

## 2 A meso-level analysis

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This book proposes to study changes in how international financial institutions (IFIs) and donors go about the work of governing finance for development. Yet how do we go about studying the *how* of global governance? This may sound like a straightforward question, but it is in fact a significant challenge: if we want to focus on the process of governance rather than on specific organizations, it is not obvious what level of analysis to focus on, what objects to study, or how to analyse them. This chapter provides an overview of how I have gone about the task of studying the how of governance, and develops a framework of analysis that can be applied to other issue areas.

This book, and the framework that it proposes for studying global governance, is the product of a long process of trial and error, as I have sought to find ways of studying emerging patterns in global economic governance. When I began this research, almost seven years ago, I was initially interested in understanding policy changes that I had noticed in the International Monetary Fund (IMF), particularly its decision after the Asian financial crisis to streamline conditionality and introduce the standards and codes initiative. As I began talking to people at the organization and in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and reading through archival documents on past practices, it became clear to me that these changes were not simply about fewer or different kinds of conditions, but instead reflected a more profound reworking of the practices of conditionality. These policies drafted new actors, including market participants and civil society actors, into the process of implementing and evaluating conditions and developed new techniques to do so. They relied on different assumptions from those of the structural adjustment era, such as those underpinning new institutionalist economics, and involved less direct forms of power and more complex forms of authority.

Over time, it also became clear that what I was studying was not one or two new policies, but rather several clusters of policies and related practices that shared certain assumptions and orientations. Each cluster could be understood as a particular governance strategy. The strategy of

fostering ownership, for example, linked several policies together: not just the streamlining of conditionality but also the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the move to general budget support among donors. The strategy of standardization in turn underpinned the development of the standards and codes initiative as well as the good governance agenda and the millennium development goals (MDGs). Eventually I came to identify two more recent strategies focused on managing risk and vulnerability, and measuring results.

Although this project began as a study of the IMF, it soon became clear that if I focused only on this one institution, I would miss the connections between changes in IMF conditionality policy and those in other organizations such as the World Bank and British Department for International Development (DFID) that were often the originators of key policies and strategies. I could instead have treated these shifts as epochal global governance changes, understanding them as the latest stage of advanced capitalism or another example of global governmentality or the risk society.<sup>1</sup> This more global perspective does make it possible to see broader forces underlying some of these policy changes. Yet, it quickly became clear that by focusing only on the broadest level of analysis I would risk over-generalizing the changes taking place and miss the complex particularities involved in each institution and policy.

Instead of focusing on a single organization or on macro-historical patterns in global governance, this book engages in what I described in the Introduction as a meso-level analysis: one that starts in the middle, focusing on processes and practices that cut across a range of different institutions and links various actors. For this reason, this is not a book organized around specific organizations – with chapters on the IMF, the World Bank and key donor organizations, for example; nor is it structured around an analysis of the logics of capitalism, neoliberalism or network-based governance. Instead, I am focusing on four key governance *strategies* – standardization, ownership, risk and vulnerability management, and results-measurement – which are shared by a variety of organizations and agencies, but take specific forms in each. In order to understand how the work of governance is being done, I trace the role of five key governance *factors* that make up these governance strategies: the actors involved in governing, the techniques used, the forms of knowledge implicated, and the forms of power and authority involved. Finally, I take a step backwards and ask whether there are any broader patterns underlying the shifts taking place in these various governance practices; through this process, I have identified the emergence of a particular *style* of governance in recent years – a more provisional approach to governing.

This chapter begins by arguing for the importance of understanding global governance as a kind of practice – situating my theoretical framework relative to the broader practice turn in social theory and international relations (IR). I then go on to develop the key categories in my analytic framework, explaining how we might study global governance by focusing on governance strategies, examining governance factors and identifying particular governance styles. I conclude by putting these analytic categories into action, seeking to understand how governance patterns change over time. The goal of this book is not simply to understand what these new governance strategies do, but also to figure out how they came into existence and whether they will survive. By focusing on the meso-level of analysis, I argue, we can develop a more nuanced conception of how not just individual policies, but more complex strategies and styles of governance, change over time.

### **Understanding governance as practice**

Over the past decades, a growing number of social theorists have begun to use the concept of practice in their work. They are an eclectic bunch, ranging from Pierre Bourdieu (who developed a “practice theory” based on the concepts of practice, habitus and field), to Michel Foucault (who focused on discursive practices and, in his later work, on embodiment), and Michel Callon and Bruno Latour (who have studied the practice of knowledge-creation in the sciences through actor network theory (ANT)). Most IR scholars who identify themselves as part of the practice turn have drawn primarily on the work of Bourdieu.<sup>2</sup> My framework, in contrast, owes more to the insights of Callon, Latour and other scholars of science and technology studies (STS), as well as to some of the ideas of Foucault.

What then is a practice, and why is it useful for understanding global governance? In his introduction to a field-defining book on the subject, Theodore Schatzki defines practices as “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity organized around shared practical understandings.”<sup>3</sup> It is worth spending a moment unpacking some of the implications of this definition. Practice theorists’ emphasis on the material character of human action differentiates them from constructivist and certain post-structuralist approaches, which tend to focus more narrowly on its discursive or ideational dimension. Yet practices are not just activities (e.g. whirling around in a circle), but meaningful ones, organized around common understandings (e.g. about the pirouette as a kind of dance movement). Practices are therefore both material and discursive, combining an action with a frame of reference.

Because practices are socially situated but enacted by individuals and groups, a focus on practice provides one possible answer to the conundrum of the relationship between structure and agency. Agency is constituted in part through practice: we are defined in part by what we do (as dancers or paper-pushers), and in part by the social context that makes this action possible. At the same time, practices are modified through individual and collective action, and change over time. There is a wide array of meaningful activities that we might define as practices, ranging from pronouncing words, to writing a memo, to negotiating a loan with a low-income country.<sup>4</sup> As these examples suggest, practices can be thought of as connected and nested in one another, with more complex practices relying on a whole range of more basic and often unnoticed ones.

In IR circles, a number of scholars have begun to make use of the idea of practice in their work.<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, in particular, have provided an elegant and coherent pitch for the importance of practice in IR, building on Bourdieu's work to do so. Although my use of practice in this book shares much with their contribution, it also differs in several important respects – partly on theoretical grounds, but also on practical ones. Much of the recent work on Bourdieu in IR, Adler and Pouliot's included, has focused on empirical cases in the realm of security and diplomacy. In this particular realm, Bourdieu's ideas have proven to be very fruitful. Bourdieu's concepts of field, doxa and habitus are particularly useful for explaining the persistence of logics of practice. Pouliot, for example, examines the operation of the field of diplomacy – which he defines as a relatively autonomous community of practice in which everyone agrees on the stakes, knows the rules (or doxa) and plays the same game.<sup>6</sup> In this context, Pouliot puts considerable emphasis on the role of habitus, the tacit know-how and assumptions that various actors learn through their position in the wider social structure, and bring to the game of diplomacy.<sup>7</sup>

Although my theoretical framework shares much with these earlier contributions to the practice turn in IR, there are also a number of key areas in which it differs. In order to make the practice turn work for the study of global governance, I argue that we need to place more emphasis on knowledge-making practices, shift from fields to problems as the basis for communities of practice, and pay greater attention to the dynamics of change.

Practice-oriented IR scholars have tended to emphasize the importance of tacit or practical knowledge in international politics, and to differentiate it from more reflexive, self-conscious forms. Pouliot for example seeks to contrast “the abstract schemes produced by technocrats and social scientists” with the tacit, un verbalized knowledge that informs practice:

it is this tacit, practical knowledge that he sees as crucial to international practice.<sup>8</sup> Yet, those who study global governance would certainly want to question such a tidy distinction between the abstractions of bureaucrats and the concrete practices of governance.<sup>9</sup> The main practitioners of global governance are in fact technocrats, and many of them are also social scientists (particularly economists). Their practical work involves translating the messiness of the world into useful abstractions (reports, tables, matrices, scores, indexes) that can then be deployed to govern their unruly objects. To grasp the dynamics of global governance, we therefore need to understand the production of expert knowledge as a kind of practice – a task, I will suggest below, that is particularly suited to the insights of ANT scholars like Callon and Latour.

The concept of field used by many IR practice theorists also needs to be used with caution when considering the processes of global governance. Fields have a kind of coherent logic that enables those operating within them to know the rules and to agree on the stakes involved, rather like playing a game.<sup>10</sup> While it is possible to identify a number of fields within the realm of development finance, the closer we look at current practices of governance, the less clear it becomes where the fields begin and end. Actors working at the IMF, the World Bank, NGOs and aid agencies share many assumptions about the tacit rules of the game and the relative hierarchy of economics over other forms of intellectual capital. Yet they also have quite different cultures: the IMF is a centralized institution that focuses tightly on “hard” financial issues and concerns, whereas the World Bank is known for its diffuse structure and more heterogeneous intellectual culture. If we focus on who is actually engaged in the practices of governance, we see a very loose network of actors (including international organizations (IOs), NGOs, governments, the private sector and academia) playing a multitude of games, often using different rules, and seeking different stakes.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, many of the recent changes in development finance are expanding the community of practice by including an ever-wider range of actors in the processes of governance, making the boundaries of that community subject to change and contestation. As I will discuss below, I have therefore found it more useful in this study to look at how actors and practices become connected around concrete problems and strategies rather than through predefined fields.<sup>12</sup>

It is also important that we pay attention to changes in governance practice. As social theorists like William Sewell, David Stern and Anthony King have pointed out, Bourdieu’s concepts of field and habitus tend to push his analysis towards the structuralist, or objectivist, side of the balance, making it easier to explain the stability of practices than to understand their changes.<sup>13</sup> Although it is important to be able to understand

what does not change in IOs and other institutions over time, we also need conceptual tools to help us understand shifts in practices.<sup>14</sup> Even mundane bureaucratic practices change significantly over time. Why is it that everyone working at a development agency or government-funded development NGO nowadays (at least in certain countries) knows how to prepare a results matrix when proposing or evaluating a program, whereas they had not even heard of the practice fifteen years ago? Why did various practices designed to foster ownership become ubiquitous in the early 2000s, but have become less so more recently? To answer these questions, we need an approach to practices that is attentive to their contingency as well as their sedimentation.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will elaborate the analytic framework that I propose to use for the rest of this book. This meso-level approach draws on some of the insights of other practice theorists in IR while being more attentive to the role of knowledge-making practices, focusing on problems rather than fields as the glue that links governance practices, and seeking to understand what drives the changes in governance strategies. As this brief discussion has probably already made clear, the concept of practice is a slippery one: because it includes everything from basic coping practices like pronouncing words to highly sophisticated ones like managing an IO, the concept can be difficult to use with precision. To avoid conceptual muddiness, it is useful to use more specific terms to designate the different kinds of practice that are involved. It is for this reason that I have chosen different terms – strategies, factors and styles, rather than practices – for my key conceptual categories.

### **Focusing on governance strategies**

Chapters 5 through 8 each examine one key governance strategy: creating global standards, fostering ownership, managing risk and vulnerability, and measuring results. These strategies are constellations of practices that are linked by their connection to a concrete problem and a way of defining and tackling it, rather than by their situation in a common field. Focusing on strategies is a particularly effective way of understanding institutional practices because they are in many ways problem-driven machines.

What kinds of problems am I talking about? When we look at recent policies adopted by various organizations and governments involved in financing development, it is clear that many share similar concerns. For example, in the past few years there have been numerous policies that identify risk and vulnerability as key challenges in a more uncertain global environment – including social risk policy at the World Bank, the Organisation

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and DFID, and renewed attention to low-income countries' vulnerability to external shocks at the IMF following the recent financial crisis.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a wide range of institutional actors became preoccupied with developing and implementing new global standards in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and sought to achieve them through a range of policies including the good governance agenda, the standards and codes initiative, and the MDGs. Standardization, risk and vulnerability are all concepts, but they only really become effective when they are translated into concrete practices that seek to foster or control them. They are thus examples of what I am calling *governance strategies*.

The term "strategy" has its origin in military planning. In global governance as in warfare, a strategy looks at the medium to long term, while tactics are the more immediate means through which those objectives are pursued. Yet, unlike wartime strategies, governance strategies are not always explicitly articulated, nor are they the source of a central will or intention. My use of "strategy" is therefore quite different from traditional IR use, in which "strategic" interaction refers to individual rationalist action, often in a game-theoretic context.<sup>16</sup> Governance strategies are social rather than narrowly individual, and are embedded in the day-to-day work of governance.

Governance strategies are defined by a set of assumptions, goals and ways of doing things. Strategies link together several policies, often across more than one institution. In so doing, they work to problematize certain aspects of social, political and economic life: to draw a line between one issue and another, to make an issue visible, to suggest a direction or a point of attack – in brief, to make things governable.<sup>17</sup> My concept of governance strategy therefore resembles Foucault's concept of *problematization*, which he uses in his later work. In the *Use of Pleasure*, for example, Foucault's goal is to understand how certain sexual practices came to be problematized at a certain moment in history, "becoming an object of concern, an element for reflection, and a material for stylization."<sup>18</sup> This book examines how such reflexive moments of questioning and contestation – or problematization – emerge from, and are translated into, routine everyday forms of practice. In so doing, the concept of strategy links discursive or ideational approaches, like constructivism and post-structuralism, and materialist and pragmatic ones, like Bourdieusian practice theory.

The various strategies that I am studying emerged as certain issues came to be viewed as matters of concern, either for the first time or in new ways. For example, in the debates prior to the development of the strategy of country ownership, key actors began to see the challenge of dealing with a country's domestic politics as both relevant and problematic in new ways.

As I will discuss in the coming chapters, this problematization of politics was precipitated by contested failures in development and finance, particularly in Africa and Asia. After decades of denying or downplaying the political dimensions of their policies, development policymakers began to see political institutions and a lack of political will, or ownership, as a key determinant of program failure, and thus a legitimate object of policy action. This process of problematization was not limited to elite policymakers or economists but was a wide-ranging debate that included NGOs, critics, state leaders and institutional staff. In the process, these actors brought background assumptions about what counted as success and failure into the foreground, forcing the IFIs to defend and adapt not just their policies but the expert authority on which they were based.

Key IFI and donor actors began to see fostering country ownership as a way of addressing the problem of politics and re-establishing their authority. Yet this was a far from coherent process: there was no singular individual or group responsible, nor a general commanding troops to ensure ownership. While many institutional, intellectual and governmental actors championed the ownership strategy, others resisted it. Nonetheless, over time, the practice of fostering ownership has become an explicitly articulated and generally accepted strategy, one that has been adopted by a whole host of organizations ranging from the IMF to many donors and NGOs and that has had profound effects across a multitude of issue areas.

### **Examining factors of governance**

Studying specific governance strategies may be more manageable than trying to make sense of broad practices like “the governance of development finance,” but strategies are still very complex things. If we want to understand how strategies do the work of governance, we need to break them down further into their constituent parts or *governance factors*. Even the simplest of practices are complex phenomena made up of many different dimensions.<sup>19</sup> I want to focus on five dimensions of practice here that are central for understanding governance strategies: the roles of actors, techniques, knowledge, authority and power. The concept of “governance factors” encourages us to look both at and beyond day-to-day practices: to look not just at what is done, but who is doing it, how they conceptualize their work, what specific techniques they use, how they are authorized, and what kinds of power relations are implicated. By studying these factors we can compare past and present practices, determine whether patterns exist that link policies through a common strategy, and assess whether changes are occurring.



*Actors*

Who is governing? If we are to understand the meaning and import of a particular governance practice, then we need to consider which actors are involved. Agency and practice are intimately connected: practices are always undertaken (practiced) by particular actors; at the same time, those actors can be shaped by the practices in which they participate. This book draws some inspiration from Callon and Latour, who have urged scholars to “follow the actor.”<sup>20</sup> This approach has produced some fascinating analyses of heroic figures, such as Latour’s account of Louis Pasteur, as he forged networks that helped to remake the scientific world.<sup>21</sup> Yet, as Susan Leigh Star has pointed out, it is important to look beyond such heroic figures, to the more ordinary actors involved in the day-to-day work of governance.<sup>22</sup> Part of our task must involve moving from actor to practice, determining which actors are engaged in both developing particular governance strategies and in the everyday implementing of global development practices. At the same time, we need to also move from practice back to actor, considering how specific governance strategies not only empower certain actors to govern, but also seek to define and constitute them in particular ways – “making up people,” to use Ian Hacking’s phrase.<sup>23</sup>

How much can a focus on actors tell us when they are enmeshed in a highly technical bureaucratic system? As Latour puts it, those practices that are the most technical are also the most social: it takes a lot of negotiation (and domination) to make something appear beyond contestation.<sup>24</sup> In global economic governance, we can think of the many scholars, NGO activists, and IO and government staff involved in defining what counts as a problem, framing solutions, and then persuading others to accept their take on these issues. Problematizing governance practice is a dynamic and contested process, defined by major debates, some areas of relative consensus and others of ongoing conflict. Through this process, certain ideas and practices will eventually become dominant, and taken for granted (or black-boxed), although they remain vulnerable to later contestation and revision. Throughout this book, I will examine the roles of a range of different actors in translating, negotiating and producing various governance strategies.

Some of these same actors are involved in the day-to-day work of implementing a given strategy, and were involved in its creation. Yet much of the ongoing work of governance is delegated. That is part of the power of modern governance: once certain rules, routines and procedures have been established, governance can be done through intermediaries – what governmentality scholars call governance at a distance.<sup>25</sup> In this book,

I will examine the ways in which IFIs and donors have increasingly sought to delegate the authority for governing to a wider range of actors, including members of civil society, private-sector actors, government leaders and the poor. These new governance strategies are not only designed to enrol new actors in the practice of governance, but also to constitute them as particular kinds of active and responsible actors. By paying attention to these dynamics, we can begin to appreciate the dynamic relationship between those who govern and the practices through which they do so.<sup>26</sup>

### *Techniques*

Having gained a general idea of who is doing the governing, we then need to figure out what kind of techniques they are using. As I discussed earlier, practices are materially mediated, involving not just individual people but also material actions and, in many cases, concrete objects. When studying global governance, a useful way of understanding these different forms of material mediation is by looking at the specific techniques designed to do the work of governing.

Many governance techniques are designed to make things happen: they may be procedures for implementing a policy, for negotiating an agreement, for consulting with a population or for conducting an evaluation. Sometimes these procedures are highly specific and explicitly articulated: in the case of DFID's good governance policy, or the IMF's streamlined guidelines for conditionality, for example, there are "how to" guides for staff that set out specific steps for applying the policies.<sup>27</sup> In other cases, these ways of doing things may be unspoken norms and habits, what Bourdieu would view as part of the habitus of everyday practice. Over time, certain kinds of techniques may become more common, while others disappear. Another set of techniques that has become particularly prominent in international development and finance organizations in recent years involves those practices necessary for measuring and evaluating governance practices. They include an ever-expanding repertoire of indicators, risk assessments, impact assessments, stress tests and surveys, as organizations become increasingly caught in a cycle of self-assessment, criticism and justification.

For practices to be effective they must be made visible and useable, so that they can be evaluated and monitored. This often means translating them into documents of some kind. In their research on the scientific process, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar revealed the techniques through which scientists work in their laboratories to translate everything from rats to chemicals into paper.<sup>28</sup> More specifically, they suggest, the objective of the scientist is to turn everything into numbers, graphs and

reports that they can then use to demonstrate a new fact about the world. Such *inscriptions*, as Latour calls them, stabilize the messiness of the laboratory (in which objects and animals do not always do what they are expected to do) and render its products into a kind of information that can be taken out of the lab and used to convince others of its truths.

It is not hard to see how the concept of inscription might be applied to an analysis of global economic governance practices. Scientists are not the only ones engaged in efforts of inscription: if anything, modern bureaucratic organizations are even more so machines of inscription that work to translate the complications of the world around them into tidy analyses and reports. Moreover, as I will discuss throughout this book, many of the new IFI and donor policies place increasing emphasis on the production of new kinds of reports and documents, which act as ever more powerful reference points for global action. In fact, each of the four strategies discussed here relies in part on such performative inscriptions for their effectiveness, including reports on observance of standards and codes (ROSCs), PRSPs, debt sustainability analyses (DSAs) and results chains.

Inscriptions are not only material in their form, but also in their effects. As Callon has argued in his study of economists and economic theory, such inscriptions both describe a particular version of reality and also play a role in constituting it: they are, in short, performative.<sup>29</sup> Inscriptions act as a crucial referent around which different actors can mobilize and through which they can manage things. There are cases where inscriptions can become self-fulfilling, such as when enough actors accept the inscriptions. In others, they may have perverse or even opposite effects.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the book, I will examine the role played by different techniques of governance, focusing not only on any emerging trends but also on the limits and resistances to their implementation. Bureaucratic techniques have potent effects. Yet the creation and mobilization of particular kinds of techniques is always contingent and contested. Different actors work to produce inscriptions and then use them to develop alliances, to enrol others in their projects, and to ultimately make their representations of the world so authoritative as to appear beyond contestation. Such efforts are always provisional, and ultimately subject to challenge and revision.

### *Knowledge and ideas*

Techniques are partly but not exclusively material. They involve physical processes, objects, spaces and measurement devices. Yet these material forms cannot be understood without reference to the knowledge that

underpins and authorizes them. As I discussed above, some IR scholars have emphasized the tacit, habitual and unspoken forms of knowledge that underpin international practices. In this book, I am interested in examining the ways in which tacit and reflexive forms of knowledge interrelate and influence each other – particularly in moments of profound debate, when a new set of issues becomes problematized.<sup>31</sup>

To do so, I focus on two kinds of knowledge involved in governance practice: practical or small “i” ideas, and more profound ontological and epistemological assumptions. As I will discuss throughout the book, governance actors have developed and used a range of potent ideas over the past few decades, including public choice theory, new public management, new institutionalist economics, and participatory development. Many of the actors who have debated, developed and applied these practical ideas are not exclusively social scientists or practitioners, but a bit of both: many of them are economists who oscillate between IOs like the World Bank and university departments. The ideas they rely on are important, but they are on a smaller scale than many of the large “I” Ideas that have been the subject of global governance studies of the past – such as Keynesianism, Neoliberalism or Marxism. Small “i” ideas are practical in orientation: they operate at a level that is closer to particular techniques and practices, and provide specific guidance as to how to do things.

This does not mean that these ideas are not connected to broader, more ideological assumptions – merely that they operate at their more pragmatic edges. They are the technicians rather than the shock troops of ideational change. Thus, for example, public choice theory relies on a range of free-market assumptions about rational individuals and the efficiency of the market, but presents itself not as a defence of the free market, but rather as a way of analysing and resolving certain kinds of problems with inefficient state services or government corruption. Such practical ideas are thus particularly important guides for directing and authorizing emergent governance strategies over the past few decades.

Underpinning both these practical ideas and the various techniques being deployed are more fundamental assumptions about the ontology and epistemology of governance – assumptions that, I will suggest below, help define the particular style of governance. Results-based measurement, for example, is a kind of epistemological practice that involves efforts to create a new kind of fact – the result. Social risk analysis, on the other hand, is driven by and helps to reproduce a new ontology of poverty. These governance strategies, and the debates or problematizations that have informed them, are thus working to reshape some of the basic foundations of tacit governance knowledge: changing what actors see in the world of development and how they seek to make sense of it.

It is important to stress that these new forms of knowledge are themselves produced and reproduced through various practices. We therefore need to examine not only the debates that helped to shape these ideas and assumptions, but also the ways in which they are translated into policies, embedded in documents and cultures of practice, and adapted, altered and contested over time. Moreover, the relationship between ideas and the material world is dynamic and contested. Things have a habit of not quite fitting the categories into which we put them. Objects can resist efforts to define and understand them – particularly when actors seek to make sense of complex objects using simplistic, often quantitative metrics. A practice-oriented attention to the role of knowledge and ideas is therefore attentive to the complex and friction-laden relationship between thought and action in global governance.

### *Authority*

We cannot talk about the actors, techniques and forms of knowledge that make up a particular governance strategy without also considering the role of authority. One of the principal factors that distinguish practices from actions is the fact that a practice occurs within a particular normative context: as philosopher of science Joseph Rouse puts it, “[a] pattern constitutes a practice rather than some other kind of regularity to the extent that it is a pattern of correct or appropriate performance.”<sup>32</sup> Practices must be authorized by someone or – crucially – by related practices, such as those involved in creating “expert” knowledge or in soliciting public participation and support. To understand a particular governance practice, we therefore need to pay attention to the particular forms of authority involved: both what form they take and to what extent they are accepted and taken for granted, or are in the process of being debated and problematized.

Max Weber famously defined three bases for authority: legal-bureaucratic, traditional and charismatic.<sup>33</sup> He went on to argue that because of the disenchantment of modernity, we have been left largely with the first, legal-bureaucratic form – in which rules, law and bureaucratic procedures are the bases of legitimate institutional practice. While it is hard to dispute the basic intuition behind this claim, Weber’s definition of contemporary institutional authority remains too narrow, for it downplays the ways in which modern institutions continue to rely on a variety of forms of authority to lend legitimacy to their practices: not only *expert* authority, but also *moral* and *popular* forms.<sup>34</sup>

As Martha Finnemore and Michael Barnett have pointed out, bureaucratic organizations such as the IMF, the World Bank and nationally based

aid agencies have traditionally relied on their claims to expertise as the basis of their authority.<sup>35</sup> IFIs are made up of experts who have been trained to wield the technical knowledge that is central to their work. They are divided into specialist units, each of which is staffed by people schooled in their field and in the technical procedures through which they apply that knowledge to their objects.<sup>36</sup> Their expertise becomes the fundamental basis of the institution's claim to legitimacy, authorizing governance practices. Why should borrower countries accept the authority of a particular set of conditionality guidelines or risk assessments? It is because they are underpinned by expert knowledge. This brand of authority has served organizations like the World Bank very well over the years. Yet, in their recent efforts to shore up their authority, IFIs and donors have supplemented their claims to expert knowledge with several other forms of authority.

One form of authority that plays a crucial role in much of social life but is often less visible in global governance is that of moral authority: the claim that a particular practice is correct because it serves the greater good. Although organizations like the IMF and World Bank made few appeals to their moral authority during the structural adjustment years, earlier, in the 1970s, Bank President Robert McNamara made countless appeals to the moral imperative of poverty reduction. Recent years have witnessed a return to this kind of moralizing discourse, as Bank and IMF leaders have called for the need to "civilize globalization."<sup>37</sup> Moreover, as I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6, such appeals are not merely rhetorical but are also embedded in particular practices – as the standards and codes initiative and the good governance agenda both seek to give concrete form to a set of universal aspirations.

More interesting still is a form of authority that has been marginal in global governance for many years, but which has recently become more central: that of popular authority. The popular basis for authority is well understood in domestic political contexts, where it is the core of the liberal theory of the state. It has been less studied in the international context, yet is arguably increasingly important as IOs seek to build consent for their practices. Popular authority is premised on the notion that if the public (or their representatives) has consented to certain practices, then they are legitimate.

In the international realm, consent has traditionally been formalized in treaties, articles of agreement or other rules by which state actors generally agree to accept the authority of a given organization in a particular issue area. Yet IOs and others are also beginning to make use of a broader range of practices designed to foster popular authority. These practices generally include making certain information public (e.g. a government's

compliance with certain standards or its plans for poverty reduction), and consultation with affected communities and the encouragement of their participation. Nikolas Rose has described such practices as “technologies of community,” since their goal is to govern through particular communities – encouraging their members to play a more active role in their own self-management.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, they also clearly play an important role in granting a certain kind of popular authority to donors and IFIs, supplementing their more traditional reliance on expert knowledge as the basis for the authority of governance practices.

Throughout this book I will examine this proliferation in the forms of authority that development organizations have begun to rely on to support their activities, tracing their connections with one another and the tensions that have begun to emerge.

### *Power*

We cannot discuss authority without also considering the role of power. If we accept Rouse’s contention that “practices matter,” then we must also recognize that there is always something at stake in a given practice. Practices are not only produced with reference to particular norms and thus forms of authority, he suggests, but they are also “sustained only against resistance and difference, and always engage relations of power.”<sup>39</sup> I will focus on three ways in which power is important to the practice of global governance: as a productive, increasingly indirect and exclusionary force.

Focusing on practices means paying attention to productive forms of power. Traditional or instrumental conceptions of power tend to treat power as an external force that acts on pre-existing subjects or objects, seeking to push them this way or that, and alter their behaviour or direction.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, a productive conception of power, as Barnett and Duvall point out, tends to see its object as more plastic and mutable: power is a force that actively constitutes, reshapes, differentiates – even invents new objects and subjects.<sup>41</sup> Practices themselves enact a particular kind of productive power as they work to configure the world – its objects and actors – in particular ways. I have already discussed one of the most potent examples of this kind of power when I considered the ways in which certain global governance strategies seek to constitute or “make up” people, transforming them into risk-managing individuals, active participants or results-oriented bureaucrats.

Although we can often talk about a particular actor, individual or institution exercising certain kinds of power, as soon as we consider productive as well as instrumental power it becomes difficult to separate

actors from the context that informs and enables them. Such efforts, moreover, become even more difficult as power takes less direct forms. In theory, direct power is exercised by one actor over another, as in the classic formulation in which A gets B to do what B would not otherwise do.<sup>42</sup> In practice, most forms of power are less easy to identify or trace than this hypothetical situation. This is particularly the case in global governance, in which various institutions, agreements, rules and expectations intervene between the source of power and its object. Even when it is possible to say, for example, that the US Executive Director on the IMF Executive Board exercised American power by insisting on the inclusion of a particular condition on a country's trade policy, the actual connection between American power and the borrower state is complicated by several intermediary institutions, agreements and practices. Many recent IFI and donor practices have been considerably less direct than even this particular example: by choosing to adopt standards and codes in new areas, for example, rather than more formal conditions, IMF and World Bank staff have developed practices that seek to influence intermediary objects, such as the quality of governmental institutions, in the hopes that different economic policies will ultimately result, rather than applying a condition to the specific policy that they seek to change.

In a growing number of instances, IFI staff have taken an even less direct approach, seeking to empower various intermediary actors, such as civil society or market participants, in the hopes that they will put pressure on the government for reform.<sup>43</sup> This increasing reliance on technologies of community not only signals a shift to more popular forms of authority, as discussed above, but also reveals a change in the distribution of authority and power: these technologies authorize a wider range of actors to share in the practice of global governance. Yet this delegation of authority involves a complex set of power dynamics: it is only those actors deemed "capable" (e.g. those civil society organizations that have learned how to "demand" good governance), that are included in this expansion of governance authority.

Even as some new actors are empowered by being authorized to play a greater role in their own governance, others are excluded. Defining something as competent practice always excludes other possibilities: when low-income governments are told, for example, that this is the right way to govern their economic affairs or manage their debt level, they are also being told that these other actions are not acceptable. When IOs seek to define a set of standards that all countries can aspire towards, they are also developing a means of defining those who do not meet those standards. This is not the straightforward kind of exclusion that instrumental power generally involves, in which you are either included or excluded.



Instead, it is not unlike what Giorgio Agamben has called “inclusive exclusion,” in which those who are excluded are still an essential part of the system, as standards of “best practice” are defined in large measure by what they exclude as not meeting that standard.<sup>44</sup>

In many cases the form that this exclusion takes is not all or nothing, but rather a matter of degree: the development of results measurement matrices, good governance standards and debt risk assessments all allow IFIs and donors to rank and sort countries along a continuum, differentiating between better and worse performers. Just because such forms of exclusion are increasingly indirect does not mean that they are ineffective or that they do not have painful consequences: low scores in these rankings have very real costs for poor countries. We can only capture these kinds of productive, indirect and exclusionary power dynamics by looking not just at who is using power and to what end, but by focusing on how power operates: in other words, by examining the practices of governance.

We can gain a much more nuanced appreciation of how a particular strategy does the work of governing by drilling down and examining the various factors of governance that are in play: who is doing the work of governance, using what assumptions and techniques, enacting what forms of power and appealing to what kinds of authority. While these factors play a role in all governance strategies, the particular form that they take varies over time, allowing us to trace broader shifts in the practices of governance.

### **Recognizing governance styles**

So far, I have focused on the meso-level strategies that give shape to global governance practices as well as the more basic factors, or building blocks, that make them up. I have suggested that this kind of analysis helps us to overcome the limits of focusing narrowly on individual organizations or policies, as well as to avoid the overly broad generalizations of certain global governance approaches. Beginning in the middle, however, does not mean that we cannot examine broader patterns of governance: rather, it means that any such analysis must be inductive – developed through careful study of concrete governance practices. If it becomes apparent that similar kinds of actors, techniques, forms of knowledge and kinds of authority and power keep reappearing across a range of different strategies, this tells us that a broader process is underway.

During my research for this book, I was struck by the ways in which each of the strategies that I identified seemed, despite their differences, to share some marked similarities. As I will discuss at much greater length

in the coming chapters, I saw in each strategy a tendency to integrate more local actors in the processes of governance while also attempting to constitute them as more active participants; to use increasingly symbolic and performative inscription techniques; to draw on a similar set of small “i” ideas as a way of making politics amenable to economic governance; to deploy more productive and indirect forms of power in order to sort and rank states and individuals; and to redistribute authority while expanding its basis to include popular as well as expert forms.

As I moved back in time and looked at the recent history of financing development (as I do in the next chapter), I found some markedly different patterns at work. During the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and early 1990s, the actors involved were restricted, the techniques of governance more direct and straightforward, the ideas more narrowly economic, the forms of power more coercive, and the authority exclusively expert. By focusing in on these factors, I had uncovered some broad differences in how the work of governance was done then versus now. These differences are not random, nor are they driven by a kind of monolithic logic. Instead, they are subtler, but important, differences in the *style* of governance. The structural adjustment style was confident and direct: certain of its authority, direct in its techniques, seeing the future as a continuation of the present. More recent governance strategies are defined by a more provisional style: far less certain about its authority or the future, and relying on more complex and indirect techniques and forms of power to achieve its ends.<sup>45</sup>

I have chosen to talk about “styles” rather than “logics” of governance in order to avoid overstating their coherence.<sup>46</sup> A style colours but does not determine governance practices. The two historical moments that I discuss in this book are characterized by the predominance of a particular style of governance. However, this is not true for all periods: sometimes there is more than one style in operation. Today, for example, the more confident style of the structural adjustment era still defines certain aspects of development finance – certain issue areas, institutional units and individual economists – even if the more provisional style has gained considerable influence.

What do different styles of governance actually do? If strategies emerge out of the problematization of given issues and questions and seek to provide particular solutions, then governance styles do the same at a more fundamental level. As I will elaborate in Chapter 4, modern governance practices have had to come to terms with a very basic problem: the inherent fragility of their claims to expert authority. This fragility has methodological, ontological and epistemological aspects. IFI and donor actors are faced with significant methodological challenges: how do they measure

and translate the complexities of real development problems in narrowly economic terms? In fact, as I have discussed elsewhere, institutional staff will often spend considerable energy debating just how qualitative or quantitative their metrics should be, and how objective or subjective their findings are.<sup>47</sup> These difficulties often have ontological underpinnings: time passes and situations change, making past methods obsolete; more fundamentally, the world is messy and unpredictable, and exceeds our capacity to represent it. Underpinning these debates about metrics is a more profound epistemological dilemma: given such complexities and contingencies, how can institutional actors know what they know, and act on a given problem with authority? Modern governance practitioners must therefore come to terms with the ever-present possibility of a very basic kind of failure – the failure to know what counts as a failure.

A style of governance is a particular way of defining and resolving these dilemmas of governance. During the structural adjustment era, institutional actors relied on a simplistic ontology, treating the world of development as if it were amenable to straightforward methods of measurement and intervention. This allowed them to govern through a narrowly economic methodology and a highly confident set of practices. More recent governance strategies reveal a far more provisional attitude to the world and its governability. The ontology of recent governance practices is messier and more fluid as the world seems more volatile and complex. New strategies like ownership and risk management are underpinned in turn by more cautious epistemological claims about what is actually known.

As I will discuss in the chapters ahead, this caution is driven by a greater awareness of and preoccupation with the possibility of failure – failure to tackle the political roots of development pathologies, to measure the achievements of complex programs, to predict the next big shock. This preoccupation has led IFI and donor actors to develop *proactive* governance strategies as a way of inoculating development programs against failure. Such strategies may mean playing the long game, by fostering a results culture, for example, or promoting certain risk-management capacities among poor people, which will only pay dividends over the long term. IFI actors are also relying increasingly on *indirect* techniques that operate in the gaps of formal policies, through the proliferation of informal conditions, for example, or through policies that rely on pressure from peers or civil society groups. The new strategies also make use of increasingly *symbolic* practices in their efforts to govern development – practices that depend more on what they represent than on what they are. The value of global standards, for example, lies increasingly in their capacity to signal a country's commitment to reform, making it visible

and open to evaluation. Such symbolic practices are also performative, as they seek to mobilize market and civil society actors to act on the basis of these signals provided. Finally, many of those engaged in these strategies are not only preoccupied with failure, but also seek to *hedge* against future failures.

We are therefore witnessing the rise of the kind of “provisional expertise” that Niklas Luhmann pointed towards, in which experts sought to avoid failure by minimizing risks and deflecting responsibility; yet this is a kind of provisional approach to governance that is not limited to risk-management techniques, as he suggested, but that is present in a wide range of different governance strategies.<sup>48</sup> In the coming chapters, I will examine just how this provisional style colours each of the new strategies, and I will reflect on the sustainability of this shift and its implications in the Conclusion.

### **Understanding change**

My discussion of the strategies, factors and styles of governance all emphasize their dynamic character. The next two chapters provide a more detailed account of the forces driving the recent shift in how IFIs and donors manage the financing of international development. For now, I will just provide a basic outline of how attending to the styles and strategies of governance and the factors that make them possible enables us to appreciate not just how governance is practised, but also how those practices change over time.

The question of what drives changes in governance is one that has recently gained significant attention in IR. Constructivist scholars have followed in Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink’s steps by seeking to understand shifts in governance norms, tracing the various stages in norms’ life-cycles from their emergence to their internalization.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, a number of critical and post-modernist scholars have sought to explain governance changes through Foucault’s notion of governmentality, seeing them as signs of a broader, more epochal shift to a liberal form of self-government.<sup>50</sup> In spite of their considerable strengths and resonances with my findings, both of these different approaches tend to emphasize the discursive or ideational drivers of change, downplaying its practical dimensions. Although norms, rationalities and the ways that they are materialized are clearly connected, one cannot be reduced to the other: changes in norms can lead to changes in concrete techniques, but innovations or breakdowns in material practices can also lead to changes in governance norms and eventually to broader rationalities.

The concept of strategies lends itself particularly well to a conception of change that is attuned to both the material and discursive aspects of governance practice. Rather than being tied to a set of functions or a relatively stable field, strategies are organized around particular problems. Those problems change over time – or rather, the way that institutional actors problematize and tackle them changes. For example, although IFIs have always had to develop some kind of implicit conception of policy time and the future, it is only very recently that they have become explicitly preoccupied with the unknowability of the future, seeking to manage these uncertainties through a strategy of risk management. Such strategies come into being in the context of particular moments of problematization, in which those things that were once taken for granted are destabilized and contested: suddenly the unpredictability of the future seem very important. These moments bring part of the tacit background of governance practice into the foreground, making it the subject of a more reflexive debate.

Why do certain things that were taken for granted become open to debate? As the cases that I consider in the next chapters reveal, there can be many different reasons for settled assumptions to become the subject of problematization: particular events, key actors, a change in ideas, innovations or difficulties in techniques – any of these can precipitate these kinds of more profound debates. Yet, lurking behind these more contingent factors is often a concern about the problem of failure.

Given that the question of failure is one that has been discussed before in both global governance and international development literatures, I want to be very clear about how I am using the concept here. Susan Park and Antje Vetterlein have pointed to development policy failure as one of the triggers of change in IOs' policy norms.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, James Ferguson and Timothy Mitchell have argued that many development ideas and policies persist in the face of very obvious failures in their explicit objectives.<sup>52</sup> Without getting into the interesting tensions among these analyses, I would simply like to note that they all focus primarily on objective failures.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, my interest is not just in objective failures but also in the ways in which certain things are subjectively *defined* as failures at certain moments. The meaning of most failures is subject to contestation – but some failures in particular seem to provoke enormous debate about the very grounds of what counts as success and failure. It is these *contested failures* that often lead to a problematization of sedimented governance practices.

For example, the growing interest in the political dimensions of development discussed above was underpinned by a new conviction that the success and failure of aid programs hinged on domestic stability and

ownership. This was a significant departure from previous conceptions of the determinants of policy success or failure. This redefinition was arguably linked to certain objective failures in development financing, notably the “lost decade” of development in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet the failure of development in sub-Saharan Africa had been going on for decades; past World Bank and other reports had acknowledged the problem, but had identified very different causes and solutions. It was only in the 1990s that this problem was *defined* as a particular kind of failure (of political will and of governance), opening up a wider debate about aid effectiveness, underpinned by key questions about what counted as successful or failed aid.

While changes in more specific policies or norms may sometimes hinge on certain reasonably obvious objective failures, changes in governance *strategies* often depend instead on more contested debates about what counts as success and failure. Such debates are not merely technical matters for the experts to work out, but are in fact highly political, and often include a wide range of actors including policymakers, academics, NGOs and political leaders. There is a lot at stake in calling a policy a failure (or a success), including potentially the survival of the organizations involved. Debates about success and failure pose significant challenges to institutional authority, since they strike at the heart of claims to expert authority. How can you be an expert on an issue if you are not sure what counts as success? As I noted above, institutional expertise is a fragile thing, depending on a whole host of methodological, ontological and epistemological compromises. Such moments of problematization can unsettle existing compromises, forcing their renegotiation.

Over time, actors develop new strategies as a way of managing these problems and re-establishing their authority: these strategies seek to move what has been problematized into the background, black-boxing their key assumptions and practices as a new kind of tacit understanding. As my discussion of the development of four new governance strategies reveals, this is not a quick or straightforward process, but rather a messy, contingent and contested affair. For, as I suggested above, the particular form taken by the strategies of fostering ownership, developing standards, managing risk and vulnerability, and measuring results is defined by a more provisional style of governance. The most recent solution to the problem of failure is to develop a preoccupation with its ever-present possibility.

The remainder of the book puts this meso-level analytic framework into practice. In the next two chapters, I will trace the path from the structural adjustment era to the present day, examining the differences between the dominant governance strategies then and now, and tracing

the processes of problematization and contestation that ultimately led to their decline. Chapters 5 through 8 then examine the four new governance strategies, considering how they emerged in response to the erosion of previous practices and assumptions, and how they do the work of governing. In each case, I examine the role of each of the factors of governance and then consider whether we are in fact witnessing the emergence of a more provisional style of governance. The book concludes by pointing to a paradox of sorts: despite the cleverness of this new provisional style of governance in hedging against failure, the various strategies all face a number of their own failures. After exploring in more depth the paradoxical politics of failure, I conclude by examining the sustainability and long-term implications of this move to a more provisional style of governance.