



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



Understanding Global Governance: the Contribution of Data Sets

Jacint Jordana, Lewin Schmitt, Adam Holesch

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INTRODUCTION

The governance of world affairs in the 21st. century is increasingly complex. A diverse set of actors are engaging in global rule-making through formal and informal processes. Traditional intergovernmental organisations and processes are complemented, substituted or antagonized by informal international law-making, private rule-making and public-private initiatives (Coen and Pegram, 2018; Marx and Wouters, 2018). Acknowledging these trends, global governance has emerged as both an organisational principle in international relations as well as an analytic approach through which those complex relationships can be studied.

The past decades have seen not only a spectacular rise of global governance actors but also their growing impact on international and domestic affairs. Unsurprisingly, this has boosted academic interest and resulted in novel theoretical and conceptual contributions. Increasingly, global governance scholarship is turning to the quantification and empirical measurement of such actors, e.g. mapping formal (Gartzke and Schneider, 2013), informal organisations (Roger, 2020) or transnational networks (Abbott et al., 2018).

A first challenge to come to grips with these developments is to understand them empirically. For this we need to take stock of existing databases and identify knowledge gaps. In this policy brief, we present an overview of 100 existing data sets covering various aspects of global governance. We then identify gaps, where scarce or no data is available and where further research is necessary. In our recommendations, we call on policymakers and researchers to address these gaps, focusing especially on the study of global governance actors beyond formal intergovernmental institutions. In general, the availability of better data sets would facilitate quantitative analyses, which are increasingly needed to improve our understanding and management of global governance.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The [GLOBE project](#) currently lists and catalogues [100 data sets](#) with a global scope and relevance to the study of global governance. By that, we mean data sets with a clear international dimension, measuring global activities, actors, or outputs, and linkages among states. It also looks at country data on issues with a direct impact on global issues (as in security or finance), and measurements of states' interactions. The list includes metadata, i.e., collections of various databases as well as specific data from a range of sources such as universities, government agencies, international organisations (IOs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The sample is by no means comprehensive, but we focused our analysis on the 100 data sets that we consider the most relevant and impactful resources publicly available today.¹

In the following, we will provide an overview of these data sets. To do so, we first consider their distribution among two dimensions: (1) focus and (2) scope. By focus, we mean the main topic or domain investigated by the data set. By scope, we distinguish between a narrow scope (specifically studying global governance phenomena) and a broad scope (indirectly studying global governance phenomena). We then take a closer look at those data sets falling within the narrow scope, analysing the different features and agents of governance that they cover. Lastly, we draw conclusions on the reviewed data sets and point out information gaps.

The GLOBE project is clustered around topical work packages (trade, development, security, migration, climate change, finance). Of the 100 data sets listed by GLOBE, 61 data sets fall within these specific topics or domains. Of the remaining data sets, five deal with topics that are not within GLOBE's focus (e.g., culture); three are cross-sectoral; and 31 cover general, non-topical aspects of global governance (figure 1).

This distribution of data sets among GLOBE domains broadly matches the relative rate at which global governance literature is studying each of them, with trade and security being

¹ This is a first approximation to the current state of global governance data availability. The GLOBE project welcomes all comments about additional resources and future research avenues.

positive outliers. In general, the three most covered domains – security, trade and climate change – are also among the most prominent fields for the application of global governance theory (Sinclair, 2012; Zürn, 2018). This sparks the question of whether (a) those fields are more studied because of better data availability or (b) data availability is better because of higher interest by researchers. There may be also other explanations such as the inventory of the datasets as a selection bias. Some fields like development might have more consolidated datasets from the World Bank or OECD.

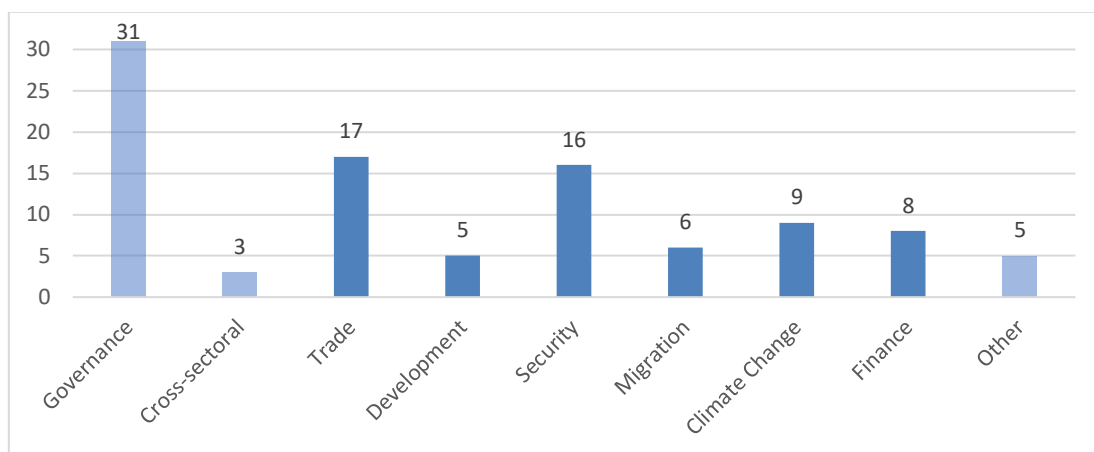


Figure 1: Topical distribution of data sets listed by GLOBE

Among the data sets, we can also distinguish between their scope, separating those that deal with global governance in a narrow sense – specifically studying global governance phenomena – or in a broad sense – indirectly studying global governance phenomena. The 100 data sets are distributed more or less equally amongst those two categories (see figure 2).

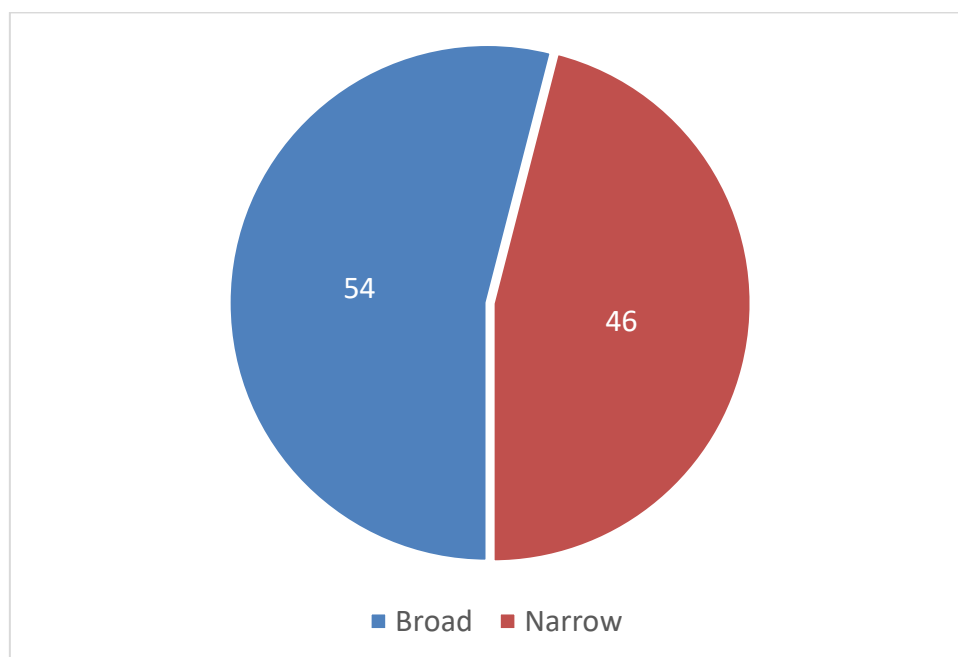


Figure 2: Distribution of data sets, narrow vs broad scope

For the **54 data sets classified as broad**, we include data sets that measure globalisation trends from the national perspective and shed light on countries' interdependences, such as the IMF's [Direction of Trade Statistics](#), which tracks national trade flows and bilateral trade flows between states; or the [Diplomatic Representation Data Set](#), which quantifies the diplomatic relations between states across time.

We also include datasets that contain countries' data with global impact, e.g. the Joint Research Council's [Global Conflict Risk Index](#), which expresses the statistical risk of violent conflict in any given country in the next one to four years; the various UNHCR data sets tracking migration flows; and the IMF's [World Economic Outlook](#).

Most of these data sets report on a country/year level. This is unsurprising, as it reflects the long-dominant paradigm of the Westphalian nation-state as the most important unit of analysis. However, we argue that the drastic rise of global governance needs to be better reflected in the research body. In this light, it is a welcome finding that a growing number of data sets tries to capture phenomena beyond these two basic units, thus allowing for a more refined and granular picture of world politics.

We classify the remaining **46 data sets as narrow**. By that, we mean data sets that are dealing explicitly with global governance phenomena. Amongst those narrow data sets, four different subcategories emerge, each quantifying a different feature relevant for the study of global governance dynamics (see figure 3):

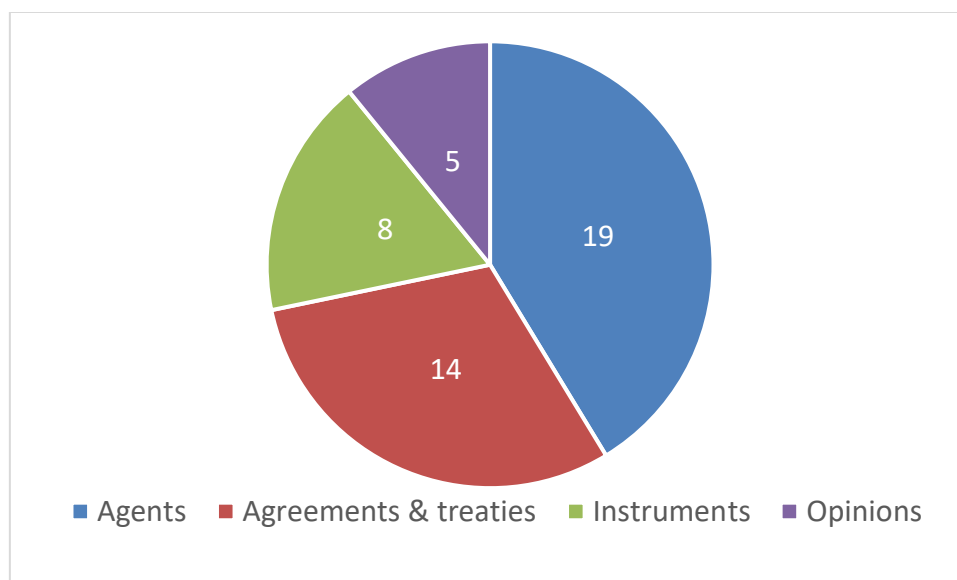


Figure 3: Distribution of data sets among scope and focus

- **Agents** –data sets that describe formal and informal IOs, or even networks and partnerships, e.g. the [Measure of International Authority Index](#), which estimates the delegation and pooling of authority, and tracks the scope of policy portfolios for 76

IOs; or the [TRANSACCESS](#) data set, which contains information on the formal access of transnational actors, such as NGOs, civil society groups or multinational corporations, to 298 bodies of 50 IOs.

- **Agreements & treaties** –data sets that identify multilateral treaties, agreements, etc., e.g. the [Design of Trade Agreements \(DESTA\) Database](#), which collects systematic data on the design of preferential trade agreements; or the [International Environmental Agreements \(IEA\) Database Project](#), which includes thousands of bi- and multilateral environmental agreements and related information.
- **Instruments** –data sets that collect information on actions and policy initiatives, including regulations, originating from non-state actors, e.g. the European Commission’s [EUAidExplorer](#) tracking the EU’s aid flows; or the [Transnational Governance Initiatives \(TGI\) database](#) covering 60 transnational climate governance initiatives.
- **Opinions** –data sets that collect public opinion views, or media information, measuring attitudes of citizens, elites or other focus groups towards global governance phenomena, e.g. the [DemGovCit National Survey](#), which studies citizens’ perceptions of democratic governance beyond the state; or the [LegGov Elite Survey](#), which analysed worldwide elites’ views towards global governance.

Figure 3 demonstrates the dominance of the more traditional research focus on agents (especially IOs) and treaties, compared to more novel approaches that study instruments or opinions. While the study of IOs underwent some worthwhile innovations (e.g., the study of informal institutions, IOs’ openness, ...), researchers increasingly turn to global governance aspects beyond IOs. Indeed, we would advocate more experimental research on such non-traditional forms of global governance, because they can greatly enrich our understanding of today’s complex and multi-stakeholder world politics.

Taking a different perspective, we assign the **19 data sets² on global governance agents** to the four types of agents involved in global governance as identified by GLOBE. These are: supranational governance, transgovernmental networks, public-private partnerships and private governance. Each type of agent has different features, properties and capacities, and entails different political dynamics. As figure 4 shows, most of them deal with supranational governance (14 data sets on IOs). The relatively new research strands on transgovernmental networks (4), public-private partnerships (3) and private governance (2) are lately gaining more traction, but in comparison data availability is still quite scarce.

² Some of them include different categories of agents and are therefore counted more than once.

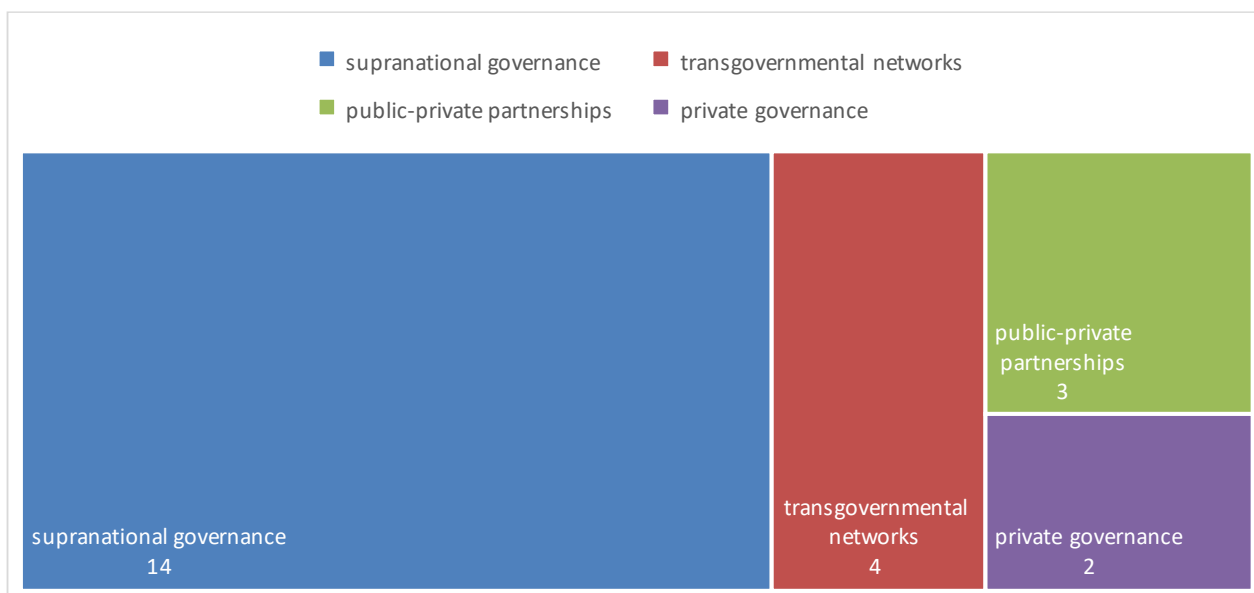


Figure 4: Distribution among agents of governance for the narrow data sets

Another noteworthy development is the emergence of data sets covering multiple levels or agents of governance, of which we count four. Given the complex and interlinked nature of global governance, the emergence of such multi-modal research is a promising development.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The GLOBE selection of data sets is very eclectic, and our sample shows great variety in focus and scope. Nevertheless, this meta-comparison generated interesting conclusions and promising avenues for future research efforts.

First, while most **narrow data sets** focus on the more traditional aspects of global governance (IOs and treaties), we also find some **novel approaches that study previously unexplored questions** such as regional authority, transnational regulatory agencies, or mixed forms such as public-private partnerships and cooperative initiatives. Such innovative research can reveal many original insights into the functioning of global governance and **should receive much more attention from researchers and practitioners.**

Second, information on **private actors in global governance features in very few datasets.** This represents a severe gap of information, given the importance of private sector actors in global governance (see box 1).

Third, the available **data sets also distinguish themselves by either capturing samples or entire populations.** While the sampling approach greatly increases the feasibility of data collection, the heterogeneous character of global governance phenomena could undermine

the validity of any conclusions drawn from sampled data. Therefore, we **encourage research efforts that attempt to comprehensively gather data on the entire population.**

Fourth, **topic-specific or sectoral data sets tend to provide more detailed information than general ones**, as could be expected. It is less intuitive that sectoral data sets outnumber the general ones. Unfortunately, where comprehensive, general data exists, the level of detail is often quite limited. For instance, most data sets on IOs lack good information on either membership or design features.³ In such cases, sectoral, regional or small sample data may be available, but these are naturally less useful for general purposes and often difficult to combine with other data points.

More generally, reliable, **comparable and systematic data on different aspects of global governance remains limited**, despite a positive trend in such research. Historically, empirical research on global governance has mostly relied on single or small-n case studies. While these provide valuable insights into the understanding of the particular study object, they rarely allow for comparisons or generalisations about the wider global governance architecture. And where large-n data sets can be found, these tend to focus on institutional or other traditional, more formal and public sector-centric forms of global governance.

It is clear that our understanding of global governance benefits from more systematic data collection efforts. In turn, this will prove beneficial for the strategic interests of the EU as a global actor for two reasons: Firstly, equipping researchers and analysts with better data to study global governance issues will allow them to **provide better advice to EU policymakers**. Secondly, all additional publicly available information on global governance will naturally **strengthen the multilateral order**, for it not only **improves effectiveness** but also **grants additional legitimacy to global governance initiatives and actors**. Hence, **supporting such activities and filling information gaps should be a prime objective of the EU's research agenda.**

Gathering the necessary data is often a tedious, time- and resource-intensive effort. Adequate funding of research projects is therefore imperative. In addition, public research institutions such as the European Commission's Joint Research Council should continue to produce and disseminate relevant data, so as to provide researchers with additional avenues for the study of global governance.

³ For noteworthy exceptions, see Hooghe and Marks (2015), Tallberg and Sommerer's [TRANSACCESS data set](#), or the [work by the WZB Berlin Social Science Centre](#)

Box 1: The role of private sector actors in global governance

Private governance describes situations when non-state actors supply governance without direct assistance from states or IOs. Private governance arrangements seek to steer behaviour by engaging in several different kinds of activities: such as information sharing, rule setting and financing.

This form of governance is very widespread. It can be found in a myriad of international bodies that are created by or primarily driven by private sector entities such as national or multinational corporations, associations and NGOs. These bodies include many of the technical standard-setting bodies such as 3GPP, functional non-profit organisations such as ICANN, or advocacy groups such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). In general, private governance appears to be especially common in the area of environment, global economy, global health and scientific research.

Mapping and analysing such private-sector initiatives' impact on global governance is key to the proper understanding of global governance at large. Recent research that investigates the role of private sector actors in global governance is especially prominent in the climate change domain. Examples include work on private transnational regulatory organisations (Abbott et al., 2016), "governance experiments" (Hoffmann, 2011), international and regional standardisation (Marx and Wouters, 2015), and non-state action (Chan et al., 2019).

However, what is missing are the large-n studies or data sets with comparable relevant information on these actors, networks and systems. It would be a tragic fallacy to interpret this absence of research as an indication that private-sector actors are not engaging in global governance. By all means, existing work suggests a lot of currently understudied activities. For example, it is hard to overestimate the relevance of technical standard-setting boards (e.g., ISO, 3GPP, OMG, etc.), most of which are private sector-led. Similarly, a significant part of global governance of financial markets is in the hands of private-sector actors, such as rating agencies, the SWIFT international payment network, and an array of industry standards.

The Project “Global Governance and the European Union: Future Trends and Scenarios (GLOBE)”, addresses the strategic priorities identified in the EU Global Strategy such as trade, development, security and climate change as well as migration and global finance to identify the major roadblocks to effective and coherent global governance by multiple stakeholders in a multipolar world. The project, coordinated by Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals (IBEI), will provide policy-makers, academics and the general public with an analytical grip on the state of play in global governance. It also hopes to equip national and European policy-makers with tools to identify constraints and opportunities in a set of global governance scenarios for 2030 and 2050.

For the purpose of analysing the dynamics of global governance in the different issue areas, GLOBE makes extensive use of quantitative methods, but it also elaborates a number of case studies to examine key institutions and global policy configurations. Combining diverse research methods, GLOBE aims to contribute to a new generation of studies in global governance, capable of identifying and diagnosing the most relevant problems at the sector level with more precision. GLOBE mainly employs a range of data-gathering and research techniques: big data mining, combining and expanding existing databases, elaborating and distributing questionnaires, document analysis, personnel interviews, and developing foresight techniques. The use of big data mining will be focused to extract from the world’s broadcast, print and online news a ‘heatmap’ related to the main global governance issues in these fields such as the institutions and type of actors that are mentioned most often in relation to a topic, reference to the EU in global media or even the ratio of negative/conflict events v. positive/cooperative events between dyads of actors. Some of the GLOBE partners have elaborated large datasets on different characteristics of institutions and organisations related to global governance. Noteworthy examples are the WZB dataset on international organisations and other entities involved in global governance, the IBEI dataset on the institutional features of regulatory agencies at the national level and the ESADE dataset on the characteristics of heads and boards of international organisations.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Global Governance and the European Union: Future Trends and Scenarios” (GLOBE)
COORDINATOR	Jacint Jordana, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals – IBEI, Barcelona, Spain, jjordana@ibei.org
CONSORTIUM	ESADE Business & Law School – ESADE, Barcelona, Spain Facultad Latinoamericana Ciencias Sociales – FLACSO – Buenos Aires. Argentina Hebrew University of Jerusalem, HUJI, Department of Political Science and the Federmann School of Public Policy and Governance, Jerusalem, Israel Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals – IBEI, Barcelona, Spain ISGlobal Barcelona Institute for Global Health, Barcelona, Spain Katholieke Universiteit Leuven – KUL - Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies - Leuven, Belgium Peking University – PKU - School of International Studies, Peking, China University College London – UCL – Department of Political Science, London, UK Universitas Bina Nusantara – BINUS - International Relations Department, Jakarta, Indonesia Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung - WZB - Berlin, Germany
FUNDING SCHEME	Horizon 2020 Framework - SC6 - GOVERNANCE-2018 - Trends and forward-looking scenarios in global governance
DURATION	1 January 2019 – 31 June 2022 (42 months)
BUDGET	EU contribution: 2,500,000.00€
WEBSITE	https://globe-project.eu/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Jacint Jordana, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals – IBEI, Barcelona, Spain, jjordana@ibei.org Adam Holesch, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals – IBEI, Barcelona, Spain, aholesch@ibei.org

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