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International organizations in a changing global order

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Citation

Hosli, M. O., Jyalita, V. V. H., & Price, O. (2026). International organizations in a changing global order. In *The Europa Directory of International Organizations* (pp. 3-7). Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4308572>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Introduction: International Organizations in a Changing Global Order

Multilateralism is under pressure; but international organizations (IOs) are of core importance for global governance and stability. This introduction provides an overview of developments related to international organization and multilateralism over time, demonstrating core trends and trade-offs related to power politics, the need for (global) collective action and the role of international organizations in a changing global order.

From the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) to the establishment of the United Nations (UN) system and the international organizations that we know of today, there has been a common awareness that cooperation is imperative for navigating global problems that are increasingly interconnected and complex: Challenges related to peace and stability, climate change, pandemics, financial crises, or global terrorism are characterized by cross-border effects and cannot simply be dealt with by individual nations.

Accordingly, IOs have expanded rapidly since the end of the 19th century. Studying IOs and the role they play in shaping global governance, international norms, and patterns of international cooperation, matters for understanding how states and non-state actors coordinate relations and manage collective challenges. While core to global governance, the structure and network of IOs, due to their sheer number and at times overlapping mandates, is not always easy to apprehend.

What are 'international organizations'? Approaches and interpretations of IOs can be somewhat confusing, as the scope of their organization, activities, and global governance practices is as varied as the definitions that have developed over time (Thompson & Snidal, 2011). In the narrow sense, IOs are a form of formal organization involving more than two states or their representatives. This approach, reflecting state-level membership as a classic IO model, encompasses intergovernmental organizations such as the UN and its various specialized agencies, programs and funds, and regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In the modern international system, however, various non-state actors have also stepped up to address the limits of governmental organizations and rally around shared concerns and goals by creating (international) non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Moreover, activities of IOs and NGOs are often interconnected and intertwined, making the study of IOs and their contributions across diverse substantive areas even more relevant.

Some international institutions that fit within such a broader model of IOs include the International Red Cross as a humanitarian network, comprising the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and 191 (independent) National Societies. Other examples are the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) or the World Council of Churches. While states remain the principal actors in the contemporary international system, non-state actors can play a meaningful role, and both models are relevant to a comprehensive understanding of international organizations. Many IOs depend on funding by their member states, but also (and often increasingly so) by multilateral actors, NGOs or businesses and private donors.

In spite of the existence of a multitude of IOs and NGOs in the networks of global governance, several transborder challenges still very much need attention, with examples being ecological crises, food and health insecurities, (violent) conflicts, and migration-related pressures. Critical voices have prompted the international community to reflect on the effectiveness of IOs, or consider adaptations or even other institutional forms. Alternative arrangements, such as the informal groupings of states known as ‘the Gs’ (e.g., the G-7/G-8 and the G-20), have emerged with various states experimenting and pushing the possibilities of international governance to focus on key policy areas in adapted ways. Such (informal but relevant) groups usually operate without a secretariat or formal structures of decision-making.

The principles of rules-based multilateralism that IOs are based on (and thrive in) have also been increasingly challenged in recent years. Power rivalries and skepticism towards existing multilateral frameworks from major states like the U.S., China, and Russia have exposed the institutional constraints of many IOs and tested the strength of their norms, values, and obligations. This has led to a rising wave of ‘minilateralism’ where smaller groupings of states form alliances, often for short-term goals, and without the necessity of unanimity or consensus amongst all IO members driving decision-making, and often less commitment in terms of global values and responsibilities. With this, the world order risks becoming more fragmented, as power and coordination are diffused in much smaller and selective coalitions, and the authority of centralized institutions risks being affected.

Yet, despite pitfalls and the challenges that come from a fragmenting and somewhat turbulent world order, IOs continue to survive and evolve, and have often proved to be a positive force in their own right, forming far-reaching networks of activities in fields such as environmental protection and conservation, the economy, peace and security, and social and cultural preservation. Moreover, several IOs have opened the doors for states and non-state actors to negotiate, create international laws and behavioral norms, address conflicts, collect and disseminate information, and pool resources. Many IOs, including those linked to the UN, have demonstrated ‘resilience’ in spite of global political pressures and more recently, budget cuts. Moreover, IOs have consistently remained integral to global governance in their diverse forms amid ongoing transformations in the international order. This enduring presence underscores their ongoing relevance, even in an era when multilateralism is under pressure (Hosli, 2022).

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE LIBERAL GLOBAL ORDER

International organizations in the modern sense began with the establishment of the League of Nations. This was the first major experiment in universal political organization and emerged out of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where the victorious allied powers sought to rebuild international order after the devastations of the First World War. Woodrow Wilson likely was its best-known advocate, and the Covenant of the League was incorporated into the wider Versailles settlement. The League was intended to provide a permanent forum for diplomacy, and a mechanism of collective security, reflecting the belief that peace could be preserved through regular consultation and institutionalized restraint rather than through shifting balances of power alone. Yet the League also revealed an enduring contradiction of liberal multilateralism: Although the U.S. was central to its conception, its Senate refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty, and hence, the U.S. never joined (Mazower, 2012).

The failure of the League of Nations led to the redesign of (universal) international organization. During the Second World War, the Allied Powers began planning a new institution that would retain the

League's universal ambitions while attributing a more decisive role to the major powers. The foundations of the United Nations were laid through a series of wartime conferences: At Dumbarton Oaks in 1944, representatives of the U.S., UK, Soviet Union, and (the Republic of) China drafted the basic structure of the new organization, including a General Assembly (UNGA) and a Security Council (UNSC). At Yalta, in February 1945, the Allied leaders resolved the key issue of voting in the Security Council, especially the veto power of permanent members, ensuring that the organization would rest on continued great-power participation (Mazower, 2012).

This design was finalized at the San Francisco Conference in April to June 1945, where delegates from fifty states negotiated and signed the UN Charter, which entered into force on 24 October 1945. Unlike the League, the UN was built on an explicit compromise between the principles of universalism and power politics: The UNGA reflected the principle of sovereign equality, while the Security Council recognized the special authority of major victorious powers in maintaining peace and security (Mazower, 2012). This way the United Nations became the institutional center of the post-1945 liberal multilateral order.

Following the creation of the United Nations, the postwar order was widened through a parallel set of economic institutions designed to prevent a return to the instability of the interwar period. At Bretton Woods in 1944, Allied states established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to promote global monetary stability and economic cooperation, reflecting the belief that political peace depended in part on a more orderly international economy (Ruggie, 1982). This was followed by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, which created a rules-based framework focusing on reducing tariffs and managing trade relations among states. Together, these institutions gave the liberal global order both a political and an economic foundation.

Over time, this institutional framework became broader and more encompassing. Decolonization brought numerous newly independent states into the United Nations, dramatically expanding its membership and altering the social and political character of the organization. What had initially been a system designed largely by and for the victorious Allied powers increasingly became a forum in which actors from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean asserted their own priorities and visions of international order. This shift, however, did not erase the unequal institutional foundations that were based on the realities of 1945; the most powerful institutions, particularly the Security Council, continued to reflect the postwar distribution of power. Nevertheless, decolonization made international organizations more global in character and forced the liberal order to confront claims for more sovereign equality, racial justice, economic redistribution, and development on a much wider scale (Mazower, 2012).

Simultaneously, the substantive agendas of several IOs expanded far beyond their original focus on diplomatic coordination and postwar reconstruction. Development became a central concern as newly independent states pressed for international support to overcome the legacies of colonial extraction and uneven economic incorporation. Human rights gained institutional prominence, particularly after the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the subsequent growth of treaty-based monitoring bodies. Specialized agencies and international regimes also widened governance to include aspects such as public health, refugee protection, food security, education, and later environmental cooperation. IOs were increasingly expected not merely to prevent conflict, but to manage the social, economic, and humanitarian conditions on which a stable global order depended. Many IOs, based on member state consensus or agreement, gradually expanded the substantive focus of their activities. For

example, the GATT turned into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and the scope of areas included into its intergovernmental rounds of negotiation expanded to encompass a wide range of aspects related to trade, investments, non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade, and the protection of intellectual property rights. This also meant that decision-making, as a consequence of larger membership and a broader scope of activities, became more complex. The number of organizations within the UN also clearly increased. Several specialized agencies were founded early on, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1945, or the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948, and were complemented by a range of specialized programs and funds such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950, the World Food Program (WFP) in 1961, the UN Development Program (UNDP) in 1966 or UN Women, only established in 2010.

With this, IOs, also those connected to the UN, thus became central to the liberal global order not simply because they facilitated cooperation among states, but because they supplied the principal institutional machinery on which that order was legitimized and extended (Mazower, 2012). They created forums in which norms could be articulated, rules negotiated, and collective purposes defined. They also provided administrative and legal mechanisms through which these norms could be implemented across an expanding range of issue areas. However, the post-1945 system did not remain static. By the end of the Cold War, the liberal multilateral model appeared to have reached its moment of greatest confidence, as IOs (including those related to the UN) came to be seen not merely as instruments of interstate coordination, but as the natural framework for global governance. It was this apparent high point of liberal multilateralism that would make its later crisis all the more striking.

FROM POST-COLD WAR TRIUMPH TO CONTEMPORARY CONTESTATION

The end of the Cold War appeared to mark a high point of liberal multilateralism. With ideological division seemingly overcome, several IOs, including the UN itself, were increasingly seen as the legitimate framework for governing an interdependent world. UN paralysis eased, while liberal democracy, market integration, and rules-based cooperation gained renewed force. The language of ‘global governance’ captured this growing confidence in formal organizations and multilateral coordination (Ikenberry, 2020).

Nowhere was this optimism more visible than in the United Nations itself. In the 1990s, the UN’s ambitions expanded well beyond the traditional management of interstate conflict. Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *An Agenda for Peace* captured this new mood, presenting preventative diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding as part of a broader and more activist role for the organization in securing international peace and stability (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Peacekeeping operations multiplied in scope and complexity, while the UN became more deeply involved in state reconstruction, electoral assistance, humanitarian relief, and transitional administration. The organization was increasingly expected not only to contain violence, but to help rebuild political order in its aftermath. In this sense, the post-Cold War moment appeared to confirm that IOs could move beyond narrow coordination among states and assume a more central role in the governance of world politics (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004).

This period was also marked by the rise of humanitarian intervention and the deepening of the normative claims associated with liberal internationalism. Crises (and violent conflict) in Somalia, Bosnia,

Rwanda, and later Kosovo intensified debates over sovereignty, human rights, and the responsibilities of the international community in the face of mass atrocities (Bellamy, 2009). Although the record of intervention in the 1990s was arguably uneven, these debates nonetheless reflected the growing belief that IOs, notably those related to the UN, should serve not only as arenas of interstate diplomacy but as vehicles for the defense of universal values and the management of humanitarian emergencies. The emerging language of civilian protection and international responsibility suggested that the boundaries of multilateral governance were expanding, even as the institutional and political means of realizing those ambitions remained contested.

At the same time, the economic architecture of liberal multilateralism was strengthened. The creation of the WTO in 1995 marked a major institutional deepening of the postwar trade regime, transforming the more provisional framework of GATT into a more formalized and legalized body for the regulation of global trade (Ikenberry, 2001). Together with the IMF and WB, the WTO reinforced the sense that IOs had become the core infrastructure of a liberal global order grounded in openness and managed interdependence. By the late 1990s, it was increasingly plausible to view IOs not as peripheral diplomatic forums, but as a principal institutional machinery through which global governance itself was organized.

Nonetheless, this post-Cold War ascendancy also contained the seeds of a later crisis. As IOs were expected to manage an expanding range of security, economic and humanitarian challenges, the liberal assumptions beneath the order remained less universal than they appeared. The extension of international authority into domestic governance and uneven humanitarian intervention generated tensions that became more visible over time (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004). Because the post-1945 order depended heavily on American support and strategic restraint, the later weakening of U.S. leadership became especially destabilizing for the global multilateral organizational framework.

CHALLENGES TO THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001, patterns of multilateralism briefly appeared to be renewed rather than weakened. The UNSC responded rapidly through Resolutions 1368 and 1373, condemning the attacks, affirming the inherent right of self-defense, and obliging states to strengthen cooperation against terrorism. NATO also invoked Article 5 for the first time in history, underscoring the sense that collective institutions remained central to the management of major security crises.

Yet this moment of solidarity quickly gave way to a more unilateral and exceptional logic of security. The 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy elevated pre-emption to a central principle of American doctrine, signaling a growing willingness to act outside, or ahead of, established multilateral frameworks and constraints. In this respect, 9/11 did not simply generate a new security agenda but accelerated a shift away from the forms of strategic restraint that had long underpinned U.S. leadership within the liberal order (Ikenberry, 2001).

The 2003 invasion of Iraq marked the clearest expression of this change. Whereas the intervention in Afghanistan could still be situated within the broad post-9/11 consensus around self-defense, Iraq exposed profound divisions within the Security Council and the wider international community. It demonstrated that hegemonic power, most closely associated with the construction of the post-1945 multilateral order, was also willing to bypass or reinterpret the institutional legal frameworks. The

damage to the order's legitimacy was therefore not only in strategic but also normative terms. As Acharya (2014) argued, the Iraq War weakened confidence in the impartiality of international law and intensified doubts about whether liberal multilateralism operated as a genuinely universal order or as an order sustained when, and insofar as, it was aligned with U.S. preferences.

The weakening of hegemonic leadership also enhanced institutional fragmentation. As universal bodies struggled to deliver timely and authoritative outcomes, states increasingly seemed to turn to regional organizations and issue-specific coalitions. While such arrangements may sometimes offer flexibility, they also risk displacing universal forums and normalizing a more selective form of cooperation. In that context, multilateralism becomes less of a shared organizing principle of world order than one modality among many, competing with narrower and more strategic forms of coordination (Ikenberry, 2020).

What was, therefore, at stake was not simply the performance of particular organizations but the resilience of the wider liberal multilateral order itself. If international organizations are among the principal mechanisms through which that order was legitimized and extended, their present challenges reflect a deeper transformation in the political foundations on which they depend. The central question is no longer whether multilateral institutions remain necessary; it is whether they can be adapted or renewed under conditions of increased geopolitical rivalry, contested legitimacy, and weakened hegemonic support.

DELEGATION, LEGITIMACY AND COMPLIANCE

These issues bring into focus a more fundamental dimension of contemporary international organizations. Even in a more contested and fragile global order, states continue to rely on international institutions for continuity, expertise, relevant legal frameworks, and administrative capacity. The relevance of IOs, therefore, depends not only on their formal existence, but on the institutional processes through which they exercise authority in practice. This makes it necessary to examine how authority is delegated to them, on what basis that authority is regarded as legitimate, and how compliance with their rules and norms is sustained.

At the center of this discussion is delegation. IOs are created by states, largely funded by states, and dependent on state consent, yet they are also expected to carry out tasks that states cannot easily coordinate alone. By delegating authority to IOs, according to liberal institutionalism, states can reduce transaction costs, facilitate bargaining, gather and distribute information, and create mechanisms for dispute settlement and implementation (Keohane, 1984).

Yet delegation is never politically neutral. To delegate is to transfer a degree of authority away from direct state control and toward an institution that may develop its own procedures and claims to expertise. This is why the relationship between states and IOs is often understood through a principal-agent framework, in which states act as principals and organizations as agents (Hawkins et al., 2006). States delegate because they expect gains from specialization and coordination, but once authority is delegated, the agent may acquire room for maneuver that exceeds the narrow intentions of its creator. Secretariats, legal bodies, technical agencies, and specialized offices may shape agendas, define policy problems, and interpret mandates in ways that are not wholly reducible to member state preferences.

This raises the question of legitimacy. If IOs exercise authority beyond the immediate control of individual governments, on what basis is that authority justified? Their authority depends heavily on

recognition, acceptance, and the belief that their actions are appropriate and justified. One source of legitimacy is functional: organizations are often regarded as legitimate when they solve problems effectively and facilitate collective action where unilateral approaches would fail. Another source is procedural: IOs may derive legitimacy from rules, consultation, representation, and the appearance of impartiality in decision-making (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006). In practice, however, both forms are fragile. Effectiveness can be undermined by deadlock, underfunding, bureaucratic overstretch, or geopolitical rivalry. On the other hand, legitimacy is often weakened by unequal voting structures, opaque decision-making processes or the persistence of post-1945 hierarchies within major institutions.

Such tensions are especially visible in debates about democratic legitimacy. Many international organizations exercise authority that affects domestic policy and the scope of state action, yet they often do so at some distance from direct public accountability. This has generated longstanding concerns about technocracy and democratic deficits. From this perspective, critiques have argued that the problem is not simply IOs being influential, but that they exercise authority without sufficient mechanisms of political contestation or representation. At the same time, it is not clear that legitimacy of global governance can be measured solely by the standards of domestic democracy. In a world of transnational crises, institutions may derive legitimacy not only from electoral accountability, but also from the expertise and provision of collective goods that no single state can secure alone. The question, therefore, is not whether IOs should exercise authority, but under what conditions that authority can be regarded as justified and acceptable.

Compliance is where these questions become the most concrete. International organizations ultimately depend on the willingness and capacity of states to implement the commitments they make. States comply for different reasons: The rules align with their interests, they value their reputation, they accept the legitimacy of the institution, or monitoring and enforcement raise the costs of non-compliance (Keohane, 1984). Importantly, however, non-compliance does not always arise from deliberate defection; states may fail to comply because the rules are ambiguous, because they lack the bureaucratic capacity to implement them, or because domestic political constraints make full implementation difficult to achieve. Compliance is never fully separable from power: Stronger states are often better able to reinterpret or bypass institutional constraints, while weaker states are more likely to bear the practical consequences of enforcement. This unevenness is one reason why legitimacy and compliance are so closely linked. Institutions that cannot enforce rules risk appearing not only weak but unequal.

In the contemporary international order, such issues have become even more urgent. As states turn to unilateral and informal alternatives, IO authority is increasingly contested. If IOs are to remain central to managing transnational problems, they must be seen as entities with fair procedures, their authority justified, and their rules implemented with consistency. Delegation, legitimacy and compliance, therefore, expose the central tension of global governance: IOs are created to enable cooperation under sovereignty, yet the authority required for that cooperation raises persistent questions of control, accountability, and fairness.

THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Many IOs in the current system of global governance have always operated within an unstable context of international politics. From earlier efforts to manage great-power conflicts to today's polycrisis and renewed geopolitical rivalry, their central task remains the same: To organize cooperation in ways that reduce conflict, also amongst their member states.

The first challenge for many IOs is the renewed tension between sovereignty and collective obligation: IOs depend on states voluntarily accepting limits on their autonomy, yet many governments have become more nationalist, inward-looking, or skeptical of multilateral authority, often based on populist sentiments. Such trends weaken consensus-building and limit the capacity of IOs to implement their mandates. These pressures are intensified by democratic backsliding, funding crises, and the more openly unilateral posture of powerful states (e.g., the U.S.).

Moreover, North-South divisions are generally intensifying. Global South countries are pushing for reforms for an equitable and fair international decision-making structure after decades of alleged marginalization, echoing the past movements of the New International Economic Order (NIEO). The Group of Seventy-Seven (G77), a political grouping that formed after the decolonization of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, is advancing the agenda for South-South cooperation and solidarity, and is calling for a more just and fair representation on the international stage (often with the support of China). India, too, has been vocal for better Global South representation in the UN, NAM, and G20 that would better address the concerns of the Global South (Thakur, 2024). The growing disappointment in universal IOs for failing to perform and lacking a more inclusive decision-making process (an example being the UNSC), worsens distrust and creates rifts between developing countries and global institutions, pushing them to seek alternative and smaller cooperation arrangements to better fulfill their interests and needs.

Another challenge involves the rising influence of emerging economies and of several Asian countries, shifting global power constellations. The patterns of multilateralism are changing; entities such as the BRICS (with Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa forming the group's core members) are playing an active role in global affairs and are equipped with (collective) economic power. This is evidenced by China with its 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), new powerful blocs exercising influence in what now (since 2023) is the G21, and African countries' pushing for permanent membership in the UNSC. The introduction of such new players affects patterns of global governance, with each seeking to reshape universal and other international organizations according to their own agendas and national interests.

Moreover, several IOs will also have to contend with new forms of international negotiations and forums, and defend their legitimacy in the absence of a stable world order. With the retreat of the U.S. in defending an international (collective) agenda, deadlocks and stalemates emanating from great power rivalries, difficulties forming consensus in important international institutions (including the WTO, the WHO or the UNSC), and questions surrounding the principles of multilateralism, there has been a wave of alternatives emerging: Smaller and looser alignments of states represent a form of this minilateral trend and are often perceived as a more viable and flexible way of collaborating and governing international relations (Thakur, 2024), while these entities in turn raise questions related to representativeness and the legitimacy of their actions.

Growing non-Western economies benefiting from the existing liberal global order may generally support liberal international institutions, but it remains unclear whether they will advocate for the same norms. The G20, which expanded the G8 after the 2008 financial crisis in terms of membership, seems to have been less inclined to take on the burdens of leadership and to endorse the liberal order. In the context of current leadership vacuums, some scholars have even called it a "G-Zero world", where there are no new groupings among states and no one country or bloc with the willingness or economic and political ability to fill in the role of the U.S. in terms of maintaining the liberal order in the post-Cold War era (Bremmer & Roubini, 2011).

With challenges to the rules-based order and to the foundations of multilateralism (Hosli, 2022), many IOs seek to find ways to remain relevant and effective in practice. Many organizations, including those

within the UN system, aim to find solutions to adapt and increase resilience, also in the current era of funding pressures, which are notably due to delays in member state financial contributions or even their decrease or withdrawal by individual states. Several IOs are experimenting with a widening of their funding sources – making up for decreases in member state funding to have more support from public or private donors and from external institutions -- while patterns of earmarked funding and increased donor dependence can affect and constrain the ways in which they fulfill their core mandates.

Nonetheless, many UN member states accept the importance of global institutions. While there are pressures forcing several IOs to re-organize and to find new ways of dealing with current and emerging challenges, it often are the organizations' member states themselves that would need to find consensus and agreement on ways to proceed and to achieve institutional adaptations.

While multilateralism is under pressure, it likely still is the most adequate way to constrain the effects of global power rivalries and to provide relevant (institutional) safeguards and protection very much needed in the framework of a conflictual international environment. IOs certainly remain central to such processes.

CONCLUSIONS

The evolution of both universal and more substantively focused IOs over time shows that many of them have always existed at the intersection of universalism, power politics, state sovereignty, legal obligations, principles of fairness and equity. Their history is therefore not one of linear progress, but of repeated adaptation to changing forms of conflict and interdependence.

Many IOs, including those within the UN system, have helped legitimize and extend the liberal global order notably after 1945, while their agenda has gradually evolved beyond peace and security to include aspects such as development, human rights, humanitarian action, health policies, migration, and environmental protection. Yet the authority of several organizations has always rested on somewhat fragile foundations. Post-Cold War expectations expanded the responsibilities of many IOs, while U.S. unilateralism, geopolitical rivalry, unequal institutional structures, and Global South demands for reform have increasingly exposed the limits of liberal multilateralism.

Still, IOs remain indispensable to global governance. They provide forums for diplomatic exchange and negotiation, generate norms and relevant legal frameworks, coordinate expertise, help collect and disseminate information, and lead state and non-state actors to address problems that cannot just be managed by individual countries. Their future relevance hinges not simply on preserving existing structures, but on member state readiness to facilitate adaptation, to help IOs remain to be perceived as legitimate, inclusive, and effective in a world marked by fragmentation, rivalry, and transnational crisis. While multilateralism is under pressure, it remains to be the most desirable way to deal with global challenges in an international context. Many IOs would be willing to adapt, but without the support of member states as their main constitutional units, they cannot change their institutional structures, or the range of subjects addressed. Consensus among member states is core to achieve outcomes and adaptations, and remains an aim to be pursued despite headwinds faced due to unilateralism, criticism of global governance structures and nationalist or populist sentiments. In spite of the various obstacles and challenges they may face, IOs are central also in the medium and long term for ordered, peaceful and effective ways of global governance.

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