



Policy Memo

DATE: October 19, 2015

SUBJECT: Understanding the Future Actors in Transnational Governance

On October 14–16, 2015, the Stanley Foundation gathered experts and policymakers from academia, government, international organizations, and civil society organizations at the Airlie Center in Warrenton, VA, for its 56th annual Strategy for Peace Conference. The conference featured autonomous roundtables focused on policy challenges in four key global issue areas: Climate Change, Human Protection from Mass Atrocities, Nuclear Security, and Global Governance.

This policy memo captures the major discussion points and policy recommendations from the roundtable on “Understanding the Future Actors in Transnational Governance,” chaired by Keith Porter, President and CEO, the Stanley Foundation. Additional information about this roundtable and others held as a part of the 56th annual Strategy for Peace Conference is available on our Web site: <http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/spc-2015.cfm>.

The number and variety of transnational actors involved in global governance has increased dramatically, but this phenomenon remains poorly understood. The lack of common tools to analyze this changing context has further restricted policymakers and stakeholders in transnational governance from understanding their options and acting in the most effective manner.

The group discussed the scope and definition of actors in transnational governance, terms of engagement between transnational actors and other governance institutions, and how to design a framework for practitioners.

The objectives of the roundtable were to develop a method to identify the main actors and their roles for any issue area and to develop options for multistakeholder governance that could be applied across a variety of issue areas. The roundtable grew out of a previous Stanley Foundation workshop in November 2014, cohosted with the World Future Society and the National Defense University. As part of the discussion, participants assessed the context in which transnational actors operate, trends driving transnational actors, and different categories and forms of transnational actors. It also examined the circumstances under which transnational actors and global governance institutions should engage one another, and the opportunities and pitfalls of transnational governance.

This policy memo outlines trends in transnational governance, including the context in which transnational actors operate and the roles that nonstate actors can and do take in transnational governance. It also identifies options to improve transnational governance, including a set of categories that can aid in understanding context and roles in transnational governance.

Understanding Complexity Is Essential for Effective Transnational Governance

Complexity and uncertainty are unavoidable features of governance in the twenty-first century. Understanding these preconditions from the outset can help actors in transnational governance build resilience into their efforts. At the same time, the global interdependence of today's world means that any transnational governance will have second- and third-order effects, regardless of the actions taken and of the operating context.

Existing international institutions have different mechanisms and processes, and involve different actors. Some institutions have formalized rules of engagement for nonstate actors, while in others, nonstate actors must resort to indirect channels to influence decision making. Even in venues with formal channels for civil society and other nonstate actor participation, these may not be the most effective way for these groups to influence outcomes. Several participants voiced concerns that governments or international institutions may use formal engagement processes as a way to coopt or consolidate control over an agenda. Yet effective nonstate actor participation in a policy process can lead to greater legitimacy for international institutions as well as nonstate actor efforts. As a result, civil society organizations and other transnational actors must understand the specific operations of the process they wish to influence.

The plurality of actors in transnational governance means that legitimacy of both processes and actors is increasingly contested. No process can include all potential stakeholders, but excluded stakeholders will call into question the legitimacy of the process from which they are omitted. Consequently, a participant suggested, the challenge for transnational governance is to include the *relevant* stakeholders. Others suggested that conscious efforts at multistakeholder buy-in at the outset of an effort can go a long way toward limiting perceptions of exclusion and improving results.

At the same time, the diversification of new actors in transnational governance means that even as it is increasingly contested, legitimacy can come from many sources. As a result, it becomes more difficult to assess which actors and processes are legitimate and which are not. Participants underscored the importance of recognizing that legitimacy can come from both performance (i.e., results) and accountability.

Transnational Actors Make Significant Contributions to Global Governance, but Their Role Remains Poorly Understood

In transnational governance, nongovernmental groups often supplement gaps in traditional interstate governance. Nonstate actors can play a variety of roles in transnational governance, including agenda setting, norm creation, lobbying, and implementing agreed outcomes. They frequently have more expertise or even direct jurisdiction on a given issue than governments.

Civil society can also play a unique role in holding nonstate, state, and international organizations accountable for following through on commitments.

No group is monolithic, including states, businesses, international institutions, and civil society. As a result, even when organizations or groups involved in transnational governance may seem to have oppositional interests, there are always collaborative individuals. Several participants suggested that transnational actors, including individuals, can be bridge builders, bringing together polarized groups. Participants also noted that not just civil society but other actors, including funders and middle-power countries, have been successful bridge builders on various issues.

Still, several participants stressed that transnational actors must continue to educate states, international organizations, and the general public about the contributions to governance that transnational actors can make. Although the presence of transnational actors in global governance may appear obvious to those intimately acquainted with them, the majority of the world is still unfamiliar with this phenomenon.

Key Observations on Transnational Governance

The following are notable observations on transnational governance that came out of the roundtable discussions.

- Multistakeholder approaches are more likely to be successful in accomplishing their goals than methods that include only a segment of stakeholders (e.g., states). Such approaches are also likely to lead to the most durable solutions to global challenges.
- The United Nations has been more successful in achieving its goals through multistakeholder approaches when it gives different types of actors—including business and civil society—equal seats at the table (e.g., the Global Compact) than when it pursues goals through state-dominated intergovernmental routes (e.g., the General Assembly or Security Council).
- Actors should identify the goal or problem to overcome and build a coalition around it, rather than vice versa.
- Actors should be flexible in how they pursue their goals; the most effective process may not be the most obvious at the outset. Additionally, as governance processes evolve, transnational actors should be open to new formats and methods.
- Several categories may help transnational actors and those who study them better understand the context in which they operate and the roles they perform, and thus more effectively accomplish their goals. Although there are overlaps between categories, and many actors and activities will not fit neatly into these categories, they provide an outline of a typology for understanding the actors in transnational governance. These categories, while incomplete, include:
 - Type of actor, including

- Nongovernmental organizations, corporations, and foundations
 - Public or private organizations
 - Donors, contractors, and aid recipients
- Issue area: (including human rights, finance, and environment)
- Geography: global, regional, or local
- Methods of engagement (along a spectrum)
 - Oppositional to collaborative
 - Top down to bottom up
 - Formal to informal
- Functions (including agenda setting, coalition building, and implementation)
- Participants also stressed the importance of relationships, process, and accountability in creating durable and effective outcomes. Many well-intentioned transnational actors do not hold themselves accountable to local constituencies, and as a result, their “solutions” are often inadequate and unsustainable.
- Several participants highlighted the benefit of in-depth, multifaceted mapping of situations where transnational actors are attempting to have impact. Mapping that can accommodate real-time changes is even better.

Looking Ahead

Beyond further exploration of the observations listed above, the discussion uncovered several potential lines of inquiry for future work on transnational governance:

- Find ways to develop actionable guidelines for transnational governance actors.
- Identify emerging issues where transnational governance can fill policy gaps.
- There are differences between the conditions that lead to collective global action to support a vision or create a global norm and the conditions under which civil society groups are most likely to achieve intended and well-executed policy outcomes. Though this workshop mainly focused on the latter, understanding the former is also extremely important for understanding the different actors in transnational governance.
- More work is needed to understand how transnational governance can be most effective in conjunction with traditional forms of governance, as well as in highly polarized, “ungoverned,” or highly regulated or controlled environments.
- Applying the parameters developed in this roundtable to specific case studies will help inform future actors in transnational governance of the best methods to accomplish their objectives.

- Although participants in this workshop generally understood nonstate transnational actors to be nonviolent, violent nonstate actors and groups that blur the lines between violent and nonviolent deserve closer examination.
- Examine the role information technology can play in transnational governance, especially in data collection and analysis and Internet platforms.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation or any of the conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

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About The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation advances multilateral action to create fair, just, and lasting solutions to critical issues of peace and security. The foundation's work is built on a belief that greater international cooperation will improve global governance and enhance global citizenship. The organization values its Midwestern roots and family heritage as well as its role as a nonpartisan, private operating foundation. The Stanley Foundation does not make grants. Online at www.stanleyfoundation.org.