

Introduction to the Debate Section

Understanding Contemporary Challenges to the Global Order

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Many observers of contemporary global politics conclude that the present moment represents one of the most unsettled times in global politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The unprecedented foreign relations of the Trump presidency, the continued success of radical right populists in Europe and beyond, the inability of European states to resolve the problems of the Eurozone or the surge in immigration, and growing challenges to international institutions as diverse as the ICC, the EU, and the WTO all point to a global order under stress.

Scholars of comparative and international politics and political economy are now asking questions that would have seemed far-fetched only years ago: Are we witnessing a turning point in the history of the post-WWII global political order, or rather a continuation of trends that have long been in

evidence? What has brought us to this point? And what are the likely consequences? This Debate Section brings together a group of political scientists who specialize in comparative, European, and international politics and political economy to discuss these contemporary challenges to the global liberal order.

The Debate begins with the question of what the contemporary global order entails. This is important because although scholars commonly invoke concepts such as “liberal international order,” they mean different things to different people – from US hegemony, to an economic order founded on free trade and investment, to an international regime one that promotes liberal ideas and values such as democracy and human rights. Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Hofmann therefore clarify our understanding of “the global order” and offer a pared-down conceptualization: a multilateral, rules-based order comprised of states as the primary actors that promotes economic liberalism. They argue that rather than a crisis *of* the order, we are witnessing a crisis *within* the order, that is, a moment of systemic transformation of the existing order.

The three remaining essays in the Debate build on this conceptual framework and explore the current challenges from the individual level to the international level. Bisbee et al. ask what has happened to the domestic consensus that had for decades undergirded the global order in the Western world. They propose that political opposition to the international order is rooted in the negative individual and local-level effects of globalization, not in opposition to international institutions per se, which are no longer appropriately cushioned by domestic social and economic policies.

Goodman and Schimmelfennig then tackle the politics of migration, an increasingly salient policy field that spans the national and international dimensions of the contemporary crisis. They argue that while international migration is an essential component of the global order, in practice, it has proved particularly challenging to establish a rules-based, multilateral regime governing the movement of people. Policy regimes governing international migration have never been coherently formulated, leaving contradictory policy arrangements governing issues such as immigration, asylum, welfare, and citizenship. New bouts of international migration over the past decade have

thus not *created* a crisis of the global order, but rather reveal a policy regime that would never have been able to confront such challenges.

The Debate concludes with an essay by Copelovitch et al. that evaluates the nature of the challenges to each of the three fundamental ordering principles of the global order identified by paper 1: a state-led global order, economic liberalism, and rule-based multilateralism. It argues that there are grounds for optimism with respect to the two first principles of an international state-led order and economic liberalism, but identify greater challenges to the procedural principle of inclusive, rule-based multilateralism, such as unilateral disintegration challenges and an increase in popular scepticism about the merits of international institutions. Nonetheless, the paper concludes that there are reasons for cautious optimism that the core principles of the liberal order will endure.

Each of the contributions takes a distinct perspective on the questions posed above. But together, they contribute to our understanding of the three major questions about the contemporary challenges to the global order. First, on the question of whether what we are seeing today is truly a new development, or rather old wine in new bottles, some contributions (such as Eilstrup and Sangiovanni, and Goodman and Schimmelfennig) argue that crisis has always been a feature – and driver – of the international system, and that certain issues, such as immigration, have never been successfully tackled at the international level. Others (such as Bisbee et al. and Copelovitch et al.) argue that today's challenges are bigger than ever before. Second, on the question on what has brought us to this point, most contributions highlight a growing crisis of domestic politics and a growing politicization of international issues such as migration as a root-cause of the problems faced on the international level. These domestic developments also make it harder for international institutions to fulfill their mandates. Finally, regarding the likely consequences of the contemporary challenges to the global order, the contributions point out that crises are not an unusual feature of the global order and that today's high degree of political, economic, and technological complexity creates a need for international cooperation that will not be undone by domestic politics. The papers also identify risks to the global order that have the potential to develop into more serious challenges for the existing global order.

Taken together, the contributions in this debate offer an overview of what is at stake with this crisis and suggest ways forward of how scholars of public policy, international relations, and comparative and European politics can combine their respective strengths to study it.