

Roundtable: What Will the Events of 2016 Mean for the Years Ahead?

WGRN Senior Advisory Board

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The **WGRN Senior Advisory Board** features some of the world's most prominent international politics scholars and civil society practitioners. We asked several members to share their thoughts on the tumultuous events of 2016 and how those might shape international politics over the next several years. Here are the two questions they were asked and their insightful responses.

1) The year 2016 saw the unexpected success of the Brexit referendum, Donald Trump's election on an explicitly America-first platform, and a rise in authoritarianism or nationalist populism in a range of countries. What do you think the events of 2016 portend for global politics over the next several years? For example, will we see a clear retreat from internationalism and/or globalization, or are there reasons to take an alternate reading?

2) As a scholar working on international issues, what do you think is the most important issue or dynamic to watch in the coming years? Where should attention be focused?



Richard Falk

Professor Emeritus of International Law, Princeton University

1) I believe that the rise of right-wing populism leading to the election of popular autocrats makes all but certain that narrow nationalist calculations will prevail in coming years to a greater extent than at any time since the end of World War 2. Such a prospect seems substantiated by the

unmistakable early signs of the Trump challenge to a cooperative international order, including manifesting a harshness toward immigrants, Muslims, as well as hostility toward the kind of international trade arrangements that emerged under the ideological banner of neoliberal globalization. Trump's attack is based on allegations that trading arrangements with a series of countries, most notably China, are unfair to the United States, and should be drastically revised for the benefit of the American people. It is possible that Trump's seeming willingness to collaborate with Putin's Russia offers some hopeful signs that ruinous patterns of conflict in the Middle East can be brought to an end, or at least moderated, and even that a process of de-nuclearization could be initiated, offsetting what appears to be an increasing risk of nuclear weapons being used. We should not entirely exclude the possibility of surprise moves from Trump of the sort that Nixon produced by normalizing relations with China, although his appointments and public acts to date suggest a rather firm ideological agenda that leans far to the right.

2) In the short run, the hostility of the Trump presidency to multilateralism, especially in the context of climate change agreements and arms limitations, and to the UN System should be a clear priority for those of us concerned with world peace and global governance. Such hostility appears to extend to international law in general, and seems to suggest a return to a more primitive Westphalian conception of world order in which the main geopolitical actor is a law unto itself in the context of war/peace issues, and seeks to impose its will elsewhere by using leverage at its disposal. Such an approach accentuates the hierarchical character of international relations, and likely intensifies conflict patterns creating growing risks of violent encounters involving both state and non-state actors.

One possible outcome of these developments is a shift in the nature of global leadership. China seems ready to seize the opportunity created by Trump's 'America First' posture. China announced its readiness to fill the global leadership vacuum that is being created by Trump's version of geopolitics. This conjecture was somewhat confirmed by the tenor and content of President Xi Jinping's address to the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos. In those remarks Xi proposed a world free from nuclear weapons and a world order in which equality among states, whether large or small, would become the foundation of global governance. Such a view to be actualized and legitimated depends on an enhanced role for international law and international institutions. We may soon be asking whether the torch of world order has been passed from Washington to Beijing? At the very least this is an intriguing possibility, and should encourage interested scholars to inquire whether non-Western and Asian ideas of world order are gaining ascendancy, and what would be the regional and global consequences of such a power shift.



Joel Trachtman

Professor of International Law, The Fletcher School, Tufts University

1) The events of 2016 can be understood as political revulsion from globalization. Internationalism as a bias toward international governmental action is of course to be rejected, while international action that is merited by the structure of problems and individual preferences will be durable. There seems to be a growing consensus that globalization was allowed to exceed the scope of redistributive capacity—that insufficient care has been taken to ensure that the losers from globalization are cared for through adjustment assistance programs, or through more gradual liberalization. There also seems to be an excessive backlash, scapegoating globalization for effects it does not cause. This will have to run its course. The lesson: policy elites must be careful not to over-sell globalization, because the tools of globalization must be preserved to address global problems and to improve peoples' lives, where they are appropriate. Subsidiarity, rather than a bias toward internationalism, must be the rule, along with embedded liberalism as described by Karl Polanyi and John Ruggie.

2) Political science that tries to explain the revulsion from globalization will be important. Work by political sociologists like Diana Mutz will help to understand and respond to this revulsion. Also, from a legal standpoint, more work on appropriate mechanisms for approval of international agreements is necessary, in order to respond to the kind of tyranny of the minority that was evidenced by Flanders' ability to hold up CETA [EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement]. Finally, TTIP [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership] and TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership] seem to be attractive only if they are able to address non-tariff barriers through harmonization and mutual recognition, which will require greater, not less, legislative capacity at the regional, and perhaps international, level. We will need to work on developing this legislative capacity without provoking the kind of revulsion we have seen in Europe and the U.S.



Carol Gould

Distinguished Professor, Hunter College, Department of Philosophy, and Director, Center for Global Ethics and Politics at the Ralph Bunche Institute, The Graduate Center, City University of New York

1) To state the obvious: We have entered a period of reaction—against economic globalization, against international cooperation, and against inclusiveness in our politics—of race, gender, immigrants, etc., and have concomitantly witnessed a frightening increase of nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, and anti-immigrant exclusionism. Globalization and regionalization have to date been led by capitalist corporations and their global governance facilitators—the WTO, IMF, and the wealthy states themselves, and have often taken overly technocratic or bureaucratic forms, unresponsive to the needs and rights of those affected by them and with a growing inegalitarianism in distributions (despite the diminution in absolute poverty), where many groups have not benefited from the global economy. The democratic deficit within global and regional institutions, which are largely unaccountable to the people affected by their decisions and policies, the lack of good jobs for many people, and the decline in power of labor and unions, have contributed to the present dangerous situation, leading people to turn to the only counterbalancing institutions with power, namely national states, with hopes that these states will take care of them. Of course, this dynamic has also led to a search for scapegoats and a thoroughgoing unwillingness to address the needs of refugees and other migrants, and the human rights of oppressed and suffering people around the world. The earth’s climate will also continue to be negatively impacted, with scant hope for the cooperative worldwide action required to mitigate it and adapt to it.

2) Although it may seem to some that democracy has been a cause of these problems, with the vote for Brexit and Trump, in fact real democracy (beyond voting and majority rule) needs to be part of the solution. The lack of power that people have over the institutions to which they are subjected and which increasingly affect them at a distance needs to be remedied. To my mind, this has to start in economic life, as much as in politics. People require more opportunities for control over their everyday lives and not only in regional and global governance. This would involve self-management (or more minimally, more democratic forms of management) in economic firms. It also requires more respect and opportunities for collective bargaining and for labor unions. The growing demand for a universal basic income within states can also be encouraged. We have to begin to address the deficits in global justice through some new taxes or

other controls over capital, especially financial transactions and, in the long run, probably introduce modest forms of global taxation. Democratic representation for affected people within global governance institutions also needs to become a priority, with the eventual introduction of new institutions that give real power to labor and not just capital. Along these lines, the ILO would have to be given effective power to regulate and protect labor internationally, beyond its current weak role in promulgating and monitoring labor rights. And while regional integration is well underway economically, its social and economic consequences would need to be guided more democratically, with participation by affected publics, whether through parliamentary or other forms. In the face of growing authoritarianism and the persistence of wide inequalities in income and wealth, I believe that social movements will emerge demanding more economic and ecological justice and standing in defense of liberty. The only question is when and how. Democratic transformation cannot come soon enough.



Fernando Iglesias

Director of the Campaign for a Latin American Criminal Court; Former member of Argentinian Parliament and Parliament of Mercosur

1) The world has shifted into nationalistic populism driven by the inability of Nation-States to solve global issues, such as immigration and economic crises, among others. The result of this tension has been the rise of nationalistic populism, looking inward as a solution to global problems, and failing to create transnational institutions to solve the problems created by globalization.

2) Attention should be focused on what could be a conservative UN Security Council next year, depending on the French election in 2017. If Ms. Le Pen's party succeeds, we could have a representative from the French nationalist party, the Chinese CP, a Brexit representative, Donald Trump, & Vladimir Putin, among others, occupying one of the most important global decision-making institutions in world history. For all of us who work for a peaceful and more interconnected world, difficult times are ahead of us.



Catherine Lu

Associate Professor of Political Science, McGill University; Associate Director of the Institute for the Study of International Development

1) One way to think about 2016 is that it exhibits some of the trials and tribulations of an increasingly globalized world that has produced uneven and multiple vulnerabilities and advantages in social relations at local, national, international and transnational levels. In this sense, although there are features of 2016 that point towards a backlash against, or retreat from, increasing social, economic, and political inclusion and diversity, these strategies are not likely to generate legitimate, sustainable, normatively or practically plausible responses to the challenges of inevitably more globalized circumstances of politics.

2) I am concerned about how the circumstances of globalization continue to set for humanity a monumentally complex task, of developing appropriate institutions, processes and conditions by which we can, together, construct social/political structures at global and domestic levels, that are mutually affirmable and affirmed by all. In my view, this task involves not only rethinking the terms of (local and global) justice from more global perspectives, but also understanding the problem of alienation in politics, and how the struggles for global justice are related to the struggles for non-alienated human flourishing in the 21st century.



William Scheuerman

Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Indiana University

1) These developments are deeply alarming, and not just from a cosmopolitan perspective. Anyone committed to democracy and liberalism should be worried. A cosmopolitanism that does not take the harsh realities of existing political and social conditions seriously is doomed, as I tried to argue in *The Realist Case for Global Reform* [Ed. note: Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011 <http://www.polity.co.uk/book.asp?ref=9780745650296>]. Cosmopolitanism as a mere moral project, a Kantian “ought,” tends to obscure the political and social realities at the root of Trump, Brexit, etc. And neo-Hegelian accounts of world government that see it as somehow inevitable, notwithstanding reactionary “regressions,” say too little about what we need to do to make cosmopolitanism a real and not just ideal possibility. Radical political and social reform, both domestically and internationally, is more necessary than ever. That means, first and foremost, a reordering of the capitalist political economy. Yet how we could achieve fundamental reforms, and who its key agents might be, remain unanswered questions.

2) The fundamental tension between democracy and capitalism remains the problem of our times. Unless democratic societies can figure out how to recalibrate the two in a way that provides decent social conditions and a measure of mutual respect not just for the well-to-do but for everyone, nationalistic and fascistic backlashes against globalization will continue to prevent progress towards a cosmopolitan order. One of the oldest issues of social theory remains the most pertinent.



Jim Barton

Board of Directors, Democratic World Federalists

1) While I think we are in for some dark years, what comes to mind is that our movement was especially born in 1937, one of the darkest years of the 20th century (The bombing of Guernica, Rape of Nanking, Italy's ventures into Ethiopia, continuing Nazi consolidation of power, the collapse of the League of Nations) when Clarence Streit was writing *Union Now* [http://www.constitution.org/aun/union_now.htm]

2) Climate change is the most important global issue. I had previously thought it would catalyze a global sense of global citizenship, but that has not happened. The rise of fascism and scapegoating is the most important new issue. I am coming to think that what we need most is not strong international institutions, but a strong foundation of democratic citizenship. We are also entering a confusing and confused time. The good and bad guys are clear in the 1937 examples above of Nanking, Guernica, Ethiopia and Germany. What to do vis-a-vis Aleppo is harder to determine. A third dynamic to watch is that of generations. Young people support the UN more than older people (but don't join the UNA). Too many UK millennials supported the Remain campaign to pollsters, yet would not go out to the polls.



Luis Cabrera

Associate Professor of Political Science, Griffith University; Co-convenor of The World Government Research Network

1) I think 2017-20 will provide a crucial test of whether the liberal-internationalist model developed from the 1940s is becoming exhausted, or whether some creative re-invention is possible. I do expect it to be challenged by a Trump administration's instinctive resistance to internationalism and coordinated governance between states, and the responses by other states to an America-first foreign policy. If I had to bet, I would bet that the Trump administration will find that much of the retreat to statism and, really, the shift to U.S. mercantilism promised in the presidential campaign, will prove very difficult to actually carry out. For one, shredding and seeking to re-work NAFTA or similar trade agreements will do little to address the mechanization and other factors that have eliminated so many of the jobs that Trump supporters had been promised would return. And, provoking a trade war with China, etc., stands to hurt the US as much or more than its trading partners. We may see mostly business as usual economically, though also with some meaningful scaling back of US international engagement and less support for key international organizations.

2) On question 2, I think there's a lot to be gained by looking at regional integration. In fact, for the student of supranationalism and especially democracy beyond the state, much of the interesting action is taking place regionally. The EU remains an unmatched laboratory for exploring the possibilities for and challenges to deep regional integration. Eyes are on the challenges lately, of course. The Global Financial Crisis and its aftermath has put a great deal of pressure on the European project, and it has contributed to the rise of the far-right parties in numerous member states. I think in many cases these parties have been as surprised by their success as EU officials and political scientists. For example, I spent November 2015 interviewing members of the UK Independence Party around England, and I certainly didn't come away with the impression that they expected to win the Brexit vote. Nor did they seem to have a plan for restructuring the party's aims after the victory. And, whether they actually did 'win', meaning that Britain will actually separate itself meaningfully from the EU, rather than effectively remain under EU law and free-movement rules in exchange for single-market access, remains to be seen. If there is a clean break, the move could well feel like a loss, given the very modest interest shown by India and other countries so far in pursuing separate trade deals with Britain.

Finally, I would say that recent regional parliamentarization developments, especially in the African Union and South America's Mercosur, bear watching. Argentina recently became the second Mercosur member to hold direct elections to its parliamentary body, Parlasur; and the Pan-African Parliament is pursuing the same under instruments out for ratification by member states. The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly is comparatively less developed, but it also has the potential to play meaningful representation roles over time. Those three, I'd suggest, are important sites of investigation for the shape of regionalization in the Global South and the world system overall.