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Guest Editors' Introduction

Democracy, Global Governance, and
Political Inequality

Abstract: This issue connects and extends recent international and sociological discussions begun at the latest World Congress of the International Sociological Association (2010) on democratic global governance, two recent issues of the International Journal of Sociology (Winter 2007–8 and Summer 2011) on the topic of political inequality, and a new issue of the Brazilian journal Sociologias on

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democracy, global governance, and political inequality, in which two articles being published here will appear in Portuguese. This introduction defines the three main concepts of this issue of the International Journal of Sociology, presents the history of research on global governance and its connection to democracy, including a discussion of how sociology contributes to the literature, and discusses the four articles that appear here.

This issue of the *International Journal of Sociology* connects and extends two recent sociological discussions of democracy, global governance, and political inequality. First is the dialogue begun at the International Sociological Association (ISA) World Congress in Göteborg, Sweden (2010), where Christopher Chase-Dunn and Alberto Martinelli organized the session “Democratizing Global Governance.” Chase-Dunn and Martinelli described the session as an address of “conceptual and empirical issues in the study of global governance and historical and contemporary efforts to democratize the global system.” Second, it connects with two recent issues of the *International Journal of Sociology* on political inequality—“Causes and Consequences of Political Inequality in Cross-National Perspective” (vol. 37, no. 4 [Winter 2007–8]), edited by Joshua Kjerulf Dubrow, and “Political Inequality in Latin America” (vol. 41, no. 2 [Summer 2011]), edited by Soraya Vargas Cortes and Dubrow—and the Dossier section of a forthcoming issue of *Sociologias*, “Desigualdade Política, Democracia e Governança Global” [Political Inequality, Democracy, and Global Governance], also edited by Cortes and Dubrow.¹

This introduction defines the three main concepts of this issue, presents the history of research on global governance and its connection to democracy, including a discussion of how sociology contributes to the literature, and discusses the four articles published in this issue.

Democracy, Global Governance, and Political Inequality: Three Big Terms

Discussions should open with definitions of the main terms, so we offer definitions of democracy, global governance, and political in-

equality. Of the three, democracy is perhaps the most contested concept and thus the most difficult to define. We adopt John Markoff's cautious definition (this issue) of democracy as "self-government of a territory by some people who had full rights" (in this issue, p. 16). In our caution, we agree with Markoff's argument: "We sometimes talk as though we know what democracy is, but what it is changes as people develop different conceptions of what it means to be a self-governing people or of which inhabitants of some territory should be full participants" (in this issue, p. 18).

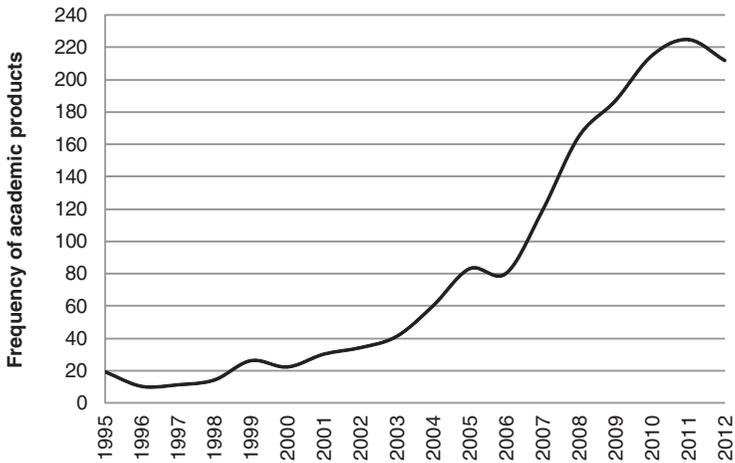
Global governance and political inequality are also contested concepts, but to initiate discussion we offer the following definitions. We define global governance as a system that regulates how decisions that affect countries and their interrelations are made, implemented, and enforced. Variations of the definition of global governance are taken up in this issue by Chase-Dunn et al. and Dubrow. Political inequality can be defined as structured differences in influence over governance structures, including those at the global level. For a more detailed conceptual discussion of political inequality, see Cortes and Dubrow (2011) and Dubrow (2010).

Popularity of Global Governance in Academia

To what extent is global governance a popular research subject among academics? We address this question using data from the Thomson ISI Web of Science Citation Database; to measure popularity, we counted the number of academic products when searching for the topic "global governance."² Figure 1 shows the extent of popularity between 1995 and 2012; as of 1995, global governance enjoyed a steady rise in popularity, with a sharp increase in 2004. The figure rises to a high of 225 in 2011. This is all the more remarkable in comparison with earlier eras, as between 1980 and 1994 only three products are listed under that label.

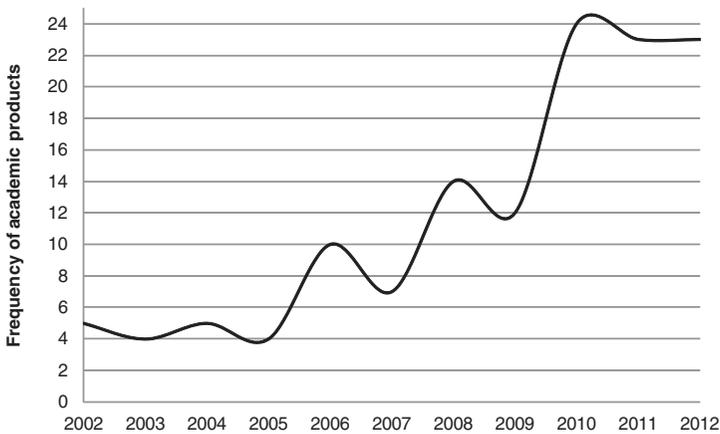
The combination of the topics "global governance" and "democracy" has only recently seen an increase in popularity (Figure 2). The term "democratic global governance" yielded only four products, and the combination of "democracy" and "global governance" has six between 1995 and 2001 (this database contains no record of

Figure 1. Popularity of “Global Governance” in Academic Research, 1995–2012



Source: ISI Thomson Web of Science Citation Database using topic term “global governance.” Frequency counts can include the following academic products: article, book, book review, book chapter, editorial material, proceedings paper, review, and letters.

Figure 2. Popularity of “Democracy” and “Global Governance” in Academic Research, 2002–2012



Source: ISI Thomson Web of Science Citation Database using topic terms “democracy” and “global governance.” Frequency counts can include the following academic products: article, book, book review, book chapter, editorial material, proceedings paper, review, and letters.

products before then). The rise in popularity did not occur until 2006 ($n = 10$) and, since 2010, has reached a plateau of the low to mid-20s. According to the database, the combination of these topics is only a small and recent subset of research on global governance.

Disciplinary Sources of Research on Global Governance

Who studies global governance? The disciplinary source of research on this topic is diverse (more than eighty-eight different Web of Science categories, ranging from anthropology to veterinary sciences) but is dominated by international relations ($n = 665$) and political science ($n = 536$), which jointly account for a full 77 percent of the total academic products (Table 1). These two disciplines also dominate research that combines “democracy” and “global governance,” jointly accounting for more than 70 percent of these products.

While democracy and global governance have been fixtures in the disciplines of international relations and political science, in sociology global governance has received attention only recently, and that attention fluctuates from year to year (Figure 3). Although no products were listed before 1995, in 2007 there were ten but just two years later there were four. According to these data, less attention has been paid to global institutional issues in sociology than other social science disciplines. Sociology is about as likely to produce research on “global civil society” ($n = 70$) as global governance ($n = 63$) and exceeds economics ($n = 27$) in that regard, but even in that relatively smaller topic of research ($n = 356$), international relations ($n = 116$) and political science ($n = 88$) dominate.

We see democracy, global governance, and political inequality as intimately related. Democracy, which features unequally resourced actors operating under rules that limit who can participate and how, is strongly tied to political inequality (Bohman 1999: 500–501; Dahl 2006; Dryzek 1996; Mueller 1992: 987–90; Verba 2006). The relationships between democracy, political inequality, and global governance are thus keys to understanding how global governance functions in theory and practice. It is widely assumed that current

Table 1

**Disciplinary Sources of Research on “Global Governance” and
Combination of “Democracy” and “Global Governance”**

“Global governance”		“Democracy” and “global governance”	
Categories	Frequency ^a	Categories	Frequency ^b
International relations	665	Political science	50
Political science	536	International relations	47
Economics	151	Ethics	14
Law	128	Environmental studies	11
Planning development	117	Business	10
Environmental studies	108	Economics	10
Public administration	82	Planning development	9
Sociology	63	Law	8
Business	61	Philosophy	6
Ethics	50	Social sciences interdisciplinary	5
Social sciences interdisciplinary	49	Geography	4
Management	42	Social issues	4
Geography	38	Communication	3
Social issues	33	Management	3
Area studies	30	Public administration	3
Environmental sciences	30	Sociology	3
Public environmental Occupational health	30	Cultural studies	2
Educational research	25	Environmental sciences	2
Women’s studies	25	History philosophy of science	2
History	24	Urban studies	2

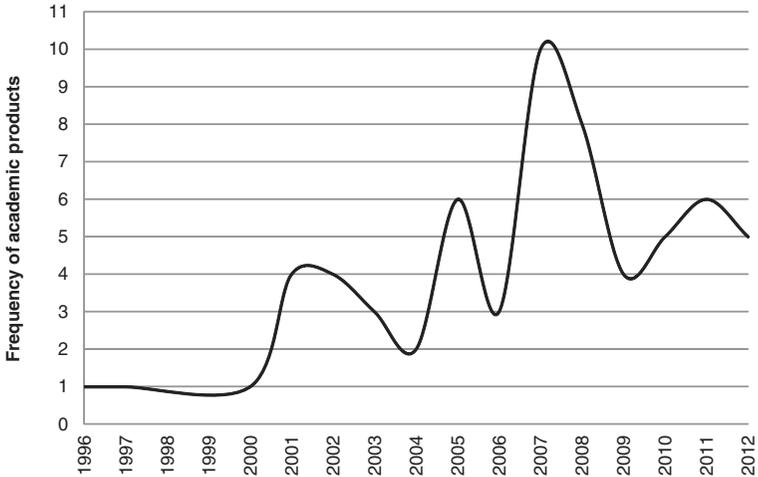
Source: Authors’ calculations based on the ISI Thomson Web of Science Citation Database.

Notes: Web of Science Categories with topic terms of “global governance” and combination of “democracy” and “global governance.” Frequency counts can include the following academic products: Article, book, book review, book chapter, editorial material, proceedings paper, review, and letters.

^aMinimum count of 20. Total count is 1,558.

^bMinimum count of 2. Total count is 137.

Figure 3. Popularity of “Global Governance” in Sociology, 1995–2012



Source: ISI Thomson Web of Science Citation Database using topic term “global governance” in the Web of Science category of “sociology.” Frequency counts can include the following academic products: Article, book, book review, book chapter, editorial material, proceedings paper, review, and letters.

global governance systems are dominated by the most resource-rich countries. To imagine *democratic* global governance is to contend with the thorny issue of political inequality between countries.

Because political inequality is tied to global governance, sociology’s long history of social stratification research makes it an ideal discipline to study it. Political inequality is both a dimension of democracy and, sociologically speaking, a dimension of social stratification. The sociological study of political inequality is a hunt for these structured differences in influence over governance decisions; it suggests how we should view any situation in which political processes systematically and historically lead to a pattern of unequal political outcomes. A process-centric version of power inequality does not reduce all political processes to political inequality; it merely points out where we should suspect it. For example, pluralism—in which some win and some lose, but the

rules of the game are fair and balanced—is not political inequality. Elitism is. That a man can be elected president of the United States is not political inequality; that a woman never has is. Political inequality does not occur when government makes a law on economic resource distribution that favors the already advantaged over the disadvantaged. Where there is a historical pattern of these policies to which the disadvantaged unsuccessfully voice opposition, we can suspect political inequality.

Articles in This Issue

This issue features four articles on the related topics of democracy, global governance, and political inequality. It begins with an article by John Markoff on the history of changes in the ideal and the practice of democracy and its future prospects in a global environment. Markoff asks a fundamental question: Can democracy meaningfully exist on a scale beyond the nation-state? Markoff is skeptical that it can, given that (a) the current system is unaccountable to most of the world's populations; (b) powerful countries are unlikely to give up their power advantage; and (c) all countries are reluctant to substantially relinquish national sovereignty to a supranational entity.

Christopher Chase-Dunn and colleagues use a world-systems perspective to address Markoff's fundamental question and come up with a different answer. After outlining the problems of how to establish and maintain democracy, they offer solutions designed to move democratic global governance from ideal to reality. They offer suggestions for the radical reformation of the United Nations to enable this global governance body to address problems of global scope more effectively. They also argue that innovations to the global system frequently come from the semiperiphery, rather than the core; since transnational social movement organizations that hold counterhegemonic attitudes are located in the semiperiphery, these organizations have the potential to establish a global polity and a global civil society that pushes for greater representation and holds countries accountable.

Joshua Kjerulf Dubrow directly responds to the first two articles by asking two questions: Is global governance inevitable?

And is *democratic* global governance likely? Markoff and Chase-Dunn et al. contend that given the nature and magnitude of global problems—including deadly pandemics, transnational criminality, climate change, intimately tied financial markets, and much more—the powerful countries realize that their carefully guarded global capitalist system is at risk; many countries' solution was to make global governance a reality. If this is so, the next question is whether truly democratic global governance will develop. Dubrow identifies two major problems that impede the development of democratic global governance: the possibility of nationalist retrenchment—backsliding toward unilateralism in which countries eschew democratic global governance strategies—and the ubiquity of political inequality in any democratic system. Dubrow argues that nationalist retrenchment is unlikely to prevent the consolidation of global governance systems. Political inequality is much more difficult to overcome, especially because political inequality at the national governance level tends to be replicated at the global governance level.

The creation of democratic global governance depends in part on the relationship between identities at lower and higher territorial units. Can people hold a local identity while also holding a supranational identity? Kazimierz M. Slomczynski et al. address this question in reference to Europe. The authors use IntUne data on political elites and masses to examine arguments that territorial identities can be complementary, rather than competing. If people could hold local and supranational (i.e., European) identities, it would enhance the possibilities for building a strong civil society. Also, according to this argument, both political elites and masses have a positive relationship between local and supranational identity—the stronger the one, the stronger the other—and this positive relationship is strongest in countries with a high level of democracy. Slomczynski et al. find that, on average, political elites hold their local identity more strongly than do the masses. While they also find that local and supranational identity have a significant, positive relationship—and that this relationship is strongest in more democratic countries—this holds for masses, and not political elites.

Taken together, the articles in this issue of the *International Journal of Sociology* present diverse sociological perspectives on the related topics of democracy, global governance, and political inequality. We hope that this issue will serve the international sociological community as a base from which to connect and extend further research in this area.

Notes

1. Two articles (Markoff and Dubrow) are forthcoming in Portuguese in *Sociologias*.

2. We define academic products by what is available in the database: article, book, book review, book chapter, editorial material, proceedings paper, review, and letters.

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