

# Roundtable on Capitalism and Global Governance

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## Introduction

Scholarly and public interest in the nexus of capitalism and global governance has intensified in recent years. The persistence of economic inequality, the rise of populism, the backlash against globalization, the Covid-19 pandemic and supply chain fragility, the resurgence of open conflict in Europe, and the urgency of the climate change crisis have only drawn further attention to the relationships of markets and trade to norms and institutions. Solutions to many of these challenges, which are closely tied to capitalist dynamics, require interventions on a scale that only institutions of global governance can provide.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, these challenges compromise governance institutions by making them susceptible to private influence. Moreover, critics have raised alarm about the ways some forms of global governance – such as powerful philanthropic institutions, private summitry forums, and international organizations that enforce economic globalization on nation-states – evade democratic accountability.<sup>2</sup> Such developments have prompted scholars to analyze the entangled histories of capitalism and global governance and the evolution of the global economy and its regulation as well as collective efforts to provide for the well-being of humans and their environments.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Michael N. Barnett, Jon C. W. Pevehouse, and Kal Raustiala, eds., *Global Governance in a World of Change* (Cambridge, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of current debates, see Christopher May, “Who’s in Charge? Corporations as Institutions of Global Governance,” *Palgrave Communications* 1, no. 15042 (2015): 1–10; Jinseop Jang, Jason McSparren, and Yuliya Rashchupkina, “Global Governance: Present and Future,” *Palgrave Communications* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–5; Tim Bartley, “Transnational Corporations and Global Governance” *Annual Review of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (2018): 145–165; Martin Wolf, *The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (New York, 2023); Quinn Slobodian, *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy* (London, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance Adam Tooze’s recent publications: Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (New York, 2018); Adam Tooze, *Shutdown: How Covid Shook the World’s Economy* (New York, 2021).

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This roundtable brings together four leading scholars and their perspectives on the past, present, and possible futures of research on capitalism and global governance. Patricia Clavin discusses capitalism and governance through the dynamics of international relations, while Nicolás Perrone brings a lawyer's perspective to the public-private creation of international rules; Neil Rollings considers firms, governments, and global governance through both continuities and change, and Quinn Slobodian applies the analytical framework of international political economy to the evolving relationships between states and markets on a global scale.

Despite their diverse points of departure, all roundtable participants emphasize the centrality of business to both capitalism and global governance and stress the need to analyze the evolution of these complex relations through the lens of firms. As a result, this roundtable demonstrates the value of bringing business history in conversation with related historical disciplines – such as histories of international relations, economic thought, international law, and global history – and it lays a foundation for further research on capitalism and global governance. Together, the following contributions examine corporations in the evolution of international political economy and global economic frameworks.<sup>4</sup> They respond to the call of international business scholars to answer the “big questions” around business environments and strategy.<sup>5</sup> And they attend to the sociology of economic and political elites, fundamental to understanding the dynamics of global capitalism and its governance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On political economy, see, for instance, Christian May and Andreas Nölke, eds, *The Handbook of the International Political Economy of the Corporation* (Cheltenham, 2018); Rawi Abdelal, “The Multinational Firm and Geopolitics: Europe, Russian Energy, and Power,” *Business & Politics* 17, no. 3 (2015): 553–576.

<sup>5</sup> On international business, for a precursor work, see Raymond Vernon, *Sovereignty at Bay: The Multinational Spread of U.S. Enterprises* (New York, 1971). For appeals to renew the field, see Peter J. Buckley, Jonathan P. Doh, and Mirko H. Benischke, “Towards a Renaissance in International Business Research? Big Questions, Grand Challenges, and the Future of IB Scholarship,” *Journal of International Business Studies* 48, no. 9 (2017): 1045–1064.

<sup>6</sup> On the sociology of elites, see Bernhard Reinsberg, Thomas Stubbs, Alexander Kentikelenis, and Lawrence King, “Bad Governance: How Privatization Increases Corruption in the Developing World,” *Regulation & Governance* (2019): 1–20; Alexander Kentikelenis and Sarah Babb, “The Making of Neoliberal Globalization: Norm Substitution and the Politics of Clandestine Institutional Change,” *American Journal of Sociology* 124, no. 6 (2019): 1720–1762; Babb and Kentikelenis, “Markets Everywhere: The Washington Consensus and the Sociology of Global Institutional Change,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47 (2021): 521–541; William K. Carroll, *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the 21st Century* (New York, 2010); Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford, 2001); Neil Fligstein, *The Banks Did It: An Anatomy of the Financial Crisis* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).