

Global Governance Research

Exploring Patterns of Growth, Diversity, and Inclusion

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Abstract

Global governance has been widely embraced as an object of analysis and as a way of “seeing” world politics. Yet we still know little about how publishing has evolved. This article presents the first systematic exploration of these patterns. It uses an original dataset of global governance research to answer three first-order questions: How has publishing varied over time? What issues have scholars focused on? And who has been publishing in the field? The authors found that research has grown and become increasingly diverse—but selectively so. Some marginalized issues feature more prominently than in the rest of international relations, but there are blind spots too. Further, while research is less American and women have been comparatively more active relative to other areas, geographical diversity remains extremely limited. Scholars based in the Global South have been the first authors of less than 14 percent of all publications. To conclude, the article reflects on implications for the field.

Keywords

global governance – international relations – research – publishing – diversity – inclusion

1 Introduction¹

The idea of “global governance” has been remarkably fecund. Prior to the 1990s, the term was hardly used. It made fleeting appearances in the writings of scholars, but was rarely the focus of sustained analysis. Now, the situation could not be more different. As Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall have said, the idea seems to have “attained near-celebrity status,” becoming “one of the central orienting themes in the practice and study of international affairs.”² It is discussed at the highest levels of government, scholars write articles and books on the topic, and academic careers are defined by it. Courses on global governance are common, and many universities offer master’s degrees and doctorates too. There are workshops, conferences, and journals—including, of course, *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*. And by one count, there are more than twenty university centers, at least eleven major research programs, and five foundations and think tanks that orient their work around the topic.³ Only a few ideas in the social sciences have birthed such an expansive field of scholarly endeavor in such a short period of time.

In view of the enormous interest in global governance, it should not be surprising that there have been numerous efforts to map the idea’s evolution in scholarly work, and, in some cases, to propose ways of “rethinking” its use.⁴ Such studies have traced its growth in the 1990s and explored how the idea has been employed by researchers. Many have noted the lack of consensus on a precise meaning of the term. Some have approached global governance as a new phenomenon that can be the object of social scientific analyses. James Rosenau famously defined it as “systems of rule at all levels of human activity—from the

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2 Barnett and Duvall 2005, 1.

3 Jordana, Schmitt, and Holesch 2020.

4 Ba and Hoffmann 2005; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006; Hofferberth 2016; Roger and Dauvergne 2016; Weiss and Wilkinson 2019.

family to the international organization—in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions.”⁵ Meanwhile, others have regarded global governance as a new perspective that highlights diverse forms of authority and transnational processes, providing concepts and language that can help us make sense of contemporary global politics.⁶ Most often, it is both: a set of interrelated tools and ideas for analyzing the novel patterns of cross-border cooperation that have been appearing at the start of the twenty-first century.

However, while there have been many studies of global governance over the past thirty years, few have investigated patterns of research and publishing on the topic. This is much more surprising, particularly given the degree to which global governance research has become institutionalized over time. The more self-reflective studies that have been published have been enormously valuable for connecting the work done in different areas, for furthering thought, and for reorienting academic work. But they inevitably focus on a narrow range of themes, particular issues, and the writings of a few prominent scholars. Ultimately, they are concerned with the evolution of ideas, not academic practices like research and teaching. As a result, they tell us little about how global governance is actually studied and taught around the world and offer only tentative answers to important questions about academic relevance, rigor, and inclusiveness. Within the discipline of international relations (IR), a growing number of studies have done so. The Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) project, for example, has been tracking academic practices in IR, revealing both welcome and worrying trends.⁷ But these only speak indirectly to research on global governance in particular.

In this article our aim is to develop a comprehensive picture of the study of global governance that can open an informed discussion about the history of this field, its present shape, and its future direction. To do so, we present findings from a new database of peer-reviewed journal articles that either claim to examine global governance, or which adopt a global governance “lens” to investigate world politics. This provides us with a broadly representative sample of all the articles published on the topic and allows us to map top-level patterns in the field. In doing so, we have focused on three core questions: How has publishing varied over time? What issues have scholars focused on? And finally, who has been publishing in the field? The first of these focuses on the ebb and flow of research: How has it evolved across different periods? The second

5 Rosenau 1995, 13.

6 Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006.

7 Maliniak et al. 2011; Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013; Maliniak et al. 2018.

focuses on the topics that have been studied: Which have been more central or peripheral? The third aims to assess broader issues of inclusiveness within the field: Whose voices are typically being heard?

These are first-order questions that reflect enduring issues in academic research. For scholars of global governance, the way scholarship has evolved relates to issues of academic relevance. Certainly, there is little doubt that writing on the topic has exploded since the 1990s. But how much has been published, and has interest in global governance been sustained since that time? This is an especially important question at present. Many have attributed the initial growth of research to the unique post-Cold War moment when opportunities for revitalizing international cooperation reached new heights.⁸ Today, though, this moment seems to have faded. Now, there are concerns about gridlock, great-power competition, a declining liberal order, and populist resistance to “globalism.”⁹ One might reasonably wonder, therefore, whether the idea has remained relevant in this new environment. Have global changes led to a decline in interest in the subject, or reduced use of global governance as a lens for observing world politics? Or, alternatively, has interest proven resilient—perhaps, becoming even more salient? Observing publishing trends can help us answer this question about the vitality of the field.

Our interest in the second and third questions has been motivated by concerns about scholarly priorities and inclusiveness. Many IR scholars have raised questions about the “globality” of the discipline and biases in the types of issues scholars focus on. The TRIP project, for example, has revealed a discrepancy between the issues that scholars regard as the “most important” foreign policy challenges and the topics covered by prominent academic journals.¹⁰ Amitav Acharya, Evelyn Goh, and others have also made powerful calls for the discipline to widen its horizons by prioritizing issues of importance beyond “the West” and including a wider range of cases and voices.¹¹ The criticisms underlying such calls dovetail with widespread concerns about race- and gender-based discrimination in IR.¹² We ask, therefore, whether these dynamics can be found in the study of global governance too? In a sense, by breaking away from traditional IR categories and offering a “global” perspective, we might expect global

8 Falk 1995; Weiss and Wilkinson 2019; Acharya and Buzan 2019; Franke and Hofferberth 2021.

9 Hale, Held, and Young 2013; Cooley and Nexon 2020.

10 Climate change, for instance, is regularly ranked among the most pressing issues, but remains on the margins of IR; see Green and Hale 2017.

11 Acharya and Buzan 2019; Goh 2019.

12 Maliniak et al. 2008; Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013; Zvobgo and Loken 2020; Hutchings and Owens 2021.

governance research to be more sensitive to wider concerns and more inclusive than the discipline itself. At the same time, given that scholarship on the topic has been centrally located in IR, it is plausible that these patterns are simply replicated here.

In the next section, we focus on situating this project and explaining our approach to data collection. The following three sections then explain what our data tell us about the questions outlined above. Overall, we found that global governance research has grown considerably, and that the idea has been adapted to study phenomena across numerous issue areas. Scholarship has also responded to major international events, like September 11, the 2008 financial crisis, and the migration crisis, suggesting that global governance ideas have been useful for explaining many contemporary trends. We show, however, that the field is nevertheless somewhat uneven. One positive aspect of this is that these ideas appear to have been helpful for analyzing some pressing issues that have been relatively neglected in IR, including the environment and global health, where novel governance arrangements may be especially common. Yet there are blind spots as well, possibly because such arrangements are less pervasive in other areas and associated ideas are not especially well suited to understanding their dynamics: work on international security, for instance, has been a major focus of IR scholars, but is not well represented in the literature. Finally, but relatedly, we found that those most engaged in global governance research are somewhat distinct: they are less American and more likely to be women, for instance. However, geographical diversity remains low. Indeed, global governance research is not especially global.

In the final section, we look forward, outlining some of the next questions and actions that researchers and academic leaders should prioritize. We call on researchers to reflect on the kinds of issues and scholars that have historically been included and excluded from global governance debates, the factors that have limited diversity in our community, and what might be done to promote it in the future. Ultimately, though, our aim is not to provide definite solutions, but to start a conversation that has seldom taken place in this field and badly needs to occur.

2 Examining the Study of Global Governance

Within IR, a growing number of studies have begun to systematically analyze trends in academic teaching and research. Relying on databases of journal articles, faculty surveys, collections of course syllabi, and other sources, these have increasingly provided a comprehensive picture of academic practices.

Some of the most well-developed studies along these lines have been produced by scholars associated with the TRIP project, which has been tracking disciplinary trends since 2003. However, many others have used similar approaches to understand patterns in subfields like international security, global environmental politics, and international political economy, or trends in specific countries and regions.¹³ Numerous issues have been addressed, and our understanding of the discipline has expanded considerably. Such analyses have allowed scholars to explore inter alia questions about scholarly priorities and methods, about undergraduate- and graduate-level teaching and learning, and about race- and gender-based discrimination.

Despite its apparent growth and institutionalization over the past thirty years, the study of global governance has been neglected. Those who have taken stock of research have tended to offer reviews of major ideas and changing themes, providing useful but ultimately somewhat impressionistic pictures of research trends. Studies, like those by Rorden Wilkinson and Thomas Weiss, tell us about the most important, path-breaking innovations, and have made powerful calls for rethinking key ideas. In doing so, they have often hinted at broader patterns of research and publishing.¹⁴ But, ultimately, they offer only snapshots of what has been happening. Arguably, only a few studies undertaken by the editors of *Global Governance* in the early 2000s have offered something closer to a synoptic view.¹⁵ However, their intention was mainly to inform editorial practices by comparing publishing in *Global Governance* with journals like *International Organization* and *International Affairs*. The data collected was, accordingly, quite narrow in scope, and the last was published in 2005. At present, then, the studies we have are dated and limited in terms of their ability to illuminate academic practices.

Our aim in this article is to provide a comprehensive picture of academic publishing that can inform discussions of the past, present, and future of our field. We do so by constructing a database of journal articles where global governance features as an explicit object of analysis or is employed as an analytical lens for understanding world politics. This was done by combining search results from two journal article databases: Scopus and Proquest. These provide comprehensive catalogues of academic articles, covering tens of thousands of journals, along with other sources, like books and newspapers, in numerous languages. In each case, we conducted a search for articles that include “global

13 Kristensen 2015; Seabrooke and Young 2017; Green and Hale 2017; Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar 2020.

14 Weiss and Wilkinson 2019.

15 Knight, Macfarlane, and Weiss 2005.

governance,” or a close domain-specific variant of the term, in either its title, abstract, or list of keywords.¹⁶ The location of the term in these places suggests that global governance is the main focus of an analysis, or that a work relies on the idea as dominant framing device, and likely makes use of associated concepts to “see” world politics. We limited our search to the years between 1975 and 2019 and looked only at peer-reviewed articles. The results were then merged, duplicates were removed, and we double-checked results by hand, eliminating articles that still did not match our criteria.

This yielded a dataset that contains 5,012 articles from over one hundred journals, the most significant of which are listed in Figure 1. Certainly, this is not the entire “universe” of articles on the subject. Indeed, our approach has some limitations. First, many articles may be about “global governance” or are somehow relevant, but do not use the term or a domain-specific variant. They may, instead, use terms like “transnational governance,” “world order,” or “international organization” that inevitably fall through our “net.” Second, while books and book chapters have also been important mediums, they do not feature here. Third, though the articles in the dataset are written in many languages and come from all regions, there could be a bias toward those from North America and Western Europe that are better documented in the underlying datasets, or which are published in the English language. And, finally, since our approach is different from earlier efforts, like the TRIP project—which focuses on “IR articles” in a smaller set of high-profile academic journals—direct comparisons, while still informative, should be approached with a degree of caution. These considerations should be kept in mind when interpreting results. However, the technique we relied on yields a comprehensive and likely quite representative picture of all the articles published to date that are most directly related to the study of global governance.

The combined dataset contains considerable information on these articles. Some is derived from the underlying databases: publication dates, author names, affiliations, and so forth. This was then supplemented by coding of our own. First, we coded the country locations of first authors, based on their affiliations at the time of publication. Second, we coded the gender of first authors.¹⁷ Third, we have identified each article’s “primary” issue area. This was done

16 Domain-specific variants include terms like “global economic governance” or “global climate change governance.” We did not use a prespecified set of such terms. Instead, we searched for articles where: 1) the word “global” is followed by “governance”; 2) they are separated by, at most, two words; and 3) they collectively form a single logical expression.

17 For this, we relied on gender-specific pronouns used in online biographies. If no information was available, the variable was left as missing.

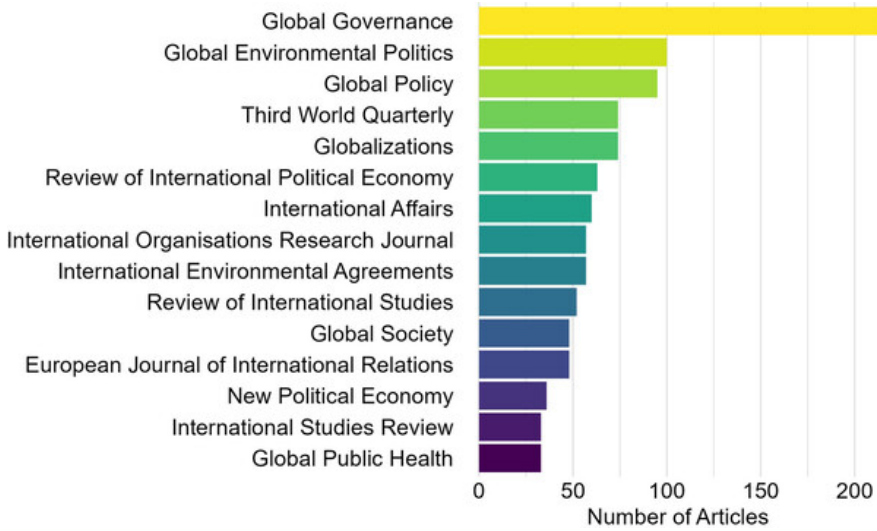


FIGURE 1 Top fifteen journals in the dataset

using a list of keywords derived from the domain-specific varieties of global governance we identified. With this, we performed an automated coding of issue areas based on whether a word like “ocean” or “finance” appeared in an article’s title, keywords, or abstract. When there were multiple appearances, the first word to appear determined our preliminary coding. Nearly every article was classified in this way, apart from a residual category of presumptively “general” articles that received none. The automated coding was then checked, and adjustments were made by hand. In total, adjustments occurred in less than 20 percent of cases. In most, this simply involved moving an article to a broader category; for example, from “economic” to “general” or from “forestry” to “environment,” if it dealt with several issues. Once these specific domains were determined, we then organized articles into several general groupings.¹⁸

3 Exploring Patterns of Global Governance Research

These data enable a more detailed investigation of global governance research than has been possible thus far. In principle, the dataset can be used to answer numerous descriptive and causal questions, several of which are outlined in

18 These groups track those in the TRIP database and the discipline of IR itself—for instance, they loosely follow the sections of the International Studies Association (ISA).

the conclusion. Here, we report results related to the three initial questions that guided our efforts: How has publishing changed? What issues have scholars focused on? And who has been publishing on the topic? All three speak to major concerns in IR and beyond, and we explore them, in order, in the following sections. In each, we explain what our data say and reflect on how this confirms or unsettles common understandings about the character of research.

3.1 *The Growth of Global Governance Research*

To begin, we examined variation over time. Anecdotally, of course, we know that publishing has grown since the early 1990s. But we have little data on the ebb and flow of publications, and whether research has remained relevant. At the outset of this project, we had some reason to think that interest might have declined, and that publishing may have flagged. Patterns of academic publishing are often, although not wholly, linked to external events that make certain subjects or ways of framing projects more or less attractive.¹⁹ With global governance, specifically, there have been many claims of this kind. The idea has often been linked to the post-Cold War moment: when declining tensions bolstered cooperation, older institutions were revitalized, and many new ones appeared. It is plausible to link the growth of research to these facts.²⁰ Today, though, cooperation seems to have declined: institutions have been in crisis, and gridlock, great-power competition, and nationalism have grown.²¹ The initial moment that first generated interest in the idea seems to have passed.

If so, this may have led scholars to embrace alternative ways of framing research questions and seeing world politics. Correspondingly, we might expect a decline in the rate of publishing. Our data reveal, however, that this has not been the case. Researchers appear to have responded to changing events by publishing more on a wider array of topics, not less. Consider Figure 2. It shows, first, that global governance research has indeed exploded. Prior to 1990, there were few articles. The earliest entry in our dataset appears in 1980, when John Ruggie published “On the Problem of ‘the Global Problematique’: What Roles for International Organizations?” in *Alternatives*, a journal associated with the World Order Models Project (WOMP).²² *Alternatives* proved to be an incu-

19 Acharya and Buzan 2019.

20 Falk 1995; Weiss and Wilkinson 2019; Franke and Hofferberth 2021.

21 Hale, Held, and Young 2013; Cooley and Nexon 2020.

22 Based on our data, one can argue that Ruggie published the first academic article explicitly framed as a study of global governance. He was not the first to use the term, however. That honor likely goes to Saul Mendlovitz, founding director of the WOMP, who used it as

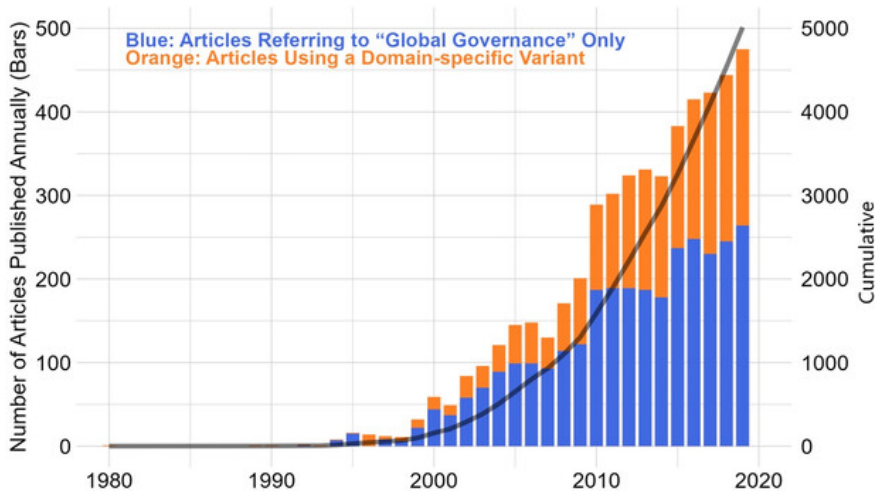


FIGURE 2 The growth of global governance research

bator for early ideas. The term primarily appeared in the writings of WOMP researchers, and they published most of the early articles in that venue. But ultimately, these were few and comparatively unsystematic. The cumulative total in 1990 was still in single digits.

Subsequently, global governance research increased substantially. By 1999, around 200 articles had appeared. But it was only at the turn of the century when numbers really took off. By 2009, the number increased to just over 1,000. And a decade later, in 2019, there were over 5,000 articles. In the past ten years, then, scholars have published nearly four times the number of articles as in the first three decades combined. In part, this simply reflects the overall publishing trend. Today, there are more journals and academics publishing more articles than ever before. This growth is still significant in comparative terms, though. For instance, if we look at the number of articles relative to those concerned with “international organization” (around 22,000 in 2019), the share has risen from less than one-tenth in 2000 to more than one-fifth of the total.²³ We can choose different reference points (“international regime,” “world order,” etc.) and get slightly different results. But they all suggest that publishing has grown in both relative and absolute terms.

far back as 1975 and was responsible for all the earliest written appearances we were able to identify, see Mendlovitz 1975a; 1975b, p. xvi.

23 This calculation was done by performing a nearly identical search to the one described in the previous section using the term “international organization.”

That said, if we look at the figures, two striking facts emerge. First, the use of domain-specific terms like “global economic governance” and “global environmental governance” has become a major feature of the literature. In Figure 2, we break up annual publications into those that make use of such terms (displayed in orange) and those that simply refer to “global governance” (in blue). This shows that prior to 1999 “global governance” was the primary term used by scholars, appearing in 75–90 percent of all articles. Since then, however, the share has steadily declined. Presently, only 55 percent of articles use the more general term on its own.²⁴ Second, but relatedly, the overall figures suggest that research has not increased at a constant rate: it has, instead, been punctuated by three publication “waves.”²⁵ Specifically, we can identify a first, formative phase running between 1980 and 1998, where the number of articles was relatively low, averaging around 7 per year; a second, between 1999 and 2008, where a new annual average of about 104 articles is reached; and a third, from 2009 to 2019, where over 300 articles have been published annually.

Combined, these patterns lead to two conclusions about the evolution of research. One, our analysis provides some evidence of academic relevance and confirmation of David Coen and Tom Pegram’s claims about different “generations” of academic publishing on the topic.²⁶ They posit that there have been two so far. First, an initial generation of “signpost scholarship,” which called attention to global transformations and fashioned new concepts for understanding them. This largely corresponds with the first wave of research we identified, which almost exclusively used the more generic term. They, then, suggest that a second generation discovered the relevance of these ideas and translated early insights into different subfields. Our data provide confirmation for this, too, since the share of articles using domain-specific terms has increased since the onset of the second wave we identified. Finally, Coen and Pegram have called for a third generation of research that integrates insights from different fields. But our data suggest, intriguingly, that we are already in the midst of a new wave of academic publishing.²⁷

24 Of the domain-specific variants, “global economic governance” has been the most common, with 410 articles using this term in total, followed by “global environmental governance” and “global health governance,” which appear in 310 and 312 articles, respectively.

25 These periods were estimated through a change point analysis, employing several change detection models for time series data that do not assume a normal distribution; see Ross 2015.

26 Coen and Pegram 2018.

27 We can only speculate about this third wave here. However, in a separate analysis we found that articles employing more sophisticated methods increased substantially during this most recent period, and that researchers have focused more on interinstitutional

Our second conclusion focuses on the way research has stayed relevant in the face of new global circumstances. During the first wave, new concepts were introduced and then applied by researchers focused on a variety of domains. This speaks to the value of these ideas, demonstrating how they have helped scholars make sense of and link up conversations occurring in very different areas that have each witnessed transformations in the way issues are managed. But if we look at the patterns underlying the subsequent waves of publishing we identified, these have also often converged on several world historical dates. We found, for instance, that there are upticks in research areas after several major events—a surge of publications on global security after September 11, on global economic governance after 2008, on global climate governance around the Copenhagen summit in 2009, and on global migration after 2014. We explore the specific topics that researchers have focused on in the next section. But the fact that studies have grown in the wake of such inflection points hardly indicates that the idea has become less relevant over time. Rather, it suggests that scholarship has responded to, aimed to interpret, and evolved with a world that has changed significantly from the one that first motivated its development in the early 1990s.

3.2 *The Diversity of Global Governance Research Topics*

As noted already, global governance has been simultaneously regarded as an object of analysis and a “perspective” on world politics that differs from more traditional approaches to IR. According to Klaus Dingwerth and Philipp Pattberg, the idea offers a unique lens that can “guide our analysis of political processes beyond the state” by foregrounding novel institutional arrangements, diverse sources of authority, and a growing range of actors.²⁸ The burgeoning number of articles that have focused on global governance, or in one way or another adopted this lens, as described in the last section, suggests that many scholars have found the idea to be valuable for bringing into focus the phenomena they are interested in. The growing number of domain-specific variants of the term—we counted a remarkable 120 in total—also testifies to its versatility, demonstrating that it has been employed by scholars across many issue areas. But has the idea been useful for exploring all areas of world politics, or has its use been restricted to a few? If so, which ones? And perhaps most crucially, has it helped us to study issues of genuinely global significance?

interactions, regime complexity, and fragmentation. This suggests that scholarship has increasingly moved beyond case studies of individual institutions, embracing a wider analytical lens that encompasses many.

28 Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006, p. 198.

Given that global governance research is largely rooted in IR, it is plausible that the field tracks the same issues—and suffers similar biases. If novel governance arrangements were evenly spread across issue areas and a governance lens proved to be equally useful, or equally popular, as a tool for understanding their dynamics, then the domains it is applied to might simply reflect the underlying interests of IR scholars, which skew toward the study of security and international political economy (IPE) and away from the environment, health, human rights, and migration.²⁹ However, this need not be the case. Those who played a role in developing the idea, like Rosenau, believed it was widely applicable.³⁰ But if nonstate actors, transnational processes, and new forms of cross-border cooperation have appeared more frequently in certain issue areas, then its value may vary. Where they are less prominent, or where research interests differ, there may be less incentive to utilize the lens that Dingwerth and Pattberg describe. And, if so, patterns of research may be different.

Is the study of global governance unique? Our data reveal a mixed picture. In some ways, we found that it is. Figure 3 shows that the most frequent variety of article in the dataset focuses on environmental issues. Such studies account for more than a quarter of the total, and the number published each year has grown steadily, rising from around 15 percent in 1995 to nearly 30 percent in 2019. Thus, an issue area that has been marginalized in IR is the most common within the literature on global governance. The case of security is nearly the opposite. As noted, research in IR has bent toward this area: across the world, security is among the most common fields of research.³¹ However, when it comes to global governance, security articles are comparatively limited, accounting for only 6 percent overall. Their share of annual publications has also declined over time, falling from 10 percent in 2000 to 5 percent in 2019. Thus, there do appear to be differences between global governance research and the rest of IR.

That said, there are ways in which the literature simply reflects patterns in the wider discipline. For instance, after environmental issues, articles on economic problems are the second most common variety. Accounting for 25 percent of all those that have appeared, this is only marginally more frequent than the 18–19 percent of IR faculty who, on average, and across all regions, list IPE as their primary or secondary research field.³² And if we restrict ourselves to

29 Maliniak et al. 2017; Green and Hale 2017.

30 Rosenau 1995.

31 Maliniak et al. 2017.

32 Maliniak et al. 2017.

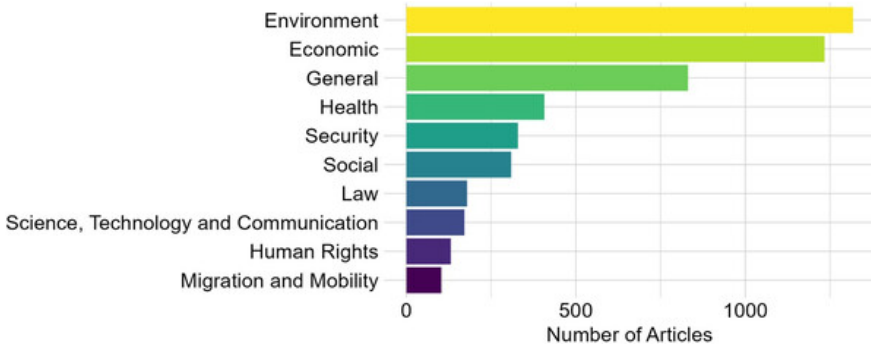


FIGURE 3 Major research topics

numbers from North America and Western Europe—where IR research has traditionally been concentrated—the shares are virtually identical. Several areas that have received relatively less attention in IR also seem to be marginal in the global governance literature. Articles on migration and human rights, for example, have been noted for being relatively peripheral in IR and are some of the least common in our dataset, accounting for less than 4 percent of the total, although the former area has been increasing its share since the migration crisis started in 2014.

This has important implications. First, it does appear that interest in global governance and the usefulness of a governance lens varies. If we look at environmental articles, it seems clear that researchers working in this area have found the idea to be especially helpful, perhaps because it effectively captures the kinds of phenomena (nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], international organizations [IOs], private authority, etc.) seen in this area.³³ One might argue that this is the case for global health too. Just like the environment, health has largely been neglected in IR: in the most recent TRIP international faculty survey, less than 1 percent of faculty listed it as their primary or secondary field across all regions. In our dataset, though, it is the fourth most studied topic—and, surely, its position will increase further in the wake of Covid-19. However, in other areas, the usefulness of this lens is less clear. Much scholarship focuses on economic issues, but the numbers are not obviously more than what we see in the rest of IR. In such cases, global governance concepts may be useful, but not especially so. And in others, like security, there is little evidence that researchers have found value in these ideas. This may, again, be related to the types of phenomena that scholars have been inter-

33 Green and Hale 2017.

ested in (war, sanctions, terrorism, etc.), along with the prevalence of realist theory that tends to downplay the importance of institutions and nonstate actors.³⁴

Second, but relatedly, global governance ideas have no special ability to draw our attention to the most significant problems in world politics. Some, such as Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, have seen global governance as the “savior of IR,” helping us to move away from technical debates and to focus on issues of genuine importance.³⁵ Certainly, there are areas that are widely agreed to be important—and marginal in IR—which are better represented in the literature. This is undoubtedly a positive feature. But other issues of global concern suffer similar levels of neglect. Migration issues are ranked among the top concerns in the most recent TRIP faculty survey, but their share of articles is still low, albeit increasing. Most problematic, security issues, which faculty regularly rank among the top foreign policy challenges—and are bound to increase further due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—are a much smaller part of global governance research than their importance would seem to warrant. Overall, then, this suggests that while global governance ideas have helped scholars to see and understand certain area of world politics, there do appear to be blind spots that deserve greater attention.

3.3 *Inclusion and Exclusion in Global Governance Research*

Our final reflections center on issues of inclusivity. Within IR, there have been mounting concerns about the limited number of perspectives that have found expression in academic debates. The discipline has, for instance, often been referred to as an “American Social Science,” and many studies have confirmed the dominance of American academics in the field’s journals.³⁶ Scholars like Amitav Acharya, Barry Buzan, Kelebogile Zvobgo, and Meredith Loken have also criticized IR’s overwhelming bias toward “Western” and predominantly White voices.³⁷ And of course, there have been concerns about the marginalization of women too.³⁸ These observations have stimulated efforts to investigate patterns of exclusion in the discipline, to recognize the contributions of women, non-Western, and racialized academics, and to actively promote their

34 Maliniak et al. 2011; Maliniak et al. 2017.

35 Weiss and Wilkinson 2019.

36 Hoffmann 1977; Kristensen 2015.

37 Acharya and Buzan 2019; Zvobgo and Loken 2020.

38 Maliniak et al. 2008; Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013; Fattore 2019; Hutchings and Owens 2021.

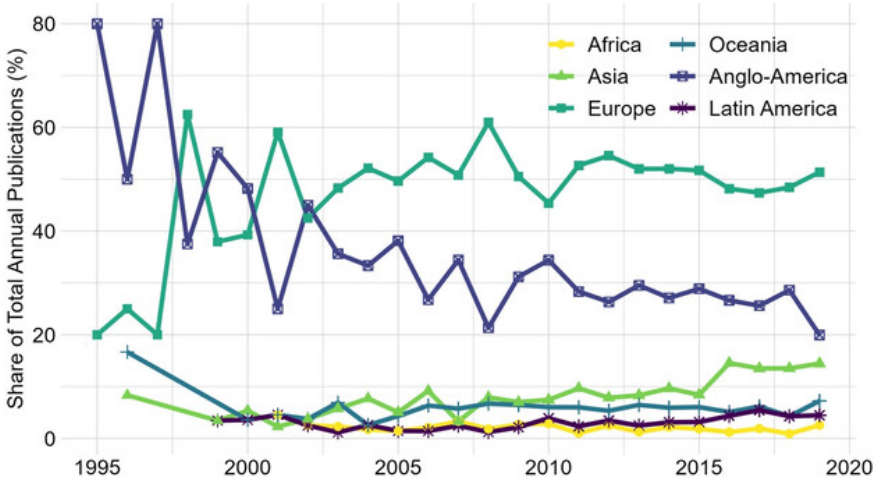


FIGURE 4 Annual publications by region

inclusion in academic debates. But to our knowledge, these analyses have not so far extended to research on global governance.

Here again, patterns of inclusion and exclusion in IR may simply be replicated in this area. Since global governance research has traditionally been rooted in IR, the types of voices included in academic debates may be similar. However, as with the issues studied by global governance researchers, there may be differences. Indeed, the two may well be connected. Within IR, if we look below the surface, the types of issues studied across regions and genders show some distinctiveness. Data from the TRIP project demonstrate that European researchers have focused more on “international organization,” on average, while American researchers have emphasized security.³⁹ Women, in turn, have been found to disproportionately study transnational actors, IOs, and NGOs—and areas where these are prominent, like the environment, IPE, human rights, and global health—whereas men have focused more on security and foreign policy.⁴⁰ Given the kinds of topics featuring in the global governance literature, we might therefore expect it to have a distinct topology.

We found that this is the case—in part. Consider, first, the annual publication rates across regions in Figure 4. Initially, in the 1990s, global governance research was an American affair. Prior to 2000, more than half of all articles

39 Maliniak et al. 2018.

40 Maliniak et al. 2008, 133.

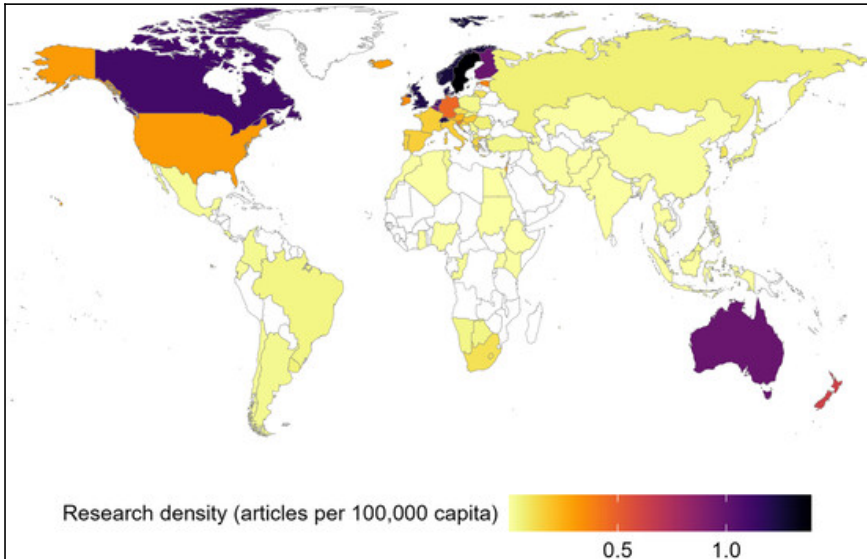


FIGURE 5 Global publication rates

on the topic were by a few entrepreneurial academics in the United States and Canada who developed new ideas and set the research agenda. However, that rate has steadily declined over time, averaging around 30 percent of all publications since 2000 and dropping to as low as 20 percent in several years. In the meantime, Europeans have taken the lead. Since 2000, they have been responsible for more than half of the articles published each year, on average. This consistent performance has then built into significant cumulative differences. The United States remains the largest single-country producer, responsible for almost 21 percent of all publications. However, the UK is not far behind, with around 17 percent, and Europe as a whole is responsible for nearly half (49 percent) of all the research published.

These different emphases are even more striking when we weight publications by population size (Figure 5). This measure is not unproblematic but gives us a sense of the extent to which specific countries and regions have embraced global governance research—how common such articles are overall. Here, Western European countries, Canada, and Australia are far ahead, and Nordic states feature prominently. Per capita, the two top publishers are Sweden and Norway. They are followed by Switzerland, the UK, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Canada and Australia, in seventh and eighth places, respectively, are the only non-European countries in the top ten. The United States, according to this measure, lands in nineteenth place, suggesting that global governance ideas have been embraced far less. Putting this together with the

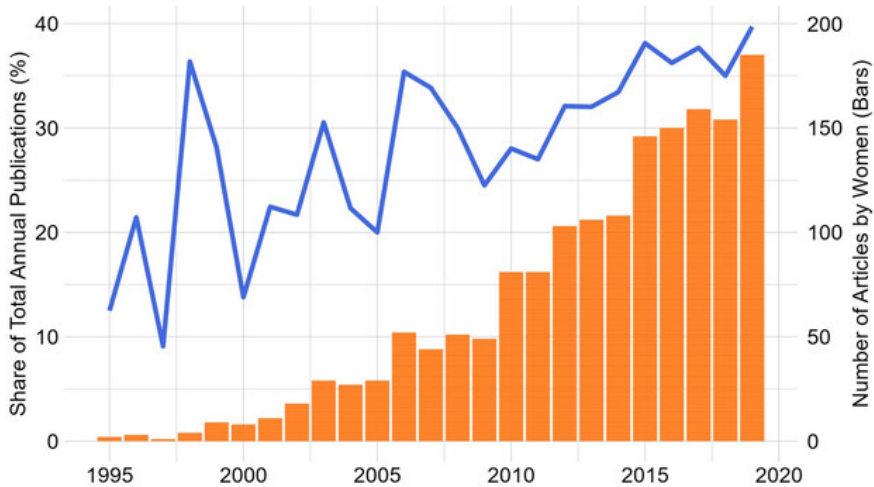


FIGURE 6 Global governance research by women

data on overall publication trends, it is fair to say that while IR may still be an “American Social Science,” the study of global governance has largely become a European one.

Next, consider the gender of authors. When it comes to the involvement of women in IR, the picture has been pretty dismal. One recent study, using TRIP data, found that they accounted for only 23 percent of IR faculty, and that in the period 2004–2007 they made up only 19 percent of all authors. Our data show, by contrast, that women have been somewhat more active in global governance debates (see Figure 6). In the same period 2004–2007, they were the first authors of around 28 percent of all publications. This is still highly imbalanced, but the share is almost 50 percent higher than the rest of the discipline.⁴¹ Unfortunately, we cannot directly compare trends after this period. However, our data show that the number of women publishing global governance research has increased since then. Indeed, between 2015 and 2019, women were the first authors of 37 percent of publications, on average—a figure approaching the roughly 40 percent who are ISA members.⁴²

41 Of course, we should be cautious about these comparisons. As noted in Section 2, our data only record the gender of first authors, while the TRIP data include all authors. If anything, though, this should lead us to understate the number of women publishing on global governance since TRIP data reveal that they are somewhat less likely to be first authors in coauthored publications; see Maliniak et al. 2008, 129.

42 Fattore 2019, 4.

This focus may have been driven by two factors. First, it could be that global governance ideas have been useful for understanding phenomena that women have historically focused on—transnational processes, IOs, NGOs, and so forth.⁴³ This would help to explain their higher levels of authorship across most issues in our dataset. We found, for instance, that women studying security issues were more likely to do so using a global governance framing, and the same was true for several other issues where women have typically been less well represented. Second, these patterns may be amplified because women have tended to conduct research on issues where global governance ideas have been widely employed. In the end, despite the comparatively high rates of authorship across the board, we see many women as first authors in fields such as environment (38 percent) and health (42 percent) that previous research shows they have studied and are well represented in the governance literature.⁴⁴

Arguably, the way in which global governance research most resembles IR concerns its overall topology. As noted, the limited geographical diversity of IR has rightly been highlighted as an issue. Most studies have been published by Northern academics, and the number of racialized academic voices has been extremely limited, meaning that only a narrow slice of worldviews and experiences are reflected in current debates. There have, accordingly, been growing calls for a “global IR” that properly recognizes the contributions of non-Western academics, and corresponding efforts to promote the inclusion of non-White voices, within the Global North and beyond. Unfortunately, research on global governance has not fared any better on this front. While we can consider only the geographic dimension of our data here, academics based in the Global North are clearly dominant. If we return to Figures 4 and 5, though the share of research published by academics in Asia (especially China) has increased, the involvement of other regions remains extremely limited. And overall, scholars based in the Global South have been the first authors of less than 14 percent of all publications.⁴⁵

4 Conclusion

In many ways, global governance is an academic success story. Starting in the early 1990s, new ideas about the nature of politics “beyond the state” were

43 Maliniak et al. 2008.

44 Ibid.

45 For this calculation, we equate the Global South with non-OECD states.

developed and this has helped us to see the world in new ways. Scholars have drawn on the concepts that American academic entrepreneurs first pioneered, and these have been adapted to a variety of fields. This attests to the value of these ideas. Just as importantly, we believe, their value appears to have been sustained despite important changes in the world itself. Though the post-Cold War moment that first inspired the growth of research may have shifted, researchers have responded to important historical events and interpreted them using a governance lens. Far from declining, then, global governance research appears to be more alive than ever.

At the same time, we believe in the importance of questioning and reflecting on academic practices. Many efforts have already been made to “rethink” global governance ideas but, so far, scholars have not thought a great deal about how research is done—and by who. This has been a major aim of our work, and our effort flags several issues. First, we found that while these ideas have been adapted to many areas—demonstrating their relevance and utility—that uptake has been uneven. Some domains, like the environment, economy, and global health, are well represented. But other important topics, like security, migration, and human rights, have not been major ones in the global governance literature. Second, we found that the kinds of academics involved in global governance debates are somewhat different from the rest of IR. Overall, they appear to be less American, despite the field’s roots in the United States. It also appears that women have been more active. In these ways, then, conversations about global governance have been somewhat more inclusive. However, in other respects, the field suffers similar biases. Women still publish less than men, and the exclusion of scholars from the Global South is especially troubling.

As a research community, we need to understand and unpack these issues. More work is needed to explore the patterns of research we see, including:

- Why do certain domains feature more (or less) prominently?
- What methodological, ontological, and theoretical divides exist?
- Which ideas have featured in journals, textbooks, and classes?
- When and how have governance ideas had an impact on policymaking?
- What limits involvement from different parts of the research community?
- How has unequal involvement shaped our perspective on world politics?

Answers to these questions can deepen our understanding of the work being done. But action matters even more. Certainly, many of the problems we have highlighted affect IR, not global governance per se. However, to the extent that global governance researchers have developed their own institutions—journals, book series, workshops, research centers, and so forth—it falls on editors, organizers, and scholars to promote richer debates, embrace best prac-

tices, and create space for marginalized issues and academics. Within the broader discipline, important conversations about global IR and about gender- and race-based discrimination are now taking place—along with corresponding efforts to improve academic practices. But in the study of global governance they are only just beginning.

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