

# Global Civil Society

Contested futures

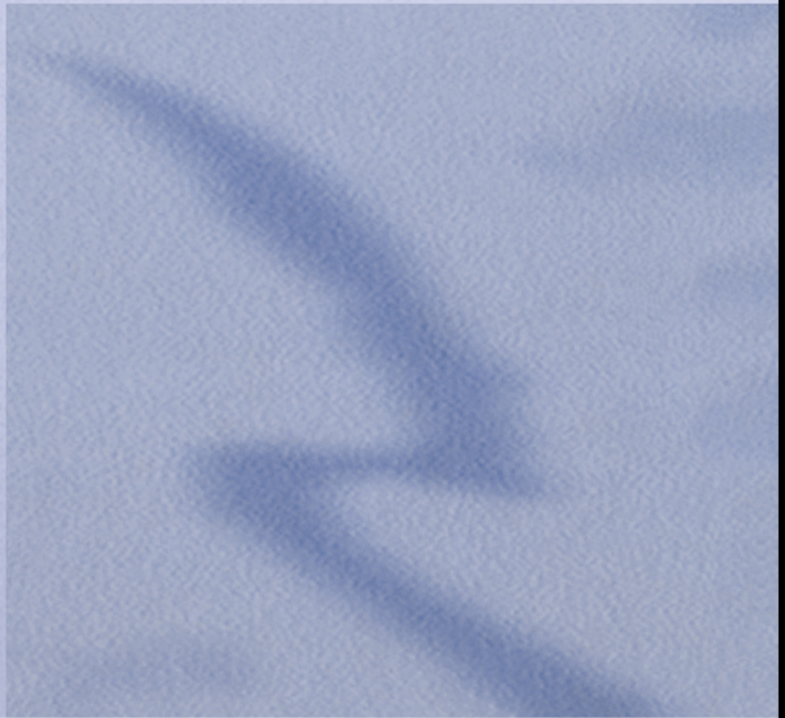
*Edited by*

Gideon Baker and David Chandler

Routledge Advances in International Relations  
and Global Politics



Routledge  
Taylor & Francis Group



**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

# Global Civil Society

For many commentators, global civil society is revolutionising our approach to global politics as new non-state-based and border-free expressions of political community challenge territorial sovereignty as the exclusive basis for political community and identity. This challenge 'from below' to the nation-state system is increasingly seen as promising nothing less than a reconstruction, or re-imagination, of world politics itself. Whether in terms of the democratisation of the institutions of global governance, the spread of human rights across the world, or the emergence of a global citizenry in a world-wide public sphere, global civil society is understood by many to provide the agency necessary to these hoped-for transformations.

*Global Civil Society* asks whether global civil society is such a qualitatively new phenomenon after all; whether the transformation of the states' system is actually within its reach; and what some of its drawbacks might be. The authors explore and critically evaluate a variety of perspectives: the cosmopolitan vision; the view of global civil society as transnational movements advocating a growing moralisation of world politics; and more sceptical views, advancing new possibilities for understanding the role of non-state actors in global politics.

This book brings together for the first time the whole range of established and alternative voices on global civil society, both congratulatory and critical, to set a marker for the state of the debate about global civil society today. This book will be invaluable for students and researchers in the fields of International Politics, Democratisation and Civil Society.

**Gideon Baker** is a lecturer in Political Theory at the University of Salford. He is the author of *Civil Society and Democratic Theory: Alternative Voices* (also published by Routledge). **David Chandler** is a senior lecturer in International Relations at The Centre for the Study of Democracy, The University of Westminster. He is the author of *Constructing Global Civil Society: Morality and Power in International Relations*; *From Kosovo to Kabul: Human Rights and International Intervention*; and *Bosnia: Faking Democracy after Dayton*.

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LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2005 by Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN  
Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge 270 Madison Ave, New York,  
NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*  
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis  
or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to  
<http://www.ebookstore.tandf.co.uk/>.”

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data* A catalogue record for this book is available from  
the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data* A catalog record for this book has been  
requested

ISBN - Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-415-35480-3 (Print Edition)

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# Introduction

## Global civil society and the future of world politics

*Gideon Baker and David Chandler*

For an increasing number of commentators, global civil society represents nothing less than the outline of a future world political order within which states will no longer constitute the seat of sovereignty, a status first bestowed on them by the Treaty of Westphalia in Europe (1648) and subsequently exported around the globe. For many, global civil society is revolutionising our approach to sovereignty as new non-state-based and border-free expressions of political community challenge territorial sovereignty as the exclusive basis for political community and identity (Falk, 1995:100). This challenge ‘from below’ to the nation-state system is increasingly seen as promising nothing less than a reconstruction, or reimagination of world politics itself (Lipschutz, 1992:391). Whether in terms of the democratisation of the institutions of global governance, the spread of human rights across the world, or the emergence of a global citizenry in a world-wide public sphere, global civil society is understood to provide the agency necessary to these hoped-for transformations.

The ‘stakes’ in narrating global civil society—understanding its significance, analysing its potentialities—are therefore of the highest order. Yet, so far, much of this storytelling has been uncritical. For the most part, we find transnational movements and events ‘beneath’ the level of the state placed under the rubric of global civil society with barely a thought as to the significance of a move to label and categorise thus. In addition, much of what is written is prepared to uncritically celebrate the arrival of transnational citizen action. What is required is more sober reflection on whether this form of action is such a qualitatively new phenomenon after all—what we might term global civil society *past*; whether the transformation of the states’ system is actually within its reach—the *contested futures* of global civil society; and what some of its down-sides might be—the *dialectic* of a global-civil-society-based form of enlightenment.

None of this is to say that there is not a critical literature on global civil society. The problem seems to be, rather, that the hopeful and critical voices never meet, instead talking past each other and becoming unhelpfully polarised in the process. This book seeks to counteract this trend, to bring together for the first time the whole range of voices on global civil society so that their various merits might be considered more carefully. In the process of this bringing together we also hope to clarify key positions within the burgeoning discourse of global civil society and the chief points of overlap and disagreement between them—to set a marker for the state of the debate today. However, this collection is not just about setting established voices in a framework for comparing and contrasting; alternatives to the recognised approaches are also put forward. Many of

the authors provide *new* perspectives on what global civil society—either as discourse or practice—means today.

Having considered the aims of this book, we now seek to put it in its wider context, to provide a short introduction of what we see as the key points in the debate so far about global civil society. Following this, a brief overview of the structure of the book, and of the individual chapters, is provided.

Optimism in the world-transformatory potential of global civil society is grounded in the view that the nation-state, which long held a central position in the international order, has been increasingly sidelined by new international actors, some of these operating from ‘above’ in the form of the growth of new forms of global governance, but also from ‘below’—witness the plethora of non-state actors and networks which operate on an international level. The boundaries of sovereignty, once seen to clearly structure world politics, now seem to be much more ‘fuzzy’ at the edges. As a result, though necessary to an understanding of the mechanisms shaping the international order in the twenty-first century, states are felt to be far from sufficient to such understanding. Rather than states bearing all the agency in the determination of world affairs, it appears to many that a new actor has appeared, an actor whose precise shape and contours may be indeterminate and disputed, but whose presence is not: global civil society.

Global civil society is seen by numerous analysts as the principle driver behind an extension of the rule of law and political community—*societas civilis*—beyond national boundaries; as something like a world citizenry in the process of constituting itself ‘from below’. Mary Kaldor, for example, argues that the end of the global conflict of the Cold War ‘allows for the domestication of international relations and the participation of citizens, and citizen groups at an international level’ which was previously the preserve of governments (Kaldor, 2003:13). For other commentators, while global civil society cannot yet be seen as a certain route to this global citizenship, at the very least it inspires us—requires us—to consider it as never before. Thus for John Keane, ‘brand new democratic thinking—implicit in the theory of global civil society—is required’ in the face of the growing lack of accountability of global governance (Keane, 2003:126).

On the most optimistic readings, it appears that the international realm is in the process of a deep transformation as a result of this ‘pressure from below’. No longer exclusively the sphere of violence and competition, of the ‘war of all against all’, the international realm is increasingly a space where transnational actors *and* the transnational values they sponsor—an emerging global ethic or ‘law of humanity’ orientated around human rights—work to overcome the narrow self-interest of national elites. For Jean Grugel, the global civil society approach therefore represents ‘an overt attempt to blend normative theory with international relations’ (Grugel, 2003:275). This can be seen in the work of Kaldor, for example, who asserts that: ‘The new meaning of civil society offers expanded possibilities for human emancipation’ (Kaldor, 2003:143). For John Clark, also, ‘the time is ripe for “ethical globalisation” morally underpinned by new activist citizens’ networks’ (Clark, 2001:18).

Global civil society theorists cover an increasingly wide range of perspectives and views. Yet despite their differences, most approaches focus on the break between old forms of ‘citizenship’ tied to the nation-state and new forms of moral and political community. Most also locate global civic actors as the source of ethical action in the world, and their break from conventional state-based politics as the strategic basis for

radical political change. Below we sketch out the different levels on which this case is built, starting with the empirical.

### **The empirical case**

The most important empirical trend since the end of the Cold War is alleged to be the development of a global civil society, bringing with it new ways of doing politics or of establishing moral-political communities. As Ann Florini states (2001:30): 'The state system that has governed the world for centuries is neither divinely ordained nor easily swept away. It is, however, changing, and one of the most dramatic changes concerns the growing role of transnational civil society'.

The numbers of international NGOs had grown from 176 in 1909 to 28,900 by 1993 (CCG, 1995). The early 1990s witnessed a huge increase in the number of non-state actors involved in international policy. The number of development NGOs registered in the OECD countries of the industrialised 'North' grew from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993 and their total spending doubled, rising from US\$2.8 billion to US\$5.7 billion. In the 'South', the growth in the registered numbers of NGOs was even more impressive—for example, figures for Nepal show an increase from 220 in 1990 to 1,210 in 1993; in Bolivia, from 100 in 1980 to 530 in 1993; and in Tunisia, from 1,886 in 1988 to 5,186 in 1991 (Hulme and Edwards, 1997:4).

Jessica Mathews argues that we are witnessing nothing less than a historic reversal of the post-Westphalian trend to increasingly concentrate power in the hands of states; so much so in fact that 'increasingly, NGOs are able to push around even the largest governments' (Mathews, 1997:53). In another influential article, Lester Salamon, claimed that 'we are in the midst of a global "associational revolution" that may prove to be as significant to the latter twentieth century as the rise of the nation-state was to the latter nineteenth' (Salamon, 1994:109).

It is in assessing the *significance* of these empirical trends, trends that few would dispute, that the normative approach to global civil society becomes enmeshed with this narrative of its growth. Thus according to many analysts the growth of the non-state sector, in threatening the political monopoly of nation-states in international decision-making, suggests nothing less than an emerging alternative view of political community from that suggested by states and the market—previously the only players in town. Global civil society represents a 'third force' capable of empowering citizens and possibly transforming the international system itself. Claims of this order come attached to an understanding that global civil society is indeed restructuring our sense of, and approach to, the political. For Kaldor, the *site* of politics itself 'has shifted from formal national institutions to new local and cross-border spaces and this is, to a large extent, the consequence of global civil society activities' (Kaldor, 2003:148).

### **The normative case**

Like the concept of human rights, few people today would argue against the normative or ethical concept of global civil society. Even those who may dispute the existence of

global civil society in practice would not argue against the use of the concept to highlight a positive normative goal or ideal (see Van Rooy, 1998:30; Kumar, 1993:388).

What then are the goals or ideals suggested by the idea of a global civil society? Three seem particularly salient. First, the *extension of political community*, as international politics is no longer seen as a political sphere limited to the narrow national interests of states but as increasingly open to non-state actors working with a more universal human interest in mind. Second, positing the actions of global civil society as a major determinant of world politics re-emphasises *human agency* in the face of the determinism of a neo-liberal 'end of history'. Finally, global civil society appears to portend the *extension of democracy* beyond national boundaries, where it is perceived that decision-making has increasingly escaped 'above' and beyond the control of nation-state-based democratic institutions.

### *The extension of community*

Global civic activism is seen as restoring collective values as a counterweight to the atomising individualism and political apathy reflected in the institutions of formal, state-based, politics. According to Richard Falk: 'globalisation from below extends the sense of community, loosening the ties between sovereignty and community but building a stronger feeling of identity with the sufferings and aspirations of peoples, a wider "we"' (Falk, 1995:89). For Mary Kaldor (2003:2) too, such processes 'have opened up new possibilities for political emancipation':

Whether we are talking about isolated dissidents in repressive regimes, landless labourers in Central America or Asia, global campaigns against landmines or third world debt...what has changed are the opportunities for linking up with other like-minded groups in different parts of the world, and for addressing demands not just to the state but to global institutions and other states... In other words, a new form of politics, which we call civil society, is both an outcome and an agent of global interconnectedness.

In such accounts, the promise of global civil society is not only that it offers up a new, more engaged and participatory way of doing politics, but also a new, more ethical, way of constructing political community. For normative theorists such as Andrew Linklater, the problem that global civil society is beginning to address is that the nation-state restricts the bounds of moral reasoning to the 'boundaries of political association' (Linklater, 1981:27). Linklater argues that the obligations of citizens to states have acted as a historical constraint on humanity's moral and political development. In an internationalised social environment the self-determination of the individual, man's capacity to 'participate in the control of his total political environment', is restricted by the territorial limitations of sovereignty. Linklater suggests that these political and moral limits are historically conditioned (1981:34). The solution is that of radical political struggle to resolve the tensions between the moral duties of men and the political duties of citizens through the 'actualization of a higher form of international political life [which] requires [a] radical critique of the state' and the formation of a broader, more



inclusive community (Linklater, 1981:35). For many, global civil society promises just such a community.

### *Human agency*

The second attraction of the notion of a global civil society is that it posits the need for radical human agency in contrast to the perceived economic determinism of globalisation theory. As Naomi Klein reported from the first annual World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil: 'Many people said they felt history being made in that room. What I felt was something more intangible: the end of the End of History' (Klein, 2002:193). By challenging the 'end of history' thesis, which suggests the end of radical alternatives to capitalist liberal democracy, global civic advocates reaffirm the potential for change (Heins, 2000:37).

Globalisation is often considered to be the central problematic of international relations today. The neo-liberal perspective of the end of politics and domination of the free market, with states powerless to shape economic and social policy, is often presented as the backdrop which makes necessary the agency of global civil society and a restoration of the political on a new basis:

Civil society is a process of management of society that is "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" and that involves the struggle for emancipatory goals. It is about governance based on consent where consent is generated through politics. In a global context, civil society offers a way of understanding the process of globalisation in terms of subjective human agency instead of a disembodied deterministic process of "interconnectedness".

(Kaldor, 2003:142)

### *The extension of democracy*

Perhaps most popularly and enthusiastically, the project of global civil society is held to challenge the non-democratic structures of global governance emerging in the wake of globalisation. For Mary Kaldor, global civil society expands the sphere of 'active citizenship', referring to 'growing selforganization outside formal political circles and expanded space in which individual citizens can influence the conditions in which they live both directly through self-organization and through political pressure' (Kaldor, 2003:8). Richard Falk also argues that global civic resistance 'from below' counters the problem of 'power' going global while traditional democratic institutions remain local. Global civil society movements 'carry the possibility of an extension of the movement for democratisation beyond state/society relations to all arenas of power and authority' (Falk, 1995:35).

Rather than states being the space of democratic politics, the international sphere is increasingly viewed as the location of 'democratization from below through the articulation of radical and new forms of transnational citizenship and social mobilisation' (Grugel, 2003:263). Mary Kaldor expands on these new mechanisms for world-wide democratisation created through global civic action, highlighting a role for global civil

society in the representation of marginalised global constituencies and in providing internationalised spaces for a world-wide public to deliberate in:

Global civil society does provide a way to supplement traditional democracy. It is a medium through which individuals can, in principle, participate in global public debates; it offers the possibility for the voices of the victims of globalisation to be heard if not the votes. And it creates new fora for deliberation on the complex issues of the contemporary world, in which the various parties to the discussion do not only represent state interest.

(Kaldor, 2003:148)

### **This book**

As we have seen, Mary Kaldor is correct in noting that, despite the ambiguities involved in the concept of global civil society, all versions 'are both normative and descriptive'. Writers and advocates are both describing an emancipatory 'political project, i.e. a goal, and at the same time an actually existing reality, which may not measure up to the goal' (Kaldor, 2003:11).

While all commentary on global civil society is implicitly or explicitly normative, there is nonetheless a useful heuristic distinction to be made between those commentaries that are mostly concerned with the ability of the concept to capture important aspects of how world politics *is* changing today, and those that are interested primarily in interrogating the concept of global civil society as an attempt to re-imagine what the future of world politics *might be*. Both such approaches are properly analytical, though the former analyses more directly the empirical evidence on global civil society, while the latter is concerned to a greater degree with how global civil society is imagined. The chapters in this book are accordingly divided into two parts that reflect this difference of approach. Part 1, the more empirical, brings together chapters *contesting current trends*, while Part 2, the more conceptual, includes chapters *contesting future possibilities*.

In the rest of this Introduction, a short resume of the chapters is provided.

In Part 1, Alejandro Colás's opening chapter argues for an alternative reading of global civil society to the dominant view that it is a (liberal) normative programme to be promoted and actualised. Colás seeks instead to develop an understanding of global civil society as a historical reality, rather than as a political project; as a specifically modern site of socio-political struggle which contains very diverse, often incompatible, ideological projects. Reading global civil society in this way requires identifying the concrete structures and processes which are bearers of the ethical norms and values associated with global civil society, rather than the other way round.

Colás illustrates this core argument by looking at the particular experience of civil society under colonial and post-colonial rule in the Maghreb, suggesting that the notion of global civil society has at once an older and more contested history than is usually allowed for in contemporary discussions. One consequence of this, he concludes, is that many expressions of contemporary global civil society can be seen as negative socio-

political reactions to the very attempts at promoting global civil society as a liberal 'project to be realised'.

John Keane, in the second chapter, is in agreement with Colás that global civil society is not a single, unified domain, though this does not suggest to him that it is a meaningless construct either. Quite the contrary, since it contains within it a pressing constitutional agenda which must be conceptualised in fresh ways: the need to go beyond the present clutter of global political institutions in order to find new governing arrangements that enable something like effective and democratically accountable government, the rule of law and more equitable and freer social relations to develop on a global scale.

Keane argues that rising to the challenge of this new constitutional agenda for global governance—as suggested by global civil society in the making—requires in the first instance that we understand extant global governance. This will not be easy, but it must be done as a necessary pre-condition for the bold leap of imagination needed to achieve political change on a global scale. So it is to furthering understanding of global governance today which Keane devotes his chapter. The principal thesis here is that a new form of governmental power is emerging in the world today that Keane calls *cosmocracy*. Cosmocracy describes a type of institutionalised power that defies all previous accounts of different governmental forms. Cosmocracy is the first-ever world polity, a world-wide web of interdependence. It stands on the spectrum between the 'Westphalian' model of competing sovereign states and a single, unitary system of world government. Yet it also functions as something more and other than an international community of otherwise sovereign governments, being a much messier, more complex type of polity. For Keane, the essence of cosmocracy is a conglomeration of interlocking and overlapping sub-state, state and supra-state institutions and processes that have political and social effects on a global scale. And it is this form of governance that sets the scene for action in global civil society today.

For Vanessa Pupavac in Chapter 3, the ethos of global civil society is very far from pressing us towards more progressive forms of global governance, as Keane imagines it might. Instead, the discourse of global civil society is seen as echoing some of the worst features of the ideals of nineteenth-century liberal imperialism. Pupavac views the rights-based global governance sought by global civil society enthusiasts as promoting a demoralised, agency-free, image of the human subject who requires the promotion of his or her rights 'from without'. Pupavac contrasts this approach with classical social contract thinking, which she argues pre-supposed the moral agency of rights-holding citizens. Suspicion of the moral capacity of political majorities has led human rights advocacy to exhibit a preference for the codification of supranational frameworks beyond national political processes. In other words, there is a retreat from the modern ideal of law as derived from the will of legal subjects and a moral division is created between a global ethical elite of moral agents and the mass of citizens globally.

Pupavac seeks to expose this moral claim coming from global civil society as a will to power *by* global civil society. In claiming all virtue, global civil society is also disclaiming its own will to sovereignty. For none other than global civil society would be acting as sovereign by determining human rights norms and the conditions of their application. Under such a therapeutic ethos, Pupavac suggests, rights now denote rights of external therapeutic intervention rather than real freedoms.

In Chapter 4, Richard Falk provides a much more optimistic reading of global civil society in the world today, arguing for a view of its ethos and practices as progressive and emancipatory. Falk first sets out to chart the development of global civil society to date as a means to considering just what has been achieved and what might yet be achieved. Falk sees progression through three stages up until now. The first phase he associates with the activities of NGOs and popular movements in relation to specific issue areas, especially war/peace, the environment, human rights and women. Falk's second phase focuses upon the mobilisation of society to achieve democratisation and self-determination, including arenas of decision-making beyond the territorial state. This phase achieved prominence in the latter stages of the Cold War, exhibited in the form of movements (such as the Green Party in Germany) of opposition to the established order of the state and of geopolitics generally. Finally, the third phase of development for global civil society occurred in the period following immediately after the Cold War, and can be divided into two aspects: an anti-globalisation movement and a global justice movement. Civil society actors in this period became animated by the growing evidence that multinational corporations and international banks were escaping from the regulatory authority of sovereign states and shaping global policy on the basis of profits rather than human wellbeing.

In the remainder of his chapter, Falk considers three possible scenarios for the future of global civil society after September 11 and the subsequent 'war on terror'. In the first scenario, the United States generates a global resistance movement that is fearful of an American Empire. The second scenario is of a return to the approach of the 1990s and involves relying upon an improved framework for inter-governmental law enforcement against non-state actors engaging in transnational political violence. But though beyond the horizon of immediate plausibility, there exists for Falk a hoped-for third possibility—the potential for a non-utopian geopolitics premised on non-violence, governability, the rule of law and global democracy. It is Falk's view that the implicit ideology of global civil society is increasingly an affirmation of this vision of the future; to the extent that moves in this direction can be taken, therefore, the degree of implausibility is diminished.

Returning to a more sceptical view of the politics of global civil society, in Chapter 5 James Heartfield explores the interaction between 'anticapitalism' as a celebrated example of global civil society activism, and the business, government and international financial institutional elites they seek to challenge. He argues that, far from being genuinely radical and suggestive of a renewed world-politics, anti-capitalist protest is actually motivated by the same doubts that beset international elites, only this time represented in oppositional form. Specifically, these doubts arise from the disappearance of the class-based organisations of the old left, which leads radicals, now shorn of a popular base, into a similar crisis of confidence to the capitalist elites who are increasingly aware of their own disengagement from any political constituency.

For Heartfield, the ironic convergence of interest of anti-capitalism and capitalist elites is then found in the emergence of Non-Governmental Organisations. The importance of NGOs for capitalist elites is that they represent a 'moderate bridge' between the protestors and those behind the barbed-wire defences. The importance of NGOs for anti-capitalism is that they are its organisational form, ensuring its coherence as a movement.

In Part 2 of the book, Mary Kaldor opens with a chapter (Chapter 6) arguing for the tradition of Kantian cosmopolitanism and suggesting that this is much more realistic than