes have fallen short of expectations.

With respect to **correction**, accountability requires that A provides B with redress in cases where A’s actions have had harmful consequences for B. This compensation might take the form of apologies, policy changes, institutional reorganisations, staff reprimands, management resignations, reparations or even incarcerations. In a situation of accountability, affected circles must be assured that affecting actors take responsibility for their actions and learn from any mistakes.

Applying these four general points to the issue at hand, a global governance institution would be accountable to the extent that it is transparent to those affected, consults those affected, reports to those affected and provides redress to those who are adversely affected. Each of the case study chapters in this book assesses the performance of the global governance agency in question on these four lines, and considers in what ways and to what extents civil society activities advance these four facets of accountability.

As diverse experiences across the thirteen cases show, there are multiple ways to practise accountability in global governance. On the one
hand, the different institutions adopt different instruments to enact transparency, consultation, evaluation and correction. On the other hand, different constituencies (e.g. academe, business, diasporas, faith groups, governments, women, and workers) have different needs and expectations as regards accountability processes that are meaningful to them. Thus accountability is anything but straightforward and on the contrary remains heavily contested. Moreover, while it is important to identify and learn from good practices of global governance accountability, it would be unhelpfully simplistic to hold up certain frameworks as a ‘best practice’ blueprint that should be followed by all institutions in all circumstances.

**Who is accountable?**

Are global governance agencies subject to accountability requirements? Do they fit the category ‘A’ in the general definition above? After all, traditional (often dubbed ‘Westphalian’) doctrines of international law and international organisation would have it that states are the sole actors in world affairs, with the implication that only national governments would have obligations of accountability in global arenas. Indeed, many state leaders today still insist on old-style notions of ‘sovereignty’ in their dealings with global governance institutions. Likewise, councils, management and staff of global regulatory agencies – especially the intergovernmental bodies – are often only too ready to absolve themselves of responsibility by attributing all power and accountability in their operations to the member states.

Fifty years ago few issues of accountability arose in respect of global governance institutions themselves. At that time ‘international organisations’ were few in number, small in size, and limited in scope. Societal regulation was undertaken more or less wholly and solely by nation-states. Thus accountability for public policy both domestically and internationally could be attached more or less entirely to national governments and key decision-takers within those governments. In this Westphalian world the buck stopped somewhere, and everyone more or less agreed where that was: the sovereign state.

However, contemporary governance has a post-statist character, in the sense that, as seen above, societal regulation now involves multiple kinds of actors in addition to national governments. Governance has become post-sovereign, in the sense that policy processes are institutionally diffuse and lack a single locus of supreme, absolute and comprehensive authority. Today no regulatory body – including a state – constructs public policy on its own. Global institutions, regional agencies, state bodies
and substate authorities are embedded together in a host of polycentric networks that operate in respect of different public policy issues. None of the parties involved holds a clear position of final arbiter.

The relative simplicity of Westphalian accountability equations therefore no longer applies in world politics. In today’s polycentric governance apparatus it is well-nigh impossible to link accountability neatly and simply to a single decision point, or even to a single type of actor like the state. Public policy emanates from – and accountability correspondingly applies to – complex networks rather than one or the other player in isolation.

For example, who is accountable in the case of Internet governance? Is it ICANN? Is it parallel private regulatory mechanisms such as the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)? Is it (and should it be more so) the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as the most relevant public global agency? Is it the United States Department of Commerce as (until recently) underwriter of ICANN? Is it the State of California under whose laws ICANN is incorporated? Is it other nation-states who acquiesce to these largely privatised arrangements of Internet governance? Is it the software companies, civil society groups and individual programmers who share in the operation of ICANN, W3C and IETF? The obvious answer is that all of these participating actors have a case to answer, both individually and collectively. Yet this principle of multifaceted accountabilities is not easily translated into practice: which parts of public policy networks should be held to account, to what respective degrees, how, and to whom?

Indeed, there is considerable danger that governance agencies exploit these post-sovereign circumstances of diffuse polycentric decision-taking in order to avoid accepting due responsibility for their actions and omissions. In one recurrent scenario, for example, major states and the UN blame each other for policy failures regarding peace and security. Likewise, client states and the IMF habitually fault one another for flawed macroeconomic policies: the governments complain of imposed conditionalities, and the Fund protests that its role is only advisory. Similarly, protagonists in other policy areas regularly claim that some other agency is responsible for failures: e.g. to deliver essential medicines to AIDS sufferers; to ensure adequate food for all; to take measures against climate change; and to halt manipulations of global finance for tax evasion. In situations of polycentric governance where the buck does not stop it is all too easily passed.

It is vital to resist these temptations of finger-pointing and to insist on retaining accountability as a cornerstone of effective and legitimate governance of global affairs. However, to reaffirm accountability in respect
of polycentric public policy networks requires a shift in assumptions away from a now obsolete ‘sovereignist’ mindset that seeks to attach ultimate responsibility to a single highest authority. Instead, accountability needs to be understood and practised in contemporary governance in a dispersed and shared fashion. All nodes in a given public policy network – including the global regulatory institutions involved – must play their part in delivering transparency, consultation, evaluation and correction.

Thus global governance agencies, too, must answer for their actions and omissions, albeit usually as parts of larger regulatory arrangements rather than as players in isolation. The councils, managements and staffs of global governance institutions share in generating the impacts of public policy on contemporary society. The influence of these transplanetary agencies must not be exaggerated, but it must not be denied and ignored either. The corresponding responsibilities cannot justifiably be wholly transferred to states and other parts of the relevant public policy network. Some responsibility – and associated requirements of accountability – lie with the global governance mechanism itself.

**Accountability for what?**

If global governance institutions need to be held accountable for their share in contemporary societal regulation, for what more specifically is each agency answerable? This question can be addressed in terms of the overall purpose of the governance body, as well as the various activities that the organisation undertakes in pursuit of that mandate.

As noted earlier, global governance mechanisms are indispensable to the delivery of many public goods in today’s more global society. Each of these regulatory instruments is meant to advance one or several planet-spanning public goods, whether in respect of conflict management, cultural creativity, disease control, ecological sustainability, financial stability or technical standardisation. Often this mandate is expressed explicitly in the constitutional document that established the institution, like the Charter of the United Nations. Instances of informal global governance like the G8 and certain CSER schemes lack a founding legal convention of this kind, and their respective purposes must be deduced from other declarations and actions. In some cases, such as the OECD, the objectives and corresponding activities of a global governance apparatus may range quite widely.

Yet however its mandate is expressed, a global governance institution is first and foremost answerable for the ways and degrees that it does or does not further whatever public good(s) it exists to promote. This
accountability can be more specifically assessed in line with the fourfold framework set out above. Thus, first, how transparently does the agency in question pursue its delivery of the given global public good? Second, how consultative are the institution’s policy processes in respect of providing that global public good? Third, how well is the organisation’s performance evaluated in regard to furthering that global public good? Fourth, how well does the global governance actor in question correct its shortcomings in promoting the particular global public good?

To answer this ‘accountability for what?’ question, each of the case studies in this book identifies the general rationale for the global governance institution in question and summarises the various activities that the agency undertakes in pursuit of that raison d’être. This specification of mandate is important for the formulation of suitable accountability demands in respect of the organisation. A lack of clarity regarding the objectives and activities of different global governance bodies can lead people to formulate inappropriate calls for accountability and/or to direct them to the wrong places. In this vein, for example, civil society activists have often confused the IMF and the World Bank, which although related have distinct purposes and programmes.

That said, in some instances stakeholders may have understandable grounds to wish that a given global governance body would be tasked with a different mandate to the one that the institution formally holds. For example, some advocates might urge that bodies like the WTO should pursue more ambitious objectives in respect of ecological sustainability or social justice than those set out in their charters. In such cases the resulting demands of accountability will exceed those for which the regulators themselves may feel responsible.

**Accountability to whom?**

Having established that global governance institutions need to practise accountability, and for something, a further issue arises about the audience for that accountability. Who are the constituents of global regulatory agencies? Who are the stakeholders who have a right to claim accountability from these bodies?

By the general definition of accountability adopted earlier, an actor (‘A’) is answerable to those whom it affects (‘B’). In line with this ‘affected principle’, a global governance institution is accountable to those whose lives and life chances it influences. These people collectively form that agency’s constituency: its public. As the political philosopher John Dewey expressed it, ‘the public’ comprises those persons who are affected by a given set of transactions to such an extent that the consequences need to
be cared for (Dewey 1927: 15–16). Thus to determine who has a right to claim accountability of a given global regulatory body (or certain of its actions) one must in each case identify the relevant public.

The contours of this public may vary according to the institution. For example, the WFTO addresses a global public comprised mainly of the producers and consumers of fair trade goods. For its part, the OIC in the first place addresses a transplanetary community of Muslims, or *Ummah*. The Global Fund has as its key stakeholders donors and persons living with the three diseases that it combats. More diffusely, the UN claims in the Preamble to its Charter to serve ‘we, the peoples’, an umbrella that now encompasses more or less the whole of humanity.

Certainly, the question of constituency in global governance can become complicated, since different stakeholders may have divergent and competing interests in respect of a given regulatory arrangement. For example, in handling matters of Third World debt the G8 has affected creditor institutions, debtor governments, investors in global financial markets, and residents (including many destitute people) in poor countries. How does and/or should the G8 prioritise its accountabilities among these, to some extent rival, audiences? Similarly, how do CSER schemes related to climate change negotiate the various and sometimes contending claims for accountability held by company shareholders, employees, customers and persons who bear the brunt of global warming, both now and in future generations?

Thus accountability to whom is often a highly charged political matter in global governance, as elsewhere. Depending on which stakeholders are favoured, accountability practices in global governance can either perpetuate or alter existing configurations of power. In some cases, accountability arrangements in global governance may mainly serve constituents who are already strong, such as major governments and large corporations. Alternatively, a global regulatory body may practise transparency, consultation, evaluation and correction in ways that expand political space for marginalised groups such as slum dwellers and indigenous peoples. To put the matter in terms of deeper social structures, global governance accountability can, depending on its design and operation, either reinforce or counter established hierarchies of, for example, age groups, castes, countries, classes, cultures, (dis)abilities, genders, races and sexualities.

Hence there is nothing inherently democratising in accountability. On the contrary, certain kinds of transparency, consultation, evaluation and redress can actually widen social inequalities and entrench authoritarian rule. To make global governance more accountable is not in itself a sign of greater democracy. It all depends on which stakeholders are
addressed by, and benefit from, accountability processes, and to what relative extents. To ensure that accountability in global governance has democratising consequences it is vital that all constituencies are identified, recognised and answered. To this end, global governance transparency would, for instance, need to be practised in ways that reach all stakeholders, including those who may be illiterate, face disability, speak minority languages or lack access to the Internet and libraries. Hence posting technical jargon in English on a website would not constitute effective transparency for many constituents. In addition, accountability processes that are more deeply democratic would need to give particular attention and priority to disadvantaged stakeholders who tend otherwise to remain marginalised. In this vein, for example, case studies in this book show how certain accountability exercises in global governance have enhanced voice for poor producers, women and citizens of weak states.

A further important consideration when identifying ‘the public’ in respect of global governance relates to time. The temporal frame for accountability arguably extends for whatever period given global governance actions have significant impacts. Depending on how one measures ‘significance’, that period could extend from seconds to centuries. Indeed, contemporary demands for reparations in respect of the harms of colonialism imply that accountability can apply over quite a long term. Likewise, some commentators maintain that today’s policymakers are accountable to as-yet unborn future generations for the ecological consequences of current practices. The present discussion is not the place to elaborate on complex ethical issues of responsibility over time; it suffices here to stress that the constituency of a global governance institution has historical as well as social and political parameters.

**Accountability by what means?**

In order to determine who is and is not being served by global governance accountability it is important to identify and assess the institutional mechanisms that a given agency uses in order to enact transparency, consultation, evaluation and redress. One of those channels of accountability – relations with civil society groups – is the subject of special attention in this book. However, before exploring this particular angle in greater detail, it is helpful to contextualise civil society engagement within the wider array of means that are available for making global regulatory institutions answer to stakeholders.

Regrettably, the review that follows suggests that global governance arrangements in general do not at present operate adequate accountability
mechanisms, especially when measured against democratic criteria. To begin with, contemporary global regulatory institutions themselves incorporate very few formal procedures for direct accountability to affected persons. In addition, global governance accountability pursued indirectly through organs of the nation-state tends to be weak as well. Indirect accountability through local, regional and other global regulatory agencies is usually even thinner. Meanwhile informal accountability mechanisms for global governance – for example, as enacted through companies, mass media operations and civil society activities – do not come close to filling the gaps left by formal procedures.

**Direct mechanisms**

To begin with direct links between the governors and the governed, the constitutions of global regulatory agencies lack the principal instruments of democratic accountability that operate in the modern state. No popular elections are held for global executives or global legislatures, so affected publics do not have this basic means of direct consultation and control. In a singular exception to this rule, ICANN conducted an online general election in 2000 for five ‘at large’ directors on its board; however, this unique experiment in putative global representative democracy proved highly problematic and has not been repeated since (Klein 2001). World federalists have proposed various designs of global parliaments (Falk and Strauss 2001; Monbiot 2003), but there is at present no particular prospect that such speculations will bear concrete results in the foreseeable future.

Similarly, global governance bodies generally lack their own judicial processes through which affected constituents might seek evaluation and correction of flawed policies. Such global courts as do exist (e.g. the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris, and the International Criminal Court in Rome) examine cases related to states, firms and individuals; they do not adjudicate on conduct of global regulatory agencies. Nor is it possible for citizens to take a global intergovernmental institution to regional, national or local courts for alleged policy mistakes, since the agency and its personnel generally enjoy immunity from prosecution in respect of the official mandate of the organisation. Meanwhile transgovernmental networks like the G8 do not even have legal personality and so cannot be a named party in court.

In a quasi-judicial construction several global governance institutions have recently established permanent external review bodies that invite testimony from affected stakeholders as part of their assessment exercises. In this vein the World Bank has operated an Inspection Panel since
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1994, and the IMF has had an Independent Evaluation Office since 2001. Yet these units are small and can at most conduct two or three enquiries per year, each involving only a handful of public inputs. Moreover, the recommendations that result from these occasional investigations are not binding. Other global governance agencies lack even this modest scale of regularised formal assessment of their policies. At best, bodies like the Commonwealth, the Global Fund, the OECD and the UN commission an occasional ad hoc external review of certain of their activities.

In sum, then, the contemporary growth in influence of global governance processes has not been accompanied by a corresponding development of formal accountability mechanisms which link these agencies directly to the publics they affect. The principal emphasis in official accountability procedures for planet-spanning governance remains with indirect processes, where connections between the global agency and impacted circles are forged through the mediation of third parties such as national governments, the mass media and civil society organisations.

**Indirect mechanisms: the state**

Today, as in the past, nation-states are generally expected to be the main intermediaries between global governance institutions and citizens. Indeed, state oversight is built into the heart of the constitutions of many global governance bodies. Global intergovernmental institutions normally have an overseeing organ composed of high-ranking delegates of member states. Examples include the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Board of Governors of the IMF and the World Bank, the WTO Ministerial Conference, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers of the OIC, and the OECD Council. Likewise, certain informal global governance instruments such as the Asia-Europe Meeting and the G8 convene periodic summits of state leaders that confirm principal policy initiatives. Some global regulatory agencies also have organs for day-to-day oversight of their operations by representatives of national governments. In this vein the United Nations has its three Councils (Economic and Social, Human Rights, and Security), while the Bretton Woods institutions have their respective Executive Boards. All of this on-site involvement by high-level national ministers and officials keeps global governance agencies of the intergovernmental and transgovernmental kind closely in touch with the views and priorities of their member states.

However, a state-based approach to global governance accountability also has several significant limitations. For example, some global regulatory arrangements like the G8, the OECD and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) have substantial impacts on countries...
whose governments are not members. Although some of these excluded states might be informally consulted from time to time, they have no official seats in the institutions concerned, from which they can speak for their populations. Meanwhile, state monitoring is not integrated at all into the procedures of private global governance instruments like CSER and the WFTO. State involvement is also marginal in the daily operations of hybrid arrangements like the Global Fund and ICANN.

Even where states are members which have delegates integrated into the institutional operations of a global governance agency, those representatives may, especially in the case of weaker states, exercise little effective voice. For instance, how effectively can the government of Bangladesh make WTO arrangements genuinely accountable to the population of that country? How far can the fragile state apparatus in Sierra Leone provide an adequate check and balance on behalf of the national population vis-à-vis the comparatively formidable World Bank?

To be sure, member states working collectively can today still counter the influence of even the strongest global governance institution; yet it is questionable whether the voices of weaker governments obtain much volume in the overall chorus. A handful of states currently dominate most intergovernmental and transgovernmental arrangements, for example, with permanent membership in the UN Security Council and the largest shareholdings in the Bretton Woods institutions. The same elite of states often also figures strongly behind the scenes in private and hybrid regulatory mechanisms (e.g. the US Department of Commerce in relation to ICANN). In contrast, the scores of other states whose jurisdictions together encompass the large majority of humanity may participate in little more than name. Collective actions by the Group of 77 at the UN, the Group of 24 at the IMF and the World Bank, and the Group of 90 at the WTO have on the whole accomplished little in altering hierarchies of state influence in those institutions.

Yet in any case accountability to states, whether they be powerful or weak, does not necessarily translate into accountability to (all) affected people. To be successful mediating agents of global governance accountability, states must in turn answer to those for whom they purport to speak. However, it is not clear that, for instance, government ministers at an OIC conference or technocrats in the World Bank Executive Board are particularly attuned to the needs and opinions of various non-state stakeholders in their home countries. On the whole, only extended and weak chains of accountability link state delegates in a global governance arena to the wider publics that those officials notionally represent.

In principle, tighter democratic accountability of global governance institutions through states could be forged with rigorous oversight by
national parliaments. After all, parliamentarians have direct links to well-defined popular constituencies, and electoral exigencies compel these legislators to be responsive to their voters. Yet in practice national parliamentary scrutiny of a state’s actions in global regulatory arenas has been patchy at best. Indeed, outside North America and Western Europe such oversight has to date barely transpired at all. Global governance issues rarely figure with prominence in national legislative elections anywhere in the world, North or South, and citizens hardly ever take concerns about global governance to their national legislators. National parliaments hold few hearings, let alone full-scale enquiries, into global governance matters. Parliamentary outreach by global regulatory agencies has generally not gone beyond preparing an occasional seminar for legislators. Even more rarely has the director of a global governance body given evidence before a national parliamentary committee.

Developments have been only marginally more promising in respect of actions on global governance taken by international groupings of national legislators. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (in existence since 1889) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (created in 1911) have performed no noteworthy scrutiny of global governance institutions. A somewhat stronger record has come from Parliamentarians for Global Action, a grouping of over 1,300 members from 110 national legislatures that has addressed various United Nations activities since the late 1970s. A Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNoWB) has operated since 2000 with an explicit aim to enhance the accountability of that institution. However, efforts since 2003 to create a similar Parliamentary Conference on the WTO have made less progress, and initiatives of this kind have not arisen at all in respect of other global governance bodies.

Given these and other disappointments, many citizens today have limited faith that their national government (either the executive or the legislative branch) can deliver adequate democratic accountability of any kind, whether in respect of global governance or more generally. High, and in many cases rising, levels of voter absenteeism are one obvious indicator of this scepticism. Indeed, rather than turn to the state to make global governance more accountable, some citizens today conversely look to global regulatory mechanisms to make their state more accountable. Using this so-called ‘boomerang’ tactic (Keck and Sikkink 1998), a number of human rights campaigners have sought to counter the democratic failings of their state through UN bodies. Likewise, civil society groups in some countries have used the Bretton Woods institutions to press for greater fiscal accountability in their national governments.

Still another way that states are, by themselves, inadequate as agents of global governance accountability relates to insufficient representation...
of political identities. The modern state generally addresses ‘the demos’ in terms of a national community whose homeland corresponds to the terrain of the state’s jurisdiction. However, people in contemporary global affairs hold more complex political identities than their national citizenship alone. For example, many diasporas, faith groups, indigenous communities, peasant circles, sexual minorities and women’s movements do not feel that the government of the country in which they reside ‘represents’ them sufficiently. Likewise, disabled persons could justifiably complain that states took until 2006 to pass a convention through the UN regarding their specific rights. Various non-national publics therefore seek alternative mechanisms in addition to, or even instead of, the state in order to obtain fuller accountability from global governance institutions.

In sum, then, while states singly and together can be an important force for accountable global governance, they have proved to be far from sufficient on their own. Many states obtain limited voice in global regulatory organisations or are excluded from membership altogether. Weak states can be in highly dependent relationships to some global governance agencies. National parliaments, both individually and collectively, have comprehensively neglected their potentials for advancing accountable global governance. Many states themselves have poor democratic credentials vis-à-vis all or part of their resident populations, including significant circles of people who do not turn solely or even substantially to the state to advance their political destiny. Accountable global governance therefore needs more than oversight by national governments.

Other indirect mechanisms
If global governance agencies provide barely any direct accountability to affected persons, and if states provide only limited indirect accountability, what other indirect mechanisms could be available to address the remaining substantial democratic deficits? Some of the potential additional channels are official, namely through governance agencies constructed on other than national scales (local governments, regional institutions and other global regulatory bodies). Further possible channels of indirect accountability are unofficial, including corporate, media and civil society activities.

Given that local and regional institutions operate in contemporary governance with some relative autonomy from national governments, these substate and suprastate agencies could in principle extract some supplementary accountability from global regulatory bodies. Indeed, certain global governance instruments like UCLG and ASEM are themselves built around, and direct their accountability in the first place to, local
and regional bodies rather than nation-states. Overall, however, trans-local and interregional organisations have so far occupied only a tangential place in global governance.

Nor have local authorities made significant arrangements to monitor global intergovernmental and transgovernmental agencies, in the way that municipal and provincial bodies maintain a substantial presence in Brussels to engage the European Union. A few associations of local authorities hold consultative status at the UN, but they play only the most marginal of roles in that institution. Substate agencies are absent altogether in most other global regulatory agencies. Thus while local government may be the scale of governance that generally operates with closest proximity to the everyday lives of most people, at present municipal and provincial authorities generally do little to connect their constituents to global regimes.

As for suprastate regional governance institutions, at present only the EU has the potential to extract much accountability from global regulatory bodies. This significance is particularly striking in the WTO, where the EU rather than any of its member states is the principal player. The future may also see an EU seat replace those of the relevant member states on the overseeing boards of the Bretton Woods institutions. For its part the EU Parliament (directly elected since 1979 and now numbering 785 deputies) has given some, albeit irregular, attention to global governance matters, particularly in respect of trade; however, this scrutiny has not on the whole had major accountability effects.

Among regional institutions the EU is an exception in pursuing even limited global governance accountability. Other bodies, such as the African Union (AU), ASEAN and MERCOSUR, have to date barely made an appearance in global regulatory arenas. They have therefore done nothing of note to advance transparency, consultation, evaluation and redress in global governance agencies. Likewise other regional parliaments, such as the Consultative Assembly of the Arab Maghreb Union (launched in 1989) and the Latin American Parliament (operating since 1987), have generally done even less than national legislatures when it comes to monitoring global regulatory institutions.

Another possible channel of accountability vis-à-vis global governance institutions is among the planet-spanning agencies themselves; yet these relationships, too, have contributed little to date. The United Nations has at times aspired to the status of *primus inter pares* among planet-spanning regulatory institutions, where for example all global economic institutions would report to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). However, in practice this wider oversight by the UN is weak. Indeed, many recently created global governance arrangements (especially those
of a transgovernmental and private character) ignore the UN altogether. Meanwhile, in the reverse direction other global agencies accomplish little by way of holding the UN itself to account.

Some degree of informal peer review does operate among global economic institutions. In this vein management and staff of agencies such as the BIS, G8, IMF, OECD, UN, World Bank and WTO critically monitor one another’s work through regular contacts. However, this mutual surveillance has a mainly technocratic character, centred on the niceties of macroeconomics. It also operates within a narrow and fairly closed circle of global managerial elites. Such processes of professional peer review incorporate few inputs from the experiences and preferences of wider publics and hence do little to strengthen democratic accountability.

Turning to unofficial channels, global governance accountability can be indirectly pursued through corporations, whether as individual firms or as business associations like the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) and the World Economic Forum (WEF). Corporate lobbies have developed significant relationships with most global regulatory agencies, especially those institutions that work in the fields of finance and trade. Indeed, many private global governance mechanisms – for example the IASB, the International Capital Market Association (ICMA) and the large gamut of CSER schemes – are borne of business initiatives. In addition, corporate philanthropy has become a significant source of financing for much of the UN system as well as for a number of public-private hybrid instruments such as the Global Fund. In these different ways business-based pressures for accountable global governance can come with considerable clout.

Yet, as and when corporate actors do seek to make global governance institutions more accountable, the crucial issues remain to what end and for whose benefit that accountability operates. The capitalist enterprises that dominate contemporary production normally focus on a ‘bottom line’ of financial profitability and a corresponding principal concern to advance shareholder interests. Those priorities do not necessarily further public interests of efficiency and/or democracy; indeed, they can sometimes lead companies to undermine these interests, for example with cartel behaviour and the exercise of undue influence over political parties. Drives to maximise financial returns may also sit uneasily with other qualities of a good society such as cultural creativity, distributive justice, ecological integrity and peace. Increased accountability to the corporate sector could therefore in some ways actually contradict urgent contemporary needs for more effective and legitimate global governance.

Recognising these tensions, some business circles have in recent times adopted notions of ‘corporate social and environmental responsibility’
that aim to broaden the accountability concerns of companies beyond shareholder returns alone. However, this promotion of a ‘triple bottom line’ (financial, social and ecological) has chiefly emanated from larger firms in the Anglophone North. CSER remains a relatively minor trend in overall business circles worldwide. Even companies that have embraced the principle have thus far often done so more in rhetoric than in concrete action. Indeed, sceptics worry that CSER is a minimalist exercise whose main aim is to pre-empt a more constraining public sector regulation of business, including through new planet-spanning bodies like a Global Competition Office, a Global Environmental Organisation and a Global Tax Authority. In any case, even where promoters of CSER work with the general interest at heart, global governance accountability pursued through companies can at best supplement public mechanisms. No amount of CSER can adequately reconcile the inherent tensions in privately owned capitalist enterprise between shareholder concerns and the overall public good.

This general conclusion also holds with respect to the specific mass media sector of corporate business. Certainly print, broadcast and Internet communications can in principle do much to advance democratically accountable governance, including in regard to global regulatory institutions. For one thing, the mass media can provide important channels to enhance the public transparency of global governance agencies. After all, newspapers, radio, television and websites constitute the main sources of day-to-day political information for most citizens in contemporary society. In addition, mass media reporting of public views regarding a given global governance policy or programme can constitute a sort of indirect stakeholder consultation. Likewise, investigative journalism can serve as an important informal evaluation mechanism in respect of global governance. The mass media can also provide powerful channels through which adversely impacted publics can demand redress from global regulatory bodies. Sympathetic media coverage is now pretty well indispensable to the satisfaction of political grievances. Given this substantial influence of mass communications in contemporary politics, most major global governance agencies have in recent decades devoted considerable attention to media relations, for example by hiring relevant experts onto their secretariats and by instituting media training for their professional staff.

Yet in practice the mass media have not extracted nearly as much accountability from global governance agencies as might be attained. For one thing the main print, broadcast and Internet outlets have provided at best incidental coverage of global regulatory institutions. Moreover, many journalists are poorly educated on global governance, so that their
accounts of these matters are steeped in superficiality and inaccuracy. If affected publics are largely unaware even of the existence of many global governance arrangements, let alone the modus operandi and policies of those organisations, this ignorance is in good part due to the failure of mainstream mass media to report this information. In most cases the high-circulation outlets tend, particularly with commercial interests in view, to present only those relatively few global governance stories that involve scandal or compelling visual footage. Indeed, the capitalist media conglomerates that dominate contemporary global mass communications arguably have little interest in cultivating large-scale critical public awareness of the prevailing regimes that sustain their power. Alternative non-profit outlets such as Indy Media and openDemocracy provide possibilities to pursue deeper accountability in global governance, but their operations and audiences are small. On the whole, therefore, the mass media do little to fill accountability gaps vis-à-vis planet-spanning regulation.

Mass media, corporate business and broad networks of governance agencies: both singly and collectively, the various direct and indirect means reviewed above for extracting accountability from global governance arrangements are highly unsatisfactory. The problem is both quantitative and qualitative. Regarding quantity, these diverse channels generate inadequate amounts of transparency, consultation, evaluation and redress from global regulatory bodies. Regarding quality, these channels generally bias the limited accountability that is obtained towards the advantaged and the powerful, in terms of social strata as well as geographical areas of the world.

Civil society

What then of civil society, the particular concern of this book? In what ways and to what extents do civil society associations provide channels of accountability in respect of global governance institutions? How far do these citizen action groups make planet-spanning regulatory bodies answer for their conduct to affected people? In particular, can civil society activities bring the required: (a) quantitatively, major increases in overall levels of global governance accountability; and (b) qualitatively, substantial redistributions of global governance accountabilities towards less privileged countries and social circles? The next thirteen chapters explore these questions in relation to a range of global regulatory institutions.

As a preliminary step, however, the present conceptual framing chapter examines the general notion of civil society as it relates to global
governance. To that end the discussion below first sets out contrasting definitions of civil society and elaborates on the approach adopted in this book. The discussion then reviews the highly diverse manifestations of civil society that exist in relation to global governance. Further remarks consider the sometimes limited ‘civility’ of civil society and the consequent need for thorough accountability of civil society associations as well as global governance agencies.

**General conceptions of civil society**

Like ‘global governance’ and ‘accountability’, ‘civil society’ has multiple and deeply contested definitions. These conceptions have also varied widely over time since the Latin term *societas civilis* first appeared more than two millennia ago. Aristotle, Locke, Ferguson, Hegel, Gramsci and other political philosophers have meant very different things by the concept (Cohen and Arato 1992). Different generations and different theories have appropriated the phrase ‘civil society’ in diverse ways in accordance with different contexts and different political struggles.

Today as well, notions of civil society arguably require some reinvention in order that they generate maximal insight and maximal democratic gains in respect of emergent conditions of polycentric governance. Modern political theory has generally conceptualised civil society in relation to the state. However, as seen earlier, contemporary governance extends beyond nation-states. In this light it makes sense to think of civil society in relation to a governance apparatus more generically, rather than in connection with the state per se. At an earlier historical juncture, when the mode of governance was statist, civil society engaged the state alone. However, at the present time, when the mode of governance is shifting towards polycentrism, civil society engages complex regulatory networks that involve multiple types of actors, including global governance agencies. Civil society today also relates to transplanetary regulatory institutions directly and in their own right, and not merely as adjuncts of states.

But what, more precisely, is ‘civil society’? Four main contemporary usages of the term might be distinguished. First, for some analysts civil society refers to a general quality of a given human collectivity. From this perspective a ‘civil’ society is one where people relate with each other on a basis of openness, tolerance, respect, trust and non-violence (Keane 2003). A second type of definition identifies civil society as a political space, an arena where citizens congregate to deliberate on the actual and prospective circumstances of their collective life. This conception overlaps considerably with notions of ‘the public sphere’ (Habermas 1962; Fraser...
2007) and ‘deliberative democracy’ (Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Bohman 2007). A third general approach treats civil society as the sum total of associational life within a given human collectivity (Tocqueville 1835). In this case civil society encompasses every non-official and non-profit organisation outside the family, including bodies like recreational clubs that lack an overtly political character. This third perspective is also broadly reflected in notions of ‘social capital’ (Putnam 2000). A fourth formulation, invoked widely in policy circles today, sees civil society as the aggregate of so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs). On these lines civil society involves a ‘third sector’ (alongside governance agencies and market actors) of formally organised, legally registered and professionally staffed non-profit bodies that undertake advocacy and/or service delivery activities in respect of some public policy issue (Salamon et al. 1999).

Needless to say, assessments of the extent and consequences of civil society activities in regard to global governance accountability will vary depending on which of these four conceptions one adopts. Analyses based on notions of ‘civil’ society, or the public sphere, or social capital, or NGOs will generate very different results. The choice of definition therefore cannot be taken lightly and requires careful justification both intellectually and politically.

The present book draws primarily on the second type of conception distinguished above, while giving it some of the emphasis on associational life found in the third and fourth approaches. Civil society is taken here to entail a political space where associations of citizens seek, from outside political parties, to shape societal rules. As understood in the analyses that follow, then, civil society activities are an enactment of citizenship, that is, they are practices through which people claim rights and fulfil obligations as members of a given polity. These initiatives are also collective, that is, they involve citizens assembling in groups that share concerns about, and mobilise around, a particular problem of public affairs. In engaging that problem civil society associations are especially interested to affect the rules (i.e. norms, standards, principles, laws and policies) that govern the issue at hand. As self-consciously political actions, civil society operations are steeped in struggles to impact the ways that power in society is acquired, distributed and exercised. However, civil society efforts to shape governance do not – in the way of political parties – aim to attain or retain public office.

This conception of civil society seems more helpful, both theoretically and practically, than other available alternatives when it comes to assessing the effectiveness and legitimacy of contemporary global governance. The first notion identified above, that of civil society as a quality
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of civility in society, is a broad descriptor that adds little analytical value in respect of contemporary global social relations. With this approach the concept merely confirms the obvious, namely that openness, tolerance, respect, trust and non-violence are today often lacking in transplanetary social spaces.

The third conception has, significantly, helped Alexis de Tocqueville and others to see that the collective life of human beings involves more than states and markets. This principle applies as well to global spheres, where many relationships (e.g. among a diaspora or sufferers of a common disease) are not reducible to governmental and commercial logics. However, beyond this important general insight the concept of civil society as the totality of associational life is too diffuse to offer much guidance in research and policy (Chandhoke 2003). From this perspective everything from sports tournaments and travel clubs to environmental campaigns and human rights advocacy falls under one roof. More exact parameters are wanted so as to obtain a more precise assessment of the activities and impacts of civil society.

Going too far in the other direction, the fourth conception – that of civil society as the sum total of NGOs – is overly restrictive. This definition tends to exclude collective actions, such as found in social movements, which are not formally institutionalised, legally certified and professionally administered. Yet much citizen engagement of governance occurs outside an NGO framework, particularly when it involves non-Western political cultures and/or more subversive resistance. Global governance institutions generally favour a concept of civil society as NGOs inasmuch as bureaucracies generally find it more convenient to deal with other bureaucracies. Moreover, NGOs often (though not always) present fewer challenges to deeper social and political structures than other less bureaucratic forms of civil society organisation (Fisher 1997). It is important that research and policy consider the full range of possible citizen initiatives in respect of global governance and that the starting definition of civil society does not, in advance, exclude substantial areas of potentially significant activities.

Indeed, various commentators have come to interrogate the very term ‘civil society’ as being politically suspect. In a Gramscian vein, some sceptics worry that hegemonic power has promoted ‘civil society’ (particularly in the sense of an aggregation of depoliticised NGOs) as a way to discipline dissent and promote a false legitimacy for an oppressive capitalist order. In a post-colonialist vein, radical critics also worry that ‘civil society’ is so steeped in Western theory and practice that, in an imperialist project, it invariably marginalises and silences other political cultures (Germain and Kenny 2005).
While recognising these dangers, the present book is not as ready to dispense with a concept that has, in many contexts over a number of centuries, deepened analytical insight and advanced democratic practice. Certainly, ideas of ‘civil society’ must be employed carefully and critically so that the activities in question are not captured for hegemonic and imperialist ends – and thereby detract from democratic accountability. However, with vigilance against such co-optation and a determined focus on democratic purpose, it would seem that the particular definition of civil society invoked here can in fact be politically opportune, helping various subordinated circles in today’s more global society to gain recognition, voice, resources and influence.

**Manifestations of civil society**

If civil society is understood to be a political space where citizen groups seek, from outside political parties, to shape societal rules, what kinds of activities fall within this arena? In particular, what sorts of civil society initiatives might seek to extract greater accountability from global governance agencies? Who in civil society pursues transparency, consultation, evaluation and correction in respect of global regulatory arrangements like the WTO, ASEM, the climate change regime and ICANN?

The answers to these questions all involve diversity. Civil society actions in respect of global governance vary enormously in size (small to large), duration (ephemeral to long term), geographical scope (local to global), cultural context (diverse modernities to non-modernities), resource levels (dystopic to affluent), constituencies (broad general interests to narrow special interests), ideologies (conformist to transformist), strategies (cautious to reckless) and tactics (collaboration to confrontation). With such huge variations it is difficult to draw specific overall conclusions about civil society impacts on global governance accountability.

In terms of issues of concern, the wide spectrum of civil society associations involved in global affairs includes animal rights activists, anti-poverty movements, business forums, caste solidarity groups, clan and kinship mobilisations, consumer advocates, democracy promoters, development co-operation initiatives, disabled persons alliances, environmental campaigns, ethnic lobbies, faith-based associations, human rights advocates, labour unions, local community groups, peace drives, peasant movements, philanthropic foundations, professional bodies, relief organisations, research institutes, sexual minorities associations, women’s networks, and youth groups. As this list again emphasises, civil society in the conception adopted here takes multiple cultural forms and extends beyond NGOs to other types of actors.
Regarding cultural diversity, the content and style of civil society engagement of global governance varies greatly between, for example, the actions of pygmy groups in respect of World Bank support of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline, and Japan-based peace associations advocating a ban on landmines. Religious and secular organisations often co-exist uneasily in civil society relations with the UN. Asia-based and Europe-based civil society initiatives bring diverse political cultures to the table at ASEM congregations. Anglophone civil society relating to the Commonwealth is one thing, while Muslim civil society relating to the OIC is quite another. Amazonian groups invoke a discourse of ‘florestania’ in preference to that of ‘citizenship’ to convey their alternative, more ecologically centred, understanding of rights and obligations within a polity (GTA 2005). In short, while notions of civil society were until the late twentieth century long rooted in Western political theory and action, contemporary understandings and practices of civil society are most emphatically multicultural (Hann and Dunn 1996).

Regarding the types of actors involved, the inclusion of business forums in civil society is controversial for some and is indeed rejected by several contributors to the present book. Usually this exclusion rests on the argument that the business sector aims to advance self-interests of profit maximisation, whereas civil society should promote general public interests on a non-profit basis. However, a distinction can arguably be drawn between, on the one hand, business forums as civil society associations and, on the other, individual companies as market players. As civil society actors, chambers of commerce, employer federations, and issue-based corporate initiatives like the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) are often concerned with more than immediate financial returns for their members. Thus, for example, the Bretton Woods Committee, which assembles 700 members mainly from large corporations, has lent its weight to campaigns for poor-country debt relief (Orr 2002). Meanwhile other business associations that seek to shape societal rules are quite detached from big capital, including alternatively minded groups that promote creative commons licences, fair trade schemes, micro-credits, open source computer programming, and collective action by street vendors. Indeed, other civil society groups such as ethnic lobbies and labour unions can focus on narrow sectoral interests no less than some industry associations. Moreover, many advocacy groups like Amnesty International and Oxfam obtain substantial income from retail sales. Given such considerations the exclusion of business forums from civil society lacks logical consistency. The move is also politically dubious. The heavy weight of big business in contemporary advocacy operations may pose a major challenge to democratic
global governance, but this problem is not satisfactorily addressed by wishing business-based citizen associations out of the definition of civil society.

Likewise, analysts disagree on whether political parties should, as in this book, be excluded from the scope of civil society. After all, as members of political parties citizens also openly seek to shape the rules that govern various aspects of social life. However, the position adopted here maintains that an important qualitative difference exists between activities which have as their aim the attainment of public office and those which keep greater institutional distance. Of course every dividing line blurs in practice, for example as individuals move between positions in civil society and officialdom. Meanwhile some environmental organisations and trade unions have tight connections with green parties and labour parties, respectively. In addition, fringe political parties may have as little expectation of leading a governance administration as student movements and human rights associations. Nevertheless, the general distinction between political parties and civil society associations identifies a significant difference in emphasis between the logics of plebiscites and representative democracy on the one hand and the logics of deliberation and participatory democracy on the other. Electoral-legislative strategies and civil society operations involve very different (albeit potentially complementary) ways of exacting accountability from governance authorities.

The civility of civil society

While the notion of civil society as developed above usefully highlights a distinctive and significant dimension of political life, the terminology unfortunately carries some potentially misleading normative connotations. In particular, the adjective ‘civil’ can understandably be read to imply that the actors and activities in question have intrinsically positive consequences for effective and legitimate governance. The term can suggest that ‘civil society’ is inherently a good thing, promoting openness, respect, tolerance, trust and peace.

Indeed, many civil society initiatives do have positive qualities of this kind. Peace movements have often furthered arms control, non-violent conflict resolution and intercultural understanding. Human rights advocates have countered arbitrary detention and torture, as well as advanced the dignity of disabled persons, indigenous populations, outcastes, people of colour, sexual minorities and women. Citizen campaigns for animal rights and ecological integrity have on various occasions raised moral standards in human treatment of the rest of nature. Trade unions
have in many contexts promoted decent working conditions. Consumer activists have also ‘civilised’ market relations after the production phase. Development solidarity groups, religious as well as secular, have frequently put issues of global distributive justice on the political agenda. All of this is to the good.

However, civil society is not inherently civil. The kinds of beneficial outcomes just described do not flow automatically from collective citizen action outside political parties. On the contrary, these positive impacts result from, and require, deliberate choices and concerted efforts. In other cases civil society initiatives can have negative consequences. These ‘uncivil’ potentials are most blatant in activities with criminal, fundamentalist, militarist, racist and terrorist qualities. After all, Al-Qaeda, Aum Shinrikyo, Gush Emunim, the Interahamwe, the Ku Klux Klan and global paedophile networks are also ‘associations of citizens that seek, from outside political parties, to shape societal rules’. Many other civil society organisations also operate through arrogance, fraud, greed, hatred, narcissism and violence. In such cases of harm rather than good, ‘civil society’ can seem something of a misnomer (Ahrne 1998; Chambers and Kopstein 2001; Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Kaldor and Muro 2003).

Civil society associations can also exhibit more subtle democratic failings. For example, many of these organisations are insufficiently transparent regarding their aims, structure, procedures, personnel and funding. In addition, the group culture of some civil society initiatives may inhibit open and critical internal debate. Some citizen action organisations are captive of a particular business enterprise, family network, governance institution, political party or philanthropist. In many cases a given civil society body can be difficult to access, even for people whose interests the association claims to promote. Often civil society organisations fail to undertake searching evaluations of their own conduct and offer few if any mechanisms for redress when they err and cause harm.

Given these potential flaws, it is vital that civil society groups diligently pursue their own accountabilities as part of their strivings to improve the accountabilities of other actors. The question of civil society and accountable global governance is therefore partly a question of the accountability of the civil society associations themselves. Some citizen action groups engaging in global affairs have developed laudable good practices in this regard. The International Non-Governmental Organisations Accountability Charter launched in 2006 offers one possible way forward (INGO 2007). However, much further work is needed to enhance transparency, consultation, evaluation and correction in the operations of civil society organisations as they engage globally.
In sum, then, this book takes no *a priori* position on the desirability or otherwise of civil society involvement in global governance. The starting point is that global governance suffers major shortfalls in accountability and that civil society could, in principle, help to close these gaps. However, the actual nature of civil society influences on global governance accountability, positive and/or negative, cannot be established in advance. These assessments require detailed empirical investigations of the sort that are undertaken in the case studies that follow.

**Conclusion**

If nothing else, this opening chapter has demonstrated that the relationship between civil society and accountability in global governance is anything but straightforward. Each of the three pivotal concepts – ‘global governance’, ‘accountability’ and ‘civil society’ – is subject to multiple and deeply contested interpretations. As emphasised at the outset, the purpose of this chapter has not been to resolve these theoretical and political disputes, but to outline a broad framework of analysis that lends internal coherence to the present collective research endeavour.

This framework is anything but apolitical. The study is unabashedly motivated by deep concern to promote democratic accountability as a cornerstone for effective and legitimate global governance. This chapter has therefore placed explicit emphasis throughout on identifying power relations and ways to democratise them. At the same time the conceptual framework guiding the book is not ideological, in the sense of imposing a particular vision for the future of global governance and the place of civil society within it. Individual authors and readers can and should draw their own conclusions in that regard.

The ensuing more empirical chapters now proceed to assess civil society impacts on the accountabilities of a range of specific global governance institutions. To this end each of the case studies sets out:

(a) the mandate and activities of the global regulatory apparatus concerned, thereby establishing for what that institution is accountable;

(b) the accountability challenges that the global governance arrangement in question faces, including in particular the shortfalls that remain after considering channels other than civil society (such as governments, parliaments and mass media);

(c) the range of civil society engagements of the global governance institution under discussion, including diverse issue foci, organisational forms and ideological positions;
(d) the accountability effects on the global regulatory agency of that civil society involvement, in other words how the citizen group interventions have and have not advanced transparency, consultation, evaluation and redress in respect of the global regulatory agency concerned – and in particular how well civil society involvements have supplemented other accountability mechanisms and filled the gaps left by those other channels;

(e) the main circumstances that have helped or hindered civil society contributions to democratically accountable global governance in the case at hand.

The concluding chapter then synthesises these findings and reflects on their implications for future practices of civil society and accountable global governance.
Accountability for Civil Society by Civil Society: A Guide to Self-Regulation Initiatives. Compiled and edited by Dorothée Guénéheux & Alison Bottomley April 2014. We are CIVICUS, the only global alliance dedicated to enhancing the rights, freedoms, health and vitality of civil society as a whole. We’ve worked for two decades to strengthen civic action and civil society throughout the world. We believe a healthy society is one where people have multiple opportunities to participate, come together, deliberate and act for the common good. The world is rich in voluntary bodies, charities, campaigning organisations, rights-based social movements, protest and other citizen groups. Collectively, we call this civil society. Uniquely, our purpose is to strengthen global civil society serves to channel global public opinions and put policy ideas onto the international agenda. It indirectly strengthens the capacity of the subjects to influence global actions and enhances the accountability of international decision-making processes. Admittedly, global civil society has its own democratic deficits, most notably the problem of accountability and representation within the organizations due to the absence of direct elections. Global civil society, with a clear North domination, is also challenged of being unable to represent the people it aims to help.