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**THE INFLUENCE OF NON-STATE ACTORS ON GLOBAL
POLICY-MAKING**

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Abstract

This article investigates a non-state actor's growing participation in global policymaking, which is an attempt to challenge the unitary state perspective of international relations. The growing globalization of the world economy has led to the emergence and proliferation of non-state actors such as NGOs, multinational enterprises, and transnational advocacy networks which have been actively involved in the formulation of global policies especially in the areas of environmental governance and human rights. These actors are often more agile and responsive than formal government institutions, which enables them to make a difference in global policy. This analysis looks at how non-state actors influence policy processes, and more importantly, the factors that determine their success or failure in achieving desired objectives. Theoretical frameworks that include pluralism and network theory guide the author's analysis of the relevant non-state actors, their interrelations, and their relations to state actors and participation in international policymaking in an attempt to understand the complete picture. The analysis underscores the ambiguity of non-state actors: who, on the one hand, advance positive agendas and encourage international cooperation, their impact on issues and problems differ greatly in magnitude on the other hand. This paper aims at understanding the role of non-state actors in global governance and international relations gives them a deep analysis of their activity in the modern world.

Keywords: Non-State Actors, Global Policymaking, International Relations, Pluralism, Transnational Advocacy Networks, Environmental Governance, Global Governance.

Introduction

According to a significant number of scholars and experts in the field, non-state actors have been increasingly and profoundly altering the state-centric framework that has traditionally characterized classical international relations theories. Alongside the phenomenon of globalization, there is a prevalent and widespread belief that these non-state actors have been progressively gaining a more prominent and influential position as key players in the realm of policymaking regarding global affairs (Tehseen2024). When considering the dynamics of relative global surveillance and control, non-state actors are thought to hold more power and agility than intergovernmental organizations, and in some cases, even surpass several governments themselves. In the particular context of global environmental governance, for instance, non-state actors have previously been recognized as significant catalysts driving some of the most critical international agreements, particularly those that focus on urgent matters related to climate change and sustainable practices (Nwanisobi, 2021). However, despite the notable and substantial rise of non-state actors in governing a variety of global issues, the true influence and role of these non-state actors as global policymakers or norm creators has not been comprehensively elaborated or sufficiently analyzed in related academic or policy discussions.

This paper is primarily concerned with the roles of non-state actors, specifically those that are actively operational within the diverse fields of civil society, various forms of transnational economic activity, and numerous international associations. It aims to conduct a thorough investigation into the different mechanisms by which these non-state actors can potentially exert influence on the international policymaking system. Conversely, this paper will explore reasons why, in some specific cases, these actors manage to influence the institution but fail to affect the actual policymaking process itself. In the following section, the key terms of the research—including policy, policymaking, and the influence exerted by non-state actors—are going to be critically reviewed and discussed in depth. Further, existing theories related to this subject matter will be assessed carefully according to the various means and specific conditions presupposed by each theory

regarding the potential influence of non-state actors on the international stage.

Theoretical Frameworks

Frameworks or models that aim to map global policy-making by non-state actors within the broad boundaries of international relations can be used to consider the analytical dimensions of this essay. The following questions highlight the importance of these models:

Who are these non-state actors?

What positions do these actors occupy vis-à-vis states?

How do the various categories of non-state actors interact with each other?

How do they interact with states?

Answers to these questions lead us to consider essentially intergovernmentalism and transgovernmentalist modes of action, as well as understanding the role of non-state actors as both networks and civil societies, emerging from the ontological and epistemological foundations.

One theoretical framework is pluralism, which attributes states significant power and dominance in the world while also allowing for consultations with and representation of other entities' interests. Libertarian pluralism or group-oriented pluralism allows for the possibility of collective agreements among involved entities without necessarily harming any, an important move because the sovereignty of states is not absolute even though realist-informed theories argue that sovereign states must be upheld. This model is highly representative of a network approach as it allows key decisions to be made at a 'global marketplace' of ideas with state representatives providing just one voice, albeit the loudest and most powerful. The empirical precedence to the libertarian pluralism model is the global 'summit' conferences that are well-publicized and the sites of worldwide networking. Such conferences involve senior to mid-level state officials, CBOs, and a host of other actors from TNC representatives to religious leaders.

- **Pluralism Theory**

The main aim of creating the course curriculum is to examine and evaluate the influence that non-state actors have on global policy-making via their discourse practices. To support this investigation,

four specific theoretical frameworks are utilized as strong analytical bases. The first framework is Pluralism Theory, which suggests that the political environment is fundamentally pluralistic, consisting of various actors and conflicting interests. For a political process to function effectively, it needs to include a variety of perspectives from civil society, thereby recognizing the complex dynamics of societal composition (Aytac, 2021). A key aspect of this theory is the recognition of diverse viewpoints and the existing power imbalances among participants.

In contrast to the traditional realist perspective that confines the scope of politics solely to the behavior and actions of governments and established institutions, the Pluralist approach opens up the field to encompass a vast array of individual and collective actors, as well as sub- and supranational entities that play a significant role in shaping and determining the fundamental rules that govern society (Johnson et al.2023). From this broader viewpoint, entire sectors are recognized as what might be termed 'constitutional arenas' 'dynamic spaces that include a diverse assortment of stakeholders who are actively engaged in complex policy negotiations (Rementeria, 2022). These negotiations can span a wide range of issues, from international patented drugs to intricate financial regulations and significant farmland investments. This inclusive approach not only produces a novel perception of political authority but also encourages the understanding that planning should be seen as an organized and systematic process of decision-making. Such a process increasingly relies less on traditional forms of public debate and the standard parliamentary procedures that have historically dominated political discourse. Furthermore, in this multifaceted policy environment, non-state actors emerge as essential participants, fully engaged in the democratic process and prepared to contribute to an open and transparent policy-making framework. They do so while remaining acutely aware of the socio-political and ethical ramifications that may arise from potential regulatory reforms (Berman, 2021). In the realm of International Relations, especially when viewed through the lens of global governance and the evolving landscape of diplomacy, there is an unexpected and rich plurality of ideas and values that is progressively influencing the interface between policy

and science. This ongoing interplay is reshaping the way policies are developed and implemented, creating a pluralistic system that is reflective of diverse interests and perspectives, ultimately enriching the global conversation about governance and cooperation on pressing issues.

- **Transnational Advocacy Networks**

Non-state actors are complex and diverse, grouping actors of all levels of social relations from the individual to the forum, the network, and the alliance, and ranging in both size and coherence. This subsection focuses on one particular type of non-state actor that has been ascribed particular influence: transnational advocacy networks. Although TANs are only one particular category of non-state actors/networks within a much wider range of actors who participate in transnational issue politics and governance, several reasons justify our decision to focus on them in different parts of this paper. In addition to mobilizing resources, including best practices, through social learning, information, and norm transfer across borders, some writers have claimed that they actually shape international norms informally through direct participation in global governance (Biersteker, 2024).

The collaborative network form that advocacy and watchdog organizations have taken has helped them optimize their resources and efforts. Furthermore, this body of work has contributed to a better understanding of the network effects involved in generating international cooperation and commitment around global public goods provision. As we explain regarding international collaborative networks, the diverse group members of TANs blend their advantages and resources. Then the participants, in turn, derive from a network effect, in which the expectations and actions of an organization are shaped by what other interconnected organizations are doing, such as spurring the spread of both information and resources (Koenig et al., 2021). Last but not least, although it is not a simple answer, we find that as a result of the existence of a number of successful case studies of TAN development in the last twenty years or so, networked advocacy, or networked advocacy campaigns, have attracted considerable attention.

Types of Non-State Actors

Three broad types of non-state actors are generally identified: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, often labeled transnational corporations (TNCs), and the rest. NGOs are typically considered to have as their primary objective in seeking to influence policies a concern for justice. MNCs/TNCs are identified as engaging in inter-state relations out of a concern for their own welfare, which is equivalent to maximizing profit; they have no national loyalties (Ghosh, 2025). Among the 'non-others' are criminal societies, warlords, and other groups that may threaten the well-being of individual states. Though a distinction is drawn between NGOs and MNCs, it is likely that both groups of private individuals will often work in mutually supporting ways, each influencing policy developments to their own advantage under some circumstances, though opposing one another under others. They will each have access to their own contacts in transnational institutions (Faroque et al.2022).

In the bilateral context, for example, there came under intense lobbying by private business stakeholders to reduce controls on trade and production of ozone-depleting substances at the same time as NGOs were calling for tighter measures to control TNCs. The variety of private institutions that are now engaging in debates about aspects of global policy formation is thus considerable. Each group of private individuals is operating with its own mission and objectives and is finding inroads to policymakers through different modalities. The two policy groups work with contrary risk perceptions and economic calculations about ongoing policy courses. These conceptual divides are not necessarily antagonistic to each other. By engaging in an open process where the contrasting views and criticisms of non-state actors are respected, a multilateral policy forum can be seen as expanding the knowledge base to which policymakers have access (Alami et al., 2021). However, a multilateral process that pays heed only to the secretive interactions between epistemic communities and individual business consortia may be regarded as undemocratic. Non-governmental policy analyses are in an ambiguous position in relation to the mainstream analysis of diplomats and business policy officials. They may be cited in policymaking to demonstrate a leading civil society awareness of issues, or to critique any lack of

integration between democratic policymaking and expert discourse. At other times, they may be billed as diverting policy attention from the center. For example, early in the ozone protection negotiations, they attempted to limit the scope of a 'peak ozone' depletion scenario raised by a coalition of TNCs and NGOs by commenting that 'it is not necessary to go into the policy implications of very high emission scenarios, as everyone can see that this would be unacceptable' (Harvey, 2021).

Non-State Actors in International Relations

Non-state actors play a crucial role in international relations. These entities work in conjunction or in conflict with the state-centric system, seeking to influence state behavior and state action. There are various possible ways this might occur. At the international level, non-state actors can advocate their interests and preferences in national parliaments (direct influence). They can also work to shape the epistemic structures and discourses in which states operate so that elected representatives might be more likely to take policy decisions that are in line with the non-state actors' policy preferences (indirect influence) (Vidačak, 2022). Similarly, non-state actors can operate within international institutions, such as world governance forums and formal negotiations, to influence policy change at the transnational level. They can, at the supranational level of policy influence, further develop international norms, rules, laws, standards, and reform the global institutional structures through a range of reform strategies.

The presence, influence, and evolution of non-state actors' role change not only the meanings of concepts like power, government, governance, and regulation in the pertinent fields of the social sciences. They equally affect the field in which they are active and societies. In the environment, development, and climate fields, the research results and case studies show that non-state actors and their activities are reshaping global and regional governance, creating private standards in partnership with states and through competition while contesting and proposing alternative governance modes and standards. Large-scale analyses of these summit interactions can lead us to a wider understanding of present global transitions (Marques, 2023). Furthermore, occasional successes acting on public opinion and lawmakers to ban plastic, for

example illustrate that it is possible for non-state actors to effect change in the wider population. Such ideas could subsequently filter up into international law, were the effect on public opinion great enough to push governments to address the issue. International institutions need to understand patterns in politicization as well as the implications from intensity, valence, and scope of resistance, as these will condition their field of agency and their capacity to shape symbolic representation.

Non-State Actors in Global Governance

Non-state actors are increasingly becoming key participants in the various global economic structures that encompass both formal and informal governance, as well as in international standard-setting networks and global corporate policy institutions. Their role is of significant importance with respect to their active involvement in global policy making, which can occur in the capacity of either co-formulators of policy or as implementers of the devised strategies. The array of partnerships between different entities can indeed involve numerous combinations of stakeholders; however, practical experiences indicate that the most common and effective partnerships are typically formed between governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, particularly when addressing critical issues such as environmental challenges or social health concerns (Berman, 2021). One pertinent yet less well-examined question in this dynamic is which types of partnerships prove to be the most effective in catalyzing meaningful policy reforms. While this review does take into account the effectiveness of these partnerships, it emphasizes a different aspect as its primary concern. The primary focus of this literature review is centered around the concept of policy reform driven by the additional resources that emerge from the collaboration involved in the implementation of, as well as operationalizing, multi-stakeholder partnerships that revolve around influential policy ideas or standards that hold significant sway in shaping governance (Stott, 2022).

Interest in the role of non-state actors in various global governance arrangements is relatively recent in the strategy literature. Beginning in the 1980s, policy scholars showed an acceleration of networks and self-regulatory regimes, moving over time to

encompass investigations of business and global self-regulation in global governance. More recent reviews began to constitute an analysis of the governance and accountability deficits of global public-private partnerships. Attention was then turned to how different partnerships can secure and be seen to symbolize "good global governance." The literature varies somewhat by supranational involvement and assessments of the ability of public-private partnerships to fill an implementation or governance gap and to reform policies and norms (Gordanić, 2022). However, all agree that partnerships are increasingly common, albeit to differing extents. Globalization has forced governance considerations to pay attention to the global scale; the worst effects of neoliberal economic ideologies have been reversed. If anything, multilateral approaches are discounted in favor of a neo-institutionalist preference for steering rather than rowing, and state centrism is gradually being replaced by more interest-driven and inclusive state, sector, and issue-based global partnerships.

Challenges and Criticisms

The increasing participation of non-state actors (NSAs) in the policy-making process has brought to the forefront a number of significant potential challenges and criticisms that cannot be overlooked. The legitimacy of some NSAs and their accountability to the very individuals and groups whose interests they claim to represent has been called into serious question. When engaging and interacting with NSAs, it can be notably difficult to establish who they truly represent, what their specific remit is, whether they are indeed in a conflict of interest, and whether they possess the necessary moral authority to make decisions that affect broader groups, sometimes even above those who are supposed to represent the public. Non-elected NSAs, in various contexts, have also been criticized for potentially undermining democratic processes and institutions, as they may represent instead those social interests that are best able to be heard and amplified, leading to skewed power dynamics (Mlambo, 2023). Furthermore, there are increasing concerns from governmental and intergovernmental representatives that, due to their interactions with business representatives, some NSAs might inadvertently prioritize the protection of business interests above the general welfare or public

good, raising questions about the overall impact of their involvement in policymaking and how it shapes the political landscape.

The extent to which individual NSAs and networks of NSAs are able to affect policy-making processes also varies considerably. NSAs with limited resources or visibility, or those with perspectives conflicting with those of more powerful NSAs, may find their impact to be limited or moderate. The financial resources, capacity, technical knowledge, and global reach of transnational corporations, in particular, have been identified as important enabling factors in their ability to influence policy-making in a variety of issue areas (Milsom et al.2021). More general criticisms directed at both individual NSAs and the NGO community as a whole include concerns that assurances of transparency in fundraising and accountability are sometimes not upheld. In the context of global health governance, disclosure of funding arrangements is an area of weakness and questions arise regarding whether donors should take responsibility and be transparent or invisible, voluntary or mandatory. There is an agreement among those discussing the governance of global health that there is a need for regulatory frameworks. How such frameworks should be constituted to reflect the complexities and challenges arising from the rise of NSAs is an area of contention. It is also important to consider the implications of the cyber surveillance disclosures for the future prospects of NSA involvement in global governance. These disclosures could put at risk the autonomy and legitimacy of interactions of NSAs in global governance, the revitalization of political society, and ultimately deter the next whistleblower at the cost to society. These concerns and issues serve to present a balanced perspective of NSAs in global policy-making and governance.

Future Trends and Prospects

Several future trends and prospects on the nature and consequences of the influence of non-state actors on global policy-making in the 21st century undoubtedly deserve our careful attention and thoughtful consideration. The rapid advances of technology alongside evolving communication networks will significantly change the myriad ways in which non-state actors can

engage in various advocacy efforts, as well as in the dissemination of information. Innovative and creative advocacy methods will empower a diverse array of non-state actors to effectively coordinate their strategies, thereby expanding the possibilities for building converging and unified pressures on global decision-makers (Ghosh, 2025). When small but highly connected actors come together and collaborate, the resultant impact is remarkably amplified and magnified. Furthermore, the proliferation of diverse types of non-state entities represents a complex interplay of both integration and fragmentation dynamics that play a crucial role in global political participation, as well as in the intricate processes of global governance. These emerging non-state partnerships, such as coalitions and networks, will undeniably pose significant policy challenges for traditional liberal institutionalist models of global governance and for the broader global civil society movement, necessitating a responsive and adaptive approach to these evolving dynamics.

The widening and deepening engagement of non-state actors worldwide contests the relevance of theories of policy-making that fail to take these entities into account, and also drives future directions in governance research. Geopolitical dynamics will of course influence the level of interest, motivation, and the perceived value of engagement among the millions of non-state actors worldwide. The fundamental pressure must be addressed in a timely, inclusive, and just manner. The analytical framework that we will introduce has been informed by an analysis of recent debates, and developed to reflect how non-state actors can set policy agendas and influence policy debates, intentions, or decisions. The great extent and depth of the work done on this subject reveals that different actors have had to engage extensively in debating and codifying relevant norms or rules, with often-divergent practical policy consequences. Political pressure from two different social constituencies is in no short measure responsible for the development of such an extensive literature.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this essay has been to analyze the notable impact of non-state actors on the complex process of global policy-making. This emerging agent-centered perspective underscores the

increasing importance of various groups and movements within society in altering the current international political landscape. By shifting our focus from a traditional state-centric viewpoint to the non-state actor perspective, we gain insight into the growing complexity of global governance structures. This complexity stems from the active involvement of nation-states, intergovernmental institutions, and a range of civil society organizations in rule-oriented activities that significantly influence global policies and decisions. Such diverse engagement presents substantial challenges to conventional interpretations of the international arena and its operational mechanisms. However, it also provides valuable opportunities for the transformative restructuring of societal futures, encouraging innovative methods for collaboration and the resolution of global challenges.

In conclusion, the rise of non-state actors signifies both challenge and opportunity. Historically, the non-state actor has emerged as a result of, and in response to, national government actions and institutional infrastructure. As this essay has shown, the rise of such groups is a key feature of late modernity and is increasingly influencing the structure and governance of global society. Their potential transcendence of state borders thus speaks to the increasing importance of interdisciplinary governance research. In terms of knowledge production, non-state strategies, underpinned by technoscience and managerial expertise, are increasingly shaping political-economic developments. Moreover, our historical overview has shown that such developments are intensifying and have strong potential futures throughout the twenty-first century. It remains, however, the case that more research is needed to explore state and non-state dialogue or conflict over regulatory strategies to improve non-state accountability. A greater understanding of this issue is particularly pressing in many cases, given the current lack of legally binding regulatory mechanisms. These are challenges that will need to be taken seriously in an ever-evolving movement for the global policy agenda.

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