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# Focus: Globalization
# Introduction: Globalization, Governance, Crisis

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The financial and economic crisis that erupted in 2007–2008 (variously termed 'the 2007–2008 global financial crisis',[1] 'the great crash of 2008',[2] 'the Great Financial Crisis of 2007–2009',[3] 'the Great Recession of 2008–10' or 'the Great Recession'[4]) calls for a fresh look at globalization and global governance. The April 2009 G-20 summit in London was hailed a year later as 'an enormous success' in governance that halted 'the drop in the global economy,' bolstered the 'financial and institutional capacity of the international community to address future crises', and furthered 'national and global financial regulatory reform'.[5] The question remains whether the global financial crisis and the response to it indeed herald a new chapter in governance. Moreover, what degree of international cooperation can, and should be hoped for? Some, for instance, apprehensive of a quasi-biological pooling of detrimental genes, advocate 'regulatory diversity' in order to avoid magnifying mistakes, and prefer to place responsibility firmly with states.[6] In the shadow of the 'Great Recession', seven international relations analysts, all from the Low Countries, address major issues of governance and change in world politics. Their analyses were submitted by the onset of 2010.

The idea of a world government, advocated by Dante, questioned by Grotius (who pointed to its sheer difficulty), and blasted by Hobbes,[7] proves seductive in an age of growing global ties, interdependencies and vulnerabilities.[8] In a refreshing interpretation of the global democracy dream, Jaap de Wilde discerns two major thrusts behind global democracy thinking: one focused on promoting democracy as the basis for good governance, the other on creating a democratic world polity. De Wilde perceives abysmal pitfalls lurking behind both approaches to democracy promotion, and mercilessly delves into them.

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The 'global governance' approach is a key contribution of international relations theory to the globalization issue.[9] Jorg Kustermans maps the major conceptions of global governance, analysing their respective weaknesses and strengths. The work of James Rosenau, a central figure in, indeed the 'father' of, global governance thinking, is situated in its historical evolution and complexity. Kustermans seeks a way between, on the one hand, Marxist gloom with regard to global governance, and, on the other hand, (cautious) liberal optimism.

The former 'Eastern bloc' countries of Central and Eastern Europe were hit notoriously hard by the global financial crisis,[10] although not in a uniform fashion. Herman Hoen emphasises how differently these societies were affected by the Great Recession, and examines why. Domestic politics matter. The respective depth of the crisis, Hoen suggests, may have been caused not so much by globalization and openness, but rather by the incompleteness of the transition from a command economy.

The meteoric rise and proliferation of neo-liberalism, beyond the 'Anglo-sphere' into the European continent, the Western hemisphere and China, remains one of the remarkable political-economic epics of the last quarter of the twentieth century.[11] Dries Lesage and Mattias Vermeiren study the impact of neoliberal thinking through the lens of international taxation. They meticulously scout for evidence pointing to an undermining, or at least weakening, of 'neoliberal hegemony' as a consequence of the Great Recession, yet the evidence, they conclude maybe somewhat regretfully, remains mixed.

While many perceive an ongoing 'gravity shift' toward Asia,[12] the Great Recession is said to have 'fast-forwarded history,' pushing China to the global forefront 'sooner and more assertively than had been expected.'[13] Some, driven by a distaste for Western values or for the United States' role in the world, greet this process with glee,[14] glossing over the autocracy, repression, corruption, and inequity notably with regard to China's countryside,[15] and failing to include India in a world-political development picture that promises to be significantly more diverse and complex than often adumbrated.[16] Be it as it may, the need is felt to look beyond the current 'unipolar moment'[17] – a moment whose beneficial side may be insufficiently discerned and appreciated.[18] Gustaaf Geeraerts sees the contours of a new world order in which China, a (if not the) primary beneficiary of globalization, plays a (if not the) primary role. In keeping with its growing weight, the quality of China's relations with other major actors is becoming ever more important. The European Union, meanwhile, appears, in Geeraerts' diagnosis, far too self-absorbed and inflexible, sticking in self-defeating stubbornness to a set of norms that China is most unlikely to accept. Geeraerts prescribes the EU a potent potion of realism and adaptability. Both China and the EU can learn form each other, he soothingly concludes, although the burden of diplomatic movement and improvement is put squarely with the EU.

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The much ballyhooed notion of a 'return' of the state during the Great Recession, fed by spectacular government interventions in the economy, including massive bailouts of large private companies, raises the spectre of advanced economies fettered and slowed down by the heavy hand of government.[19] Jacobus Delwaide ponders the relationship between globalization, the state, and the global financial crisis, exploring the question of whether the state has effectively 'returned' and is there to stay, and suggesting that, notwithstanding neo-liberalism's notable impact on hearts, minds, and policies, and the often highlighted significance of international exchanges, organizations, and non-state actors, the state may actually never have 'retreated'[20] as far as is sometimes assumed.

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